

How would Winston Churchill handle North Korea, Iran and Russia in 2019?

By Simon Brightman, Adjunct Professor, University of Ottawa, Telfer School of Management,
August 2019

Introduction

How would Napoleon Bonaparte, Lord Marlborough, Lord Nelson, Winston Churchill or even Alexander the Great view the current situation with North Korea, Iran or Russia? How would these leaders of centuries and millennia past propose to handle these matters of current day?

The Leader's Perspective Series provides a glimpse into the views of leaders on current topics of global importance, with a focus on their perceptions and subsequent decision making propensities. Unlike other articles and series, it does so for historical figures who are no longer with us. This is possible using an analytical framework that initially evaluates key individual and group attributes deduced from historical accounts and behaviour, and then framing inclinations and propensities against current scenarios. Ultimately, what is required is an in-depth, relevant body of knowledge that can be evaluated, using the proposed analytical framework, to explore the historical and current decision making actions of any individual, from any period. This is the

first of several articles that will provide the basis for a book on the applied art and science of decision making.

To begin the series, this analysis examines three topics of current affairs: North Korea, Iran and Russia, through the eyes of Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill (1874-1965). This effort is not a historical biographical account of the life of Churchill, but is instead an insightful and well grounded perspective on Churchill's decision making propensities applied to modern world affairs. In this body of work the question being asked is: "How would Churchill perceive the situations with North Korea, Iran and Russia, and how would he seek to address them?".

The method for analysis will draw upon Churchill's vast and colorful background and immediate and peripheral environmental influences (such as people, finances, physical threats, ailments) to support hypotheses and subsequent anticipated decisions. This background is evaluated using core decision making theory as well as the theoretical derivatives and subsequent analysis techniques published by the author in his research at the University of Cambridge <http://betterdecisionmaking.com>.

To ground the analysis, this work commences with a brief introduction to applied decision making theory, followed by an introduction to Winston Churchill, painting a portrait of the man influenced by pertinent decision making attributes. Rather than treating Churchill as the sum of all of his accumulated years of experience, Churchill is introduced in a progressive manner so that we may understand his behaviour and theoretical current actions at various points in his life.

Therefore, the body of the analysis is divided into three sections: young Churchill on North Korea, middle-aged Churchill on Iran, and the elder statesman on Russia. Each analysis section also includes a review of the relevant history for the “situation”.

Decision Making Basics

The applied decision making theory underlying this analysis views an individual’s values, experiences, frames of reference, personal skills, people with whom he/she chooses to interact, sources of information sought, as well as comfort with varying degrees of ambiguity and uncertainty, as key factors that influence the manner in which a situation is understood and analyzed, as well as subsequent decisions that are undertaken.

Using our analytical model, one may view decision making as a host of processes broadly grouped into three categories: a. problem definition; b. information gathering; and c. assessment of alternatives. In reality (and despite broad misconceptions pertaining to the rational and linear nature of decision making) these are not distinct phases people conduct in isolation, complete, and then progress to subsequent ones. Rather, these are often highly subjective, partially completed, iterative in nature, overlapping and mutually influential activities that ultimately impact actions and outcomes.

Most pertinent to our purpose, the practical nature of the decision making process conducted by individuals provides unique and often overlooked insight into their propensities and actions.

While most analyses focus on the end decisions, the outcomes and implications, we leverage aspects of the processes themselves to predict actions and decisions, and perhaps even to understand how to manipulate them.

Various items influence a person's perception of a problem or situation. Key ones include familiarity of the situation, the degree of uncertainty and whether aspects are viewed as structured or ill-structured. The manner in which a problem is described, whether stories or models are used to understand issues, the sources used to gather and analyze information, alongside reliance on past experiences and decisions, all greatly influence understanding.

Sources of information are of course a critical influencer of the manner in which people perceive, analyze and act on issues. Personal experiences from oneself or trusted parties are often given preference over other sources. While personal and past experience may provide valuable insight, individuals that rely on them predominantly as frames of reference tend to be more constrained in their thinking, given perceived causes and effects. It is common in such cases to limit the amount of overall time and effort spent on gathering information and subsequently on analysis (all in the interest of efficiency), though at the risk of arriving at conclusions that may not be merited.

Furthermore, information that is gathered (and analysis that is derived) from internal sources is often given further preference when the relationship between parties is strong, as well as when seniority or other internal "political considerations" may exist. GroupThink is a related common

phenomenon whereby decision makers surround themselves with like-minded individuals and rely on group consensus to justify a course of action that is agreeable at large. GroupThink does not force a challenge of common paradigms and therefore often results in the most common explanations and courses of action, with little room for critical thought and creativity.

An additional consideration is the skillset of the group that forms part of the decision. When a leader or organization at large staff their teams with individuals of similar backgrounds and education, the result is often a constrained set of narratives and insights (albeit with greater “bench strength” within a given domain). Leaders and organizations that exhibit such tendencies will often yield faster decisions that appear at face value to be decisive in nature and consistent with past actions, but may in fact be less substantiated, less thought-out, less creative in their approach and ultimately inferior in their outcome, to teams that are comprised of individuals with a wider variety of skill sets.

Ultimately, it is essential to ensure that the groups are properly staffed with varying skill sets, that frames of reference are correct and suitable, rather than simply easy and available, and that they are combined with an appropriate fresh effort to gather information and frame the issues anew.

There is no perfect algorithm that dictates for all scenarios precisely what information should be gathered and how to consider it. Rather, awareness and caution are the key items to emphasize. Decision makers must be aware of the pitfalls of certain tendencies they and their staff exhibit or

processes they adopt that may hinder their performance, and to consciously account for them as they see fit. For example, while internal sources of information may be readily available, appear suitable and immediately applicable, stopping to question and verify them with an external source, broadening the factual basis for the analysis and realigning the internal and external expert used may add time but also greatly increase the reliability of the process and the outcome.

Background on Winston Churchill

The life and time of Winston Churchill can be viewed in many ways - by early education, family milestones, military career, journalistic undertakings, his art and of course his extensive political career, which spanned over half a century. This analysis plants several stakes in the Churchill timeline and starts by assuming the perspective of young 30 year old Churchill until shortly after his change of parties in 1904, when he walked across the aisle of parliament to join the liberal party, abandoning the Conservative Tory's, albeit temporarily. Young Churchill's perspective will be used to evaluate the North Korean situation.

Young Churchill was born into a noble family, the first Son of Randolph Churchill, heir to the Duke of Marlborough. While not wealthy, the family lived a comfortable life and Churchill believed, from a young age, that he would follow in the footsteps of his Father as a politician, a leader of the Conservative Party who served as Minister of the Colonies. Churchill wished first to serve his empire as a soldier, a stepping stone he believed that would help mould him into a more formidable man and servant of the Empire.

Young Churchill's values, inclinations and behavioral attributes are evident at this stage, as a boy at Harrow, a teen at Sandhurst Military Academy and as a young Cavalry Officer who sought out battles, took risks, but always with an underlying moral, compassionate undertone. Churchill possessed a foundational belief in the goodness of man, while recognizing evil when it presented itself. Churchill believed deeply in the British Empire, but with a lens of social democracy cast over it. He believed that the British could indeed bring prosperity to uncultured, disadvantaged people and lands, through their colonial rule system. This belief he drew at first from his Father's, who himself was well grounded in the philosophy of Benjamin Disraeli, former British Prime Minister (1874-1880).

Churchill, even at a young age, took upon himself to voraciously acquire knowledge firsthand, largely via conversations with other men (and some women) as well as via books. Having advanced from Sandhurst Military College direct to the Army, skipping advanced education at Oxford or Cambridge, like many of his peers, the battlefield was his University.

Young Churchill was not afraid to seek knowledge, he was not reluctant to have his paradigms altered, as he consciously sought out the facts, the truth and then relied on his intellect to make sense of them, governed by a strong sense of morality. He was not a religious man (though officially Anglican) and felt that if one tried his best to live an honourable life, did his duty and was faithful to friends and not unkind to the weak and poor, it did not matter much what religion one subscribed to. Furthermore, Churchill was not inclined to GroupThink and sought diverse

opinions internally and externally, as far as Africa, India, America, not just from his own parties but from across the aisle, and was not afraid to step outside of his original paradigms as we see.

We witness this morally conscious behavior as Churchill abandons the Tory party in 1904 over its tariff regime across the empire, in the belief that it will result in the opposite outcomes than those desired. This was more than a policy matter for Churchill, who felt that social democracy in support of the weak at home and across the empire, was a moral covenant that politicians were to embody. As such, he could no longer stand with a party (and his Father's party) that took egregious steps to undermine this covenant, by laying heavy taxes on the poor at large, to the benefit of the crown, committing grave moral and political errors to the detriment of the Empire.

Churchill on North Korea (Young Churchill, 1892-1904)

Given this background, how would young Churchill understand the North Korean situation? To start, let's define "the situation" by distinguishing, as Churchill would, between the North Korean people, the leadership, its infrastructure, military capabilities and the geographic placement of the country.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, henceforth North Korea) is an autocratic state, a dictatorship ruled by a single family, the Kims, in succession since 1948. North Korea

has successfully developed an array of basic nuclear weapon capabilities and exercises absolute and indiscriminate power over a population of 25 Million that is largely destitute. They are also a socialist regime that has enjoyed very close support and relations with the Soviet Union, now with Russia, as well as with Iran, China and a host of other autocratic nations.

As of the 1990s extensive financial embargoes and sanctions have been placed on North Korea, in an attempt to force it, at first, to abandon its pursuit of Nuclear weapons, and since their acquisition in the late 2000's, to relinquish its ICBM and Nuclear Weapon tests and programs altogether. In the eyes of the United States, North Korea has been characterized for decades as a rogue nation, part of the axis of evil, a direct threat to US allies Japan and South Korea, the Philippines, Hawaii and an indirect threat to the US Mainland via its long range ICBM programs. Over the past 30 years, US presidents have attempted both harder and softer strategies in dealing with North Korea. US President Trump has also tried his hand at resolving the North Korean situation, a resolution that in his eyes equates to total denuclearization of North Korea.

Churchill would learn a great deal about the Korean people, their history as a unified Korean nation and the rule they have been under since 1948. He would study geopolitics of the region, going back to the start of the 20th century and the battles between Korea, Russian, Japan, China. The people of North Korea would be, in Churchill's eyes, people who have been severely disadvantaged by a myriad of factors and deserving of a better future. He would perceive them as he did the people of India in the late 19th and 20th centuries, a nation of over 300 Million who could be helped only with the leadership, financial support and guidance of the British Empire.

In the case of North Korea, this support would take on a different guise, with some similar, yet more time-appropriate underpinnings.

North Korean leadership would be described by young Churchill using the aphorism of a spoiled, physically large, rich and largely friendless child who plays alone with his vast array of toys and seeks attention by exhibiting fits of anger and temper tantrums. This child analogy may seem out of place when speaking of a nuclear capable, ruthless dictator and regime who have killed hundreds of thousands of their own countrymen and continue to starve their population at this very moment, while enjoying a life of solitary luxury. It is employed solely to assist in psychological positioning in a manner that Churchill would perhaps describe, a simplified and easy to comprehend persona that allows to more easily understand and determine how best to engage.

The national civilian infrastructure would be seen as outdated and in disrepair, insufficient to sustain a population similar to that of Canada, and in desperate need of rectification in order to support growth beyond the poverty stricken reality it currently enabled for the masses. The military (with one of the largest standing armies these days) would be seen as a formidable threat with great manpower and offensive abilities but without the strong technological, financial, logistical infrastructure to ensure long term, high levels of sustained performance in a prolonged offensive battle. Geopolitically, Churchill would see North Korea as uniquely placed, at the physical intersection of Russia, China and Japan, and therefore as an important strategic venue

from which to wield power. This would help explain to him, at least in part, the current (and highly diverse) Russian, Chinese and American views on North Korea.

As young Churchill weaves these elements together to form his understanding, his analysis of the current situation, it may look as follows. A proud and power-hungry dynastic leadership who perceives great threat to their control when external, primarily Western values and influences are introduced. As such, the best way to maintain control is to subdue the people, to maintain low levels of mass prosperity, as in this manner people's primary focus is on survival, not growth which may lead to challenges to authority and loss of power.

While Churchill would absolutely not condone such an approach given his value system, he would likely understand its place in the eyes of the North Korean leaders. The tremendous investment in military strength, at the expense of the people per se, is a necessary step for leadership to maintain their integrity and control over the nation. By maintaining a common fear and perceived threat from external Western forces, the expenses and hardships are seen as justifiable, even at great sacrifice. The entire North Korean system, all its people, military organizations, civilian systems including education and social systems, all view the world, a dangerous world, through this veil.

Young Churchill's approach therefore, would likely build on his experiences in India, as well as within South Africa fighting the Boers. Churchill would propose an Imperialistic type pathway for North Korea, "Imperialism Lite", that does not seek regime change and the institution of an

external, overarching paternalistic leadership structure, but rather focuses on financial investment in its people, its civilian infrastructure, all the while providing assurances of security that do not seek to undermine the regime. In his mind while the Western democracy system may be the optimal path for sustained moral and financial success of a nation, he would recognize there to be no short term benefit of forcefully introducing such elements into the North Korean framework.

Churchill would recognize that a great deal of trust is lacking, but could be fostered by leveraging financial investment into the country and a reduction of broad sanctions, while instituting directed investment controls to ensure that the finances are spent on civilian projects. This would be a long term investment in his eyes, one that seeks to focus on gradual progress at a civilian level, but one that bears the opportunity to radically shift local and regional geopolitical realities, military alliances, to bring about important change to a starving nation and a highly contentious and risky situation. In Churchill's mind, guided investment would be the solution, as it was for India and the other colonies.

What to the nuclear and ballistic missile threat that much is made of today? What would Churchill's position be on these? In Churchill's eyes, these would be perceived as largely defensive tools that exist primarily in order to retain the position of the regime. Churchill would view provocations by the regime, in the form of nuclear and missile tests (with some occurring August 2019), as attempts to seek global attention via threats, thereby forcing engagement and consideration. So far as they do not result in true direct threats and harm to other parties,

Churchill's stance would be to allow the dog to bark, so long as it does not bite, while directly tying investment progress to such actions. In his eyes, when the regime and the people start to drink, so to speak, from the well of a new North Korean style of prosperity, there will be far less incentive to play the role of belligerent regional neighbor.

This analysis is based on the perceived lens that young Churchill would overlay, but does not discount his considerations that the regime will certainly not, at all times, respond in kind to this form of an approach, a financially led one, and instead adopt an even more belligerent stance towards Western, Imperialist nations. To ease this concern, Churchill would likely propose the use of third parties such as the Chinese or Russians to lead the effort and assuage, at least to a degree, these concerns.

Young Churchill would establish clear guidelines for the conduct of this long term investment-first strategy, which include mutual recognition of the rights of both Korea's to choose their own paths of existence, to avoid regime change efforts and to secure their nations from regional threats. Churchill would also seek to establish a regional alliance council to help govern the key elements of the Korean initiative, primarily as a forum for all parties to raise concerns and seek support, without dominance of the United States (such as in the UN security council), and in a forum where North Korea feels it is respected and equal.

If we were to question this path and suggest it to be more aligned to that of a late 1930's to 1940 Neville Chamberlain rather than Churchill, two factors dissuade from this conclusion. First,

Young Churchill did not yet have the depth of military and political exposure that the elder statesman possessed even before he was appointed Prime Minister in 1940, some 36 years later than the end of the period upon which this analysis is based (the young Churchill). In his frame of mind, the Empire had a role to play in relieving the suffering of nations, and it had the correct formula to achieve such results. Second, even young Churchill would not, I contend, see the North Korean situation as endangering the future of Western civilization, which was the reality he encountered when he confronted The Ottomans, Germany and Austria during WWI, then Hitler in WWII. In his younger frame of mind, the belligerence would be the cry of a financially poor national, led by a very proud, ruthless, dynastic, fearful local regime seeking to have their security needs met, not a global threat to peace on earth and as such could be dealt with using a financial-diplomatic array of tools.

Young Churchill was not as politically savvy nor as battle worn as the older version who faced down the Axis forces of WWII and saw his nation through its darkest hour. Yet, the younger Winston can be viewed as a morally driven man whose values and belief in the goodness of man guided him true. Although his paths were not always successful, they were the ones he undertook with great comfort, confidence and conviction.

Statesmen would be wise to follow Churchill's likely roadmap previously described, to achieve measurable progress within this important conflict. As of Summer 2019, we witness a diplomatic stagnation in the North Korean situation, with intermittent acts of belligerency by a North Korean regime wishing to remind others that it is still a meaningful presence in a region that is

plagued by an escalating trade war between the two largest economies, China and the United States.

Churchill on Iran (Middle-Aged Churchill, 1914-1929)

As of Summer 2019, it would be accurate to characterize the situation in the Persian Gulf as extremely volatile. At core is the strenuous relationship between Iran and a host of countries, some regional (Saudi Arabia) and others simply present in the region for economic and/or security purposes (the USA and UK). Much is being written on a daily basis about the sources of the recent conflagration and prospects for escalation between Iran and Western powers, possibly inflamed in part due to social media based exchanges between US President Trump and Iranian officials. What would be Winston Churchill's perspective on the current situation? Before we address this question, let's examine the background and current situation in greater depth.

In contrast to North Korea, Iran's ideology is not Communist in nature but rather based on a revisionist, fundamentalist interpretation of the Shia branch of Islam. The prevalent and publicized Iranian ideology (as put forward by the Ayatollah, the religious and most senior leader of the nation), is that of a strict denunciation of the West and its principles, primarily the United States and Israel as the Great Satan and the Zionist occupier (respectively), who are to be abolished as part of a global Islamic revolution. While leadership is split between the supreme religious leadership and the secular government, ultimate policy is determined and shaped by the reigning Islamic council, then interpreted and executed by the government.

Unlike the people of North Korea, the Iranian people have enjoyed extensive exposure to the West, including the internet and western media, with broad ability (for those trusted by the state and largely men) to travel and modestly experience Western culture, before returning to an Islamic theocracy.

Since the early 2000's it is commonly accepted that Iran has been aiming to develop nuclear capabilities (activity that started years prior). This is part of a strategic plan to solidify their power in the region as an Islamic nation. Unlike Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, Iran states that it does not aim to bear the torch of Islamic puritanism while simultaneously acquiescing to the American or Western powers, and holds itself to be the one true discipline of the Prophet Mohammad. In Iran's eyes a nuclear arsenal will provide far greater deterrence from Western occupation and plans to overthrow a threatening, unfriendly nation, such as in the case of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, since the start of the 21st Century.

Theories that consider an integral part of Iran's practical (as opposed to theoretical, ideological) agenda to include an annihilation of Israel and other regional threats may be misplaced. The Iranian regime seeks to strengthen its regional position and influence, not to commit ideological driven national suicide. An Iranian nuclear arsenal, if acquired, will not compete with that of others such as the US or even Israel. It's importance is its role as a strategic deterrent and not as an offensive weapon to be used except out of desperation. Outwardly from Iran's perspective, these nuclear plans are positioned as non-military capabilities, for power generation and medical

needs. Iran does not explicitly acknowledge any military nuclear applications, while the US has been the primary architect of efforts to prevent Iran from achieving sufficient enrichment capabilities (higher than those needed for energy generation) and accumulation of nuclear material, to allow for weapon development.

The US does not stand alone in this effort, with Israel at its side, as well as a host of other Western countries such as the UK. In 2015 President Obama's administration led the negotiation of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal) under which Iran agreed to temporary limitations on enrichment abilities and accumulation of nuclear material, in exchange for a substantial, albeit temporary, reduction in economic sanctions, providing a great boon to the Iranian economy after many years of severe depression. The JCPOA was heralded at the time as an important diplomatic and security achievement, that placed effective (even if temporary) limitations on Iran's nuclear aspirations, in exchange for economic relief, establishing that non-military options were in fact viable in dealing with such a nation.

In May of 2018 President Trump withdrew the USA from the JCPOA. While European allies remained committed to the agreement, in the eyes of Iranian leadership, the essence of the agreement was nullified with American withdrawal, which brought with it the reinstatement of sanctions. Due to severe financial implications on its national economy, Iran has since notified parties it will resume enrichment of nuclear material, outside of the JCPOA limits, as a means of pressuring parties to alleviate sanctions.

As of summer 2019, the hypothetical timelines expressed are that Iran may be in a position to build a nuclear weapon in a matter of a year. Precision of information and analysis are commonly agreed upon as critical to successful decision making. In this important matter we are faced with a timeline that is so short and an outcome so important that in parallel with efforts to substantiate the nuclear timeline analysis, the time for decision action may be upon leaders. Iranian possession of a nuclear bomb will instantly provide it with a deterrent from occupation and overthrow, cementing its strength as a regional power. The implication of this is that if such a situation is deemed unacceptable, immediate decisions and action are needed.

Meanwhile, as recently as July 2019 we witness an escalation of words and actions between the USA, UK, other Western countries and Iran. These range from bellicose verbal threats, the sinking of commercial vessels, the downing of drones near the straits of Hormuz, to the capture of British war ships. Iran has carefully escalated its tactical military engagements with Western and other nations in proximity to its southern maritime borders, as a demonstration of its ability to influence global economic stability, as an application of pressure on Western, non-American parties to reduce the overbearing US-led sanctions.

How would Churchill view the alternatives for handling the Iranian situation? The next part of this analysis then proceeds through the life of Churchill and finds him in the late 1920's, early 1930's, as a middle-aged man in his 40's and 50's. An experienced politician at this point who served as a minister of His Majesty's Government during the Great War (First Lord of the

Admiralty, the Head of the British Navy) as well as a commanding officer fighting in battles across the Ottoman Empire (as a Major and then Lieutenant-Colonel), Minister of Munitions, Secretary of State for War, Secretary of State for Air, Secretary of State for the Colonies, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. Pre-WWII Churchill was a highly experienced politician whose tremendous breadth and depth will inform his perspective on Iran.

Churchill was at that point in his life in his 40's and mid-50's, an experienced politician who held critical posts prior to, during and subsequent to WWI, enduring battles firsthand in the battlefields of the Ottoman Empire in Western Turkey. As a politician, Churchill witnessed the rearmament of Germany in the years after WWI and the Treaty of Versailles, before Hitler's rise, and took an active role in strengthening the UK in the arms-race that saw Britain and Germany enhance their Navy, Army and Air Force capabilities. For purposes of the analysis, it is assumed that these experiences serve to inform his perspective only, and are not real-time influencers. As such, Churchill would not be constrained by the current military capacity of the United Kingdom, nor any electorate considerations.

The Churchill of this period retained much of the social, moral and psychological attributes of his younger self. Churchill was comfortable surrounding himself with other string minded individuals and did not seek shallow company in order to feel intellectually superior. People such as Frederick Lindemann, Brendan Bracken, Eddie Marsh demonstrate his continuous desire to find understanding through knowledge acquisition. Whether in small forum as well as

parliamentary and public debates, the highly eloquent and opinionated Churchill would engage voraciously, seeking the outcome of debate to resonate aloud. A quality we must account for in his style though, is the preconceived understanding with which he engaged in topics. An intellectual on many subjects, Churchill would seldom arrive unedified on a given topic. As dogmatic as he appeared, his decision making process was far from rigid and, as mentioned he would engage others with all his energy in order for clarity and if merited, a new position to emerge.

Further evidenced by current events and with perspective of Iran over the past 30 years, Churchill would view Iran as an immediate and long term threat to regional stability, due primarily to the extreme religious and aggressively offensive nature of the country. He would see them as a direct threat to Iraq and Saudi Arabia, both predominantly Suni led nations with extensive belligerent histories with Iran (Iraq and Iran fought an 8 year war in the 1980s). Churchill would consider them indirect threats to Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan, Israel and Yemen, amongst others.

As such, he would adopt a stance focused on eradication of their offensive capabilities, while providing assurances for their regional defense. In his eyes, while the Nuclear threat is more devastating in its destructive capacity, Iran's non-nuclear maritime as well as ballistic missile and proxy warfare capabilities via Hamas and Hezbollah are a far more severe immediate threat to others in the region and to global economic activity.

Churchill would seek to build a coalition of parties against Iran, while recognizing the need for timely, even unilateral action, without broad support. The battle, so to speak, would not be due to religious or even moral differences. Churchill would see the potential for drastic escalation of hostilities and a conventional war with Iran and its neighbors (geographical and resident). This, a result of strengthened offensive capabilities of Iran and their overt belligerency, due in part to economic hardship, but also ideological extremism, and the inability of other parties to moderate this behaviour with economic sanctions alone.

Churchill would aim to take action to mitigate the ascension of Iran to status of regional nuclear and reigning conventional powerhouse, even at the risk of a full conventional regional war, to mitigate the need for Western and friendly regional powers to counter a strategically stronger Iran. The goal would not be to impose a western, liberal style democracy in place of an Islamic theocracy (overthrowing the current regime), but rather to alter the balance of power that has in the past, currently affects, and will most likely continue to influence regional economic and political stability. The timeliness of proposed military action is to prevent Iran from strengthening its current capabilities with the strategic availability of nuclear and advanced conventional offensive weapons, thus presenting a fait accompli to regional and global parties, forced to deal with Iran at a different level.

Churchill on Russia (Aging Churchill, 1930-1945)

On the final day of the year 1999, Vladimir Putin started what has been, thus far, a 20 year reign as the leader of Russia, second only to Stalin in its duration. Taking over from Yeltsin in 2000, Putin has gradually, but effectively reversed all the democratization progress initiated after the fall of the USSR in 1989. In its place now exists an autocracy supported by an oligarchy of uber-wealthy industrialists. The regime, which views the United States and NATO at large as a great threat to Russia and its interests, has methodically and consistently executed an outwardly focused offensive approach to regional geopolitics that includes large scale armed conflicts (Georgia, Ukraine, Crimea) as well as extensive political manipulation of Western elections (United States 2016, France 2017, Germany 2017).

The Cold War that ended in 1989 and with it the disappearance of the USSR, leaving the United States as the sole superpower, has re-emerged as a new conflict with Russia once again playing a key role counter Western liberal democracy. How would Winston Churchill approach the situation with Russia? To address this question, we must first explore the background and situation in greater depth.

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, 15 former members of the Soviet republic became independent countries, no longer under the control of dominant Russia. Self-administered governance and gradual democratization processes (often supported and guided by the West) introduced elections in many of these countries, which for the first time in their histories

witnessed leadership that was not appointed, nor controlled by Russian authorities. These changes also gave rise to dormant geopolitical tensions between countries whose populations had migrated during over the years and whose borders had been drawn by a master, often overlooking historical strife and ethnic considerations to accommodate central political and security needs as they enforced their will on the regions.

The decade from 1990 to 2000 saw varying degrees of progress within these newly independent nations. Economies opened to the West, trade of natural resources, tourism and intellectual capital grew at rapid paces. Technology and internet infrastructure evolved and consumer adoption became the norm in countries that not long before had been agrarian and manufacturing focused, playing their role as part of a managed, central economy. In Russia in particular, this period also saw the rise of an oligarchy of industrialists, with controlling positions over major parts of the economy from Oil and Gas, Transportation through to Internet and Media. A burgeoning underworld also took hold, no longer held at bay by the communist regime, and often becoming heavily intertwined with the more legitimate sectors, blurring the lines of control and nepotism.

The late 90's and early 2000's saw renewed economic hardships within Russia (and with its trade partners), which had grown too fast with insufficient financial controls to moderate varying economic corrections. As the Russian people less infatuated with the capitalist ways, the ground was set for a swing to more stringent economic and political controls. In 2000 Boris Yelstin

appointed Vladimir Putin as his successor who would lead Russia through self definition of its democracy across political and financial realms.

Putin, a former deputy mayor of Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and mid-level KGB operative, appeared well suited to play the role of a more controlling leader while respecting the progress and direction the nation has forged since the end of Communism a decade earlier. What Yelstin did not anticipate is that Putin would, over the next two decades, virtually wipe out all of the progress made, converting Russia to an autocracy that was centrally managed by a single individual heavily intertwined with the financial oligarchy, a revisionist focused on re-invigorating Russian spirits to old-age greatness, to the times of the Tzars, from Peter the Great to Katerina and the Romanov dynasty when Russian land was vast and its military power supreme.

To assert its position, Russia under Putin has engaged in violent conflicts with Georgia over large parts of Georgian land, as well as with the Ukraine over eastern regions, in addition to the annexation of Crimea (2014-15). These actions are based on a foundational assertion they are defending the legitimate rights of Russian citizens in those regions, in essence establishing a Russian position that signals without question to the West/NATO allies that further proliferation of the alliance will not be tolerated by Russia. In 2019, Russia continues to assert its position through active presence in the Ukraine and Crimea as well as via its role in Syria, in defence of the Al-Assad regime, against the position of the US who has sought his overthrow. Russia represents a regional counterbalance to Western, NATO and US interests primarily in Eastern

Europe but also in the Middle-East, overtly and covertly attempting (and often succeeding at) thwarting alliances and relationships between the West (primarily the US) and Turkey, Hungary, Poland and China.

What is the true Russian threat though to the West, and what action should be taken by these countries to counter Russia? The primary threat to the West is the gradual, iterative erosion of its own democratic systems of governance. Unlike North Korea or even Iran, Russia under Putin views the Western democracies as a threat to its continued existence in current form and is taking proactive measures to mitigate this threat by destabilizing democratic values and systems in Western Europe and North America.

While there is no coordinated effort per se, President Trump currently leads the Western charge to address Russia across military, political and financial realms. He does so as much through his actions themselves, as via the vocalization of these actions on social media. Militarily, the US has withdrawn from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia, in response to claims that Russia has been violating the treaty for years by developing new generations of ballistic missiles. The US withdrawal is intended to signal to Russia that the USA will restart its re-armament and force a costly and dangerous nuclear race, should they persist down this path. The US has also expunged Turkey from participation in its F35 fighter partner program in order to minimize exposure of advanced stealth technology to the Russians and their allies as a result of Turkish adoption of the advanced Russian S-400 surface to air missile system (designed to detect stealth aircraft). In response, Russia has offered Turkey the SU35, their own

advanced fighter, adoption of which will further distance Turkey from its NATO allies as it shifts towards Russia.

Economically, the US and EU have engaged in extensive financial sanctions against Russia in response to the 2014 invasion of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. These measures have severely weakened the Russian currency and economy (also severely impacted by lower oil prices).

Politically, the US has recently completed a multi-year independent investigation into Russian intelligence activity aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the 2016 elections, with conclusions that indicate clear interference and voter manipulation. President Trump though continues to disregard both US intelligence estimates as well as Mueller report conclusions, remaining staunch in his skepticism and blatant disregard of these efforts, creating substantial rifts internally within the US political and intelligence systems. While the President's dismissal and down-playing of findings may be intended to signal to Russia that the US will not publicly lend credibility to such actions, it risks accomplishing the opposite, essentially legitimizing them by accepting them with no clear repercussions.

Building on our understanding of the young and middle-aged man, we update our profile by examining various aspects of Churchill in this period during which he rose to the highest rank of British and regional leadership. We do so by reflecting on key interactions with family members, close colleagues and influencers, as well as national and international political events he

endured, witnessed or influenced.

The decade from 1930 to his ascension to the premiership in 1940 is often referred to as Churchill's wilderness years. Having held office for most of the previous two decades, Churchill found himself an MP without office, due to his position within the conservative party (which he rejoined in 1924 from the liberals, and with which party he finally remained). Churchill was perceived by his peers as a great orator, an inspirational and charismatic individual who ultimately fell short in the game of politics, often at odds with party positions and never one to bite his tongue when it came to matters of principle. As such, he was often deemed a liability and hindrance to governance.

In the early 1930's, his vocal stance on Hitler, Germany and the urgent need to re-arm the British Navy and Air Forces were perceived as war mongering by a government, parliament and to a large degree a nation that had lost 750,000 of its sons in the Great War, which was intended to end all future wars. His stance against the conservative party's position on Indian independence, in addition to the London Treaty of 1930 limiting shipbuilding and terms of submarine warfare between several Western nations (excluding Russian and Germany), led to further distancing of Churchill from the party and his political weakening in this period.

While Churchill quite possibly had the greatest working knowledge of the British military establishment on all its facets, a man who deeply wanted peace, he also knew firsthand that the empire must prepare for war while seeking to avoid it. Churchill foresaw several critical

developments that, had they been heeded by those in power, may have prevented an unnecessary war within the decade. Unfortunately, due to his diminishing influence, Churchill's attempts to signal the urgent threat given occurrences in Germany went unabated. Hitler's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933, from disarmament talks and actions towards the Jewish population provided additional clarity of the character with which the world was dealing.

While slow to adopt modern positions on topics such as women's suffrage or even the right of India to independence, Churchill's moral character was of the highest standards, with foundational beliefs in basic human rights for all people irrespective of their religion or skin color. These beliefs, which manifested in tirelessly speaking truth within every hall and across any media, largely did not waiver irrespective of political considerations and costs, to his detriment. Churchill's colleagues in this period were the leading political figures of the times, including Lloyd George, Arthur Balfour, from his own party and across others as well. Few of these, if any, can be considered well aligned politically to Churchill and fewer still as close personal friends. Churchill interacted with other contemporary leaders as an intellectual peer, seeking the democratic process to yield the final result.

The impending threat from Germany was the primary focus for Churchill in these years, overshadowing all others, with Italy and Russia as close seconds, relegating Indian independence to third place. While his initial position on Mussolini was incorrect, he correctly anticipated Hitler's intentions. Churchill's sources of information in this period were the same available to others, largely the explicit actions of Germany, the public pronouncements of Hitler or other

German government members, interactions with other statesman in Europe, the United States and within the British system.

Furthermore, in this period it does not appear that Churchill had access to intelligence reports (and certainly not any exclusive access) which may have provided a more insightful view into Hitler's actions and intentions. Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative leader and reigning PM between 1935-37 was a primary opponent of rearmament for much of this period, although his stance softened over the years. In his role, one would expect him to have access to any such intelligence analysis to inform his position, and yet he and most others in Government took meaningful, active measures only much later than Churchill's "demands".

In the years leading up to WWII, Churchill relied primarily on his many decades of highly relevant personal experience, publicly available information and engagement with peers in open debate forums, to frame his perception of the German threat. Yet, the distinguishing factor for Churchill was the manner in which he artfully integrated traditional and heuristic analysis. Churchill utilized traditional analysis techniques to estimate and forecast German rearmament initiatives, trajectories and future capabilities, as well as the juxtaposition of these levels against British, Russian and other Western nations, thus highlighting the apparent logical conclusions as to materiel gaps and resulting urgency of his recommendations.

Churchill's heuristics served him well in perceiving the psychological factors underlying German language and actions, which allowed him to intuitively form a deep perspective as to the

severity and immediacy of the threat, not only given the logical ability of Germany, but also the intent of their leader to execute on the rhetoric. Unlike others, Churchill openly embraced the fears he felt and directed these emotions to a practical plan, which unfortunately he was not in a position to sufficiently influence until after the threat became readily apparent to all.

Building on this, Churchill's (hypothetical) perspective on the current situation with Russia would be an active and sustained effort aimed at combating Russian interference and weakening the enabling assets, as a result of a severe Russian threat to the long term stability and survival of Western nations as true democracies. Russia successfully manipulated the 2016 general elections in the United States and suffered no consequences, in addition to having meddled in French and German governance processes. Militarily it has actively provoked and engaged in military engagements in the Ukraine and Crimea, under the guise of nationalism, repatriation of Russian land and citizens. Churchill would clearly understand the trajectory of Russian interference and intentions, that eroding Western democracy from within is key to strengthening Putin's stature and longevity within Russia as an autocrat, as well as the position of Russia as a dominant regional power across Asia and Europe.

Churchill would support a long term strategy aimed at proactively containing and preventing such highly threatening (yet largely deniable) interference by Russia and other autocratic nations (such as China) in critical affairs of Western nations. In addition to a host of covert actions, the approach would also rely on public initiatives aimed at credibly raising public awareness to the threats of manipulation and the introduction of tools for citizens to safeguard against

misinformation campaigns by internal and foreign operators. Churchill would not ignore the matter but rather confront it with all his energy and eloquence, calling out the perpetrators and focusing on strengthening the national pride of a country's residents to determine their own destiny through existing democratic standards, rather than through the will of a foreign power.

Closing Comments

This analysis, which examines Churchill's hypothetical views and decisions on a series of current events, does not aim to portray him as analytically superior or magically prescient, as compared to other statesmen of our time. The lens that is used is an analytical model that integrates an array of personal values, experiences, analytical behaviours and characteristics of an individual themselves along with their inclinations in groups. It then overlays these attributes on a narrative that is the subject of analysis, attempting to simplify complex analyses, produce an easier array of observations that help form a perspective and ultimately inform better conclusions and decisions on complex topics. Churchill's lens is simply a tool for grounding and simplifying the narrative and analysis. This approach can therefore be replicated for virtually any subject, using a lens of any decision maker, provided we have sufficient information to critically distill these core personal and group attributes and to form a sufficiently in-depth understanding of the decision maker, that can be methodically applied to the topic of interest.

About the author

Simon Brightman is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Ottawa, Telfer School of Management. His research interests include global strategy, data analytics and strategic decision making in government, international organizations, as well as private corporations. Simon has led technology commercialization, innovation and product development for over 15 years in private and public organizations, presently serving as Head of Data Strategy for Transunion. Simon holds a BSc. in Computer Software & Business Management, an MBA as well as a Masters in International Relations from Cambridge University.