

Researchers develop new program to evaluate prominent individuals' personalities

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Researchers at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev have developed a new program that automates classification of personality traits of prominent individuals—both friend and foe—according to a paper soon to be published in the *American Intelligence Journal*.

"This new field, termed 'Computational Personality,' gives us the ability to better understand the minds of military and political leaders, which is an important aspect of strategic intelligence," explains BGU Prof. Yair Neuman of the Homeland Security Institute. "Psychologists have been building [personality profiles](#) manually for years; however, there are serious methodological difficulties associated with this practice."

The new computer-supported methodology for personality profiling uses "vector semantics." This involves constructing a number of vectors representing [personality dimensions](#) and disorders and measuring the similarity with texts written by the human subject. BGU researchers Prof. Golan Shahar of the Department of Psychology and programmer Yochai Cohen also participated in the research.

The team used the new program to evaluate President Obama's State of the Union addresses from 2009 and his most recent in 2014. According to Neuman, "Both State of the Union speeches are 'assertive' and 'organized' as expected from a political leader," Neuman explains. "However, the main difference in the 2014 speech is the 'loner' [personality trait](#) that appears. This dimension reveals a type of withdrawal from painful social interaction. In addition, the 2014 speech

exhibits higher levels of 'anger' and 'fear'."

Evaluating the leader of Hamas, Khaled Mashal, "If we characterize Mashal as someone with a psychopathic personality, then we would expect him to feel omnipotent, fearless, to perceive others (particularly Israel) as weak and vulnerable, and that his relationships revolve around games of 'predator-prey,'" Neuman explains. "According to the computational personality results, a man like that won't be significantly affected by injury to innocent citizens or the destruction of infrastructure because he lacks the ability to empathize. For his adversaries, any attempt to simulate empathy, or to try and appeal to his emotions is a strategy doomed to fail. These insights are highly important in understanding the personality and planning a campaign against it," says Neuman.

"The CIA personality profile of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was actually the Middle Eastern version of "showing off", not irrational behavior as the Bush administration inaccurately thought," according to Neuman. "So long as the leader is not defeated or publicly humiliated, even if it results in a catastrophic price to his fighters and citizens, it will be perceived as a victory. This conclusion offers a clear lesson for the current struggle against Hamas, as well."

While the methodology can be applied to any leader with available texts and speeches, the actual paper was a case study on former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi's speech to the United Nations in 2012. The takeaway from that analysis was simply that Morsi is an "obsessive" [personality](#) who was out of touch with the Egyptian people and did not see the big picture.

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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