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**Terror Management Theory in International Relations: Vladimir Putin and Slobodan
Milosevic**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts / Science in Department from
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by

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Introduction

“Tis after death that we measure men.” - James Baron Hope

So often, we seek to understand individuals and their decisions after death. Particularly in international relations, attempts to predict what may occur between two states is viewed through the lens of the international system. Although state-based analysis is a vital aspect of international relations, one cannot forget the role that individuals play in decision making. As we push the idea that individuals can make change for good, we must also recognize the idea that individuals within positions of power have true impact based on their individual beliefs and abilities. Terror Management Theory emphasizes the notion that individuals and their interactions with mortality through early life led them to cling to their self-esteem and cultural world view when making decisions.

This thesis will review psychological motives in international relations by placing the lens of terror management theory upon two global leaders: Vladimir Putin and Slobodan Milosevic. Both leaders are better understood through TMT, providing a reason to believe that their actions can be explained by TMT. Although a causal analysis will not be drawn in this thesis, these two leaders will be used to show that TMT can expand the way we look at leaders' choices in international relations.

Existing literature regarding terror management theory focuses on the notion that reminders of one's mortality lead to the adoption of worldviews and tactics that provide meaning to one's life. International relations literature regarding psychological motives is young, leaving space for the exploration of how global leaders make foreign policy decisions when confronted

with the reality of death. This thesis seeks to expose gaps in hypotheses that study leaders' decisions and their impact on global turning points as said leaders face their mortality. This thesis will also present a theory suggesting that as leaders near death, they seek to immortalize themselves and their worldviews by promoting specific actions. This thesis answers two questions:

1. How can we understand Putin and Milosevic through Terror Management Theory?
2. What does Terror Management Theory provide to our understanding of world leaders that can partner with other lenses?

Literature Review

Terror Management Theory

Terror Management Theory provides a psychological lens to international relations actions for those who experience an inclination toward preservative actions when faced with their mortality. When faced with perceived injustice, domination, humiliation, and other factors that threaten self esteem and cultural worldviews individuals find themselves faced with death-related anxiety. This thesis outlines the resulting violence directed against groups that place these threats. Research documenting the role of terror is presented in this article in how it pertains to processes that promote and discourage terrorism and violent counterterrorism actions.

Empirical evidence for TMT focuses on 350 studies conducted in 17 countries. Research indicates that when self esteem or worldview is threatened, anxiety and death related thoughts increase together. The Mortality salience hypothesis emerges out of this research, suggesting that reminders of death as a source of anxiety will increase an individuals' striving for protection.

Death reminders increase punishment-based tendencies to those who violate cultural norms and increase the desire for charismatic leaders who support one's culture. Reminders of death lead to behavior that justifies an existing culture, but they can also encourage major support for alternative ideologies. This is where international relations find its footing within TMT, serving as a field that needs TMT to understand motivations and actions of individual leaders. When cultural norms are unable to meet the physical and psychological needs of a group, that is when individuals begin determining which of their worldviews need security and heighten this security.

Aggressive policies threatening an outgroup have been consistently found as increasing when individuals are faced with reminders of mortality. With increased concerns about death, individuals are found to dehumanize and support the killing of those who threaten their own worldviews. There are, however, specific factors that cause individuals to respond negatively to those who threaten world views. Certain personality characteristics and situational factors are analyzed throughout this literature to determine which determinants encourage hostility. As individuals take on the tools of mass violence and forget the important value of human lives, international relations analysis of TMT seeks to add to how we view the causes of massacres and death labeled as collateral damage in the security process.

“Within The Causes and Consequences of the Need for self-esteem: A terror management theory.”

There is widespread empirical support for the need for self-esteem and self-esteem's role in explaining decision making. While this research widely began in the 1950s, researchers have found that low self-esteem leads to a wide array of psychological problems. However, recent

research on self-esteem points to the need to protect public image rather than private self-esteem. Individuals use a number of strategies to protect self-esteem, engaging in behavior that is socially acceptable to preserve that they think of themselves privately and alter how others view them. The human wondering of why we exist inevitably leads to heavy opinions about our own decay. The uncontrollability of the world only catalyzes this, arguing that paralysis with terror leads to the development of cultural worldviews that provide us predictability, normalcy, and permanence. Through culture, our self-esteem becomes dependent on our worldview and allows us a buffer for our mortality and vulnerability to it. These symbolic conceptions act as a cultural anxiety buffer, trying to find a reason for which we are useful. This cultural anxiety buffer appears in two ways: faith in the cultural adventure that makes human life meaningful, and belief that one plays a role in this cultural adventure.

Therefore, any defenses against a held worldview are considered a threat that must be eliminated in order to sustain the basis of our self-esteem. While this threat can come from a variety of places, this thesis concerns itself with when self-esteem is threatened by individuals' awareness of some aspect of themselves that cannot help them fulfill a valued role: death. When presented with the reality of their mortality, individuals fear their inability to contribute to a cultural drama and act to fight those in an outgroup that threaten it. When the outgroup involves a cultural or social-norms based group against another, this becomes a matter of intercultural interactions. The creation of an outgroup due to a threatened self-esteem can be used as a psychological analysis tool to understand leaders' early experiences to understand their longterm potential decisions.

Individuals as Case Studies

Terror management theory (TMT) is a psychological theory that explains how individuals engage in protective mechanisms when faced with the inevitability of death. The theory suggests that humans have a biological predisposition towards self-preservation, but unlike other life forms, humans have the capacity for symbolic thought, which fosters self-awareness and the ability to reflect on the past and ponder the future. As a result, humans realize that death is inevitable and uncontrollable, which leads to terror. To manage this terror, individuals sustain their worldviews, which are humanly constructed beliefs about reality shared by individuals that confer meaning and value, minimizing existential dread. Ernest Becker originated the theory, suggesting that individuals act in order to avoid the “inevitability of death.” The theory was then further developed by social psychologists Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon as a result of Becker’s ideas. By 1986, the three social psychologists had established that

“TMT posits that while humans share with all life forms a biological predisposition toward self-preservation in the service of reproduction, we are unique in our capacity for symbolic thought, which fosters self-awareness and the ability to reflect on the past and ponder the future. This spawns the realization that death is inevitable and can occur at any time for reasons that cannot be anticipated or controlled.”

As the idea of death causes terror, individuals manage their fears by sustaining their worldviews. Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon define worldview as “humanly constructed beliefs about reality shared by individuals that minimize existential dread by conferring meaning and value.” This definition emphasizes the importance of culture as a concept that gives meaning to life often in the form of assurance for an afterlife so long as cultural rules are followed. With

promises of immortality in the afterlife, culture provides symbolic immortality as nationality intersects with culture. Additionally, individuals often turn to cultural preservation when presented with the reality of their mortality as culture gives individuals a sense of value. Individuals play an integral role in their cultures, whether through fulfilling social roles or achieving societal center.

TMT research has three lines of research with empirical support:

1. Short elevations of self-esteem lead to lower reports of anxiety and “physiological arousal.” This concept has established the anxiety-buffering function of self-esteem.
2. When individuals are confronted with their death, their desire to defend their worldview increases. They begin to have more positive reactions to similar others, and the opposite reaction to those who are different.
3. Thoughts of death present more frequently when cultural beliefs or self-esteem are threatened.

There are over 500 studies of TMT available studying its result of aggression, stereotyping, depression, and other social behavior. Becker’s claim remains widely known as it states that “that the fear of death is the mainspring of human activity.”

The Demise of Leadership: Positivity and Negativity Biases in Evaluations of Dead Leaders

This piece by Scott Allison, Dafna Eylon, Jennifer Bachelder, and James Began analyzes five studies comparing how others view leaders before and after their deaths. The studies found that participants showed "death positivity bias," which is the notion that dead leaders are viewed

more positively than equivalent leaders who are alive. This bias was present in sports, political, and entertainment leaders.

The studies also found that leaders were viewed as more moral if they had already been moral when alive, while those viewed as less moral during their living time were viewed as more immoral after their deaths. The St. Augustine Effect was observed, which states that leaders who were viewed more positively after their deaths were those who went from good to bad, while those who underwent the same change but were still alive were viewed less favorably

The Presented Theory within this Thesis: The Worm at the Core

This thesis will now present the lens through which TMT will be tested for the remainder of this piece. This thesis will use The Worm at the Core as it presents individuals as they recognize the reality of their mortality. As individuals realize that they will one day die, they cling to two things that alter their decision-making: cultural worldview and self-esteem. The empirical evidence in The Worm at the Core provides a few core tenants that qualify whether an individual presents an attempt to “transcend death” through cultural worldview preservation and self-esteem-increasing activities.

Cultural Worldview Preservation

Firstly, cultural worldview preservation has to prevent thoughts about death. Cultural worldviews provide communities with a feeling of immortality through providing answers to an afterlife and providing life meanings. As people engage in cultural traditions and build their lives around cultures that provide a way of life, they feel as though their life has meaning. Through art, music, professions, architecture, and much more, individuals seek to create something within

their traditions that will provide them a legacy after death- essentially immortalizing them. These “meaningful groups” provide us hope that just as we have honored our ancestors from our cultural background, those that come after us will do so once we pass on. Through trying to “live on” based on what we have done in our lifetimes, Humans manage their mortality by sporting their faith in a cultural worldview, trying to find a sense of permanence in our actions. Cultural worldview, although strongly held on to, is also fragile. Through being on the edge of realizing our existence could be equally as futile as it could be meaningful, individuals turn to rule institutions, educational infrastructure, and religion to provide rituals that reaffirm the importance of our culture and soothe any fears. To believe that life means something, it is not enough to recognize that life is important and seen through culture- individuals have to also believe it about their own lives. Individuals must view themselves as integral to the functioning of their culture, meaning that political figures that are prime candidates for TMT analysis due to their clear role in societal functions. Examples of societal functions or cultural affairs include religious community events, geographic traditions, and other forms of world view expression through art.

Self-Esteem Preservation

The second vital trait that determines whether one is experiencing the contents presented in TMT is self-esteem. Self-esteem is the path through which we feel valuable within our cultural background. Self-esteem, however, is arguably more complicated due to the many ways in which one can find and lose self-esteem. TMT authors propose that self-esteem drives us all. Self-esteem, however, is hidden behind how individuals wish to present themselves within their cultures. Self-esteem ensures us that our existence is significant, rather than doomed as

unimportant and irrelevant due to the inevitability of our death. Self-esteem will be analyzed within this paper by establishing whether or not a leader is able to combine a belief in the “correctness of our worldviews” and can “demonstrate personal worth.”

Self-esteem has been historically established as a feeling individuals gravitate towards since the dawn of documented time. Whether through religious tests or historical oracles, avoidance of death is often the precedent for violence. Philosophers have also played a historically integral role to the value of death on life. Nietzsche wrote that “Death is certainly the end of life but far from being its goal. Death is a stupid fact of life, and yet it is possible to die proudly in the name of the love of life.” Kierkegaard alludes to religion in his statement “We the living may recollect the dead one, that one's life and manner among us. The dead, however, recollect nothing, even if we visit the grave to recollect every day. So it is even more important that, while we still live, we each recollect God while we can.” Popular psychologists such as Freud also centered works around death. He theorized that “humans are driven toward death and destruction, famously declaring that “the aim of all life is death.” These famous quotes may play a role in how we toy with what life means to us due to the existence of a guaranteed death, but the ways through which we determine what words to cling to our based on which serves our cultural worldview understanding and what encourages our self-esteem. Although leaders are often placed on a pedestal, they too face the same psychological implications of TMT. When their self-esteem is threatened, TMT provides a framework for the possible resulting actions to preserve self-esteem through actions that may create an outgroup or “other” to bolster existing beliefs.

Scientific psychology has also proposed many theories of how individuals act once they come to terms with their death. However, most psychological works have not been able to find a decisive conclusion or propose theories of indifference, according to the authors of *The Worm at the Core*. Terror Management Theory provides an understanding of how individuals act when recognizing their imminent death and state that no one is exempt from being susceptible. No one is immortal. No individual can escape the reality of mortality. This thesis seeks to apply TMT and the inevitability of mortality and determine if it can provide valuable insights into how world leaders specifically make decisions to help determine when violence or peace is more likely.

Methodology

Efforts to prove the existence of Terror Management Theory have been strained over the years. However, *The Worm at the Core* presents a series of survey-based experiments that indicate that those within test groups (i.e. groups faced with thoughts of their mortality prior to making a decision) were more likely to cling to their cultural worldview than the control group (Greenberg et al. 2015, 8). Those who had to answer surveys, review statements, or read about events associated with death were more likely to side with those who supported their worldview.

For example, one of the most riveting experiments listed in the book outlined the judging of prostitutes and their respective punishments by judges (Greenberg et al. 2015, 11). Under the assumption that judges are thoroughly vetted to be unbiased, the authors placed judges into test and experimental groups. When a prostitute was arrested, the typical punishment for a prostitution infraction was \$50. However, when judges were asked to fill out questionnaires about what they believed would happen when they died, the punishment for the same infraction rose to the punitive bond average of \$455. Judges in the control group- those who did not have to

fill out the survey prior to determining the price of the infraction- kept the fine at \$50. It was found that judges who were faced with thoughts about what happened when they died were influenced by thoughts of their mortality. Therefore, they clung to their cultural worldviews through morality and provided punishments of high fines to ensure that the prostitutes would show up for the trial and receive a “deserving” punishment. Many of the survey answers spoke of meeting a Savior in the afterlife, or of God. Clinging to religion and culture, even a brief reminder of mortality to a judge altered the way they perceived an infraction they had seen hundreds of times prior (Greenberg et al. 2015, 12).

It was found throughout the book’s similar experiments that when confronted with reminders of death, individuals turned to criticism and punishment of individuals who were not within their belief system. Conversely, those who acted in line with test subjects’ belief systems were rewarded. It is in these findings that it becomes imperative to study Terror Management Theory in world leaders, particularly with the realization that the management of existential terror impact all human affairs.

The methodology in the referenced book and this thesis hold true to the idea that individuals are not born with terror management practices. Infants are too young to understand the reality of their mortality in a conscious way; instead, they only focus on surviving through eating, excreting, sleeping, and hydrating (Greenberg et al. 2015, 23). This thesis, therefore, will also analyze the presented world leaders and how they become a defender of a worldview in an effort to preserve their realities and run from their mortality. “How does death enter the psychological picture?” (Greenberg et al. 2015, 14).

The methodology within this thesis will analyze leaders' decisions as they are faced with their mortality and how they react in regard to their cultural worldview and self esteem. This thesis will also determine when the need for psychological security may have been established throughout leaders' lives to establish that space for terror management is open. When children are unable to bond with early caregivers or fail to develop due to environmental factors which deprive them of safety, their development can be terribly stunted. Infants require parental love and protection in order to satisfy the infant's need for security. However, children after infancy are reinforced by their parents through punishments or rewards based on their adherence to the parent's cultural worldview. Until an individual finds self-esteem, the second component to managing terror, anxiety, and vulnerability takes center stage when a child is reprimanded. Self-esteem shields youth from the negative feelings that accompany being reprimanded.

It is said that children become "ensconced" in their worldviews by the age of five and begin to experience self esteem at or before age eleven . We learn that those that follow our cultural worldviews are good and those who fall outside of this classification are bad. Although there is a newer culture that different is not bad, it is still difficult to shake early impressions of morality and ethics as instilled in us by caregivers or our experiences in youth. The Worm at the Core defines our understanding of cultural worldviews as "understanding the scheme of things" (Greenberg et al. 2015, 15). The scheme of things can be conveyed intentionally through religion or family practices and unintentionally through even the smallest of things. Through banners, pictures, movies, and more, youth begin to develop a cultural worldview that mimics where they grow up and who they grow up with throughout their formative years (Greenberg et al. 2015, 22).

Children are said to discover death by the age of three (Greenberg et al. 2015, 23). Through seeing insects die or their first pet pass away, children see death in front of them. Through the passing of family members or movies with after-death rituals, children discover funerals. Children become aware of death, and soon question their own mortality- often subconsciously. Through nightmares or the development of little fears (ex. Spiders, animals, heights, the monster under the bed), a fear of death starts to permeate the choices of children (Greenberg et al. 2015, 192). Through interviews conducted by psychologist Sylvia Anthony, it was found that children as young as three years old were concerned about their death (Greenberg et al. 2015, 24). Children even dodge death in a way that mimics how adults do the same thing.

Children use stories like Peter Pan and others which present death within bad characters to make death seem manageable. Every time a bad character is defeated, children see that as a way to defeat death in their own right. If death is seen as a character that can be changed through the morality of a protagonist or can be destroyed by the protagonist doing good, then children can do the same. It is said that between the ages of five and nine, children see death as something they can dodge if they are merely quick or smart enough (Greenberg et al. 2015, 27). Death-denying strategies are present in adults as they mirror the actions of children, seeking to be good in the world to try and defeat the bad just as they did when they were young.

Once adults understand the reality of death, that it is not something that happens to anyone who isn't you, individuals must determine how to react. It was seen that although seven-year-olds did not view good or bad as ideas with a cultural standard to meet, eleven years olds did deal with reminders of mortality the same as adults do: through "pledging permanent psychological allegiance to their culture" (Greenberg et al. 2015, 29). **Therefore, through**

qualitative analysis of the actions and history of leaders, the following section will identify whether or not the management of terror through cultural worldview and self-esteem preservation is presented.

The follow two sections will outline Vladimir Putin's and Slobodan Milosevic's lives, looking at encounters with mortality and/or events that led them to work toward cultural worldview preservation, and clinging to self-esteem. The analysis will begin by providing an early background on both of their lives, beginning in childhood. This section will end with current/recntife and decisions, determining if TMT can be used to determine decisions on the international stage. The primary drawback of utilitzing two cases is that causation cannot be draw. Additionally, these two cases will only provide insight into the notion that TMT can be used in international relations, rather than determining all the ways in which it can be used. This thesis and its methodology is primarily concerned with determining if TMT can be used in international relations as a tool to understanding leaders, and hopes to encourage future researchers to expand on this work.

TMT IN PUTIN'S CHILDHOOD

Many scholars have made attempts to attribute Putin's political decisions, particularly in invading Ukraine, to be a byproduct of his childhood. Although that type of causation will not be drawn in this section, there are absolutely aspects of Putin's life that must be reviewed in attempts to understand whether or not he presents a candidate for Terror Management Theory. Prior to the creation of documentaries, books, lectures, and entire classes dedicated to

discovering the mind of Vladimir Putin, he was once just a little boy. Vladimir was born on October 7, 1952 (Short 2022, 17). Disputes of his childhood begin at that very moment, as many theorists and political opponents state that he was given up for adoption. Other accounts, including the one written by Philip Short in “Putin” state that his childhood was relatively normal for children of the era. At the time, it was natural for newborns to be separated from their mothers for over 36 hours after birth (Short, 2022, 17). Although scholars and doctors now know the damaging impacts of infants lacking skin-to-skin contact after birth, this was a common practice at the time and therefore not an indicator that he experienced early childhood much differently than other Russian-born children. It was also common for one newborn in fifty to pass before they even left the hospitals in Russia. Putin’s father was told to wait across the street, hoping to hear or see that Vladimir and his mother had survived through the peak of a window.

Although Vladimir survived his birth, his mother and father (also named, Vladimir) would experience two children succumbing to death. Albert, their first child, would pass away from whooping cough. Viktor, their other son, would pass from diphtheria after two years. Although this is the documented truth, there are accounts from Putin stating that authorities took his brother away as they insisted that provided his brother the best chance of survival. Putin’s mother, however, recounts her begging the authorities to take her son in order to save him. Neither version has been factually supported, but is still integral to the hard-to-recollect identity of Putin (Short 2022, 19).

Putin became somewhat of a miracle child to the family. They refused to send him to Kindergarten, educating him at home and outside the strict Russian system. Although they supposedly tried to give him up for adoption, Vladimir was under the age they accepted. Moreover, the shelters faced abysmal conditions, with carers stealing children’s food, and one in

six children dying within weeks of admission. Horror stories of cannibalism emerged, and children who survived winters in the orphanage were considered lucky. The death of Putin's brother Viktor is considered the reason for Putin's mothers' obsessive behavior toward him (Short 2022, 20). She was incredibly protective, trying to do everything they could for him.

However, in this effort, Putin was not introduced to the disciplinary Soviet preschool system that his peers had begun following. He was allowed to "do as he wished" (Short, 2022, 21), and often recalls himself as a rebellious child always seeking trouble. While he eventually joined the school in the first grade, accounts of the curriculum start with that of reading about Lenin. Lenin was considered the idol to be followed by Soviet children. He was seen as a patriarchal figure that many of them lacked as he guided the nation into a communist future.

"We are for peace! Let us rise as one! We will not allow ar to be rekindled again" (Short 2022, 24). The first graders were taught to sing together, loudly and proudly of their country. It was reported, however, that Putin took very little interest in school or hymns such as Lenin's. Instead, he was remembered for hanging out in criminal areas with *shpana*- hooligans- on the street (Short 2022, 28). Although his school was close to the highest achieving school in the region, the school that Putin attended failed to garner any interest as most students joined technical jobs or found themselves on the streets. Many attribute Putin's lack of early interest in school to his parents' decision to keep him out of Kindergarten, incidentally leaving him without the mentality of the collective. Young students found themselves emotionally broken until they agreed instinctively with the system. Putin's constant brawling and gravitation toward free thought was unacceptable in the system that emphasized morality and the collective in its teachings.

One might expect that Putin's rebellion emerged in the form of politics when he was young. However, he showed very little enthusiasm for organized activities and extracurriculars. He was allowed to join the Oktyabryonok, an organization created by Lenin's wife to create diligent young children. This type of civic activity did not excite Putin, and even he admits in interviews that he was a "hooligan" (Alter 2022, 1).

The historian, Dmitry Travin recalls Putin's actions, "It wasn't so much that conflicts sought him out, it was he who was always looking for conflicts. Whenever a fight broke out, Putin was the first to pile in" (Short 2022, 27). Putin's knack for tussling and getting involved in conflicts is recognized by almost every scholar who has outlined his early life. Even his friends recollect this quality about him. For example, Viktor Borisenko, his best friend at school, stated:

"He could get into a fight with anyone. It still amazes me...He had no fear. He didn't seem to have an inner instinct for self-preservation. It never occurred to him that the other boy was stronger and might beat him up...If some hulking guy offended him, he would jump straight at him - scratch him, bite him, pull out clumps of his hair...He wasn't the strongest in our class, but in a fight he could beat anyone, because he would get into a frenzy and fight to the end" (Short 2022, 28).

Scholars suggest that Putin's predilection for violence and fights may have been to overcorrect for his small stature. While this cannot be confirmed or denied, Putin's actions eventually caught up to him when his father had to beg for leniency from the Comrades' Court when Putin was sent their way. Putin's anger, although not toward anything and everything, was also seen in other children who grew up in cities scared by the Great Patriotic War (WWII).

Orders from Hitler to surround Leningrad in 1941 and let a famine winter starve Russians to death led to desperate actions. Cannibalism emerged, and “more people died than all Americans who had fought in every foreign war” (Short 2022, 29). Although most of the city had been rebuilt by the time Putin was experiencing childhood, the memories still stuck with the adults in his life. His parents buried memories of this time, and Putin only learned of what his parents had endured through stories when family members visited. For example, Putin tells the story of his mother being left to die with corpses to await burial during the blockade. His mother was saved when she was found by someone among the corpses. Putin told this story to Hilary Clinton, but it is found that each time this story is told, the narrative changes. For example, sometimes it is Putin’s father who found his mother and saved her. Other times it is a stranger who saved her (Short 2022, 31). Psychologists who have studied Putin suggest that this is due to the traumatic impact of the story, showing that the story changes frequently just as those who recollect trauma do when memories are suppressed.

Another haunting and traumatic aspect of the war that Putin would learn about was cannibalism. The prevalence of cannibalism was well known, but not spoken about due to its label as a forbidden topic. We now know that cannibalism permeated society during the hardest of times, presenting itself in the army, prisons, and the general population (Short 2022, 32). Individuals ate human flesh during the blockade in Leningrad, and Putin would learn even of the parents who killed their own children to survive. These stories became folklore within discussions of the war. Moreover, Putin continued to learn about death at a young age as he learned of the city's population becoming a fifth of what it was prior to the war. He also learned of the death of three of his uncles, grandmother, many relatives, and his brothers. A week after Putin was born, Stalin gave the speeches that would lead to the snowballing of his massive

purges. The paranoia of being killed due to informants was a real threat in the communal living tradition, as well. Living conditions were primitive in hindsight, but Putin claims that he never felt like his life was worse than that of others.

Putin found three mentors during his childhood. The first was Vera Gurevich, a teacher who sparked his academic interests (Putin 2000, 20). The second, was Rakhlin, his Sambo coach. Rakhlin visited him frequently at home, helping Putin hone his athletic abilities (Putin 2000, 19). Putin was motivated “To Maintain the kind of leadership I had” he said “I needed real physical strength and skills. I wanted to keep that kind of leadership...I knew that if I didn’t start sport, then in the courtyard and at school, I would no longer have the position I was used to” (Short 2022, 39)

Rakhlin noticed that the minute a fight ended, Putin would act as though it never happened (Short 2022, 40). He switched quickly from aggression to friendliness, never indicating how he felt about whether he won or lost. Although Sambo trains individuals to hide their emotions, Rakhlin noticed the impossibility of discerning how Putin was feeling. Putin’s worldview quickly became explainable through Takuan Soho, a seventeenth-century zen master that emphasized the importance of internal emptiness and the nihilation of consciousness. He often stated that there was no place for emotions in the world.

Putin’s first encounter with group inclusion came with his joining the Pioneers (Putin 2000, 18). Throughout recollections of Putin’s childhood, he is often viewed as an outsider. However, once Putin recited the Pioneer oath and the kerchief was placed around his neck by his best friend Borisenko, he became part of a cause bigger than himself. His joining the Pioneers came after attempts prior that did not work. When he made it, he promises in the oath to love his Motherland, to follow the teachings of Lenin, and the Communist Party. To be a pioneer, Putin

had to learn the life stories of every hero of the organization. He found himself learning about Pavel Morozov, a man who denounced his own father when he was a young boy. Pavlik was murdered by his community for this act, but the story was still told to emphasize a child who committed to the duty of the Pioneer revolutionaries. He was a symbol of self-sacrifice, and Putin never expressed any of his doubts- if he had them- about this story. Putin used what he had learned in Sambo to be a committed child of the Pioneers, willing to do even the most mundane of tasks to prove his loyalty to the new group he had found.

Putin was eventually accepted into the Komosol, the Party's youth movement due to his high performance in the group. His commitment was surprising to many as a younger Putin was "attracted to risk" and unflinching when asked to do what he did not want to do (Short 2022, 47). His closest friend, Borisenki, noted that one could never force Putin to do something. He stated that "the only person who could really influence him was himself" (Short 2022, 47). Putin often cited his father when speaking about his unflinching emotions. He stated that his father was also a commanding personality who focused on being taciturn. Moments of affection from his father are not noted, however, this was common for Russian father-son relationships at the time. When the time came for Putin to share with his father the plan to join the KGB, his father was opposed. He had little faith that the opportunity would work out, and many of his mentors expressed the same dismay at the idea.

Putin describes this as "the first turning point of his life" (Short 2022, 53). He defied his father and knew that he would either have to proceed with his plan or lose everything. Putin described his mentality throughout this time "If you want to win a fight, you have to carry it through to the end, as if it were the most decisive battle of your life." This quote references a

principle learned by Putin as he played in the courtyard growing up. Putin achieved his university place in his journey, and although there would be tense moments with mentors throughout, it was an integral stepping stone for Putin's Law school journey and KGB time.

TMT ANALYSIS IN PUTIN'S YOUTH

To qualify as a candidate for TMT, Putin would have to show encounters with his mortality which are then managed through cultural worldview preservation and actions that increase/guarantee his self-esteem. Although this thesis does not draw a causal line between any aspects of an individual's life and their actions, it is possible to show the use of TMT provides insight into individuals' actions.

Putin tells the following story about a rat, both to world leaders and when looking for the vocabulary to contextualize his choices.

“There, on that stair landing, I got a quick and lasting lesson in the meaning of the word ‘cornered.’ There were hordes of rats in the front entryway. My friends and I used to chase them around with sticks. Once I spotted a huge rat and pursued it down the hall until I drove it into a corner. It had nowhere to run. Suddenly it lashed around and threw itself at me. I was surprised and frightened. Now the rat was chasing me. It jumped across the landing and down the stairs. Luckily, I was a little faster and I managed to slam the door on its nose.”

Putin tells this story in his autobiography, *First Person*, and has continued to tell this story orally to world leaders (Putin 2000, 10). It is meant to serve as a warning about the act of cornering someone. Putin insists that if he is cornered, he will have no choice but to lash out as the rat did in the story. Once this story was released, many scholars and news outlets used it to

understand the philosophy by which Putin makes decisions. Dozens of media outlets have attached to this story to try and understand Putin's actions in Ukraine. While these stories are interesting reads, this thesis will focus on analyzing the "cornered rat" as an encounter with mortality for Putin in addition to other events.

Putin's encounters with his own mortality are undisputed. Growing up knowing two of his siblings had passed is the clearest experience with death at an early age. Even if the rumors that the two brothers were taken away by authorities are true instead, Putin experienced the loss of two important individuals early in his life. Putin also experienced his parents clinging to a world view after the loss of his brothers in their sheltering of Putin and homeschooling. As Putin was treated as a miracle child, this notion likely created his self-esteem and his rebellious attitude throughout his childhood. This feeling of being a miracle child was accompanied by learning about death during the war and economic despair.

Putin's predilection for fighting can be characterized as a self-esteem preservation tool, showing both the integration of his father's stoicism with his desire to defend himself. His character was also focused on a level of individual identity due to his late entrance into the Russian school system. Conflict seems to be the most common thread seen throughout Putin's childhood. Rather than channeling his rebellious attitude into civic duty, he spent his time with those he calls hooligans and engaging in fights. Putin's lack of fear and fondness for physical conflict resulted in *his undying willingness to fight until the end*. For this reason, he won many of his fights growing up. *Not quitting, quickly became a part of Putin's identity*. If he quit, he would betray both his worldview and self-esteem.

Putin's preservation of his self-esteem was also observed within his personal life as he defied his father and mentors to study what he wanted and join the KGB. Putin himself describes

this as a turning point. The story is actually consistent with Putin's character by this point. He continues to make decisions that lead him to a fight. However, he describes his need to fight as prompted by the feeling of being cornered. Although we cannot determine whether Putin's desire to fight left him cornered, or the cornering by others had made him ready to fight, we do know that fighting seems to be the way that a young Putin preserved his self-esteem.

The Russian Idea

Putin's worldview preservation occurs not throughout his childhood, but later in his life throughout his political career. Putin's political career was faced with the "spiritual vacuum" left by the collapse of the Soviet Union (Short 2022, 431). Putin described the experience as being found in a type of void, leaving many Russians with a complicated worldview of the country they lived in. With Marxism-Leninism providing the moral guidelines by which many lived their lives, Putin was faced with the task as President to determine how to replace the theory. Putin was determined to create a distinct Russian identity for a nation that found itself trapped in limbo between the culture and politics of both the West and East. When asked about the national idea during his first Presidential campaign, Putin noted that "We should not start all over again looking for an elusive national idea. It's a subject which people talk about frequently and generally quite pointlessly" (Short 2022, 431). After winning the election, however, Putin admitted to believing that a new national identity was already forming whether one wanted it to or not. His statement continued his proven dislike for ideologies. However, throughout his presidency, he gave Russia a distinctly national identity based on his worldview.

Early on, Putin harped on his belief that Russia needed to have a moral compass and needed to acknowledge the victories of the Russian past (Short 2022, 47). He defined the key

elements of a national identity as patriotism and religious and cultural values. His definition focused on the aspects that he said made Russia its own individual nation that was fundamental to Russians. Whether these are truly things that Putin believes or values pointed to when taking controversial actions, we will never know. However, we can see Putin's worldview emerge in his beliefs from literature as he sought to learn from theorists in his attempt to create a strong presidential system.

Putin's engagement with art and literature in creating a distinct national identity began with the eight new compositions he presented to be patriotic songs. He presented eight to appear to go through the motions of democratic consultation and then chose to restore the Soviet Anthem. This caused outrage, and Yeltsin even spoke up against Putin's choice to use music that echoed an era that was over. Putin also allows the use of a pre-revolutionary white, blue, and red flag. People refused to stand for the anthem, and the public outcry made it clear that the democratic consultation process was merely for show. Putin signed the measures into law, unphased by the outrage that resulted from his decision. Putin himself noted that by restoring the old Anthem, he was creating an acknowledgment of the past with the desire to focus on the achievements of the present and future. This would become a critical aspect of Putin's presidency as he continued to focus on achievements rather than failings throughout his time in office.

Putin began going to extreme measures to preserve the way he saw the world. He authorized a new version of history teachings, focusing on recalling Stalin as a leader who created the conditions needed to modernize the economy. This is astounding, and although Putin did describe Stalin as a Tyrant, this rewriting of history was a betrayal to many. He was his version of history as "the correct version." He began to attach patriotism to his worldview,

imposing the notion that if one disagreed then they were not a patriot. Any attempt at democracy faded fast, being labeled by supporters as sovereign democracy and by opponents as anything from managed democracy to a dictatorship.

Patriotism grew hand in hand with the Church as defining ideals of the Russia Putin wanted. The Church emerged later in his presidency, with early statements about faith being focused on Christianity as an ideology rather than a faith-based idea. However, Putin began visiting Christian spaces and Orthodox monasteries frequently. He began attending out of his own volition, rather than a necessity to prove to the public his religious virtue. It was clear that a relationship with Orthodoxy would be integral to withstanding opponents within the Presidency, and Putin capitalized off of this knowledge. Whether he truly believes or not is still controversial.

A clearer picture of Putin's belief system emerged when he found himself with an affinity for Ivan Ilyin. Ilyin's influence on Putin is indisputable, seen in quotes during speeches and references during interviews with the White Russian philosopher. Ilyin had left Russia and wrote his ideas from elsewhere, but his criticisms were loud enough to reach anywhere. He was a fan of the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, and a stark critic of Bolshevism. He knew that fascist regimes made mistakes, but denoted that said mistakes were outweighed by the "healthy national patriotic feeling" from which ideas emerged (Putin 2000, 443). Ilyin wanted an autocratic regime with strong central power that could control a nation and the many territories it should have. The intriguing idea for Putin was that "Russia will have to find for itself its own, original state form...which will correspond to its national history." This idea, in addition to the rejection of democracy and totalitarianism, intrigued Putin.

Putin continued to form a worldview based on other authors. He quoted Nikolai Berdyaev's ideas, an Orthodox Christian philosopher who was exiled by Lenin. Berdyaev

believed that Russians were a contradiction, able to inspire love and hate in the West. Berdyaev wrote about creativity and freedom, making his work an interesting choice for Putin's worldview. However, Putin believed in the idea that Russia was not European or Asian, but rather it was the uniting of two distinctly different worlds. Putin was also influenced by Vladimir Solovyov, a friend of Dostoyevsky who believed in the idea of a Universal Church.

However, Ilyin was a prominent feature in Putin's speeches as Putin even focused on bringing back the works of other authors who had been banned during the Soviet era. Putin wanted to ensure that a present Russia knew of and appreciated its pre-revolutionary past, allowing the new Russia to reject formal democracy in the West for what Putin labeled Sovereign Democracy. With Sovereign Democracy, Putin could protect his worldview through parties and a civil society that experienced freedom within the limits predetermined by the state. Putin was to be the one who determined that moral guidelines shared as a common belief would constitute the only way to achieve goals for Russia.

We also see TMT preservation of worldview and self-esteem converge in Putin's power vertical effort. Putin decided that he would "Rehabilitate the economy first, and only then raise the living standards" (Short 2022, 448). Putin did not want to owe any nation any money, hiring economic advisors to help him achieve paying off the national debt- particularly that to the United States. For Putin, this was both a move politically and one that mirrored his lack of desire to rely on others. Putin also dodged political blame by blaming others. He often blamed the system that he inherited, blaming corruption and patron-client relations left over from the time of Tsars for any instability. Putin's blaming of others to keep himself from shouldering blame or guilt for his actions continued in the well-known firing of political opponents. For example, when Nikolai Aksyonenko ran against Putin for Prime Minister, Putin demoted him once Putin

had won the election. He often opened up criminal investigations against those who did not agree with him, doing anything to ensure that he was not directly burning any bridges. He also stated that the corruption within the government was so strong and that he could not fight it when asked to take responsibility for mistakes that occurred within his government. Realistically, Putin acted incompetent when it came to taking responsibility because he was not willing to take the risks needed to remove corruption directly.

Putin's preservation of his identity as a politician in power continued when he alluded to Gorbachev's notion of a dictatorship of the law. Putin eventually also brought oil and gas- which were half of Russia's export earnings- under his control. When things went south, he offered up a politician to the public to prove that no one was above the law. However, these politicians were considered "sacrificial lambs," not experiencing a just trial.

Putin's personality also grew harsher over the years. It is a consideration that many have read that the reason for the war in Ukraine is a byproduct of Putin learning that he is dying. This paper will not provide any support for this notion without a factual basis. However, Putin has admitted to an incredibly rigorous work schedule in the past. By creating a personality cult, he has to appear everywhere, all the time, and work without real delegation since he does not trust many people.

MILOSEVIC

Slobodan Milosevic is the target of the second case study presented in this paper. In 1989, the world was invited to view Milosevic through his own language. A series of interviews and speeches were published in a novel that became a widespread success. For many literature fanatics, the idea that a propaganda-filled novel became a national bestseller seemed like a

tragedy. However, Milosevic's book did the same thing as his charisma did- rally the troops. His book was addressed to the Serbs, seeking to encourage them to engage in Milosevic's nationalist narrative.

Milosevic was nothing short of a demagogue. He harnessed nationalism and used it to promote his belief that Serbians were a chosen people who had been treated poorly for decades. He became the voice of the Serbs, experiencing approval ratings and popularity higher than any other politician who came before him. Songs and personality cults began to follow him everywhere he went:

“Slobodan, they call you freedom,
you are loved by big and small.
So long as Slobo walks the land,
the people will not be in thrall” (West 1994, 434)

An article in the Council on Foreign Relations by Aleksa Djilas stated that Milosevic's success and levels of power acquired could not be predicted by his early life. However, this thesis suggests that within Terror Management Theory, Milosevic's actions to cling to a cultural worldview and self-esteem could have been predicted (Djilas 1993). Although a causal link cannot be drawn through the qualitative analysis that will occur, this section will show that Milosevic is a good candidate for further research on early encounters with mortality and the long-term impact on worldview and self-esteem preservation-based actions.

Milosevic's Early Life

Milosevic was born in Serbia, to a family of Montenegrin background. This in itself is an interesting notion, seeing as his Serbian identity was Milosevic would eventually cling to, promote, and even kill for. His identity as a school child was the opposite of Putin's. Milosevic was considered a phenomenal student, seen as reliable and proper. He wrote poems and articles, taking after his father who was a theologian, and his mother who was a schoolteacher. His mother was also a communist activist, spending Milosevic's childhood caring for him when his father was frequently out of town. His mother was from a leading family of communists in Serbia and considered herself a true proponent and believer of the ideology.

Milosevic's childhood took a tragic turn in 1962. His father committed suicide while Slobodan was at university. His mother then did the same around a decade later, as did his uncle. These encounters with the reality of mortality and seeing constant death around him likely impacted Milosevic- although this thesis cannot draw a causal line between these events and his later actions. However, these events do constitute encounters with mortality and Milosevic is therefore a good case to determine whether or not TMT can be a possible lens through which to see his later actions.

Like many individuals with great aspirations, Milosevic sought out mentors throughout his youth and young adulthood to guide him after the trials of his early life. He grew close to Ivan Stambolic during his time at the Faculty of Law. Stambolic was a student who was half a decade older than Milosevic and had begun a career in politics alongside his studies. Many analysts consider Stambolic to be Milosevic's mentor- stating "In the ensuing years Stambolic would become Milosevic's mentor. Together they climbed toward the summits of power in Serbia, Slobodan always just one step behind Ivan" (Djilas 1993). Milosevic grew increasingly comfortable with the Communist party machine, being remembered for his reliability and

organization within the party. Milosevic began as a believer in the Titoist philosophy of a unified Yugoslavia under communism. Under his mother's tutelage, he accepted communism as a ruling methodology but continued to appreciate power dynamics in politics for what they were.

In the 1970s, Tito, leader of Yugoslavia prior to Milosevic, expelled reform-minded communists in Serbia. This purge was of communists who wanted to encourage freedom of speech and train young people to rise into leadership. Those expelled also wished to integrate market forces into the Yugoslavian economy, ideas that were too "out there" for Tito within a socialist economy. For many regional analysts, the purge of the liberals is seen as a turning point leading to the political deterioration of Serbia. The concept of "moral-political stability" emerged, requiring blind agreement with Marxism-Leninism to have a functioning career within society. Milosevic is considered both a result and practitioner of "moral-political stability", also known as negative selection.

After Tito died in 1980, Milosevic continued to be a supporter of Tito's policies. He was known for being an unwavering communist, even more so when Stambolic became the president of the Communist party in Serbia. Stambolic asked Milosevic to head the Belgrade party committee, "the center of democratic dissent in Yugoslavia." Milosevic policed Serbian nationalists, attacking them both verbally and through propaganda.

By 1986, Milosevic became the chief of the Serbian party when his mentor became the president of Serbia. In 1985, however, came the real turning point. Milosevic was asked to attend the 18th Session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia. He was asked to calm the unrest in the nation on behalf of Stambolic. Instead, Milosevic heard calls from the Serbs who decried their mistreatment over the years. Milosevic was struck by the Serbs who felt they had not received the homeland that they deserved. Milosevic began the voice of the

Serbs, making inflammatory yet uniting speeches to the masses about creating a Greater Serbia. Stambolic was frustrated, but Milosevic's words had already begun to change the political landscape of the country.

THE VOICE OF THE SERBS

“Every citizen can see that the Yugoslav market is less and less united” (Milosevic Address 1989).

Milosevic began to express his support of the Serbs as a matter of morality. He creates an “other”, often stating that honest men would agree with his beliefs about the world. He states that the only solution to solve the plight of the Serbs and their exodus is to support him. Milosevic then ousts Stambolic in a party vote, humiliating Stambolic publicly (Engleberg 1991, 32). Milosevic proved his credibility with a Serbian audience, pushing a narrative of grievances and blame onto Albanians. Milosevic began to cling to the idea that Albanians had forced the resettlement of the Serbs, and he led 15,000 Serbs and Montenegrins in the earliest of protests. Milosevic began to engage in “defensive arming,” stating that the Serbs had to protect themselves from other ethnic groups (Obsershall 2000, 1985). The resulting violence led to many ethnic groups engaging in defensive arming, causing a downfall of institutions approaching a state of anarchy. Milosevic reduced the power of other ethnic groups through ethnic cleansing, disguising his acts as purges of those who were dangerous.

In 1989, Milosevic reformed Constitution and halted Kosovo's claim to autonomous power. Milosevic claimed a state of emergency and removed Kosovo of the autonomy that it had only gained fifteen years prior. Albanians began resisting against this change, and Milosevic's troops drew violent in a region. He ordered the troops to stay despite protests, and trends of

violent and nonviolent discrimination spread. Ethnic Albanians feared being fired, finding themselves unprotected by local police, and faced violent opposition when they took to protesting (Ignatieff 1993, 42). Milosevic's refusal to leave Kosovo was merely the first example of many times he took to violence to repress ethnic groups who did not support his call for a Greater Serbia.

Once seen as a rising young politician who was well respected, Milosevic felt the threats of an international community intervening in his actions. Milosevic, however, continued to use his words to cling to his worldview and bolster his ideology. Creating a security dilemma in the area, he replaced previous strategies of the LCY and Serbian party organization to place Serbian provinces under the control of the federal government (Ramet 2019, 26).. He pushed Serbians to buy into a national identity, removing themselves from the notion of being Yugoslavian first. Discourse between groups began to fall apart and Serbian politicians used conspiracy theories to point fingers at Croatian opposition. Milosevic was repeatedly accused of being Stalinist in his actions.

Michael Ignatieff posited that Milosevic "developed a new style of post-Cold War authoritarian populism." (1999, 75). Milosevic led Serbia through four unrelenting wars to dominate the other republics, relying on the historically poor treatment of Serbs to keep the group invested in every fight. He was energetic, and unafraid to dismantle communist and social norms to achieve the spectacle that his rule would become. He claimed to allow opponents to speak freely, hiding behind the fact that the largest TV network and newspaper were under his influence. Djilas claimed that Milosevic had "allied himself permanently with the politics of fear" and was "always on the lookout for the hostility and conflict that produced it" (Djilas 1993). Refusing to accept political solutions to solve the mistreatment of the Serbs, it is seen that

Milosevic was concerned only with preserving his power and ensuring that his beliefs were seen, heard, and understood through force.

Milosevic's worldview was preserved after early encounters with mortality through his unrelenting beliefs which eventually became that of the Serbian people. He ensured that Serbian nationalism was made of exclusivism, and led to a people fully convinced of their unique mistreatment. As the Serbs are one of the groups that experienced the most death in two world wars, Milosevic pushed the idea that they deserved special credit and special treatment. However, pointing toward "evidence" he created a narrative that other ethnic groups were conspiring for their downfall. Milosevic was convinced that the Serbs were going to become persecuted national minorities and that he was the savior of the people. As Serbian intellectuals such as Cosic harnessed the intelligentsia to foster more anger, bitter ideas dominated the masses in a way that contributed greatly to the crumbling of Yugoslavia.

The following background will focus "defensive arming" of ethnic groups in the region as perpetuated by Milosevic to preserve his belief in a superior Serbian people (Obsershall 2000, 1985). Michael Ignatieff, a leading scholar on the security dilemma within international relations, posits that ethnic groups experience the security dilemma when insecurity is present (1993, 42). This theory points to Milosevic as he perpetuated violence by reducing the autonomy of ethnic groups in Serbia through ethnic cleansing.

Milosevic's 1987 speech caused fear across Yugoslavia by foreshadowed Milosevic's removal of Kosovan autonomous power in 1989. This caused immediate protests and violence in a country that had only received autonomous power fifteen years earlier. Milosevic took advantage of the unrest and placed Yugoslavia in a state of emergency to consolidate his power. He blamed Kosovo, and stated he would remain in power due to their use of arms. Using the

security dilemma to his advantage, Milosevic refused to remove troops from the region while also diminishing state autonomy from Kosovo. Despite their agreement to his proposed constitutional amendments, Milosevic reneged on his agreement. His determination to keep power in Kosovo despite NATO and international threats exemplify the power of an individual if they feel as though their world view is being threatened. Placing all Serbian provinces under national control, Milosevic harnessed the national media to create a Serbian identity (Ramet 2019, 26). By isolating Serbs from intercultural exchange with the other republics, Milosevic prevented healthy discourse between the groups leading to offensive violence outcomes.

Milosevic, by the end of his life, was considered one of the most untrustable politicians in the world. He was described by Warren Zimmermann as “the slickest con man in the Balkans” (Zimmerman 1999). Djilas states that this perception of Milosevic is not due to his quick change in political ideology and his sudden championing of a peaceful world when faced with the consequences of his actions, but rather than he rules his life through fear. An opportunist, Milosevic made decisions throughout his career to bolster his self-esteem- such as ousting his mentor from positions of power- and worldview- such as using violence at every turn to ensure everyone believed what he had to say. Milosevic is the ideal case for TMT, having tragic encounters with mortality early in life and spending the rest of his life trying to preserve what he can by making decisions based on fear and opportunity. His mentors both provided and emphasized a world view he had created for himself, and his leadership role as the Yugoslavian and Serbian leader allowed him to bolster his self-esteem and world view in public. Milosevic serves as an example of an individual better understood through TMT, allowing historians to make sense of his choices and use TMT to create a portfolio of decision possibilities when analyzing other leaders.

Conclusion

Vladimir Putin and Slobodan Milosevic have both had tragic encounters with mortality in their early life. However, they were reported to be vastly different individuals in schooling and their political careers. This illuminates the value of TMT, allowing us to see how both leaders may have reacted differently to reminders of their mortality but both chose actions that bolstered their self-esteem and worldviews. Both leaders are examples of the importance of TMT in international relations, showcasing how TMT can help international relations academics and practitioners in understanding retroactively and proactively the possible ways in which a leader may act when given power. This thesis seeks to emphasize the value of Terror Management Theory as an analytical tool to understanding world leaders within the international system. Although a causal conclusion cannot be drawn from this research, it is possible for future researchers to conduct a regression analysis to determine when leaders display terror management theory early in life to predict possible future decisions. Future research in TMT could open up an avenue for states to analyze the potential impacts of a new leader or administration to be prepared on all fronts for different possibilities.

This piece provides preliminary research on Vladimir Putin and Slobodan Milosevic as two candidates who present signs of early encounters with mortality which shaped their management of terror through self-esteem preservation and world-view preservation. Their careers have been centered on creating ideological echo chambers to ensure that their ideas are presented to them as the only correct options. Although both case studies have experienced early encounters with mortality in a very different ways, both saw death tragically in childhood. These experiences are haunting to read about but makes their clinging to certain identity-based labels and actions easier to understand. Terror Management Theory provides the unique opportunity to

intersect psychological motives-based research with international relations to shift the study of international relations from just interstate interactions to a study of the individuals who make up the international system. Although this piece is descriptive and focuses on illuminating the value of understanding world leader's through TMT, it is unable to account for variables such as the impact of religion and other additional identity-forming topics. Future research should include the impact of additional variables on self-esteem and cultural world view preservation throughout life.

Epistemologically, my background as the writer of this piece is integral to understand the reason for this line of research. My epistemological stance is that individuals matter in international relations as they make decisions and lead states. Although the study of states through theory is valuable to framing international relations, the studying of individuals illuminates the psychological motives behind certain decisions. The study of individuals also allows international relations to collaborate with other fields of study such as sociology, psychology, and history to learn lessons about individuals throughout history who have made system altering decisions, and how to anticipate their rise in the future.

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