

Somalia in 1977, and Argentina in 1982 typify this pattern. In all three conflicts, initiators used force to right what to them were unacceptable wrongs inflicted on them by aggressive adversaries. Conversely, a defender may attempt to protect illegitimate gains for offensive purposes.

Leaders who believe that they are acting for legitimate and defensive reasons, and who are committed to rectifying perceived injustices, are more likely to resort to force. Such a pattern of perception may help to explain why apparently credible commitments are challenged. Under these conditions, leaders are also more likely to be supported by relevant domestic constituencies; domestic support may make a challenge more attractive and its possible adverse consequences more tolerable. There is every reason to believe that the behaviour of defenders is similarly affected. To the extent that leaders consider their interests legitimate and defensive, we would expect them to be more willing to buttress and defend their commitments.

At least two related bodies of theoretical literature support the importance of role perceptions. Some recent work in cognitive psychology suggests that "self-schemas" dominate the hierarchy of available schemas. They are more important in processes of attribution than schemas of others or of events.¹⁴⁰ Analysis of the normative importance of legitimacy suggests that perception of a challenge as "legitimate" will affect the intensity of commitment to action. Further, leaders with different normative standards act on their own judgments of legitimacy and use these standards to judge the legitimacy of other's threats and commitments. Paul Stern argues that when a would-be initiator sees its challenge as the legitimate defence of an interest or exercise of a right, reinforcement of a commitment by a defender is likely to lead to escalation and deterrence failure.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Stephen G. Walker, "The Impact of Personality Structure and Cognitive Processes Upon American Foreign Policy Decisions," paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1988, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴¹ Paul Stern et. al., "Conclusions."