

Belief (in)stability and the operational code of Mark Rutte



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Abstract

In this thesis, the effect of the MH-17 disaster on Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's operational code will be analysed. I will use speeches to conduct a content analysis, based on the Verbs In Context Analysis (VICS) system. The operational code analysis will be used to better understand Rutte's beliefs across different domains and periods. The most important question will be if beliefs about foreign policy changed after an external shock. The initial focus is on the cognitive consistency theory, which state that beliefs are stable and internal coherent. The results indicate that beliefs incoherently change and so challenge basic assumptions of cognitive consistency.

The world spills over with unpredictable events. And most of the time, such events are the most defining moments in human history. One just has to look at the impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, the 1973 Oil Crisis or 9/11 to understand how determined unexpected phenomena can be. Those events usually have a major influence on the public mass and individual leaders. Whether it is on their financial resources or their perception on the adversaries (as with the Soviet Union and the Arabic countries, respectively for the Cuban Missile Crisis and the OPEC Crisis). In this thesis, the relation between stability of beliefs and exogenous shocks will be researched.

The environment and context, wherein leaders act, may influence the deeds of a leader. 9/11 was a great determinant in forcing George W. Bush to pass the Homeland Act and the Global Financial Crisis 2008 influenced governments to take stricter financial policies (de Clercy and Ferguson, 2016: 104). These two examples show that, among other things, crises can cause shifts in policies. So, were those shifts in policy result of belief change or any other reason? Precisely, were beliefs altered in such a way that this change caused a shift in policy? In answering such questions, the relationship between cognition and motivation can be researched. The link between beliefs and outcomes is an important one, because it shows the relevance of studying beliefs (George, 1969: 190). If beliefs do not explain behaviour, why would we study cognition? When the broad understanding of the transition of beliefs into decisions is clear, the changeability of beliefs after a crisis can be researched.

Following Tetlock, beliefs facilitate foreign policy decision-making by serving as a framework to assess different rational policy options. Beliefs function as principles to evaluate different outcomes (Tetlock, 1991: 28). To further explain this, leaders often make rational decisions based on various constraints; incomplete and ambiguous information about the situation and the inability to predict adequate consequences. To deal with these cognitive limits, individuals subconsciously use beliefs as guides for decision-making (Walker, 1990: 405; George, 1969: 199). Although still under-researched, the possibility exists that beliefs have a significant influence in shaping foreign policy (Holsti, 1964: 244). Thoughts indirectly shape policy in such a way that individuals receive and assimilate incoming information. However, beliefs do not unilaterally define policy; other variables, as domestic pressure, play a pivotal role in determining outcomes (George, 1978: 7). Furthermore, Walker, Schafer and Young highlight that beliefs say something about political characteristics. Beliefs reflect the political personality and the way s/he behaves in social environments (Walker, Schafer and Young, 2003: 222).

When beliefs have an influence on outcomes and decisions, the state of beliefs is of great concern. If so, beliefs are a prescription for a causal connection with political action. Whether a leader's beliefs

are stable or volatile, say something about understanding foreign policy behaviour (Walker, 1990: 405). Difference in beliefs might cause difference in decision-making processes.

In this first section, I introduced the link between beliefs and outcomes. Although determining political action by leadership personality is not the central topic, this does assign significance in studying beliefs. In the next section, the literature review, I will elaborate more on the role of individual actors in International Relations (IR) theories, the concept of beliefs, how they are structured and the link between beliefs and foreign policy. Furthermore, and this is the main concern of my thesis, I will introduce the relationship between the stability of beliefs and exogenous shocks.

Literature review

When scholars explain international phenomena, they tend to describe it from the perspective of the international system (Wendt, 1999) or the state (Waltz, 1979). Researchers within IR theories explain peace, war and political behaviour by focusing both on the state and international structures as the central actors in politics. The neorealist theory of Kenneth Waltz dismisses the idea of individuals as unit of analysis (Waltz, 1979: 65). The individual is often ignored in research, because difference in their characteristics is not relevant. International phenomena are being prescribed to the behaviour of the state, not the individual leader (Lavikainen, 2016: 6). Furthermore, neorealism claims that the international society will be directed into a state of anarchy because of actions done by the human nature of individuals. Within this theory, states are the relevant unit of analysis in studying IR and by their actions anarchy can be avoided (Waltz, 1979: 89-91). On the contrary, although Alexander Wendt's constructivism recognizes that anarchy steers politics, it's most important determinant is culture instead of the state or the individual (Wendt, 1999).

Structuralist theories state that the human nature of individuals is unchanging and set at birth. Individuals are considered as constant and consequently all behave in the same manner (Heywood, 2011: 56). However, Hermann et al. contest the notion that individuals have the same characteristics and that they approach international politics in the same way. The researchers distinguished between different leadership typologies, by linking certain characteristics with certain leadership styles. They found that leadership styles influence foreign policy outcomes, with different styles developing different governmental decisions (Hermann et al, 2001). Hermann and Hermann highlight that studying structures and states alone does not explain international politics and decision-making. To fully understand foreign policy decision-making, they suggest incorporating the "ultimate decision unit", i.e. the latest authority that can't undo a decision, into IR research (Hermann and Hermann,

1989: 362). The configuration of the individual decision unit partially shapes foreign policy and therefore makes the relevance of beliefs more convincing (Hermann and Hermann, 1989: 384).

Although briefly explained in the introduction, I will further elaborate on the concept belief. Furthermore, I will explain the way beliefs are structured and the connection between beliefs and foreign policy.

What does the concept belief mean? In the broadest sense, a belief is a subject's association between an object or entity and certain attributes and characteristics. The object can be behaviour or a policy and the attribute can be a certain outcome (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1972: 494). In other words, beliefs are causal mechanisms about what we think is true (Renshon, 2008: 822). To focalize the concept belief within the scope of my thesis, I involve the concept Weltanschauung. This is what Rosenberg calls "a comprehensive, personal, philosophy [...] of the universe and of human life" (Rosenberg, 1986: 735). Beliefs about political life and international systems, i.e. beliefs that are central in this thesis, are extracted from the Weltanschauung. The focus of this thesis is therefore on the international political life (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1972: 495).

Why are beliefs relevant for scientific research? Renshon refers to the filter mechanism that beliefs hold. Experience and pre-existing beliefs form a framework in which new incentives will be adjusted, so it fits in their belief system (Renshon, 2008: 822). Individuals view the complex world from their personal lens to structure their belief systems. By filtering new information, individuals produce perceptions of reality, whether wrong or right (Renshon, 2008: 822). So, beliefs are relevant because leaders make decisions according to their perceptions of reality instead of objective reality (Holsti, 1962: 244). Because of the reliability on the subjective reality it's therefore important to know if and under what circumstances beliefs change.

George states that beliefs are considered stable, but the possibility exists that beliefs do change (George, 1978: 4). So, if they can change, what are the condition under which stable beliefs change? First, acceptance and resistance to belief change is dependent on the personality of a leader. George does not elaborate much on this condition, but much can be assigned to personal characteristics (George, 1969: 216). A second condition concentrates on the tendency to follow authoritative experiences. This is especially apparent when looking at radical elite groups, such as Marxists (George, 1969: 217). Such groups have a subjective, unique perception on history and a 'sacred political culture' (George, 1969: 217). Excluding from such groups makes individuals more prone to belief change. Thirdly, next to personality and group variables, incidents play a significant role in affecting beliefs. The impact of significant events and historical developments causes beliefs to change (George, 1969: 219).

So how are these beliefs structured? As mentioned before, beliefs are part of a comprehensive belief system. A belief system is a distributive web composed of perceptions and knowledge about the world and him/herself (Holsti, 1962: 245). At the core of this web lies the 'Weltanschauung', the master beliefs about political life (Rosenberg, 1986: 735). Every other idea is derived from this master belief (Rosenberg, 1986: 736). Converse emphasizes the interdependence of beliefs by stating that belief systems are an interrelated web of images, whereby every idea is connected to each other. Any change in belief configuration will have effect on other beliefs (Converse, 1964: 3).

Rosenberg states three assumptions about belief system, which are of great importance for my thesis. Although I pay much attention to these assumption in my theoretical framework, I briefly introduce them here. First, belief systems are internally consistent. Because every belief relates to each other, change in one belief (for instance a belief about an adversary) will cause a change in a related belief (a belief about the political future). Second, already mentioned, a belief system contains a centre-peripheral dimension. Thirdly, the Weltanschauung or the master belief influences every other 'lower' beliefs (Rosenberg, 1986: 735).

So, what is the relationship between beliefs, belief systems and decision-making? In their research on the beliefs of Chinese leader Xi Jinping, He and Feng make the rather strong statement that beliefs dictate the behaviour of states (He and Feng, 2013: 217). Although beliefs are involved in decisions on foreign policy, I find this a simplified claim as there are additional variables influencing foreign policy. Alexander George states that cognitive beliefs are one of the many variables that shape the design of foreign policy decisions. So, to understand foreign policy, George suggests conducting a multi-variable analysis (George, 1978: 7). A researcher who tried to link beliefs with motivations is Ole Holsti in his article "A typology of "operational code" belief systems" (1977). Holsti made some assumptions about the linkage between motivations and beliefs. He argued that beliefs about the political nature are the foundation for the realisation of political goals. Holsti developed six types of belief systems and assigned to each of them different characteristics. This two-dimensional typology is aligned with two beliefs; the nature of the political universe and sources of conflict. Following from the two dimensions, different motivations are apparent. An example is a leader who sees conflict as temporary and therefore is more optimistic about achieving objectives, not dependent on chance and more confident in predicting the future (Holsti, 1977; Walker, Schafer and Young, 2003: 217). Walker eventually added another dimension; the need for affiliation, achievement and power. In research on the belief systems of U.S. presidents he found that beliefs are linked with the need for affiliation, achievement and power. These findings support the claim that cognition and motivations are related. Hence, not only do beliefs say something about the characteristics of a leader, but also do beliefs give a prescription for political action in the form of motivations for affiliation,

achievement and power (Walker, Schafer and Young, 2003: 222). So, Holsti's typology and the revision by Walker tried to fill the gap between belief and foreign policy behaviour.

As discussed above, cognition is one of the variables that can be used to prescribe foreign policy behaviour. Better insight in the changeability of beliefs can have significant outcomes because it partly explains foreign policy change. Thus, when and under which conditions beliefs change says something about the behaviour of political leaders and their adversaries (Hermann, 1990: 10). Charles Hermann identifies some agents for foreign policy change, including the external shock (Hermann, 1990: 11). The external shock plays a significant role in this thesis. Hermann describes an external shock as a dramatic international event with instant impact and visibility on the receiver. Such events cannot be neglected and ask for an immediate policy change (Hermann, 1990: 11). The question here is; do such events also ask for immediate belief change? As Hermann suggest, external shocks cause foreign policy change, but does it have the same effect on beliefs (Hermann, 1990)? Therefore, my research question is:

What is the effect of an exogenous shock on the belief system of a leader?

Theoretical framework

To give an accurate answer to my research question, I must capture the content of a belief system. I introduce the operational code analysis to unwrap the belief system and map certain individual beliefs. First mentioned by Nathan Leites in his research "A Study of Bolshevism" in 1951, an operational code analysis serves as a mechanism to translate beliefs into motivations (Leites, 1951). The operational code is similar to the Weltanschauung, as it is the entire set of beliefs about the nature of politics (George, 1969: 197). George restructured the operational code so it is a political belief system, consisting of beliefs about the political context and beliefs about the best way to achieve political goals (George, 1969). The first set of beliefs (about political context) are referred to as philosophical beliefs. These beliefs are focused on defining the political life, the essence of political conflict and the degree of control over historical developments (Walker, Schafer and Young, 2003: 216). The second set of beliefs (about achieving political goals) are instrumental beliefs. These beliefs explain the context of political action and map the leader's preferences for certain strategies (Walker, Schafer and Young, 2003: 217). The conceptualization of the operational code, divided in philosophical and instrumental beliefs, can be found in table 1. Both beliefs contain five questions. Although answers to the ten questions do not capture a person's comprehensive world view, the researcher gets a better understanding about a leader's foreign policy perceptions. The operational code is designed to map decision-making behaviour. As George suggests, aim of the operational code

is to minimize uncertainty in decision-making. In doing so, the operational code is only focused on beliefs about decision-making processes in political life, and does not include “ethical and normative beliefs” (George, 1969: 197). Aim of the development of the operational code was to express some critique against pure rational theories. Actors in the political life must deal with uncertainty in their capacity to estimate effects of decisions. With the operational code, George suggests, individuals simplify and structure their political world. By answering those ten questions, political leaders better assess and formulate their objectives. And therefore uncertainty in decision-making will be minimized (George, 1969: 197-200). From now on, when I use the term ‘operational code’ it encompasses the concepts “belief system” and “Weltanschauung”.

Table 1: Alexander George’s Operational Code

Philosophical beliefs

P-1: “What is the essential nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one’s political opponents?”

P-2: “What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one’s fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic, or must one be pessimistic on this score: and in what respects for the one and/or the other?”

P-3: “Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?”

P-4: “How much control or mastery can one have over historical development? What is one’s role in moving and shaping history in the desired direction?”

P-5: “What is the role of chance in human affairs and in historical development?”

Instrumental beliefs

I-1: “What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?”

I-2: “How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?”

I-3: “How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled and accepted?”

I-4: “What is the best timing of action to advance one’s interest?”

I-5: “What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one’s interests?”

(source: George, 1969)

Cognitive consistency

The operational code fits in the broader theory of cognitive consistency. Already briefly introduced but never mentioned, cognitive consistency predicts the stability of beliefs and rests on Rosenberg’s

three assumptions about beliefs systems. First, beliefs are stable over time. Individuals have the propensity to form new information into their existing belief system. In other words, the function of belief systems (=structuring beliefs) causes individuals to alter dissonant information so beliefs stay consistent over time. Consequently, they are resistant to change (Jervis, 1976: 118). Robert Jervis gives a distressing example; the Pearl Harbor attack by Japan: replying on the bombings the head of navy declared: "My God, this can't be true. This [message] must mean the Philippines" (Jervis, 1976: 145). Because this sudden attack did not fit into his belief system and seemed so alien, the secretary refused to think the news would be true. He probably expected Japan never to attack the United States on their own territory and therefore this expectation constructed the way he interprets the world. Expectations and pre-existing beliefs make political leaders and every individual screen information, whereby some will be noticed and some ignored (Jervis, 1976: 146). A second aspect of cognitive consistency is that beliefs are internal consistent (George, 1969: 217). As mentioned before, a belief system is an interrelated web of thoughts and ideas, whereby every node is connected to each other. Change in one belief has effect on other, related, beliefs (Converse, 1964: 3). The third aspect of cognitive consistency concentrates on the hierarchical component of belief systems (Renshon, 2008: 824). Because a belief system is based on a centre-peripheral dimension, every individual has certain 'master' and 'peripheral' beliefs. The master beliefs influence the lower peripheral beliefs (Rosenberg, 1986: 735; Renshon, 2008: 824).

When looking at the philosophical and instrumental beliefs, how do they match with the assumptions of cognitive consistency? George and Holsti argue that a leader's philosophical beliefs represent the master beliefs, while instrumental beliefs act as peripheral beliefs (George, 1969: 217; Holsti, 1970: 154). So, for a political leader the nature of the political universe and his/her adversaries is of great importance and shapes all other beliefs. Besides the hierarchical aspect, the consistency assumption is significant in the stability of the philosophical and instrumental beliefs (Walker, Schafer and Young, 2003: 217). The theory of cognitive consistency admits that change within belief systems sometimes does occur. But because belief systems are internal coherent, change will be in every element of the operational code (Jervis, 1976: 170). Small, incremental changes do not occur in the operational code, "for change does only come in large batches" (Jervis, 1976: 170). However, major events, like revolutions and wars, deeply affect the perception of individuals. When such an event occurs or when an operational code alters, the whole code will change simultaneously (Jervis, 1976: 170). George also stresses the notion that beliefs are not resistant to change. When a major event strikes a political leader, his/her beliefs can be influenced and accordingly his/her whole operational code changes. So, both his/her philosophical as instrumental beliefs will change (George, 1977: 5; George, 1969: 216).

As the above-mentioned example makes clear, the requirements for a belief system have a downfall. To remain stable and internally consistent, belief systems assimilate incoming information in such a way that it is conform with his/her existing beliefs. In other words, belief systems mould and change new beliefs. Consequently, leaders have a more subjective view, in the sense that reality sometimes is less orderly than someone's own perspective (Tetlock, 1991: 28; Holsti, 1962: 244).

Empirical studies

Some studies have focused on the influence of specific events on the operational code. Although most studies are hardly generalizable, the results shed some light on the stability of beliefs. Walker, Schafer and Young (1998) researched how the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1980 influenced the operational code of U.S. President Jimmy Carter. After this event, Carter had a more hostile view towards the political world. This pessimistic view was evident by alterations in his first philosophical (P-1) and first instrumental belief (I-1). He saw the political universe as more conflictual and he was more negative about his own political actions (Walker, Schafer and Young, 1998). U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson was researched before and after the Vietnam War by Walker and Schafer (2000). They found that his control over historical developments deteriorated (P-4), he assigned a greater role to chance in human affairs (P-5) and he became more risk averse (I-3) (Walker and Schafer, 2000). A third research was conducted by Feng (2005), concentrating on Chinese dictator Mao Zedong and the Korean War. After the war, Zedong held a more hostile view, as all his philosophical beliefs changed (Feng, 2005). More recent, Renshon researched the operational code of U.S. President George W. Bush. Renshon separated Bush's terms in office in 4 phases, with one phase concentrating on the 9/11 terrorist attack. After 9/11, Bush's first three philosophical beliefs changed significantly. His nature of political universe (P-1), realization of political values (P-2) and predictability of his political future (P-3) became more hostile after the terrorist attack (Renshon, 2008).

I discussed these operational code studies to highlight the effect of a specific event on a leader's belief system. Results from these studies show that beliefs can change. However, I want to stress that George and other cognitive consistency theorists do not refuse the claim that operational codes are immune for change. They only argue that when change is apparent, both philosophical and instrumental beliefs change (Holsti, 1977: 33). However, when looking at the empirical work done in the field of operational codes, this is not applicable. Research on Jimmy Carter, Lyndon Johnson, Mao Zedong and George Bush showed a pattern of change in beliefs and worldview (Renshon, 2008: 827). These results directly contradict the notion that beliefs are consistent, and so disprove the

assumptions of cognitive consistency. There is a debate between those who argue beliefs are internal consistent and those who argue beliefs are prone to change after an exogenous shock (Renshon, 2008: 827; Walker et al., 2003: 217). What these researchers in the field of operational code empirical tested, was the relationship between the philosophical (core) and instrumental (peripheral) beliefs. In looking at individual leadership cases, they found no internal consistency or hierarchy in their operational codes. The results pointed out that, after an identified external shock, not all philosophical and instrumental beliefs altered. Consequently, beliefs are not resistant to change, and more controversial, someone's core beliefs, instead of peripheral beliefs, are more prone to change. So, the claim from cognitive consistency theorists that philosophical and instrumental beliefs are internal consistent and hierarchical, is difficult to defend (Walker et al., 2003: 221).

When focusing on the operational code studies, there appears to be a divide between cognitive consistency theorists and operational code theorists. Nevertheless, an alternative, perhaps more radical view does exist. In his book 'Expert Political Judgement' (2005), Philip Tetlock defends cognitive consistency, and argues that individuals do not change their beliefs. And this is the key finding of the theory; "the reluctance of human beings to admit mistakes and update beliefs" (Tetlock, 2005: 128). Tetlock argues that individuals have a defence mechanism for external shocks. In contrast to the empirical work done, exogenous shocks, regardless of the magnitude, are of minimal influence on the beliefs of leaders. The radical part is that Tetlock even goes further to state that beliefs are being reinforced by these exogenous shocks (Tetlock, 2005: 131). In this way, a leader depends even more on his own beliefs.

Summarizing, there are three possible outcomes when studying the effect of an exogenous shock on an individual's belief system. First, a traumatic event does not significantly influence the leader's beliefs. Second, a traumatic event has such an impact on a leader, he will change his beliefs. Third, as discussed in the upper paragraph, the reliance on his/her own beliefs will only be stronger, because the leader perceives the exogenous shock as an illogical event in his own belief framework (Tetlock, 2005: 131). In the section stressing my analysis, I will explain how to measure these three outcomes.

Method

In my research, I will study the belief system of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. In the Netherlands, because of coalition politics, predominant leaders have a small chance of being elected as Prime Minister. Also applicable on Mark Rutte, often a mediator-type runs the Netherlands. When seeing his public appearances and statements, one would suggest he is rather diplomatic than coarse and abrupt (Maarleveld, 2011: 200). The way Rutte handles crisis events is characterising for his

leadership style, thoughtful and legitimate. In this research, the exogenous shock is the MH-17 plane crash. The Boeing 777 of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was taken down in 17th July 2014. The aircraft was shot down from the ground while flying over Ukrainian territory and all 283 passengers and 15 crew members perished. Rutte frequently stated that the MH-17 disaster was the most horrible event in his life (Ruyg, Zomergasten: 2016). The question remains; what was the effect of the MH-17 disaster on Rutte's beliefs? How did he view the political universe before the aircraft shooting? How are his philosophical and instrumental beliefs constructed?

So, why do I look specifically at Prime-Minister Mark Rutte? The answer to this question has two components. First, by choosing Mark Rutte as unit of analysis I try to broaden the empirical work done in the field of belief change and operational codes. In search of an appropriate leader I wanted to study someone who has never been researched in this way. Mark Rutte is the most important figure in contemporary Dutch politics as leader of the Netherlands. A second reason focuses more on my research topic. The most important element in my study is the relationship between a leader and an exogenous shock. In defining an exogenous shock, I mean a traumatic event. It is essential to study a leader who experienced a traumatic event. On September 4th, 2016, Mark Rutte participated in a three-hour-long interview on Dutch television ('Zomergasten') (Ruyg, Zomergasten: 2016). Part of the interview was focused on the MH-17 disaster and his experiences. He stated that this plane crash was the most horrible experience in his political career. Further in the interview he shared some emotional examples about how he coped with the event. By saying this on national television gives me sufficient reason to assume the MH-17 disaster appears to be a traumatic event for Mark Rutte. As mentioned before, the relationship between an exogenous shock and the changeability of beliefs is of central importance. Because Rutte perceives the disaster as a massive impact on himself, the MH-17 can be considered a turning point.

When heads of state are the unit of analysis in research, the acceptable research method is a content analysis (Hermann, 1980: 14). Choice for this kind of research method is partly connected with the nature of the individual subject. How can scholars research political leaders, when they are not directly accessible? To make generalizable claims about individuals, it's key to know their psychological characteristics. The difficulty here is that political leaders rarely or never participate in experiments (Schafer and Walker, 2006b: 26). So, to overcome this problem, and to measure someone's state of mind, an at-a-distance methodology is an appropriate research method. Instead of being in direct contact with their subject, researchers, utilizing this methodology, take a step back and investigate someone's behavior from a distance (Walker and Schafer, 2006b: 26). The rationale behind this design is that psychological characteristics are measured upon verbal communication of

individuals. A leader's content will be used to map his/her beliefs. So, by using an at-a-distance methodology, a relation is being made between verbal behavior and belief systems, whereby beliefs are based upon the content of what a leader says (Schafer and Walker, 2006b: 26).

I will conduct a quantitative operational code analysis of Rutte to map his behaviour and thoughts over time. The method I will use is the Verbs In Context System (VICS) analysis. The VICS looks at the verbal behaviour to test the coherence of a leader's belief system over time. For this content analysis, I use the software program Profiler Plus 7.3.2 as an automated coding mechanism. This program, developed by Social Science Automation Inc., reads a speech or any other document in digital format and counts all the verbs and subjects. The four operational code studies focused on Carter, Johnson, Zedong and Bush used Profiler Plus as their coding mechanism. In line with these studies, I use a comparable methodology.

The VICS method is a content analysis and is the link between someone's verbal behaviour and beliefs. Key of this content system is that it connects a leader's behaviour and the way s/he says something about international politics (Schafer and Walker, 2006b: 30). It gives weight to specific words and identifies the tense and category of verbs. Although most researchers use public speeches and other public statements, any verbal communication can be used by the VICS method to generate someone's beliefs. Generally, according to Schafer and Walker, VICS concentrates on the direction and intensity of coded verbs (Schafer and Walker, 2006b: 31). By direction and intensity, the authors mean the two grammatical factors, subject and verb. When a political leader is making a statement in a speech or other public appearance, s/he either talks about self as the subject or others as the subject. The other factor, the verb, is saying something about the intensity of the political action. Verbs can be placed in different categories, ranged by intensity from very conflictual to very cooperative actions. The VICS method puts the recording verbs in the following categories: *Punish (-3)*, *Threaten (-2)*, *Oppose (-1)*, *Support (+1)*, *Promise (+2)* and *Reward (+3)* (Walker and Schafer, 2006b: 32). Verbs that can't be placed in any of the categories or don't bear any political content, are coded as zero.

Walker and Schafer give an example, quoted by US President Jimmy Carter on January 4, 1980: "Massive Soviet military forces have invaded the small, non-aligned, sovereign nation of Afghanistan." (Walker and Schafer, 2003: 225). Here, subject and verb are coded as follows:

Subject: "Massive Soviet military forces", Carter is not talking about himself or his own administration, so subject is coded as "other".

Verb: "have invaded", this verb phrase occurred in the past and includes a negative content, so verb is coded as "punishment".

The relevant data line for this recording unit is: -3 other (Walker and Schafer, 2003: 225).

By attaching value to these coded verbs and eventually multiplying them by their number, results in the establishment of balance indices. Now we can see how a leader perceives international politics and other operational code questions. The establishment and understanding of the operational code indices is rather straightforward but I will discuss two of the ten VICS indices that comprise the operational code of an individual (all the indices can be found in the appendix A) (Walker et al, 2003: 226).

For every operational code question exists an index. These indices form the operationalization of the operational code (Walker and Schafer, 2006b: 32). In the previous operational code studies, the researchers considered both P-1 and I-1 as core beliefs (Walker and Schafer, 2006b: 33; Feng, 2005: 649; Walker, Schafer and Young, 2003: 232). Based on the assumptions of cognitive consistency, core and peripheral beliefs are coherent. Because P-1 and I-1 are considered core beliefs I will briefly discuss the two indices applicable for those two beliefs. The index of the nature of the political universe (P-1) is determined by measuring the total number of positive verbs about others minus the total number of negative verbs about others and dividing this number by the total verbs about others counted. The index ranges from -1 to +1, respectively from extremely hostile to extremely friendly to others in the political universe (Walker et al, 2003, 226; Schafer and Walker 2006a: 33). The other belief, direction of strategy (I-1), is different from P-1 in that it focuses on 'self' instead of 'others'. These indices are the same in that they both measure the view and the position of the individual, either cooperative or conflictual, by counting positive and negative verbs. "The logic is that the more self talks about taking cooperative action, the more cooperatively he or she defines the direction of his or her strategy, and vice versa" (Schafer and Walker, 2006b: 35). Just like P-1 index, I-1 index ranges from -1 to +1, varying from extremely conflictual actions to extremely cooperative actions.

The ten indices (appendix A) form the operationalization of beliefs. Any change in beliefs is a compelling alteration within the operational code. The magnitude of the change in indices after an exogenous shock, tells how big the change is (Renshon, 2008: 826; Walker et al., 2003: 224). I will use Rutte's speeches as primary source and unit of analysis. Because this study is a content analysis I will look at the substance of Rutte's speeches. So, are his words and beliefs about global politics consistent or adverse? To answer this question, I will select a total of 20 speeches of Rutte about foreign politics before (=10 speeches) and after (=10 speeches) the MH-17 disaster in 2014 (Appendix B). What happened on July 17TH 2014 is one of the most tragic events in Rutte's term, and therefore the most appropriate manner to test his conflict/cooperation orientations in international politics. The speeches are selected from www.government.nl and are in the English language. Because

Profiler Plus does not accept Dutch communication all speeches must be in English. Some speeches are originally spoken in English by Rutte. Other speeches are spoken in Dutch, but are translated into English by the Dutch government. The length of Rutte's speeches vary to a large extent, therefore my case selection is based on the number of coded verbs. Walker and Schafer give some guidelines regarding the selection of speeches. They state that any speech with less than 15 coded verbs is irrelevant; the cut-off point is between 15-20 coded verbs (Schafer and Walker, 2006a: 44). Furthermore, they add another criterion for appropriate selection; every speech must contain 1.500 words. However, this criterion does not apply for Rutte's speeches. When we look at his verbal communication, one finds that most of his speeches include only between 400 and 1.100 words. Furthermore, and this is quite interesting, despite his short speeches, it contains a lot of coded verbs. Therefore, my sample frame consists of:

- A cut-off point of 15 coded verbs (there's no limit on maximum coded verbs)
- Subject of the speeches must fall under foreign policy topics
- Time period: phase 1 is 23-1-2012 until 24-3-2014, phase 2 is 24-9-2014 until 8-4-2016
- Rutte is the speaker

I select ten speeches both before and after the MH-17 disaster (total N=20), which meet the above stated requirements. According Schafer and Walker, ten speeches per basic profile are sufficient (Schafer and Walker, 2006b: 44) My choice for speeches as unit of analysis is based on two aspects. First, because Rutte is still in office, classified or private material is not available on the internet or the government website. Years must pass, when such information is accessible, while speeches are one of the few available verbal statements. Second, some argue that public speeches do not reflect the behaviour of a leader. Renshon quotes Walker, Schafer and Young to reply to this critique: "a leader's public behaviour is constrained by his public image and that, over time, his public actions will consistently match his public beliefs" (Renshon, 2008: 845; Walker, Schafer and Young, 2003: 223). So, in other words, eventually a leader translates his/her beliefs into deeds. It appears that a leader's verbal communication reflects his/her beliefs. Previous research found that both private and public operational codes are not different, so what a leader thinks in a private, unhindered atmosphere is nearly identical to a public, perhaps more restrained, atmosphere (Renshon, 2008: 845).

As mentioned before, Profiler Plus counts all verbs and subjects and lists them in one of the six verb categories (punish, threaten, oppose etc.) and identifies the subject (self or other). The output consists of sixteen percentages (George's ten indices, whereby I-4 is divided in flexibility of tactics (cooperation/conflict and words/deeds) and I-5 in utility of means (appeal, promise, reward, oppose, threaten and resist)). Belief change is operationalized by the significant difference between

percentages per phase ($p \leq .05$). If an exogenous shock influences the belief system, this is apparent in adjustment of the different indices in the operational code.

Analysis

Main concern in this research was to find out if change would occur after an exogenous shock. So, did beliefs remain stable or were some alterations in the belief configuration visible? Table 2 shows the results for the operational code of Mark Rutte. The table is divided in two sections; phase 1 corresponds to the period before the MH-17 disaster, while phase 2 corresponds to the period after the MH-17 disaster. The numbers (without parentheses) are the operational codes of the Dutch leader, while the numbers with parentheses are the t-scores for the independent sample t-test. To see what the effect of the exogenous shock is, we must look at the difference of the operational codes between the two phases. I will exercise a .95 significance level because it's the most common threshold in scientific research. But because it is a small-N, I highlighted the results with a .90 significance level as well (Argyrous, 2011: 314). The operational codes in bold are proof of a statistical significant change.

Further in the thesis I will elaborate on the link between results and cognitive consistency. Here I demonstrate the results.

Table 2 shows three indices changed significantly after the MH-17 disaster; P-1 (nature of the political universe), P-2 (realization of political values) and I-4a (timing of action in words/deeds). Only three of the sixteen indices changed in Rutte's operational code. The P-1 index dropped from .50 to .24, indicating a more hostile view towards the international political universe. Looking at Appendix A, Rutte's view moved from a *definitely friendly* to a *somewhat friendly* attitude. P-2 shifted from .25 to .08, which marks a change from a *somewhat optimistic view* towards the realization of political values to a *mixed view*. The last index that significantly changed, is I-4b. This index assesses the importance of timing of actions. I-4b presents the distribution of words and deeds regarding the leader's actions. In other words, it connects words to deeds and so measures the risk of doing nothing versus doing too much. The index ranges from a *very low* flexibility of tactics to *very high* (Schafer and Walker, 2006a: 37). Looking at Rutte's operational code, I-4b changed from .57 to .30, which indicates a shift from *medium* flexible to *low* flexible of tactics. Besides these changes, no significant alteration in indices in his operational code occurred.

What's evident here, is that all three indices changed in the same direction. This means that the MH-17 disaster influenced Rutte in such a way that he had a more hostile view. Both in the philosophical as in instrumental beliefs were alterations. Rutte's view after July 17th 2014, in phase 2, consisted of a more hostile view to the world in comparison with phase 1. Although these are no major shifts in operational code, in the sense that it creates a major shift in the indices in appendix A, the changes are significant. Consequently, it undermines Rutte's past beliefs about the political universe. The results

Table 2: Operational Code of Mark Rutte

		Phase 1 (n=10)	Phase 2 (n=10)
P-1	Nature of the Political Universe	.50	.24 (2.92) ***
P-2	Realization of Political Values	.25	.08 (2.41) **
P-3	Predictability of Political Future	.50	.46 (.59)
P-4	Control Over Historical Development	.42	.37 (.619)
P-5	Role of Chance	.79	.82 (-.47)
I-1	Strategic Approach to Goals	.89	.49 (1.88)*
I-2	Tactical Pursuit of Goals	.46	.39 (.66)
I-3	Risk Orientation	-.84	-.81 (-.26)
I-4	Timing of Action		
a.	Cooperation/Conflict	.11	.33 (-1.49)
b.	Words/Deeds	.57	.30 (2.13)**
I-5	Utility of Means		
a.	Reward	.26	.17 (1.10)
b.	Promise	.04	.15 (-2.02)*
c.	Appeal	.65	.43 (2.01)*

d.	Oppose	.04	.23 (-1.98)*
e.	Threaten	.00	.01 (-1.00)
f.	Punish	.03	.02 (.28)

Note: results in bold are significant results. T-statistics are in parentheses; * $p \leq .1$, ** $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .01$.

suggest that exogenous shocks have the effect of significantly changing someone's belief system. Certainly, when looking at the results of the studies of Carter, Johnson, Zedong and Bush and now Rutte, it makes clear that external shocks influence belief systems. Although I distance myself from the question why beliefs change, these results give more insight in the way operational codes change. In case of Rutte, his beliefs became more conflictual. Before the MH-17 disaster, Rutte held clearly more positive beliefs regarding politics. While after the disaster his positive beliefs somewhat deteriorated because change moved in a negative direction. Interestingly, his first two philosophical beliefs changed significantly and are considered as important, as they determine how an individual views the political world.

So, how do these changes in operational code fit into the broader theories of belief change and cognitive consistency? As table 2 shows, three significant reversal shifts were apparent after the MH-17 disaster. As noted before, because of contradiction in theory and practice, it's hard to interpret these findings in light of cognitive consistency. Renshon highlights this: "[...] the theories, which seem to predict that beliefs generally remain stable, except when they do not" (Renshon, 2008: 837). Making predictions is hard because of this vagueness, even with clear case evidence against cognitive consistency. Although change occurred in two of the most important beliefs, P-1 and P-2, one cannot argue that this is a rejection of cognitive consistency. An important event, such as the MH-17 disaster for Rutte, only had effect on three of the sixteen operational code indices. One could have predicted a complete change, because of the magnitude of the MH-17 disaster on Rutte. On the contrary, his operational code stayed fairly stable over the five-year period.

Nevertheless, although Rutte's operational code this view is relatively abrupt and simplistic. Change occurred in one of his most fundamental beliefs about politics; P-1 and P-2. Cognitive consistency cannot explain this shift and therefore it's clearly not a contribution to the defense of the theory. Similar to change in Carter's and Bush's operational code after their external shock, Rutte's core beliefs P-1 and P-2 did change. Furthermore, besides change in operational code, a change in verbal category in three of the indices occurred (respectively from *definitely friendly* to *somewhat friendly*,

from *somewhat optimistic* to *mixed* and from *medium* to *low flexible*). Except for P-1, P-2 and I-4b, no other index changed.

When reviewing the results in table 2, it becomes clear that exogenous shocks do have a significant effect on someone's belief system. But if we link the results with the assumptions of cognitive consistency, which parts of the operational code are related with each other for a belief system to be consistent? And more important, how does the operational code of Mark Rutte fit into this construction?

As discussed in the theoretical framework section, different typologies exist regarding logical coherency. George and Holsti assumed that cognitive consistency was related to the link between philosophical and instrumental beliefs. Not only are they interrelated, but also, philosophical beliefs act as master beliefs, which influence the lower, peripheral, instrumental beliefs (George, 1969; Holsti, 1970). Walker and Schafer give a different definition for cognitive consistency. According to them, P-1, P-2 and I-4 are the most important beliefs and therefore act as master beliefs (Schafer and Walker 2006; Walker and Schafer 2003). As the data suggests, the beliefs of Mark Rutte are not internal consistent (only three indices changed). George argues that beliefs are resistant to change, but when change does occur, the complete operational code will change. According to this rhetoric, both philosophical and instrumental beliefs would change, after the MH-17 disaster. However, this is not the case. Following cognitive consistency, one would expect Rutte's *strategic approach to goals* (I-1) would become more conflictual, when also Rutte's *nature of the political universe* becomes more pessimistic. Nonetheless between both beliefs (philosophical and instrumental) no coherence exists in Rutte's case. Furthermore, if the rules for cognitive consistency are being softened, still no coherence is apparent. For instance, even within both the philosophical and the instrumental beliefs, internal coherence is not obtained. Three out of the five philosophical beliefs changed versus one out of the eleven instrumental beliefs.

Part of my theoretical framework focused on resistance to change. More precisely, Tetlock argued that belief systems would be resistant and rigidify beliefs after an external shock. The belief system acts as a defense mechanism, and a leader's belief will be reinforced by a shock. The results indicate that such a defense mechanism is not applicable for Rutte's operational code. In Rutte's case, the direction of effect is negative in relation to his prior beliefs. All three significant results shifted to the left on the verbal descriptor categories (Appendix A), so instead of being reinforced, those three beliefs were undermined.

It appears that Rutte's operational code contradicts cognitive consistency and internal coherence. While the MH-17 disaster definitely influenced his philosophical beliefs, he did not alter his

instrumental beliefs. Seen in other operational code research and likewise here, the philosophical beliefs seem far more volatile compared to instrumental beliefs. The MH-17 disaster had effect on the beliefs about actions of other actors in the political universe, while it had no major effect on the Rutte's beliefs about how he behaves.

Conclusion

I wanted to contribute an operational code research to the broader belief system studies. Furthermore, aim of this research was to study the effect of external shocks on a belief system. In doing so, I tried to test the theory of cognitive consistency. Although this contribution did not support the theory, it is anything but rejected. Nevertheless, as the example of Rutte shows, belief systems are not the interrelated web of perceptions. George argued that, because of consistency, when change does occur, all beliefs in the operational code will change. By looking at the results, we can conclude that belief systems are not as consistent as expected. Certainly, different components of the belief system can change. This notion attacks the claim from George and Jervis that when change occurs "it will come in large batches" (Jervis, 1976: 170). In fact, when we look at the operational code studies done in previous years, we find that no extensive change ever occurred in the belief system of a leader (Renshon, 2008: 840). Results from the VICS and operational code method have never fulfilled the expectations of cognitive consistency. So, perhaps we must dismiss the link between someone's operational code and consistency and look at what matters most. When we forget consistency and move back to the aim of my research, what is exactly the impact of an external shock on a political leader? By looking only at the philosophical and instrumental beliefs, an interesting finding become visible. Philosophical beliefs reveal the nature of the political universe, how it is shaped by the behavior of other political actors. On the contrary, instrumental beliefs tell us something about how a leader would act in this political universe. Rutte's P-1 and P-2 beliefs changed significantly, while his instrumental beliefs stayed approximately the same. So, an exogenous shock influenced Rutte in the way he looks at others. The way he thinks of himself and how he should act in the international political world did not change. Consequently, perhaps the MH-17 disaster fitted in Rutte's pre-existing beliefs, while he never expected that a political actor would execute it. With this research, I started the foundation for future research on Mark Rutte. Next research could be to link difference in his beliefs with a possible shift in his foreign policy. As the

introduction of this thesis suggests, beliefs are only relevant when they can be linked to motivations, behaviour and decisions.

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Appendix A
The Operational Code (Verbs in Context System Indices)

P-1: Nature of the Political Universe

Hostile								Friendly
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0

P-2: Realization of Political Values

Pessimistic								Optimistic
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0

P-3: Predictability of Political Future

Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0

P-4: Control Over Historical Development

Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0

P-5: Role of Chance

Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0

I-1: Direction of Strategy

Conflict								Cooperation
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0

I-2: Intensity of Tactics

Conflict								Cooperation
Extremely	Very	Definitely	Somewhat	Mixed	Somewhat	Definitely	Very	Extremely
-1.0	-.75	-.50	-.25	0.0	+.25	+.50	+.75	+1.0

I-3: Risk Orientation

Risk Averse								Risk Acceptant
Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0

I-4a: Flexibility of Tactics (between Cooperation and Conflict)

Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0

I-4b: Flexibility of Tactics (between Words and Deeds)

Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High
0.0		.25		.50		.75		1.0

I-5 Utility of Means (Appeal/Support, Promise, Reward, Oppose/Resist, Threaten, Punish)

Very Low		Low		Medium		High		Very High
0.0		.08		.16		.24		.32

Source: Walker, Schafer, and Young 2003.

Appendix B

Phase 1

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Phase 2

<https://www.government.nl/government/contents/members-of-cabinet/mark-rutte/documents/speeches/2014/09/24/speech-by-prime-minister-rutte-at-the-un-security-council> (24-9-2014)

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