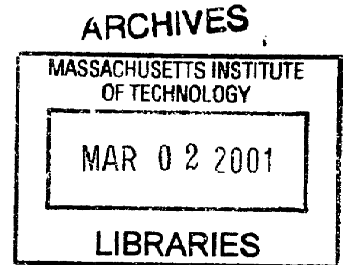


**What Causes Credibility?
Reputation, Power, and Assessments of Credibility During Crises**

by

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ABSTRACT

Year after year, Americans are told that their country's reputation is on the line. If we do not carry out our commitments, our foreign policy leaders warn, no one will believe our threats and promises in the future. This claim rests on the hypothesis, which I call the "reputation hypothesis," that tomorrow's enemies will assess America's credibility on the basis of U.S. actions today. Is the reputation hypothesis true? Will our adversaries predict our future actions by looking at today's decisions? More generally, do decision makers predict their adversaries' actions in a crisis by looking at the adversaries' previous actions?

I test the reputation hypothesis against a hypothesis which I call the "power/interests" hypothesis. This hypothesis posits that decision makers assess the credibility of an adversary's threats by assessing the current balance of power and interests; commitments are credible when they support important interests and are backed up by the power to carry them out.

I test these theories by studying American and British decision making during three crises. From 1958-1962, the Soviet Union and the NATO allies faced each other in a series of crises over Berlin and Cuba. I use evidence from American and British archives to discover how decision makers assessed Soviet credibility during these crises. I look for evidence that they based their assessments of Soviet credibility on past Soviet actions, and for evidence that they assessed Soviet credibility by evaluating the current balance of power and interests.

The results are striking: during this period the Soviets repeatedly made threats and then backed down. But years of unfulfilled threats did not damage Soviet credibility. In fact, Soviet credibility grew from 1958-62, as the power/interests hypothesis predicts. American and British decision makers worried constantly about their own reputation, but they did not use Soviet past behavior to assess Soviet credibility. This research suggests that countries should not fight to build a reputation for credibility – threats will be credible if and only if they promote substantial interests and are backed up by sufficient power.

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Preface

People sometimes say that in the social sciences you can find evidence for anything if you look hard enough. Well, I started this project in search of evidence to support the reputation hypothesis. And I believed that I had strong professional incentives to find it.

Back in 1994 when I started this dissertation I was sure that the reputation hypothesis was true. That is to say, I believed that if a country broke its word and failed to fulfill its commitments, other countries would quickly begin to doubt its credibility. This just made sense to me. The reputation hypothesis seems to be correct when it is applied to our personal relationships. If you let your friends down too many times, after all, they'll stop trusting you. If parents don't enforce their rules, the kids will stop abiding by them. And the reputation hypothesis seemed to be right when applied to international politics. After all, everyone *said* that backing down in one crisis would cause great damage to America's reputation. America's political leaders, foreign policy experts, and journalists all seemed to be on the same page about this.

The funny thing was that recent studies on reputation had failed to find any evidence to support the reputation hypothesis. So my research plan was simple: I'd be the one to find evidence to prove that the reputation hypothesis is true; I'd build a name for my self by finding evidence of a phenomenon that some leading lights in the field were saying didn't exist.

But try as I might, I couldn't find any evidence to support it. After sifting through thousands of pages of British and American primary documents, and after reading the best secondary histories of the diplomacy of the late 1950s and early 1960s, I've become convinced that the reputation hypothesis is simply wrong.

I learned many things from this project, but two stand out. First, I now genuinely believe that the reputation hypothesis is simply wrong, at least when it comes to the type of international crises that I studied. If the hypothesis is correct, it must be applicable in a narrow set of conditions, or with low frequency. Second, I'm now even more convinced than when I started that people can do social science research and come to surprising findings that overcome their prior assumptions and biases. I had every reason to believe that a finding in favor of reputation would be better-received in the field, given that it would directly contradict a body of research on the topic. But as disposed as I was to find one result, I just couldn't make that case – not with the evidence I was turning up.

Some people say that writing a dissertation is like running a marathon. It's a long, lonely, grueling process. For me, the dissertation experience was more like walking a marathon. And I would never have made it to the finish line without the mentoring, encouragement, ideas, and friendship of the following people:

My debts to Barry Posen are great. Since my very first semester at MIT, he has been a very supportive mentor and advisor. Through the example of his own work, and his incisive comments on mine, he pushed me to hold my work up to the highest standards.

Everyone who knows Steve Van Evera knows how generous he is with his time and his ideas. Steve's suggestions, encouragement, and insightful questions improved every chapter in this dissertation.

Ken Oye's superb graduate seminar on international relations sparked my interest in reputation and credibility. Ken gave me great advice on research design issues and steered me away from many pitfalls. He also helped me clarify my ideas on selection effects.

Eugene Gholz's contributions to this project appear on nearly every page. I can't count the number of times that he helped me work through the puzzles that repeatedly emerged as I wrote this thesis. I can't imagine a more helpful colleague.

My college advisor, John Mearsheimer, has been a generous mentor since I began college at the University of Chicago a decade ago. On several occasions over the past few years he has taken the time to give me thoughtful advice about my research and career. Last year he invited me to give a talk on my Cuban Missile Crisis chapter at the Program on International Security Policy at the University of Chicago. The 5-hour grilling I received produced pages of notes and suggestions. The chapter is much better today as a result of the efforts of the participants at the PISP program.

Several other friends read parts of this dissertation; their comments greatly improved my work. Frank Gavin, Colin Kahl, and Richard Wilcox read drafts of my Berlin Chapters and gave me detailed comments. Dave Burbach read an early draft of my Selection Effects chapter and helped me avoid several research design pitfalls.

Sean and Jeanne Tabatabai lent Jenny and me their beautiful villa for a week while I finished writing the first draft of the dissertation. Their generosity is hard to explain to those who do not know them.

Casey was there from start to finish. He never complained about the strange hours that I kept, about the piles of papers lying around the house, the frequent moves across the country, or about my occasional lack of attention.

This dissertation could never have been written without the generous support – financial, intellectual, and moral – that I received from several institutions. First and foremost, the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology provided an ideal environment to learn to think systematically about international relations, security affairs and war. I could not imagine a better place to get a Ph.D. in these subjects, and I could not imagine finding more support than I received from the Program as a whole and, particularly, from the Director, Harvey Sapolsky.

I am also greatly indebted to the John M. Olin Institute at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. I spent a very productive year as a predoctoral fellow at the Olin Institute; furthermore, Steve Rosen, the Director of the Olin Institute, has on several occasions gone out of his way to help me with this project and with my entry into this profession.

I also spent a full year as a predoctoral fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University. CISAC, like Olin, gave me the time I needed to get chapters onto paper and provided the opportunity to get feedback from a tough audience of scholars. Particular thanks are due to Scott Sagan and Lynn Eden for the feedback they gave me and the encouragement they have offered over the past two years.

The Center for European Studies at Harvard University generously funded three research trips to London. The MacArthur foundation funded a fourth trip to the British archives

and gave me financial support for a summer. The staff at the John F. Kennedy library and the British Public Records Office made it easy and enjoyable to work on the records at their archives.

The Government Department at Dartmouth College, and the College as a whole, made the last year of work on this dissertation as stress-free as possible. Astonishingly, they never pressured me to finish quickly and assured me that my position would be waiting when I was done. I am very grateful.

I am lucky to have two wonderful sisters, Julie and Jamie. Their friendship made writing this thesis much easier.

It is hard to describe the many roles that Jennifer Lind played in this project. She was a colleague when I needed to talk about my research. She was an enthusiastic companion when I wanted to get away from political science. And she was always a loving partner as I struggled through the final stages of this dissertation. I only hope that I can provide the same level of support and companionship to her as she embarks down this same road.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Jim and Grace Press. Their love, support, and confidence made this, and everything else, possible.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

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Year after year, Americans are told that their country's reputation is on the line. If we did not carry out air strikes against the Serbs, no one would believe NATO's threats. If we did not set a precedent in the Persian Gulf, we were warned, aggressors everywhere would swallow up their neighbors. And if we did not accomplish our mission in Somalia, everyone would believe that the U.S. would flee if it suffered casualties. Each of these claims rests on the hypothesis, which I call the "reputation hypothesis," that tomorrow's enemies will assess America's credibility on the basis of U.S. actions today. Is the reputation hypothesis true? Will our adversaries predict our future actions by looking at today's decisions? More generally, do decision makers predict their adversaries' actions in a crisis by looking at the adversaries' previous actions?

Answering this question is important. The reputation hypothesis is widely believed by American decision makers and, as a result, the U.S. has paid a high cost in dollars and lives to protect America's reputation for resolve. The United States has fought wars over issues of little intrinsic importance in order to build or preserve credibility for the future.¹ Were these costs worth paying? More importantly, Americans will be asked to pay again to protect American credibility. Should the U.S. continue to invest its money, sacrifice the lives of its soldiers, and kill people from other countries, to protect America's reputation for keeping commitments? Do reputations for keeping or breaking commitments affect credibility?²

¹ For example, the reputation hypothesis played a central role in U.S. decisions to fight the Vietnam War. On U.S. goals during the Vietnam War see, Robert S. McNamara, In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Henry Kissinger, White House Years (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979); Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).

² Even if the reputation hypothesis is true, it might not make sense to invest much national wealth, or many lives, to preserve a country's reputation for keeping commitments. If the reputation hypothesis is true but reputations are short-lived, or if they only apply in a narrow set of future cases, then decision makers should not invest much in reputation. Only if reputations last a long time or apply broadly will it pay to invest much in reputation.

In this thesis I test the reputation hypothesis against another hypothesis drawn from realist international relations theory, which I call the “power/interests” hypothesis. The “power/interests” hypothesis posits that decision makers predict their adversaries’ future actions by assessing the current balance of power and interests without reference to the adversary’s history for keeping or breaking commitments. If this hypothesis is correct then countries do not need to take costly actions today in order to generate credibility for the future. Future commitments will be credible if and only if they are tied to real interests and backed up by sufficient power.³

I test these theories⁴ by looking at American and British decision making during a series of crisis with the Soviet Union from 1958-1962. Between the fall of 1958 and the fall of 1961, the Soviets repeatedly threatened to cut off Western access to West Berlin and to force the U.S., British, and French to withdraw their military forces from the city. Each time they set a deadline, and each time they threatened dire consequences if the West ignored their demands. Each time the Soviets backed down.

A year later, in the fall of 1962, the U.S. and Soviets faced each other in another crisis: the Cuban missile crisis. For two weeks the Kennedy Administration used a combination of military and diplomatic tools to coerce the Soviets to remove its missiles from Cuba. As the crisis threatened to escalate, the U.S. and Soviets came to a compromise agreement to end the crisis: the U.S. would remove NATO’s missiles from Turkey if the Soviets removed their missiles from Cuba. The agreement slightly favored

³ Although I focus on the reputation and power/interests hypothesis, I also test two other theories. One of these theories, which I call the “Never Again” hypothesis, holds that when a country backs down in one crisis, it has more credibility in the future. The other theory, which I call the “Ingrained Lessons” theory, holds that when leaders try to assess an adversary’s credibility during a crisis they do not look at that adversary’s history; they think about their own country’s history (and the ingrained lessons that they learned from it). If their own country’s previous adversaries backed down during previous crises, they will expect the current adversary to do the same.

⁴ I use the words “hypothesis” and “theory” interchangeably.

the U.S.; the U.S. demanded that its concession be kept secret while the Soviets withdrew their missiles publicly.

This series of crises over Berlin and Cuba is ideal for testing the reputation and power/interests hypotheses. First, the reputation and power/interests hypotheses make opposite predictions about changes in Soviet credibility from 1958-62. The reputation hypothesis predicts that Soviet credibility should have plummeted during this period; the repeated Soviet withdrawals over Berlin should, according to the reputation hypothesis, have shattered Soviet credibility long before the Cuban missile crisis. The power/interests hypothesis, on the other hand, predicts increasing Soviet credibility throughout this period. From 1958-1962, the balance of power shifted in favor of the Soviet Union; the United States maintained an advantage throughout this period, but the advantage shrunk considerably. In 1958 the Soviet nuclear arsenal was small and highly vulnerable; in the event of war the United States would have attacked the Soviet Union, its armies, and its nuclear forces with a massive American nuclear strike. By 1962, however, the Soviet nuclear arsenal had grown and diversified and U.S. leaders increasingly questioned whether they could execute their war plans without suffering a crippling Soviet nuclear counterattack. By 1962 America's—and NATO's—plans for defending Europe were becoming incoherent; the strategy for defending Berlin was becoming totally untenable. As the balance of power shifted toward the Soviets, the power/interests hypothesis predicts that Soviet credibility should have increased.

The reputation and the power/interests hypothesis, therefore, make conflicting and testable predictions about this crisis-filled period. The reputation hypothesis predicts that Soviet credibility should be plummeting; the power/interests hypothesis predicts that it should be growing in step with Soviet military power.

These cases are ideal for another reason. One of the goals of this thesis is to test the reputation as thoroughly as possible. The reputation hypothesis is widely believed,

but previous empirical studies have not found much evidence to support it. These cases present an extremely easy set of tests for the reputation hypothesis.⁵ If the theory passes these very easy tests, more research will be required to determine the strength of the theory in more demanding cases. But if the theory fails these tests, I will have found strong evidence that the reputation hypothesis has very little explanatory power.⁶

The results of these cases are striking: Soviet credibility grew throughout this period. By 1962, Soviet credibility was not shattered, as the reputation hypothesis suggests; in fact, Soviet credibility in 1962 was very high. There is no evidence that the Soviet pattern of making threats and then backing away from them had any effect on Soviet credibility in the eyes of either American or British officials. Furthermore, a careful review of thousands of pages of archival documents from British and American archives reveals another striking thing. American and British decision makers almost never referred during any of these crises to the Soviet record of making threats and then backing down; nor did they argue that because the Soviets had backed down in the past, they will likely back down in the future. American and British decision makers worried constantly about their own reputation, but they did not use Soviet past behavior to assess Soviet credibility.

What do these results tell us? As for the reputation hypothesis, the data are damning. Because the research design was structured to minimize my chance of getting a “false negative” in the test of the reputation hypothesis, the findings are compelling. The reputation hypothesis is either simply wrong, or it is very weak, or it does not apply to military crises such as those I studied.

⁵ The criteria which make these cases extremely easy for the reputation hypothesis are described in Chapter 2, “Theories of Credibility.”

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the logic and validity of this “easy case” research design, see Chapter 2, “Theories of Credibility.”

The results for the power/interests hypothesis are less conclusive. The power/interests hypothesis passed the tests posed by these cases; it appears that American and British decision makers believed Soviet threats when the balance of power and interests favored the Soviets and didn't believe Soviet threats when power and interests were against the Soviets. But the research design was tailored to maximize my ability to draw inferences about the strength of the reputation hypothesis, not about the power/interests hypothesis. The findings on the power/interests hypothesis are, therefore, strongly suggestive, but they are not decisive. More research is required to bolster these findings.

This thesis can be summarized in two points: First, the reputation hypothesis has been given a free ride for far too long. Policymakers, foreign policy experts, and the public, have simply held it as an article of faith that the reputation hypothesis is true, and they have paid dearly for their faith. This study, and the rest of the growing body of empirical research on reputation, have found no evidence to support this position. More work should be done on this topic – the amount of money and lives at stake warrant it – but it is time for a shift from the presumption that the reputation hypothesis is true, to the presumption that it is false. Until a body of scholarship can show that keeping one's international commitments significantly increases one's credibility, the United States and other countries should stop fighting to preserve credibility.

Second, it seems, from this research, that the best way to make one's threats credible is to wield enough military capability to 1) carry out one's threats successfully, and 2) succeed at costs which are low enough to be warranted by the interests one has at stake. This suggests that the key to credibility is in building and maintaining overwhelming military power. It also suggests that unless one has serious interests at stake in a conflict, it is very hard to make military threats credible. Maintaining credibility against the Milosevics and Aids of the world will always be hard and very expensive,

because as great as American military capability is, the interests which we have engaged in many disputes are tangential at best.

The rest of this thesis is divided into five chapters. In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I do three things. First, I review the previous literature on reputation and deterrence. Second, I develop in detail the reputation and power/interests hypotheses and two others (which are not the focus of this study). I explain the internal logic at the foundation of each theory and draw predictions from each theory about how decision makers think, talk, and act during military crises. Third, I describe the methods that I use in this dissertation. I explain how I test the reputation and power/interests theories using only three cases, and I argue that cases which are non-representative of the entire population of cases can be used to draw inferences about the entire population.

Chapter 3 is a chapter on methods. In this chapter, I explain why case studies may be a better methodological approach for studying reputation and credibility than large-n statistical methods. I review James Fearon's ground breaking work on selection effects and deterrence. I critique and expand his argument: I argue that the problems with selection effects in studies of deterrence are more severe than Fearon recognizes, and that his approach to solving these problems is inadequate. I argue that the best way to *avoid* the problems which selection effects present for data on deterrence is through the types of case studies which I conduct in this thesis.

Chapters 4 and 5 are empirical chapters. In Chapter 4, I present the results from two of my cases. I use American decision making during the Berlin Crises of 1958-62 as one case, and British decision making during the same crises as a second case. I find no evidence to support the reputation hypothesis in either case, and I find substantial evidence to support the power/interests hypothesis. No matter how many times the Soviets backed down from their threats, the credibility of their future threats was unaffected. If the Soviets had the power to carry out the future threats, they were credible in American and

British eyes. If the Soviets lacked sufficient power to carry out their threats, they were not believed. Soviet reputation had no effect on American and British decision making.

In Chapter 5 I conduct another test of these hypotheses: I look at U.S. decision making during the Cuban missile crisis. The Cuban missile crisis occurred after four years of unfulfilled Soviet threats but, as in the previous cases, this had no measurable effect on Soviet credibility. There is no evidence to suggest that the United States doubted Soviet credibility during the crisis; to the contrary, America's senior decision makers were unanimous in their view that the Soviets were highly credible and would respond with force to retaliate against any American actions against Cuba. This chapter, like the previous one, lends support to the power/interests hypothesis and seriously undermines the reputation hypothesis.

Chapter 6 is a summary. This chapter has four parts. First, I summarize the findings from the empirical chapters for the power/interests and reputation hypotheses. Second, I discuss the implications of my results for the two other theories which I develop briefly in Chapter 2. Third, I describe the limitations of my findings. I identify other cases which should be conducted to re-test my findings on reputation during military crises. I also identify other spheres of international relations in which we should be conducting other tests of the reputation hypothesis. Fourth, I discuss briefly some other observations which arise from the theories and evidence which I present here. For example, the evidence from this thesis has important implications for nuclear deterrence between states with highly unequal military (and nuclear) power; these findings apply to nuclear deterrence relationships which may grow more important in the future (e.g., between the U.S. and China, and in the future between the U.S. and Iran, Iraq, or North Korea).



Chapter 2:
Theories of Credibility

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"When we talk about the loss of face that would occur if we backed out of Formosa under duress, or out of Berlin, the loss of face that matters most is the loss of Soviet belief that we will do, elsewhere and subsequently, what we insist we will do here and now."

Thomas Schelling⁷

A core principle of U.S. foreign policy is that America's reputation for fulfilling commitments is a valuable national asset. If the U.S. carries out its international commitments – if it fulfills its promises and executes its threats – its credibility will remain solid. Allies will continue to trust the United States and potential adversaries will be deterred from testing U.S. resolve. Failing to meet commitments, on the other hand, will lower U.S. credibility; the result would be weakened alliances and emboldened adversaries. Keeping commitments is therefore vital to U.S. national security; by developing and protecting a reputation for doing what we say we'll do, the U.S. makes its threats and promises credible.

Testing this proposition – which I call the "reputation hypothesis" – is one of the central goals of this thesis. By discovering whether today's actions affect tomorrow's credibility I shed light on the soundness of past U.S. policies and, more importantly, evaluate the wisdom of future interventions to preserve America's reputation.

The first step in testing the reputation hypothesis is recognizing that this hypothesis is one possible answer to the question: "How do decision makers assess other states' credibility?" The reputation hypothesis offers an answer to this question: decision makers assess other states' credibility by looking at the other states' history. If that history demonstrates resolve and consistency, their credibility will be high. But if the past reveals

⁷ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 55-56.

a pattern of broken promises and unfulfilled threats, their credibility will be low. But the reputation hypothesis is not the only possible answer to the question: "What causes credibility." In this thesis, I test the reputation hypothesis against competing theories.

This dissertation is, therefore, really about two things: one goal is to answer the question, "How do decision makers assess other states' credibility?". At the same time, special emphasis is made on testing the reputation hypothesis as thoroughly as possible because it is widely believed.

This thesis uses words which are used frequently in everyday discussions of politics and which, therefore, have multiple meanings. Often the words *credibility* and *reputation* are used interchangeably. In this paper I use them to capture distinct concepts. The credibility of a threat is the perceived likelihood that the threat will be carried out. One factor which may contribute to the credibility of a country's threats is the country's *reputation*. A country's reputation is the perception, held by others, of the state's pattern of past behavior. The "reputation hypothesis," described in detail below, links the concept of reputation to credibility. The reputation hypothesis posits that a country's reputation has a significant effect on its credibility.⁸ In other words, according to the reputation hypothesis, when decision makers try to assess the likelihood that an adversary will carry out one of its threats (i.e., when they try to assess the credibility of the threat) they base their analysis on that adversary's past behavior. Is the reputation hypothesis true? If not, how do decision makers predict their adversaries' actions during a crisis?

One alternative to the reputation hypothesis – which I call the power/interests hypothesis – is the proposition that past actions do not significantly affect credibility; according to this hypothesis, decision makers assess other countries' credibility by assessing the current balance of power and interests without reference to the adversary's

history for fulfilling commitments. According to the power/interests hypothesis, commitments are credible when and only when they are backed by sufficient power and serve clear interests.⁹

The most direct way to test the reputation hypothesis against the power/interests hypothesis and other alternatives is to study instances in which decision makers tried to assess the credibility of another country's threats. How did the decision makers assess the credibility of the threats and promises? What did they discuss? Did they talk about the other country's history of keeping, or breaking, commitments? Or did they ignore past actions and focus on something else, like the balance of power and interests? Beyond what was discussed, do decision makers' actions suggest that the past behavior of their adversary affected their adversary's credibility? Or do the actions suggest that the adversary's credibility was a function of the current balance of power and interests?

Issues of credibility and reputation arise in international relations whenever a state makes a threat or a promise. This, of course, happens in many areas of international politics including international security, international finance, and international trade. As discussed above, states frequently make threats and promises in the context of their military relations with their allies and adversaries. But the credibility of commitments is a topic with applications which are broader than security affairs.

In the area of international finance, international creditors must assess the credibility of the promises of prospective borrowers. How do creditors assess the likelihood that debtors will repay their debts? Does defaulting on one set of loans reduce a

⁸ The classic statement of the reputation hypothesis is Schelling. *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

⁹ In this thesis I test many versions of the reputation hypothesis against the power/interests hypothesis. I also test two other hypotheses which I call the "Ingrained Lessons" hypothesis and the "Never Again" hypothesis. My primary focus, however, is on the reputation and power/interests hypotheses.

Throughout this thesis I use the words "hypothesis" and "theory" interchangeably.

debtor's credibility to repay future loans? In other words, do international creditors rely heavily on past repayment history to predict the likelihood of future repayment? If not, how do they assess the credit worthiness (i.e. credibility) of potential borrowers? Furthermore, how do debtors assess the likelihood that a default today will lead to future costs (e.g. loan denial, higher interest rates)? Do they rely on the lenders' reputation for punishing past debtors who defaulted? If not, how do they assess the credibility of lenders to punish delinquent debtors?¹⁰

The credibility of threats and promises plays a central role in the realm of international trade, too. In trade negotiations, negotiators sometimes threaten to impose trade sanctions in order to achieve better terms of trade. How do countries assess the credibility of these threats? If these threats are made, but they are not carried out, does the bluffer lose credibility in future negotiations? If a state acquiesces to its trade partner's threats, do the concessions reduce the credibility of its future positions and encourage its partners to expect it to back down in future negotiations?

The central question that I raise in this dissertation has applications across the field of international relations but I focus here on reputation and credibility in international security. Even more specifically, I ask: How do countries assess the credibility of their adversaries during crises? By formulating the question this way I narrow it in two

¹⁰ There is a substantial literature on these questions. See for example, Jeremy Bulow and Kenneth Rogoff, "A Constant Recontracting Model of Sovereign Debt;" International Debt, Vol. 2, in International Library of Critical Writings of Economics, Vol. 56, 1995; Harold L. Cole and Patrick J. Kehoe, "Reputation Spillover Across Relationships: Revising Reputation Models of Debt;" Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Staff Report 209, 1996; Jonathan Eaton and Mark Gersovitz, "Debt with Potential Reputation: Theoretical and Empirical Analysis;" International Debt, Vol. 1, in International Library of Critical Writings of Economics, Vol. 56, 1995; Barry Eichengreen and Peter H. Lindert, The International Debt Crisis in Historical Perspective (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989); Sule Ozler, "Have Commercial Banks Ignored History?," American Economic Review Vol. 88, No. 3 (June 1993), pp. 608-20; David M. Kreps and Robert Wilson, "Reputation and Imperfect Information;" The Economics of Information, Vol. 2, in International Library of Critical Writings of Economics, Vol. 53, 1995; Michael D. Bordo and Hugh Rockoff, "The Gold Standard as a 'Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval';" National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 5340, 1995; and Tomz, "Do Creditors Ignore History? Reputation in International Capital Markets," ms.

important respects. First, I only look at how decision makers assess the credibility of their adversaries, rather than their allies or neutrals. Second, I only look at how they assess credibility during crises rather than during times of low tension. From a broad question about reputation and credibility I now have a much narrower, more-manageable research question: during military crises, how do decision makers assess the credibility of their adversaries? Do they rely on the adversary's history for keeping its promises and executing its threats? Or do they base their assessment on their estimate of the current balance of power and interests? Or do they rely on something else to guide their assessments of credibility?

When thinking about reputation and deterrence it is easy to conflate two distinct issues about reputation and credibility; clarifying them is essential to the careful evaluation of the reputation hypothesis. The reputation hypothesis holds that today's actions affect tomorrow's credibility. To test this one needs to discover whether assessments of credibility are affected by the other country's past actions. But this question can be confused with a similar but distinct question: do leaders believe that others use past actions to assess credibility (i.e., Do decision makers worry that backing down will harm their reputation? Do they believe in the reputation hypothesis?).

This thesis starts from the assumption that the answer to this second question is "yes." Decision makers, journalists, and scholars all seem to believe the reputation hypothesis. Because so many people believe it, countries frequently invest in reputation. This is precisely the reason that it is important to test the reputation hypothesis. We need to know whether decision makers do use reputation to assess credibility because decision makers believe that they do.

The problem is that the distinction between these two questions can easily become confused. In some cases, scholars trying to test the reputation hypothesis have drawn the

wrong predictions from the theory because they have conflated these two questions.¹¹

My research shows that American decision makers were extraordinarily concerned, during both the Berlin Crises and the Cuban Missile Crisis, about how any American concessions in the face of Soviet threats might undermine U.S. credibility. This is evidence that U.S. decision makers believed the reputation hypothesis, but it doesn't mean that the reputation hypothesis is correct. It doesn't mean that today's actions affect tomorrow's credibility. That is the question at the heart of this dissertation.

If decision makers use reputation to assess credibility – if the reputation hypothesis is correct – then they should, in principle, invest in reputation.¹² But if decision makers do not use past actions to assess credibility then the money and lives invested in reputation are wasted. They will not preserve or build the country's reputation.

The rest of this chapter is organized into three main sections. First I review the previous research on reputation and credibility. I briefly summarize previous research on reputation, credibility and deterrence. I then discuss in detail two of the most prominent book-length studies of reputation and deterrence: Ted Hopf's Peripheral Visions and

¹¹ For example, Ted Hopf attempts in his book to test a version of the reputation hypothesis (which he calls the deterrence hypothesis), specifically that U.S. losses in the Third World would make America's allies doubt American credibility. To test this he looks for evidence that the Soviets believed that U.S. allies will doubt U.S. credibility after a U.S. loss in the Third World. In this part of his study, Hopf tries to test the reputation hypothesis but instead tests to see if the Soviets believed in the reputation hypothesis. Hopf, Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965-1990 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994)

¹² The size of the costs that decision makers ought to be willing to pay to build or maintain a reputation, if reputation does affect future credibility, depends on the "amount" of reputation that one can buy, the costs of generating each increment of reputation, the "life span" of the reputation and the breadth of its applicability. By "breadth" I mean that a reputation can be specific to a narrow set of events (e.g. the United States will fight to defend Saudi oil) or much broader (e.g. the United States will fight to defend any of its interests). If reputations in international politics tend to be very specific, decision makers should be willing to pay less to build or protect them. In other words, even if the reputation hypothesis is correct, this does not imply that every opportunity to build reputation will be worth the costs.

Jonathan Mercer's Reputation and International Politics.¹³ In the second section I develop the reputation hypothesis, the power/interests hypothesis, and I briefly describe two other theories about the causes of credibility. I also describe the predictions that each theory makes about reputation and credibility during crises. Finally, in the third section, I discuss the method I use in this thesis and my strategies for case selection.

Literature Review: Reputation and the Causes of Credibility

In the last few years, two major books and an excellent summary article have been published on the topic of reputation and credibility.¹⁴ These works, particularly Jonathan Mercer's Reputation and International Politics and Paul Huth's article, "Reputations and Deterrence," offer exceptionally good reviews of the state of knowledge in the field on reputation and credibility. For this reason, I only briefly summarize the less recent work on these topics. Then, I critically evaluate the two most important recent empirical works on reputation: Ted Hopf's Peripheral Visions and Jonathan Mercer's Reputation and International Politics.

The two most striking facts about the treatment of the reputation hypothesis in international relations scholarship are 1) that the reputation hypothesis is widely believed, and 2) that there is a surprising absence of evidence to support it. More specifically, the concept of reputation is widely used by game theorists to build models of signaling and bargaining; at the same time, both qualitative and quantitative empirical studies have failed

¹³ Ted Hopf, Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965-1990 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Jonathan Mercer, Reputation and International Politics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ The two recent empirical books on reputation and deterrence are Hopf, Peripheral Visions and Mercer, Reputation and International Politics. The excellent summary article is Paul K. Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment," *Security Studies* 7, No. 1 (autumn 1997), pp. 72-99. The Huth article is the best summary of our knowledge about reputation and international politics; it is the first place one should go to begin to think about reputation and credibility.

to find evidence that decision makers use reputation to assess the credibility of either adversaries or allies.

Reputation plays a large role in rational choice models of international politics.¹⁵ Models of bargaining and signaling between states face an inherent problem; because the international system is anarchic, there is no one to enforce agreements between states. But if agreements are unenforceable, then why do threats and promises convey information? Said differently, if there is no enforcement mechanism, and there is no cost associated with breaking one's pledges, all threats and promises are merely "cheap talk" and should be disregarded by rational actors.¹⁶

The concept of reputation saves the day. If breaking one's pledges is costly then the act of making a pledge – either a threat or a promise – does convey information. Although it does not guarantee that the state will keep his commitment, it can be shown formally that a costly signal can send useful information about a state's likely course of future actions. If the reputation hypothesis is correct, threats and promises are not cheap talk and creating rationalist models of signaling suddenly becomes much easier. Reputation, therefore, lies at the heart of many models of signaling, learning, and bargaining.¹⁷ But the key point is that the game theoretic work on reputation and

¹⁵ See, for example, Kreps and Wilson, "Reputation and Imperfect Information;" James Alt, Randall Calvert, and Brian Humes, "Reputation and Hegemonic Stability: A Game-Theoretic Analysis," American Political Science Review Vol. 82, No. 2 (June 1988), pp. 445-66; Peter Ordeshook, Game Theory and Political Theory (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and R. Harrison Wagner, "Rationality and Misperception in Deterrence Theory," Journal of Theoretical Politics Vol. 4, No. 2 (1992).

¹⁶ See James D. Fearon, "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model," Journal of Conflict Resolution Vol. 38, No. X (month 1994); and Fearon, "Threats to Use Force: The Role of Costly Signals in International Crises," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1992.

¹⁷ These models could be built without relying on the reputation hypothesis; any mechanism by which a country or its decision makers are punished for breaking their word, or for performing badly in the exercise of international politics, could be the basis for the "cost" in the "costly signals." For example, decision makers might fear that if they break commitments, they will be punished by domestic constituents. Even if carrying out the commitment is not in the country's interest, the concentrated interests of particular

international politics simply assumes that reputation matters; they do not test this to verify their assumption.

While assumptions about reputation and the costs of breaking one's pledges lie at the heart of many rational choice models, for almost thirty years empirical studies of reputation and international politics – both qualitative and quantitative– have discovered very little evidence to support the reputation hypothesis. Snyder and Diesing, in their path-breaking study of deterrence, found “massive evidence” that decision makers worry that their actions today will affect their future credibility but very little evidence that it really does.¹⁸ They identify only one case in which they believe that a country's previous withdrawals hurt its credibility.¹⁹ In a more recent book, Ted Hopf looks at the lessons that the Soviet foreign policy elite learned from American successes and failures in the Third World during the Cold War: he concludes that the Soviets were not emboldened by American losses nor did they infer American resoluteness from U.S. successes.²⁰ Jonathan Mercer, in another recent book, looks at a series of crises before World War I and concludes that backing down did not reduce a state's future credibility; furthermore, keeping commitments, he says, did not buy a state increased credibility.²¹

constituencies may punish a leader who backs away from a commitment. These domestic audience costs may make it painful for decision makers to break their commitments and may be substituted for the reputation hypothesis in some rational choice models.

¹⁸ Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, Conflict Among Nations : Bargaining, decision making, and system structure in international crises (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 187.

¹⁹ They claim that Russia's repeated withdrawals prior to World War I led Germany to doubt Russian credibility in 1914. This is also a case which is identified by Huth and is discussed briefly below. See Snyder and Diesing, Conflict Among Nations.

²⁰ Hopf, Peripheral Visions.

²¹ Mercer, Reputation and International Politics. Mercer looks at the Moroccan Crisis of 1905, the Bosnia-Herzegovina Crisis of 1908, and the Agadir Crisis of 1911.

Huth and Russett conducted a series of statistical analyses of crises but they, too, found no evidence that backing down in one crisis reduced future credibility.²² In other work, Huth argues that low Russian credibility prior to World War I – the same case identified by Snyder and Diesing – is the one case in which past withdrawals appear to reduce a country's credibility.²³ This is clearly an important case, even if it is an outlier, and it warrants more analysis. As Huth and others note, there were several reasons for Germany to doubt Russian credibility in 1914 including the German assessment that Russia was not ready for war.²⁴ Given that this case stands out against the otherwise strong pattern that Snyder and Diesing, Hopf, Mercer, and Huth and Russett find in other cases, more study of German assessments of Russian credibility prior to World War I is warranted.²⁵ But the aggregate finding of this body of empirical research is that there

²² They did conclude that if two countries became involved in a military crisis it was likely that they would be involved in future crises. But this happened regardless of which side prevailed in the first crisis, or whether either side backed down in the first crisis. The country which was the challenger in the first crisis was likely to challenge again whether or not the defender backed down or stood firm. See Huth and Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work?: Cases from 1900 to 1980," *World Politics* 36, No. X (July 1984), pp. 496-526; "Deterrence Failure and Crisis Escalation," *International Studies Quarterly* 32, No. X (March 1988); "Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War," *American Political Science Review* 82, No. X (June 1988), pp. XX; "Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," *World Politics* 42, No. X (Month 1990), pp. 466-501; and Paul Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

For an important critique of Huth and Russett's interpretation of their data see James Fearon, "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38, No. X (month 1994), pp. 236-267; and the excellent unpublished manuscript, Fearon, "Selection Effects and Deterrence." For a critique and extension of Fearon's argument see Chapter 3 of this thesis, "Overcoming Selection Effects in Studies of Deterrence and Economic Sanctions."

²³ Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, p. 186.

²⁴ Mercer also makes this point. See Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, p. 23.

²⁵ A competitive theory testing approach, like the one used in this dissertation, could be used to test the range of predictions from the reputation and power/interests hypotheses against German decision making in 1914 and German assessments of Russian credibility specifically.

does not appear to be a systematic relationship between keeping commitments in one crisis and one's credibility in the future.²⁶

Two of the most recent empirical books on reputation and deterrence are Hopf's Peripheral Visions and Mercer's Reputation and International Politics. In the sections that follow I make a detailed summary and critique of these two important books.

Hopf: Peripheral Visions

In Peripheral Visions, Ted Hopf tests a version of the reputation hypothesis which he calls the deterrence hypothesis. Hopf tests the idea that the outcome of struggles in the third world affected American credibility during the Cold War.²⁷ Specifically, he claims to test three hypotheses. First, he tests the idea that "If the United States were to suffer a loss somewhere in the third world...the Soviet leadership would infer from that defeat that the United States lacks credibility."²⁸ The second hypothesis is that American losses would reduce U.S. credibility in the eyes of U.S. allies.²⁹ Third, American losses in the third world would reduce U.S. credibility in the eyes of neutral countries, thereby making

²⁶ Two empirical studies have argued that countries can develop a reputation for *power*, as opposed to a reputation for *keeping commitments*. (This distinction is discussed below in the section on the power/interests theory of credibility.) See, Jonathan Shimshoni, Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), and Elli Lieberman, "What Makes Deterrence Work: Lessons from the Egyptian-Israeli Enduring Rivalry," *Security Studies* 4, No. 4 (Summer 1995), pp. 833-92.

²⁷ Two differences between Hopf's question and my question are immediately obvious. First, Hopf tests the idea that outcomes of struggles affect future credibility, while I focus on whether keeping or breaking commitments (rather than failing) affects future credibility. Second, Hopf studies the effect of competition in the third world on U.S. credibility to defend its core strategic interests and its third world interests; I look at the effect of crises over strategic core interests on future credibility vis-à-vis core interests. These differences make our studies complementary; we are looking in different places for evidence of the same phenomena.

²⁸ See Hopf, Peripheral Visions, page vii, 1, and 4.

²⁹ Hopf, vii, 4.

the U.S. a less attractive potential ally.³⁰ Hopf is an expert on Russian foreign policy and, based on his examination of Russian documents, he concludes that there is little evidence to support any of these hypotheses.

Before discussing in more detail Hopf's work it is necessary to point out that he made a fundamental error at the outset of his study which made it impossible for him to answer two of the three questions that he raises. Hopf wants to assess the theory that says that America's interventions in the third world were necessary to support U.S. credibility in the eyes of adversaries, allies, and neutrals. To test this theory he draws predictions from this theory to test against evidence from the Cold War. But surprisingly, his predictions do not test the theory his study purports to investigate.

Hopf claims that if "deterrence theory" is correct, he should find the following:

"After a victory, the Soviets should express disbelief in the American willingness and ability to defend U.S. interests elsewhere in the world – both in the third world and in strategic areas of the globe. Conversely, a Soviet loss should result in gains for U.S. credibility."³¹

³⁰ Hopf is unclear about this third hypothesis in the preface to the book. He writes, "Finally, the Soviets would feel that their victory had set off dynamics in the region that would lead to further U.S. losses there..." [emphasis added]. But later Hopf writes that he is testing U.S. rationales for intervention in the third world, including "the fear that nations would fall like dominoes in a pro-Soviet direction in the region of a recent Soviet victory." (5) It appears that Hopf is attempting to test the idea that neutrals doubt U.S. credibility after U.S. losses in the third world, because this was, in fact the fear. But he conflates the questions: 1) do the outcomes of third world conflicts affect the credibility of the combatants in the eyes of neutrals, and 2) did the Soviets think that the outcomes of third world conflicts affected the credibility of the combatants in the eyes of neutrals. He says he is testing the first question, but in fact he tests the second one. This error runs throughout the book; I discuss the implications of this mistake below.

³¹ Hopf, 5.

So far so good. This is a fair prediction that tests the notion that losses in the Third World affect U.S. credibility in the eyes of U.S. adversaries (i.e., the Soviets).

The second prediction, the one designed to test the effect of U.S. victories and losses in the Third World on U.S. credibility in the eyes of America's allies, misses the mark. Hopf writes:

“After a victory, the Soviets should advance the argument that U.S. allies now fear that the United States cannot provide reliable security guarantees, and so accommodation to, or bandwagoning with, the Soviet Union is the best policy. Conversely, a Soviet defeat should result in Soviet perceptions of U.S. allies who are increasingly confident in their alliance relationship with the United States.”³²

Hopf conflates two ideas: 1) that U.S. credibility in the eyes of its allies is affected by U.S. success or failure in the third world; and 2) that Soviet leaders believe that U.S. credibility in the eyes of U.S. allies is at stake in the third world. These two ideas are not identical. The U.S. could lose credibility in the eyes of its allies even if the Soviets do not believe that this is happening. Or American credibility, in the eyes of its allies, might remain steady, despite Soviet beliefs that U.S. allies now question U.S. credibility. Hopf says that he tests the idea that “American allies lose confidence in the United States when it tolerates Soviet victories in the periphery,”³³ but he does not actually test this. At best his

³² Hopf, 5.

³³ Hopf, 5.

research can tell us whether the Soviets expected U.S. credibility to fall in the eyes of U.S. allies, but not whether this really happened.

Hopf makes this same mistake again when he tries to test the third proposition. To test the idea that U.S. losses in the periphery will drive neutrals away from America, Hopf tests the prediction that:

“After a victory, the Soviets should talk about how other victories in the region and beyond are just a matter of time, about how dominoes will fall in their favor both in the area and around the globe. After a defeat, however, they should express pessimism about the prospects for further gains.”³⁴

Again Hopf misses the mark. He tests whether the Soviets believe that U.S. losses make America less-appealing to neutrals, not whether this really happens.

Hopf apparently sets up his research this way because he is an expert on Soviet foreign policy. His expertise led him to research what the Soviets thought about U.S. credibility, what the Soviets thought about U.S. allies' assessments of U.S. credibility, and what the Soviets thought about neutrals' assessments of U.S. credibility. But his data cannot tell us what U.S. allies actually thought about U.S. credibility or what neutrals actually thought about U.S. credibility. Hopf's research can, therefore, only answer the first of his three questions: he can tell us whether the Third World struggle affected U.S. credibility in Soviet eyes, but he cannot tell us whether it affected U.S. credibility in the eyes of U.S. allies or neutrals.

³⁴ Hopf, 5.

For the remainder of this review, therefore, I only evaluate Hopf's analysis of his first question: Did U.S. victories and losses in the Third World affect U.S. credibility in the eyes of the Soviets? I make three arguments about Hopf's work on this question. First, Hopf's research design, described below, is excellent. Second, Hopf's execution of his research is problematic. Third, although he claims that the reputation hypothesis (which he calls the "deterrence theory") failed the tests he conducted, his results are mixed and actually lend some support to the reputation hypothesis.

Hopf's research design has him track the views of senior Soviet foreign policy makers as well as Soviet academics and journalists. He relies on the public statements and writings of these Soviet foreign policy elite because access to Soviet foreign policy archives was severely limited when Hopf conducted his research. Hopf argues that the substance of the statements and writings reflect more than just official state propaganda – the disagreements among the authors reflect the differing views of the individuals and disagreements among the organizations that the individuals represent.³⁵ With caution and some caveats, he argues, we can learn something important about the trends in Soviet thinking about U.S. credibility by looking at these documents.

Hopf should be commended on his research design. His data are not perfect; public statements and open-source articles can distort the true views held by statesmen. Furthermore, by combining the assessments of decision makers and non-decision makers (academics and the press) he assumes that Soviet decision makers think about foreign policy in a similar way as Soviet academics and journalists. Finally, his data do not let him observe the statements and writings of decision makers as they made momentous foreign policy decisions; his data shed light on how the Soviet foreign policy elite, more broadly, thought about U.S. credibility when they were penning articles, not when they

³⁵ Hopf, pp. 27-29.

were making decisions. Policy makers might think differently about things in the midst of making a decision than they do when they write about foreign policy in more relaxed and abstract terms.

But Hopf is clearly aware of these caveats and he accepts the costs of using imperfect data for a good reason: his research design allows him to test a version of the reputation hypothesis *directly*. U.S. leaders need to know whether America's actions today will affect U.S. credibility in the eyes of our adversaries, and Hopf tests this; he looks at Soviet evidence to see what the Soviets thought of U.S. credibility. By contrast I test the same hypothesis with a *less-direct* test. Instead of examining Soviet assessments of U.S. credibility, I examine American and British assessments of Soviet credibility. Because the reputation hypothesis is a general theory which does not rely on regime-types for its causal effect my indirect approach is valid, but it is less-desirable on these grounds than Hopf's more-direct examination. But what my research strategy loses in directness, it gains in the quality of the evidence.³⁶ In sum, Hopf's research design addresses the question directly at the cost of weaker evidence; I approach the question indirectly but benefit from high-quality data. These two research designs are complimentary.

Unfortunately, Hopf's use of evidence is problematic. He tests a very narrow formulation of the reputation ("deterrence") hypothesis and this causes him to overlook evidence which supports the reputation hypothesis. Hopf tests the idea that U.S. failures in the Third World made the Soviets doubt America's credibility to defend its interest elsewhere. As he applies this to Vietnam, Hopf writes:

³⁶ The U.S. and U.K. declassify the vast majority of documents relating to foreign policy after 20-30 years. So my research gives me access to the private communications of senior decision makers during crises as they sought to create policies.

“If deterrence theory...[is] accurate...[a]t the very least, the Soviets should have concluded that the United States was both incapable and unwilling to intervene to stop revolutionary change in the Third World. At the most, they should have inferred that the United States had lost its credibility to defend its vital interests in strategic areas of the world...”³⁷

He claims that the reputation hypothesis theory makes unambiguous predictions about the Vietnam case because America’s “enormous effort combined with total failure” makes this “the easiest possible test for deterrence theory to pass.”³⁸

But the Vietnam war provides an ambiguous case from the standpoint of reputation and credibility. Relying on the lessons of Vietnam, the Soviets could very reasonably draw the conclusions that 1) the U.S. will fight vigorously to defend even unimportant allies, and 2) that despite extreme U.S. efforts, the United States can be beaten in the Third World. But Hopf only tests the version of the hypothesis that says “U.S. losses cause lower American credibility in the future.” Since this is his focus, he is not alert to evidence that supports other versions of the theory – for example, that credibility falls after a loss unless the country pays a big cost to defend its ally in the losing effort, or that adversaries will expect a country to act in a future crisis the way they did in the past (i.e., fight hard to defend an unimportant ally).

In fact, if we look at Hopf’s Vietnam data with an eye to testing nuanced versions of the theory we find some support for the “deterrence” (i.e., reputation) hypothesis. Hopf summarizes Soviet views of U.S. credibility after Vietnam by writing: “most

³⁷ Hopf, 36.

³⁸ Hopf, 58.

[Soviets] were...convinced that the U.S. ability to prevent future revolutionary change in the Third World had been weakened; no doubt. Washington would continue to make such efforts, even if they were ultimately futile."³⁹ It is actually not clear that this summary of Soviet views of American credibility after Vietnam accurately reflects the data which Hopf presents in his book.⁴⁰ But the more surprising thing is that both of these conclusions seem consistent with the types of conclusions that the Soviets should have drawn from Vietnam if the reputation hypothesis was correct. The U.S. tried hard to defend its ally in the Vietnam War and, Hopf says, that the Soviets expected this in the future. The U.S. was unsuccessful in Vietnam and, according to Hopf, the Soviets apparently expected future U.S. efforts to end in failure, too.

In sum, Hopf's data on Vietnam does not fail the reputation hypothesis, as he claims. In fact, it provides ambiguous support for the reputation ("deterrence") hypothesis. Unfortunately, he tests such a narrow formulation of the theory that he doesn't see the evidence that points in the theory's favor.

Hopf studies two other cases in which the U.S. took direct action in the Third World: the U.S. victory in the Dominican Republic (1965), and the U.S. victory in Grenada (1983).⁴¹ According to Hopf, after the American invasion of Grenada, the most-common Soviet lesson about U.S. credibility was that "The U.S. will defend its peripheral

³⁹ Hopf, 36.

⁴⁰ Hopf's data shows that the most common view about American credibility expressed by the Soviet foreign policy elite after Vietnam was that the U.S. would continue along the course of détente and arms control (p. 37, table 7). The second most-frequently stated view is a tie between those Soviet observers who believed that Vietnam shows that "the U.S. will defend its peripheral interests" and those who felt that "The U.S. will not defend its peripheral interests." (p. 37, table 7) The next most common response was that "The United States will negotiate on Third World conflicts." (p. 37, table 7) How Hopf gets from this data to the conclusion that "most [Soviets] were...convinced that the U.S. ability to prevent future revolutionary change in the Third World had been weakened; no doubt, Washington would continue to make such efforts, even if they were ultimately futile..." is not clear.

⁴¹ Hopf, 23, Table 5.

interests.”⁴² He writes that: “There is no doubt whatsoever that the American military intervention in Grenada caused the Soviets to infer the lessons about American credibility predicted by deterrence theory.”⁴³ He does not present his data on the Dominican Republic but says that the Dominican Republic case leads to the same results as as he found for Grenada.⁴⁴ Again, Hopf’s findings about Grenada, and perhaps the Dominican Republic, seem to support the reputation hypothesis.

There is a second problem with Hopf’s data on Soviet views of U.S. credibility. Hopf provides “snapshots” of data on Soviet views of U.S. credibility but he does not provide a way to systematically compare the Soviet assessments before and after the incident. For example, Hopf’s data on Vietnam suggests that after the war Soviet observers were roughly evenly split on whether the U.S. would fight to defend peripheral interests. But the proper interpretation of this fact depends on knowing how they assessed U.S. credibility before the war, or before the outcome of the war was clear. Does the post-war “split” between those Soviets who expected the U.S. to defend its Third World interests, and those Soviets who didn’t expect this, reflect a decrease in U.S. credibility or an increase? Or was there no significant change? In the Grenada case, did fewer Soviets believe the U.S. would defend its peripheral interests before the invasion, or was there no significant change? We cannot tell from Hopf’s data.

Despite his conclusions to the contrary, Hopf’s data suggests that U.S. successes and failures in the Third World, when the U.S. was directly involved, *might* have affected U.S. credibility in Soviet eyes. Coming to a firm conclusion about this would require

⁴² Hopf, 155, Table 19.

⁴³ Hopf, 153. Hopf does not reveal how he distinguishes the effects of the U.S. invasion of Grenada with the effects of the aggressive anti-Soviet policies of the Reagan Administration and the major U.S. defense buildup which accompanied it.

⁴⁴ Hopf, p. 153, fn. 1.

looking at Soviet estimates over time (before, during, and after the crisis). Ideally, now that there is greater access to Soviet archives, archival research might be able to shed more light on Soviet evaluations of U.S. credibility throughout the Cold War. But in the meantime there is little reason to infer from Hopf's study that the reputation hypothesis is false. Rather than deliver a serious defeat for the reputation hypothesis, Peripheral Visions offers suggestive, but inconclusive, support for the idea that credibility depends on creating a pattern of assertive, hard-line behavior.

Mercer: Theory of International Politics:

The most recent, in-depth analysis of reputation and deterrence is Reputation and International Politics by Jonathan Mercer. In this section I will briefly lay out his argument and then raise two problems with his research.

Mercer studies a series of military crises in the early twentieth century to discover how decision makers explain the actions of other countries. He finds that under some conditions they attribute the actions to the character of the country or its decision makers (this is a "dispositional attribution") and under other circumstances they attribute the actions to the situation that the other country was in (this is a "situational attribution").⁴⁵ Mercer argues that decision makers explain favorable behavior in situational terms. So when an adversary backs down and refrains from some aggressive act, the adversary's actions are explained in situational terms (e.g., "he backed down because he was outgunned"). Similarly, if an ally is resolute during a crisis, their favorable act is explained in situational terms (e.g., "he stood with us because he needs our help in the future"). Only unfavorable actions, for example an adversary carrying out a threatened

⁴⁵ Mercer borrows the idea of situational and dispositional attributions from cognitive psychology. He credits Fritz Heider as the originator. See Heider, The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1958); and Mercer, Reputation and International Politics, pp. 45-46.

attack or an ally failing to keep a commitment, generate a dispositional attribution. In other words, allies who defect from agreements may be considered treacherous or disloyal, but those who keep their promises will never be called loyal.⁴⁶ And adversaries who carry out their threats may be called “aggressive” or “hostile” but adversaries who back down will not be called “weak” or “cowardly.”

Mercer links his attribution theory to the issue of reputation and deterrence by arguing that situational attributions “cannot generate a reputation.”⁴⁷ Situational attributions only have “within-situation validity...[therefore they] cannot be used to predict or explain behavior in a different situation.”⁴⁸ Mercer offers a few examples to illustrate this point. He writes that “someone who is repeatedly serious at funerals will not get a reputation for being a serious person based on this behavior.” The behavior – seriousness – will be attributed to the situation and not to the person’s character.⁴⁹ Likewise, he argues, if Mary breaks a promise after a gun is pointed at her head she will not get a reputation for being unfaithful because her behavior will be explained in terms of her situation. Mercer writes, “In a different situation, where there was no gun to her head, she might keep her promise.”⁵⁰ And, borrowing an example from Thomas Schelling, Mercer argues that if a boy in a school yard who wears glasses refuses to defend himself

⁴⁶ There is a small problem with this part of Mercer’s framework that can be corrected easily. Mercer’s assumption that countries always want their allies to be resolute during crises is not correct. Countries sometimes want their allies to back down during crises and, in these cases, the predictions of his theory with respect to allies should be reversed. For example, during both the Berlin Crises (1958-1961) and the Cuban Missile Crisis the British pressured the United States to adopt conciliatory policies; they wanted the U.S. to give in to some Soviet demands in order to reduce the risks of war. In cases in which countries want their allies to back down, the predictions from Mercer’s theory (with respect to allies) should be reversed.

⁴⁷ Mercer, p. 16-17.

⁴⁸ Mercer, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Mercer, p. 16-17.

⁵⁰ Mercer, p. 6.

from a bully, the boy will not be called a coward. His refusal to fight will be blamed on his glasses, not on his character. So “no enduring costs” will form.⁵¹

Dispositional attributions, on the other hand, can *in principle* lead to a reputation. “Because a reputation is a judgment about another’s character, only dispositional attributions *can* generate a reputation.”⁵² But, Mercer says, the evidence that he gathers shows that even when dispositional attributions are made, decision makers do not usually use them to predict future actions. So, in practice, even when a country’s actions provoke a dispositional attribution (making a reputation possible), no reputation is formed.

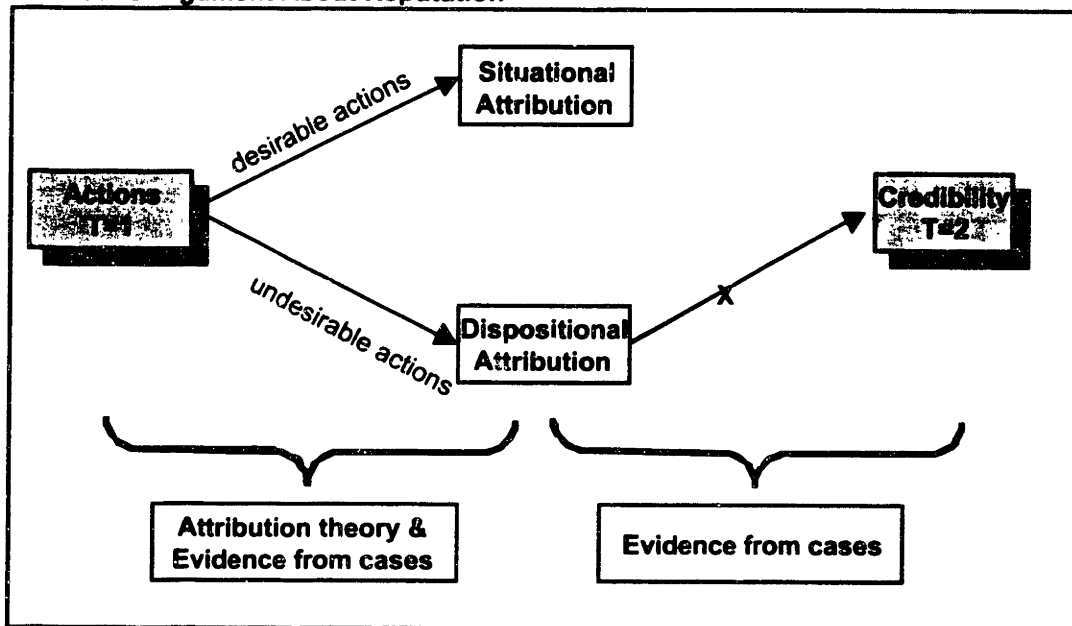
Mercer’s argument is complicated, which has led to considerable confusion.⁵³ But his argument can be simplified and represented by Figure 1.

⁵¹ Mercer, p. 64.

⁵² Mercer, p. 6. Emphasis added. Mercer is not saying here that a reputation *will* form; only that it is possible. This ambiguous wording has led to substantial confusion about Mercer’s argument. This is discussed below.

⁵³ For example, Mercer repeatedly writes that “only dispositional attributions can generate a reputation.” (p. 6). Many people have misinterpreted Mercer to mean that dispositional attributions do lead to reputations and they have, therefore, questioned why he maintains that reputation is not worth fighting for. After all, if standing firm led to a dispositional attribution and a reputation for resoluteness in the eyes of one’s adversaries, this might be good. And by standing firm, if one could avoid a dispositional attribution and a reputation for weakness in the eyes of one’s allies, this would also be good. So critics have claimed that Mercer’s argument actually suggests that one should stand firm to get a beneficial reputation from one’s adversaries and to avoid a detrimental reputation from one’s allies. For example, Copeland makes this argument in “Do Reputations Matter,” *Security Studies* 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), p. X. Copeland, however, misunderstands Mercer. Mercer does not argue that dispositional attributions do generate reputations; he argues that dispositional attributions can lead to reputations but in practice they don’t.

Figure 1:
Mercer's Argument About Reputation



As this figure shows, Mercer argues that a country's actions at time $T=1$ do not affect its credibility at $T=2$ for two reasons. First, consistent with attribution theory, many of those actions – those which the observer finds desirable – are explained in situational terms, and situational attributions cannot, *by definition*, lead to a reputation. Second, the actions which are explained in dispositional terms can in principal lead to a reputation, but in practice decision makers do not use their previous dispositional attributions to evaluate other countries' credibility. His attribution theory is silent on this point, but he claims to find support for this finding in his cases. So, in sum, there is no path between actions at $T=1$ and credibility at $T=2$. Half of the actions are explained in situational terms and so the possibility for reputation ends there; the other half are explained in dispositional terms but these, it turns out, do not end up affecting credibility either.

There are two main problems with Mercer's research which raise doubts about his results and which suggest that his approach – using attribution theory – may not be the best way to test theories of reputation and credibility. First, Mercer's framework for

thinking about reputation and credibility is *unnecessarily* complicated and difficult to operationalize. Testing the attribution theory requires coding decision makers' statements as either "situational" or "dispositional" which is not easy; there are many instances in the book of questionable coding by Mercer.

Second, and more importantly, Mercer's argument is based on the critical, and I argue incorrect, assumption that situational attributions cannot lead to reputations or affect future credibility. This means that his theoretical enterprise – adapting attribution theory to international relations and testing attribution theory against crisis behavior – has little connection to the question of reputation and international politics. If both situational and dispositional explanations of behavior at T=1 can affect a state's credibility at T=2, then knowing when decision makers make one type of attribution or another is *nearly* irrelevant to the question about whether one should fight for reputation.⁵⁴ Said differently, if in Figure 1 the box from "situational attribution" connects to credibility at T=2, then it doesn't matter whether decision makers make situational or dispositional attributions. The only question that matters is whether decision makers, at time T=2, look back at their adversary's actions at T=1 to predict their adversary's future moves. Mercer's theoretical framework – which explains when decision makers make situational versus dispositional attributions – tells us interesting things about how decision makers think, but it tells us little about reputation and deterrence.

Furthermore, because Mercer is focused on the question of whether or not decision makers make situational or dispositional attributions (despite the fact that either type of attribution can lead to a reputation) he overlooks evidence that he discovers that lends support to the reputation hypothesis.

⁵⁴ I say *nearly* irrelevant because reputations based on situational attributions are probably less important than those based on dispositional attributions. A reputation based on a dispositional attribution should

In sum, the difficult task entailed in distinguishing situational from dispositional attributions is unnecessary because it does not help us answer the question: Do decision makers use reputation to evaluate credibility? A much more simple research design – one that simply investigates whether decision makers at T=2 looked back at T=1 in order to predict their adversary's future actions – would be more effective.

The first criticism of Mercer's book is that his framework is very complicated and hard to apply systematically. Coding attributions as either "situational" or "dispositional" is extremely difficult. Most explanations of behavior – and perhaps all of them – involve a mix of situational and dispositional attributions. Mercer recognizes this and writes that his task is to determine whether each of the statements that he codes is "more situational or dispositional".⁵⁵ Unfortunately, it is not clear how one does this and many of his assessments seem, on their face, to be wrong. Mercer provides no criteria by which he codes them one way or another.

For example, Mercer quotes the German Ambassador to Italy as saying of the Italians, "If Italy fails us in the relatively unimportant Morocco question, that is a foretaste of what we may expect in really serious times."⁵⁶ Mercer codes this as a situational explanation of Italy's behavior and concludes that it contradicts the reputation hypothesis because situational attributions cannot lead to a reputation. But there is no explanation of Italy's behavior in this statement – the Ambassador says neither that the Italians failed them because the Italians were inherently cowardly (i.e., a dispositional attribution), nor that the Italians failed them because of the situation they found themselves in during the

have much more cross-situation validity than one based on a situation, even if that situation was enduring, repeating, or re-creatable. I thank Charlie Glaser for bringing this point to my attention.

⁵⁵ Mercer, p 75. See also Mercer's description of the aftermath of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Crisis of 1909 on pp. 143-45. He argues that key decisions makers interpreted the Russian surrender with a combination of situational and dispositional explanations. See also p. 150.

⁵⁶ Mercer, Reputation and International Politics, pp. 89.

Moroccan crisis (i.e., situation). All the Ambassador said was that given the lack of Italian support over Morocco, no support should be expected in the future. Mercer's decision to code this as a situational attribution is not clear. Furthermore, the Ambassador's statement seems to offer support for the reputation hypothesis but Mercer overlooks this because his main task is coding the statements as situational and dispositional attributions, not looking for evidence that behavior at T=1 affects expectations at T=2.

A few lines later in the text Mercer codes two more German evaluations of the Italians: "In whatever circumstances and under whatever Government, Italy will seek to hold herself aloof from a war against England" and "The Italian Minister is not yet born who will refuse to be part of an Anglo-French defensive arrangement, strengthened at need by agreements with Russia."⁵⁷ Again Mercer says that the Germans are making situational explanations of Italian behavior. Again this is puzzling for several reasons. First, neither of these statements is an explanation of Italian behavior; both are predictions of future Italian actions. Second, if Mercer is right and these predictions are based on situational explanations of what the Italians did in the past – they stayed out of war with England or joined an Anglo-French alliance – then this contradicts Mercer's key argument that situational attributions cannot be used to predict future behavior.

Finally, it's not at all clear that either of these predictions have any thing to do with *situational* attributions. In the first statement the Admiral goes out of his way to emphasize that the Italians will stay out of a war against England "[i]n whatever circumstances" they find themselves; he could not have been clearer that he was talking about Italian disposition. The second quote is much more ambiguous. The Ambassador says that the Italians will always be interested in a Anglo-French alliance. But he gives no clue

⁵⁷ Mercer, Reputation and International Politics, pp. 89.

whatsoever as to whether he thinks this is because of Italy's situation or because of the Italian character. Nevertheless, Mercer writes "Although this statement could be interpreted as a dispositional explanation, I think it is more situational." His criteria for coding this is a mystery.

The second, and more substantial, problem with Mercer's study is that one of his key assumptions, that situational attributions cannot lead to reputations, is not correct. Actions explained in situational terms can lead to a reputation; in other words decision makers can logically predict another country's future actions by referring to its past actions, even if the past actions were explained using a situational attribution.

Why can situational attributions be used to predict future actions? First, not all situations are transient. Some situations last a very long time. For example, geographical constraints on a state's actions can change very slowly. Switzerland has been well-defended by her mountainous borders for centuries.⁵⁸ Other aspects of a country's "situation" often change slowly. The balance of power in some regions – e.g. North America – does not change quickly. Therefore, explanations of Canadian behavior which rest on the balance of power between Canada and the United States should be valid for explaining Canadian actions for the past hundred years and for predicting them into the foreseeable future. Furthermore, some situations change quickly but repeat themselves. If a country's aggressive foreign policy was explained by its domestic turmoil, other countries would predict that future turmoil would lead to new aggression. Finally, some situations can be recreated by countries who want to induce a particular "situational" response.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Geographical constraints do change over time because they interact with changing technology. For example, mountains continue to protect Switzerland but do so less reliably since the creation of aircraft.

⁵⁹ Mercer recognizes this point. Referring to the German situational attribution of the Russian retreat during the 1909 Bosnian crisis, Mercer writes: "Of course, if the Germans believed that they could later

The examples that Mercer uses in his book demonstrate that situational attributions can be used to predict future behavior. Mercer writes that someone who is consistently serious at funerals will not be credited with a serious disposition; he is correct, but we can logically predict that he will be serious at future funerals. Mercer writes that Mary won't be considered a pushover if she backs down with a gun to her head, but we know how to get her to give up her wallet: all we need is a gun. And he writes that the bespectacled boy in the school yard will not be called a coward if he gives in to the bully. Right, but every bully in the school yard will know where to go to get a little extra lunch money. As long as the situations are similar, logical observers can predict behavior from past actions, even if the actions are attributed to the situation.

The evidence from Mercer's book demonstrates that situational attributions often involve things that are slow to change, repeat themselves, or can be recreated by another country who wants to induce the same response that they witnessed earlier. As an example of a statesman making a situational attribution, Mercer quotes former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker as saying of the Soviet Union in 1989, "...there seems to me a genuine desire on their part to move positively across a variety of areas...I am not saying it comes from any good feeling toward the United States. They are basically forced into this posture by the situation of their economy and the problems they face at home."⁶⁰ Baker attributes Soviet *glasnost* to the Russian situation, not their disposition. But he could logically predict from this that the Soviets would continue to be conciliatory to the U.S. because the Soviet economy was showing no signs of rapidly improving.

recreate the situation, they might expect the same outcome." Mercer, Reputation in International Politics, p. 64.

⁶⁰ Mercer, Reputation and International Politics, p. 58. Mercer takes this quote from Thomas Friedman, "How Washington Shifted to Embracing Gorbachev," *New York Times*, October 22, 1989, p. A18.

There are cases in Mercer's book which reveals European statesmen making situational attributions and then referring back to them to predict future actions. According to Mercer, German diplomats concluded that the French had given up in the Fashoda conference because the British had outmaneuvered the French diplomatically. Holstein concludes that Germany can get the French to back down a second time if Germany can maneuver the French into an awkward diplomatic position again.⁶¹

What are the implications of the fact that situational attributions can be used to predict future actions? First, because either situational or dispositional attributions can affect credibility, the theoretical and empirical focus of his book – explaining when decision makers make situational or dispositional attributions – misses the mark. The main focus of Mercer's book is about when decision makers make situational vs. dispositional attributions.⁶² This is the focus of his theory chapter and empirical work. And he does it all because he believes that situational attributions cannot logically lead to reputation. But since they can, all the focus on attribution theory, situational attributions, and dispositional attributions, is interesting but tells us little about reputation and international politics. It tells us very little about whether actions at T=1 affect reputation and credibility at T=2.

The second implication of the fact that situational attributions can be used to predict future actions is that it causes Mercer to overlook evidence in favor of the reputation hypothesis. For example, as mentioned earlier, during the First Moroccan Crisis (1906) the Germans predicted that the French would give up if the Germans outmaneuvered them diplomatically, just as they gave up when they were outmaneuvered by the British at

⁶¹ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, p. 84.

⁶² The dependent variable in Mercer's study is type of attribution (i.e., situational or dispositional). His theoretical contribution develops a theory of attributions and his empirical chapters test it. But neither of

Fashoda.⁶³ But Mercer says that this is not evidence for reputational reasoning because it is a situational explanation for the outcome at Fashoda. In other words, even though the Germans are drawing exactly the type of inferences about French resolve as the reputation hypothesis predicts, because Mercer is focusing on coding statements as either situational or dispositional, he misses that this is evidence for the reputation hypothesis.⁶⁴ Mercer misses key pieces of data because he has focused his attention on the tangential question of situational and dispositional attributions.

One argument has been raised against this critique of Mercer. One could argue that it is impossible to draw inferences from another country's past actions if those past actions were explained in situational terms because the past actions will have transmitted no new information. There will be no "updating" so there will be no effect on credibility or reputation.⁶⁵ In other words, to say that someone acted a certain way for situational reasons is to say that their character had nothing to do with their choice; anyone would have done the same thing in those circumstances. But if a situation is so constraining that everyone would have acted the same, then this action could have been anticipated beforehand. For example, after Mary backed down we did know that she could be coerced by simply putting a gun to her head, but we knew this before she backed down. Yes we can predict Mary's future actions, but we learned nothing new by her behavior.

This argument is technically correct. If any actions could be explained entirely in situational terms – if disposition had absolutely nothing to do with the choice and anyone

these exercises has much bearing on reputation and credibility if situational attributions, like dispositional attributions, can lead to reputations.

⁶³ Mercer. Reputation in International Politics, p. 84.

⁶⁴ Mercer. Reputation in International Politics, pp. 84-85, and fn. 41. Mercer says that the lesson from Fashoda was inappropriate to the situation in Morocco. But the Germans didn't think so. They said that they learned from the French defeat at Fashoda that Germany could defeat France in Morocco with some diplomatic dexterity.

would have behaved in the same manner – then situational attributions could not be used to predict the future. But this definition of a situational attribution is too strict to be useful and, more importantly, it is more strict than the definition Mercer uses in his study. If a situational attribution was really one which had not an ounce of disposition in it, then it would be correct to say that no new information could be gleaned. But if this was the definition, there would probably be no situational attributions. All human choices are constrained, but all still involve choice. Different people act differently when a gun is put to their head, even though they are all affected by the situation. Some kids with glasses fight to keep their lunch money, even though their situation puts them at a disadvantage. Different people make different choices in the same situation. Mercer acknowledges that the statements that he finds in the diplomatic history are never purely situational or purely dispositional – they are always a mix – and Mercer says correctly that his challenge is to determine whether they are “more situational or [more] dispositional.”⁶⁶ In other words, even the statements that Mercer codes as “situational” have elements of disposition in them, as he acknowledges, so they do transmit new information and they can be used to predict the future.

The bottom line that comes out of this point (that situational attributions can lead to reputations and affect credibility) is that Mercer spends most of his effort developing a theory that allows him to predict when leaders make “more situational” or “more dispositional” attributions; his empirical work is focused on putting statements into one of two boxes – more situational or more dispositional. But the problem is that attributions from either of these boxes can be the bases of a reputation and can lead to predictions

⁶⁵ I thank Jim Fearon for bringing this argument to my attention.

⁶⁶ Mercer, Reputation in International Politics, p. 75.

about future actions. So the entire focus of the work, while interesting, has only tangential effect on our assessment of whether we should fight for our reputation.

To summarize this critique, Mercer's research design unnecessarily complicates the study of reputation. The difficulties that arise when he tries to code attributions as either "situational" or "dispositional," the intellectual knots that one has to cut through to decide whether one believes that situational attributions can lead to reputation, or whether one believes Mercer that they cannot, is all unnecessary. Mercer's book addresses a critically important, but quite straightforward, question: do countries need to fight in order to preserve their reputations for defending their interests? In other words: will their actions at time $T=1$ affect their credibility at time $T=2$? There is no need to untangle the cognitive psychology at the heart of Mercer's study to answer this question. We want to know whether today's actions will affect our future credibility, so what we need to do is learn how decision makers assess credibility. If they look back in time and estimate current credibility on the basis of past history for carrying out commitments, then the reputation hypothesis is correct. But if decision makers do not use the past to assess current credibility, then it makes no sense to invest money and lives in reputation.

Hypotheses and Variables

In the following section I develop the theories of credibility which I test in this thesis and identify the predictions that each theory makes about decision making during crises. These predictions are summarized at the end of this section in Table 2. First, I describe the dependent variable in this study – credibility. Second, I develop the reputation hypothesis and identify nine versions of the theory – the broad version I have been discussing so far in this chapter and eight narrower versions. Third, I develop the power/interests theory and discuss the hypothesized relationship between power, interests, and credibility. Fourth, I quickly develop two other theories which I call the "Ingrained

Lessons” theory and the “Never Again” theory. These are not the focus of the thesis, but the data that I present in the cases allows me to test them, too. Finally, I describe the predictions that each of these four theories makes about what we should see in the empirical chapters to come.

The Dependent Variable (DV): Credibility

The purpose of this study is to determine the causes of credibility. More specifically, the goal is to find out what determines whether or not a country’s threat to use military force will be credible in the eyes of an adversary.

The credibility of a threat is defined as the perception, held by others, that a threat will be carried out if the conditions which are supposed to trigger the threat are met. There are three points about using credibility as a dependent variable which require attention. First, credibility is a perception. If a threat is believed by others then, by definition, it is credible (at least in their eyes); if the threat is not believed, it is not credible. One implication of this is that any threat may, theoretically, have countless levels of credibility simultaneously. Some governments may believe a threat while others reject its credibility. Even within a single government, different decision makers and agencies may disagree about the credibility of a threat.⁶⁷ This is good news for scholars of credibility because it means that a single threat may yield countless data points about credibility as different leaders and groups around the world evaluate the credibility of a threat repeatedly over time.

A second observation about the dependent variable in this study is not as beneficial to scholars of credibility: credibility is invisible. Because credibility is a perception, it resides inside the minds of decision makers. Scholars cannot observe credibility directly

so they must rely upon indicators which imperfectly reveal the extent to which decision makers view a particular threat as credible. In this study I rely primarily on two indicators of credibility: 1) the explicit, private assessments made by decision makers during crises of the credibility of the adversary's threats; and 2) the policies that decision makers advocate in response to the threats. I discuss these two indicators later in this section.

The third point is very important because it affects the predictions that I draw from the theories: the *credibility* of a threat is not synonymous with the *seriousness* of the threat. The seriousness of a threat depends on both the perceived likelihood that it will be carried through (i.e., the credibility) and the perceived consequences if it is carried through. Even threats which have low credibility may provoke a substantial response in an adversary if the country making the threat has enough power to make the consequences sufficiently terrible to contemplate. On the other hand, even a highly credible threat may not arouse much reaction in one's adversaries if the state making the threat lacks the power to carry it out or inflict substantial costs. The key point is that this thesis is *not* about what makes threats look serious, it is about what makes threats look *credible*.

The value of the DV, the credibility of the threat, can lie anywhere along a continuum from totally unbelievable to entirely credible. In this study, however, I lump these infinite possible degrees of credibility into three simple but useful categories: high, medium, and low. A threat qualifies for the 'high' credibility category if decision makers fully expect the threat to be carried out. At the other extreme, 'low' credibility means that decision makers believe that a threat is merely a bluff – they do not expect that it will be carried out. Between these two extremes lie threats which I describe as having 'medium' credibility. A threat is considered to have a medium amount of credibility if decision

⁶⁷ See Mercer's excellent discussion of this point. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, pp. 34-36.

makers assessing the threat are unsure about whether the threat will be fulfilled, or if the key leaders are divided over the credibility of the threat or promise.

To use variations in credibility over time to test the reputation, power/interests, and other hypotheses, one needs to first draw predictions from these theories about how credibility should fluctuate over time if each theory is true. In the next two sections I develop the reputation and power/interests hypotheses. Then, in the following section, I develop predictions from these theories about changes in credibility over time. The empirical chapters in this thesis use these predictions to test these predictions against a series of Cold War crises from 1958-62.

The Reputation Hypothesis

The reputation hypothesis posits that a country's credibility depends on its history for fulfilling, or breaking, past commitments. A state which consistently keeps its promises and carries out its threats will gain a reputation for resolve and its current commitments will carry weight. On the other hand, a state with a history of breaking promises and not carrying out its threats will gain a reputation for irresoluteness and its future commitments will not be believed. The core of the reputation hypothesis can be summarized by two central claims: 1) a state's credibility at any given time is affected by the state's record for keeping or breaking past commitments, and 2) a record of breaking past commitments reduces a state's credibility, while a history of keeping commitments increases credibility.⁶⁸

The reputation hypothesis is taken seriously by American policy makers. Ever since World War II the "Munich analogy" has been a powerful metaphor for the dangers

⁶⁸ According to another theory, backing down in one crisis increases credibility in future crises. This theory is discussed below in the section on "other theories."

of backing down and demonstrating a lack of resolve.⁶⁹ For years the United States continued the war in Vietnam out of fear that withdrawal would undermine the faith of the Soviets and Western Europeans in America's commitment to its allies.⁷⁰ Furthermore, concerns about America's reputation, which are frequently raised in public debates over U.S. foreign policy, are just as frequently voiced during the private meetings of American decision makers.⁷¹ The reputation hypothesis has a powerful effect on American foreign policy.⁷²

It could be argued that these statements do not really demonstrate that decision makers believe the reputation hypothesis. For example, decision makers might make arguments about reputation to support positions that they hold, even if they do not really

⁶⁹ The traditional interpretation of the "Munich Analogy" is that the failure of Britain and France to keep their commitments to Czechoslovakia in 1938 caused Germany to doubt the British and French commitment to Poland in 1939. The Munich Analogy has had a powerful impact on American foreign policy. See Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies At War: Korean, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965 (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁷⁰ Two of the leading policy makers used this argument at the time to justify America's continued involvement in Vietnam, and still maintain that this was a primary motivation of U.S. policy. See Robert S. McNamara, In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Kissinger, Henry, White House Years (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979).

⁷¹ Khong finds no difference in the frequency that the Munich Analogy was used in public debates and the frequency that it was used in private meetings of senior decision makers during the Vietnam War. See Khong, Analogies at War, pp. XX. My findings on this issue are consistent with Khong's results. The documentary evidence from the Berlin Crises show that in private meetings American and British officials consistently worried about the effects of their actions on their country's future credibility. For a few examples see State Department Paper, written by the Bureau of European Affairs, titled, "The Problem of Berlin," Date, Folder: Germany-Berlin, General, Box: 81, National Security Files, JFKL; Memorandum for the President from Dean Acheson, April 3, 1961, Folder: Germany-Berlin, General, Box: 81, National Security Files, JFKL. Theodore Sorensen wrote that Kennedy "was calmly convinced that an unflinching stand for West Berlin's freedom would, in the long run, lessen the prospects for a nuclear war, while yielding on West Berlin would only weaken the future credibility of our defenses." See Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 586.

⁷² The common view that the U.S. should carry out its commitments or else it will not be believed by its allies not only requires the reputation hypothesis to be correct, it also probably requires that balance of threat theory is wrong. Even if one believes the reputation hypothesis, the prospect of having one's extended deterrence commitments doubted might be beneficial: allies will face pressure to do their own balancing. As long as one's allies are powerful enough to defend themselves, the frequent assumption that losing one's credibility is harmful may not be correct.

believe in the reputation hypothesis. In other words, decision makers might use reputational arguments to justify policies they advocated for other reasons, even though they secretly doubt that the reputation hypothesis is true. If this is true, then testing the reputation hypothesis is pointless because the validity of the hypothesis is irrelevant.

This argument is unconvincing for two reasons. First, even if decision makers do not really believe the reputation hypothesis but simply use reputational arguments to trick the American public to support the policies that the leaders prefer, then testing the validity of the reputation hypothesis is still important. The American public believes in the reputation hypothesis, that is why it is potentially useful argument for generating public support for hawkish policies. If the reputation hypothesis turns out to be false, then educating the American public to this effect will undermine the power of the arguments which, according to this view, decision makers are using to “trick” the public. And if the reputation hypothesis is correct, then the decision makers are wrong to disbelieve it and they need to be educated to take care to act to preserve America’s reputation.⁷³

Second, there is no reason to doubt that the reputation hypothesis is believed by U.S. decision makers. Decision makers worry about reputation as frequently during private policy making meetings as they do in public. When arguing about policy options in top secret meetings, senior decision makers frequently argue that failure to carry out commitments will affect future credibility. Fear about developing a negative reputation comes up repeatedly in internal memos, telegrams, and transcripts of conversations. Perhaps the references to reputation are made in internal meetings for rhetorical value, to

⁷³ Even if the reputation hypothesis is correct, then decision makers should not always act to defend or promote credibility. In order to figure out how much national wealth and how many lives to spend in pursuit of reputation, decision makers need to know how much their actions affect credibility, how long the increase in credibility will last, whether their actions will increase credibility in the eyes of a few countries, many countries, or all countries.

win internal arguments about policies. But if senior decision makers did not believe these arguments, they would be useless as rhetorical devices.

There is every indication that decision makers believe in the reputation hypothesis as much as journalists, academics, and the American public. They all believe that backing down today will reduce credibility in the future. But are they right? Does backing down reduce the credibility of future threats?

The reputation hypothesis posits that a country's past actions have a substantial effect on its credibility. This apparently simple hypothesis must be fleshed out before it can be tested. Specifically, testing the reputation hypothesis requires clarifying two issues. First, what are the key variables which the theory identifies? Second, what are the possible values for these variables?

According to the reputation hypothesis, the key independent variable which causes a country's credibility is that country's past behavior. More specifically, the reputation hypothesis focuses on the country's record for carrying out (or not) its threats and promises.

Threats and promises are always conditional statements; i.e. a country may threaten to attack an adversary unless the adversary makes certain concessions, or to attack if the adversary takes some unwanted action. Promises are also conditional statements; countries may promise to defend an ally if the ally is attacked or unless the ally starts the conflict.

Because threats and promises are conditional statements, they are only put to a test when the specified conditions are triggered. America's Cold War promises to defend its European allies from a Soviet attack were never tested because the Soviets never invaded Western Europe. Countries only get the opportunity to demonstrate that they carry out their commitments when the conditions which are supposed to trigger these commitments are met. So, to be more specific, the independent variable for the reputation hypothesis is

a country's record of keeping or breaking commitments in past occasions in which its demands were not met. This is what I mean when I write that the independent variable for the reputation hypothesis is "past behavior" – really it's one's past behavior after one's demands have not been met.

The independent variable which the reputation hypothesis focuses on – the adversary's past behavior – could have a value which falls anywhere along a continuum, but for practical purposes it makes sense to group these values into three possibilities. When considering an adversary's past actions, decision makers could conclude that the adversary had usually kept its commitments (was highly reliable), usually broke its commitments (had low reliability), or had a mixed record (had mixed reliability). In the first case, according to the reputation hypothesis, the adversary's threats should be considered highly credible, in the second case they should be given very low credibility. In the middle case, the decision makers should consider new threats from the adversary as having medium credibility.

Versions of the Reputation Hypothesis

At its core the reputation hypothesis is very simple: failing to keep commitments reduces future credibility. But behind this simplicity, there are many possible versions of the reputation hypothesis. Table 1 lists eight conditions which may limit the scope of the hypothesis. In other words, the reputation hypothesis might be true but only in a form that is narrower than the standard formulation of the hypothesis. In this section I describe eight conditions which might limit the applicability of the reputation hypothesis and I develop a set of narrower versions of the theory which may be true even if the broad formulation of the theory is false. In the empirical chapters of this thesis I study cases that allow me to test all of the versions of the reputation hypothesis described below.

Table 1:
Versions of the Reputation Hypothesis

Condition	Narrower Version of Reputation Hypothesis	Broader Version of Reputation Hypothesis
Geography	Actions in one part of the world affect credibility in that <u>part of the world</u>	Actions in one part of the world affect credibility <u>everywhere</u>
Timing	Actions in one crisis affect credibility for a <u>short</u> period of time	Actions in one crisis affect credibility long into the future
Similarity of Issues	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises over similar issues	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises over any issues
Similarity of Stakes	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises involving <u>similar stakes</u>	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises involving <u>any level of stakes</u>
Identity of Countries	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises involving the same two <u>countries</u>	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises involving any other countries
Same Leaders #1	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises until <u>one's own leaders change</u>	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises even <u>after one's leaders change</u>
Same Leaders #2	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises <u>until</u> the leaders of one's new <u>adversary change</u>	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises <u>even</u> after the leaders of one's new <u>adversary changes</u>
Volatility of Reputation	Actions in one crisis affect credibility if they create a pattern of repeated behavior (e.g., repeatedly backing down, or repeatedly keeping commitments)	Single instances of backing down or keeping commitments substantially affect credibility in future crises

The broadest version of the reputation hypothesis is that today's actions will affect credibility in future crises, long into the future, all around the world, over any stakes and involving any issues. According to this broad formulation, a country's reputation outlives its leader. Even if the leader of a country is removed from office, the actions which the country took under his command continue to affect its credibility; similarly, a country's actions in a crisis will be remembered by the leaders of a future adversary, even if the

future adversary's leaders were not in leadership positions at the time of the first crisis. Finally, the strong version of the reputation hypothesis posits that reputation is very sensitive: even a small number of failures can erode credibility.⁷⁴

By contrast, the conditions listed in Table 1 present a set of more-nuanced versions of the reputation hypothesis. Each condition listed in Table 1 is described below:

1) Geography. A more-nuanced version of the reputation hypothesis holds that actions taken in one part of the world affect a country's credibility in future crises in the same region, but they have little impact on the country's credibility in crises in other parts of the world.⁷⁵ For example, actions taken by the United States in the Persian Gulf affect U.S. credibility in the Gulf but have no effect on U.S. credibility in Korea.

2) Timing. Another version of the reputation hypothesis posits that actions taken today affect a country's credibility for a short time, but the effect on credibility, either positive or negative, disappears rapidly.

⁷⁴ Schelling is frequently associated with the broad version of the reputation hypothesis. In fact, his writings are inconsistent on this point. Some of his arguments appear to support the broad version of the reputation hypothesis. He writes: "the loss of face that matters most is the loss of Soviet belief that we will do, elsewhere and subsequently, what we insist we will do here and now." Schelling, Arms and Influence, p. 55-56. But much of his discussion of manipulating reputation explicitly argues that a country's commitments fall into different "sets" and that a country needs to convince its adversary that the interests which it intends to defend (and maybe some that it doesn't) are in the set of primary national interests. He writes that the U.S. must make the Soviets believe that Europe is *like* Florida or California; in other words, make them believe that Europe is in the same category of interests as parts of the continental United States. But, he writes, "I doubt whether we can identify ourselves with Pakistan in quite the way we can identify ourselves with Great Britain, no matter how many treaties we sign during the next ten years." See Schelling, Arms and Influence, pp. 56-57.

⁷⁵ A few scholars make reputation arguments which are limited to repeated interactions in a particular region. See John D. Orme, Deterrence, Reputation, and Cold-War Cycles (XXXX: Macmillan, 1992); Jonathan Shimshoni, Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Elli Lieberman, "The Rational Deterrence Theory Debate: Is the Dependent Variable Elusive?," Security Studies Vol. 3, No. 3 (spring 1994), pp. 384-427; and Lieberman, "What Makes Deterrence Work: Lessons from the Egyptian-Israeli Enduring Rivalry," Security Studies

3) Similarity of issues. A third version holds that actions taken today affect a country's credibility in future crises over the same issues, but they have no impact on the country's credibility in a future crisis over different issues. For example, actions taken by the U.S. today in the Persian Gulf in a crisis over the proliferation of WMD affect U.S. credibility in future crises over WMD but have no effect on U.S. credibility in the Gulf or elsewhere in crises which do not revolve around WMD proliferation.

4) Similarity of stakes. The fourth version of the hypothesis posits that actions taken today in a crisis affect a country's credibility in future crises which involve similar stakes – both the value of the issues at stake and the potential costs and risks of conflict – but they have little impact during crises involving very different levels of national interest or military risk.⁷⁶ For example, the U.S. decision to withdraw its military forces from Somalia after the October 1993 fire-fight affected American credibility during other humanitarian military missions, but it had no effect on U.S. credibility in crises with Iraq over the control of Persian Gulf oil.

5) Same countries involved in the crisis. The fifth narrower version of the reputation hypothesis holds that actions taken today in a crisis between two countries affect these states' credibility in future crises involving the same two states, but they do not affect either country's credibility in future crises involving different countries.⁷⁷

Vol. 4, No. 4 (Summer 1995), pp. 833-92. These are discussed briefly in Huth, "Reputation and Deterrence," p. 80, 92.

⁷⁶ For example, see Snyder, Deterrence and Defense, pp.XX; Orme, Deterrence, Reputation, and Cold-War Cycles.

⁷⁷ Huth and Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work," pp. 496-526; Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence," p. 80, 92.

6) Same leaders version #1. Sixth, actions taken today by a country affect its credibility as long as its senior political leadership remains in office, but their effect on credibility disappears once the senior leadership changes.⁷⁸ For example, credibility gained or lost by the Bush Administration in its conflicts with Iraq lasted only as long as the Bush Administration remained in office, but it disappeared once the Clinton Administration took over.

7) Same leaders version #2. The seventh more-nuanced version of the reputation hypothesis is also about changes in political leaders, but this condition is about a change in the leaders of the country that is trying to assess the credibility of its adversary. This version posits that actions taken today by a country affect its credibility as long as its adversaries' senior political leadership remains in office, but the effect disappears once the adversary's senior leadership changes.⁷⁹ For example, credibility gained or lost by the Clinton Administration with Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq lasts as long as Saddam remains in office, but it disappears once Saddam's regime is replaced and the senior leadership changes.

8) Volatility of Reputation. The eighth nuanced version of the reputation hypothesis holds that individual instances of either backing down or carrying out one's commitments have little effect on credibility; only a pattern of keeping or breaking commitments has a significant effect on credibility.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence," pp. 78-80.

⁷⁹ Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence," pp. 79-80.

⁸⁰ Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence," p. 80.

Compared with the narrower versions of the reputation hypothesis, the broad version seems like a straw-man. This is not the case. Foreign policy experts and journalists seem to adhere to a version of the reputation hypothesis that is very much like the broad version described above. When foreign policy makers argued that U.S. abandonment of South Vietnam would shatter U.S. credibility across the globe in the higher-stakes conflict with the Soviets over Europe, they were using a very broad version of the reputation hypothesis. When they argued that the credibility of U.S. commitments around the world depended on defeating Serbian terror operations in Kosovo, they were claiming that America's reputation would translate across the globe, across issues, into conflicts with different adversaries involving different stakes.⁸¹

The empirical parts of this dissertation will test all nine versions of the reputation hypothesis – the broad version and the eight weaker versions – to see if the evidence supports any of the versions of the theory.

Reputation Hypothesis: Summary

The reputation hypothesis predicts that during a crisis, when decision makers try to assess the credibility of their adversary's threats, they will look back at that adversary's past actions in previous crises. If, in their view, the adversary's history is one of broken commitments, they will doubt the credibility of the new threats and promise. If, on the other hand, they believe that the adversary carried through with past commitments, they will expect the adversary to stand by his word in the new crisis, too.

⁸¹ Cite examples.

Power/interests Hypothesis

The power/interests hypothesis posits that a country's credibility is not tied to its history of keeping commitments; a country's credibility to carry out a threat or fulfill a promise is a function of the current balance of power and interests. According to this hypothesis, when decision makers assess the credibility of an adversary's threats or promises they ask themselves two questions. The first question focuses on the balance of power: can the adversary do what he threatens to do and achieve his objectives at a reasonable cost? The second question focuses on the level of interests at stake: are the interests involved sufficiently big to justify the adversary's costs and risks? The greater the adversary's chances for a cheap victory, and the more at stake in the crisis, the more credible the adversary's threats are.

While the reputation hypothesis is widely believed by policy makers and foreign policy experts, dissenting voices have argued that credibility is a function of power and interests rather than reputation. For example, Hans Morgenthau criticized U.S. policy during the Vietnam War by arguing that the United States did not need to fight in South East Asia to show the Soviets we would defend Western Europe. Using a framework like the power/interests hypothesis, he argued that the Soviets knew we cared about Europe, knew we had the power to protect our interests, and that the fighting in Vietnam would not change this one way or another.⁸² Proponents of this hypothesis agree that the West's diplomacy at Munich was a disaster, but not for the reasons suggested by the reputation

⁸² Hans J. Morgenthau, A New Foreign Policy for the United States (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 138-39; Morgenthau, Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960-1970 (New York, Praeger, 1970), pp. XX. See also Stephen Maxwell, "Rationality in Deterrence," Adelphi Paper 50.

hypothesis. The mistake at Munich was not causing Hitler to think he could have Poland, but giving away a significant potential ally in Czechoslovakia.⁸³

The reputation and power/interests hypotheses appear to overlap when decision makers look at an adversary's past actions to assess that adversary's power and interests, but a clear line can be drawn between the two hypotheses. The line between these theories is drawn here: if a decision maker uses an adversary's *history of keeping commitments* to assess the adversary's credibility, the decision maker is acting the way that the reputation hypothesis predicts. If the decision maker uses an adversary's *history of military competence* to assess the adversary's current power, and uses this assessment of power to assess credibility, the decision maker is acting the way that the power/interests hypothesis predicts.

The reason for drawing the line between the two theories here is simple. The question at the heart of this thesis, and the heart of important foreign policy debates, is whether countries need to keep their commitments in order to build or preserve their credibility. If countries use their adversary's history of keeping or breaking commitments to assess their credibility (as the reputation hypothesis predicts) then countries should worry that breaking commitments might damage their future credibility.⁸⁴ But if countries do not use the history of keeping commitments to assess credibility, there is no reason to keep commitments *for the sake of credibility*. Whether or not past military performance is

⁸³ Williamson Murray makes this argument about the lessons of Munich in The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939: The Path to Ruin (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁸⁴ Even if the reputation hypothesis is correct, it doesn't suggest that reputation is always worth fighting for. The size of the costs that decision makers ought to be willing to pay to build or maintain a reputation, if reputation does affect future credibility, depends on the "amount" of reputation that one can buy, the costs of generating each increment of reputation, the "life span" of the reputation and the breadth of its applicability. By "breadth" I mean that a reputation can be specific to a narrow set of events (e.g. the United States will fight to defend Saudi oil) or much broader (e.g. the United States will fight to defend any of its interests). If reputations in international politics tend to be very specific, decision makers should be willing to pay less to build or protect them. In other words, even if the reputation hypothesis is correct, this does not imply that every opportunity to build reputation will be worth the costs.

used by countries to assess their adversary's power has no bearing on the question of whether or not it is important to keep one's commitments; it merely suggests that if one fights, one should fight effectively, not simply to win the battle at hand but to look powerful in the future.⁸⁵ In sum, if countries use their adversaries' history for keeping commitments to assess their credibility, the reputation hypothesis is correct. But if countries assess their adversary's credibility by evaluating the balance of power, even if that requires looking at the adversary's past military competence, the power/interests hypothesis is correct.

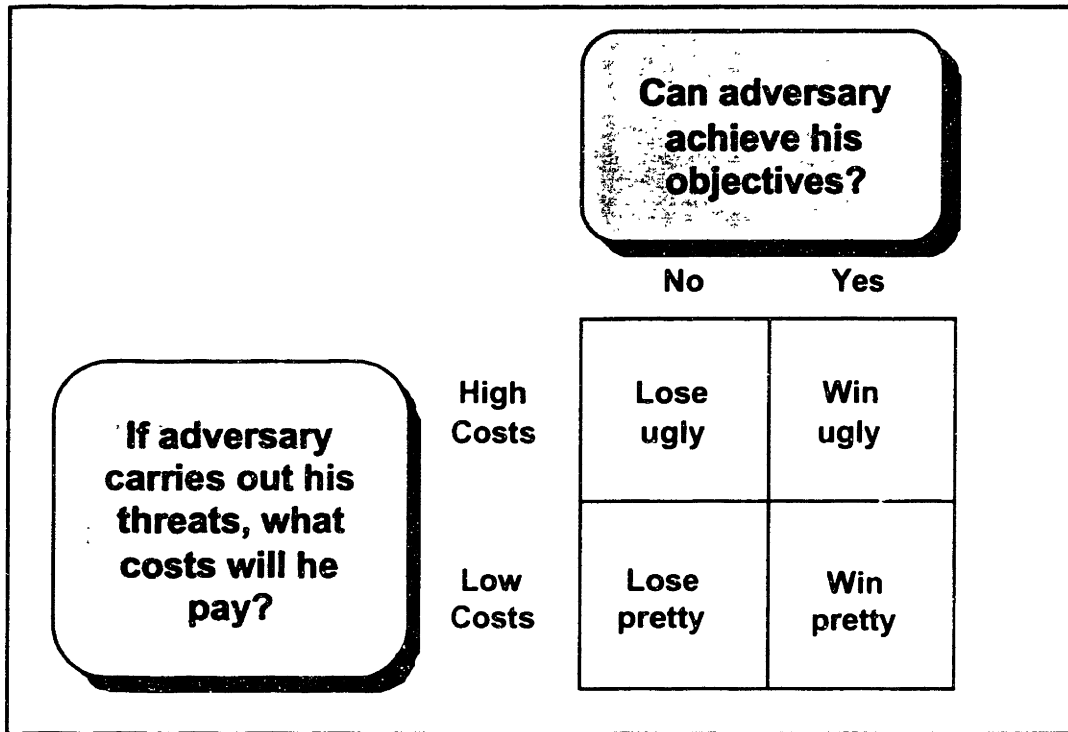
Testing this power/interests theory requires fleshing out the relationship between power, interests, and credibility more carefully. This is done below.

Power and Credibility

When decision makers assess the credibility of an adversary's threat, they must consider two questions about the balance of power. First, does the adversary have the capability to successfully carry out his threat and achieve his objectives? Second, what cost would the adversary likely pay if he carried out his threat?

⁸⁵ This distinction is similar to the distinction between getting a "reputation for resolve" and a "reputation for power." See the discussion in Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence," pp. 75-78.

Figure 2:
The Power/Interests Hypothesis: Two Questions About Power & Credibility



The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates the four possible answers that could arise from the two questions, “Can the adversary achieve his objectives?” and “Will he pay high costs?”. The horizontal axis of the diagram represents the answer to the first question: “Can the adversary achieve his objectives?”. The vertical axis represents the answer to the second question: “What costs will the adversary pay?”. In the box at the bottom right corner of the figure, the adversary has the power to carry out his threat and achieve his objectives at low cost. I label this box “win pretty” (from the adversary’s perspective).⁸⁶ The Israeli victory over Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in the 1967 War, for example, was a “win pretty” outcome. In the upper right corner is a box which I label “win ugly;” in these

⁸⁶ The adversary’s perspective is what matters. We should expect the adversary to carry out his threats, according to the power/interests hypothesis, if the adversary is probably going to win pretty.

cases, if the adversary carries out his threat, he will likely win but his costs will probably be high. The Soviet victory in World War II is the quintessential case of “win ugly.” A third box, in the lower left corner, represents cases which I call “lose pretty.” In these cases, if the adversary tries to carry out his threats, he will likely lose but his costs will probably be small. The American loss in Somalia in 1993 was a “lose pretty” situation; the lives and dollars squandered in the effort to oust Somali clan leader Aidid were limited. The last box, in the upper left corner, is one in which the adversary will probably “lose ugly.” In other words, if the adversary tries to carry out his threat he will likely lose and pay a very high cost in the process. North Korean threats to invade South Korea today are in the “lose ugly” box.⁸⁷

The power/interests hypothesis predicts that when an adversary makes a military threat during a crisis, the leaders of other countries will ask themselves if the adversary has the power to carry out the threat, and at what cost. If they think that carrying out the threat would lead to a “lose ugly” outcome, the threat will not be highly credible. By contrast, an adversary’s threat to take actions that will likely lead the adversary to “lose pretty” or “win ugly” are somewhat more credible, and a threat to do something which will “win pretty” is more credible. In other words, threats which are closer to the bottom-right corner of the diagram in Figure 2 are the most credible and those closest to the upper left corner are the least credible.

⁸⁷ Thinking about this “box” as a 2x2 matrix is a useful simplifying exercise. But the horizontal axis (lose-win) really reflects the expected probability that the adversary will “win” or achieve his objectives, which (theoretically) runs from zero probability to 100% certainty. The further to the right along the axis, the higher probability that he will win. The dividing line between “win” and “lose” is drawn at the half-way point along the axis, which is the point at which it is 50-50 whether the adversary will win or lose. The same is true for the vertical axis (ugly-pretty). This axis reflects the expected costs which the adversary will bear if it carries out its threat. The higher on the axis, the higher the costs.

A **key** point to remember is that having one’s threats located in a particular box does not mean that the expected outcome (e.g., “win ugly”) is guaranteed. “Win” merely means that the country making the threat will **likely** win if it tries to carry out the threat. “Ugly” merely means that it will expect to pay high costs if it carries out the threat.

A few points about this framework need to be clarified. First, why would a threat that lies in the “lose pretty” box be credible at all? Why would one’s adversary carry out a threat if they expected to lose? One answer is that the “win” and “lose” designations are not certain outcomes. Even a threat which is likely to lead the adversary to “lose pretty” or “lose ugly” may result, if it is carried out, in a victory for the adversary. The “win” and “lose” designations are probabilistic; similarly, the cost predictions are just *expected* costs.

But why would an adversary carry out a threat if the odds of failure are greater than the chances of success? A state may decide to carry out a “lose pretty” threat because it decides that the chance of victory is worth fighting for, especially given that the military costs are expected to be low. Threats in the “lose pretty” box may also be credible because the adversary may think he has something to gain by fighting, even if he loses. For example, if he believes the reputation hypothesis, even if it is not true, then he may choose to follow through with a threat in a “lose pretty” situation because the anticipated costs of backing down are too great. Finally, if the interests at stake are very great, threats in the “lose pretty” and even the “lose ugly” box may be credible. Countries may logically fight to protect their vital interests even if the fighting is likely to go badly; in other words, when the interests involved are very high, threats to “lose ugly” may be credible, and threats to “lose pretty” will certainly be credible. (Detailed discussion of the interaction of *interests* with the credibility of these four categories is in the next section).

A second point of clarification involves the relative credibility of the two “middle” boxes – “lose pretty” and “win ugly.” The relative credibility of threats in these two boxes depends on a range of issues specific to the circumstances and the countries involved. Some countries, for example, may be more cost-sensitive than others; cost sensitive adversaries may be more credible when they make “lose pretty” threats than when they make “win ugly” threats because they are unwilling to pay high costs, even for a victory. Other countries, on the other hand, may be particularly sensitive to losing; some political

systems may punish leaders severely who suffer foreign policy defeats, and leaders in some countries may believe the reputation hypothesis more strongly than the leaders in other countries. These countries may prefer to “win ugly” rather than to “lose pretty.” For the purpose of this thesis I don’t try to rank the two middle boxes against each other. I simply assume that, according to the power/interests hypothesis, an adversary’s threats will be most credible if they will likely lead to a “win pretty” outcome for the adversary, will be least credible if they would likely cause an adversary to “lose ugly,” and the credibility of the other two possibilities – “win ugly” and “lose pretty” – lies in between the first two situations.

A third point of clarification is about the rationale for setting up this 2x2 matrix. Does this framework suggest that decision makers talk in these terms – referring to threats as “win pretty” or “lose ugly?” Does it suggest that decision makers try to fit situations into this 2x2 matrix? The answer to both questions is: ‘No.’ The power/interests theory does not predict that decision makers think and talk about threats in these terms (i.e. “win pretty”, “lose ugly”), nor does it predict that decision makers formulate their assessments of credibility in a 2x2 matrix. This way of thinking about credibility is a heuristic device which is useful for organizing the things which the power/interests theory does predicts that decision makers think about and discuss: the likelihood that the adversary can succeed and the costs he will have to pay, if he carries out his threat.

To summarize this discussion of power and credibility, the power/interests theory posits that when decision makers try to assess the credibility of an adversary’s threats, they look at the balance of power and ask themselves two questions: first, can the adversary do what he threatens to do and achieve his objectives and, second, what costs will the adversary probably have to pay? If the adversary can do what he threatens, prevail, and pay low costs, the adversary’s threats will be most credible. If the adversary lacks the power to do what he threatens, would likely lose, and would probably pay a

large cost, the threats will be least credible. But while these considerations establish an ordinal ranking of the credibility of these different types of threat, to establish the level of credibility of any of these threats we must also consider the level of interest at stake. This is done below.

Interests and Credibility

According to the power/interests theory, when decision makers try to assess the credibility of an adversary's threats during a crisis, the balance of power is not the only thing they consider; they also consider the interests that the adversary has at stake in the crisis. The more that the adversary has at stake and stands to gain by carrying out its threats – or to lose by not carrying out its threat – the more credible that his threat will be. With much at stake, an adversary's threats should be relatively credible even if carrying them out entails substantial risks and costs. On the other hand, in crises involving trivial interests, even threats which involve high probabilities of victory and relatively low expected costs might not be credible.

According to the power/interests theory, two core interests dwarf all others. The first interest of all states is to protect its own sovereignty.⁸⁸ Second to the preservation of one's sovereignty is the promotion of a favorable global balance of power. Preventing adverse shifts in the balance of power and manufacturing (when possible) favorable shifts rank right behind preserving sovereignty as one of the very highest interests of states, according to power/interests theory.

⁸⁸ The power/interests theory is drawn from the international relations theory of realism. The idea that preserving sovereignty is the highest goal of the state is fundamental to realism. See, for example, Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. 88-93; John J. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, forthcoming); and Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 9-12.

Foreign policy analysts and policy makers have sometimes used a shorthand approach for identifying threats to the global balance of power. They frequently view the world as composed of a few major industrial centers whose control determines the distribution of power.⁸⁹ For example, after World War II, American foreign policy makers believed that there were five major industrial centers in the world: the United States, Russia, Central Europe, the U.K., and Japan. The key to preserving a favorable balance of power, they believed, was to prevent any hostile country from controlling any two power centers.⁹⁰ Using this shorthand, any crisis which involves a significant chance that one of the world's industrial centers may fall under hostile control, or that a friendly power center may become neutral or hostile, would qualify as a high stakes crisis.⁹¹ An adversary's threat to do something which would help him preserve the global balance of power, or improve the balance from his perspective, should be highly credible.

⁸⁹ The idea that the world is composed of a few major industrial centers whose control determines the global balance of power goes back at least as far as the early 20th century British strategist Halford Mackinder. See Halford Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," Geographical Journal Vol. 23, No. 4 (April 1904).

⁹⁰ George Kennan, one of the architects of U.S. foreign policy at the outset of the Cold War, thought about the world this way. Critics of Kennan's original approach to containment, such as Paul Nitze and the other advocates of a more-activist version of the strategy – generally *shared* this approach to understanding the global balance of power. They agreed that control over these five industrial centers was the key to maintaining a favorable balance of power, but they felt that control of these five centers could be significantly undermined in other parts of the world. Although they advocated a more activist containment policy than Kennan, they agreed that the goal of the strategy was to retain possession of the five key industrial centers by the U.S. or its friends. See John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 89-126. For an excellent account of American foreign policy at the beginning of the Cold War see Marc Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963 (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999).

As the Cold War recedes into history it is getting harder to understand the intense feelings of vulnerability which afflicted the United States at various points in the struggle. By the early 1960s, it was clear that Central Europe, the U.K., and Japan would be in the U.S. camp and their economies had largely recovered from the war. Given that the United States and its friends controlled four of the five major industrial centers in the world, why did the U.S. occasionally feel so insecure?

⁹¹ For realist arguments that apply this logic throughout the Cold War and into the present see, for example, Stephen Van Evera, "Why Europe Matters, Why the Third World Doesn't: American Grand Strategy after the Cold War," Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1990); Van Evera,

Often sovereignty and the global balance of power are not at risk during a crisis. Crises over issues that involve only small risks to the global balance of power, but large risks to a regional balance, engage medium-level interests. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, for example, did not threaten to consolidate enough industrial power under Saddam Hussein's control to upset the global balance of power. It did, however, threaten to upset the balance of power in the Middle East, so reversing Iraq's conquest was a medium-level interest for the U.S. Because conquest is often cumulative – the gains from one conquest can be used to raise bigger armies to make future invasions easier – states worry about shifts in regional balances of power, even though these shifts are less threatening than changes which threaten the global balance.⁹² An adversary's threats to do something to prevent an unfavorable shift in a regional balance, or to promote a favorable shift, would be a threat in which that adversary had medium-level interests at stake, and his credibility should be moderate.⁹³

A third set of crises involve lower stakes than either of the first two. States have other interests besides controlling power, and states sometimes get involved in crises and

"Primed for Peace: Europe After the Cold War." International Security Vol. 15, No. 3 (Winter 1990/1991); and Robert J. Art. "A Defensible Defense: America's Grand Strategy After the Cold War." International Security Vol. 15, No. 4 (Spring 1991), pp. 5-53. Van Evera and Art argue that this way of thinking is still relevant today. They are optimists about the security of the United States precisely because, they argue, no adversary can hope to gain control of any of the other major industrial centers.

Identifying the major industrial centers at any given time is difficult and somewhat arbitrary for three reasons. First, there are always uncertainties about how one should weigh the various factors that contribute to industrial economic power (e.g., GDP, GDP per capita, level of technology, total population, education of population). Second, the way that one groups the world into regions is always arbitrary. For example, I believe that the major industrial centers today are Western Europe, the United States, Japan, maybe Russia, and maybe China. But Western Europe could probably be grouped differently: one could say that Germany is an industrial center and the rest of Western Europe combined is another center. Third, the decision about where to draw a cut-off line for consideration as a major industrial center is inherently arbitrary.

⁹² See Peter Liberman, Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁹³ A crisis over a regional balance of power may be a high stakes crisis for states in that region because these crises may affect their sovereignty.

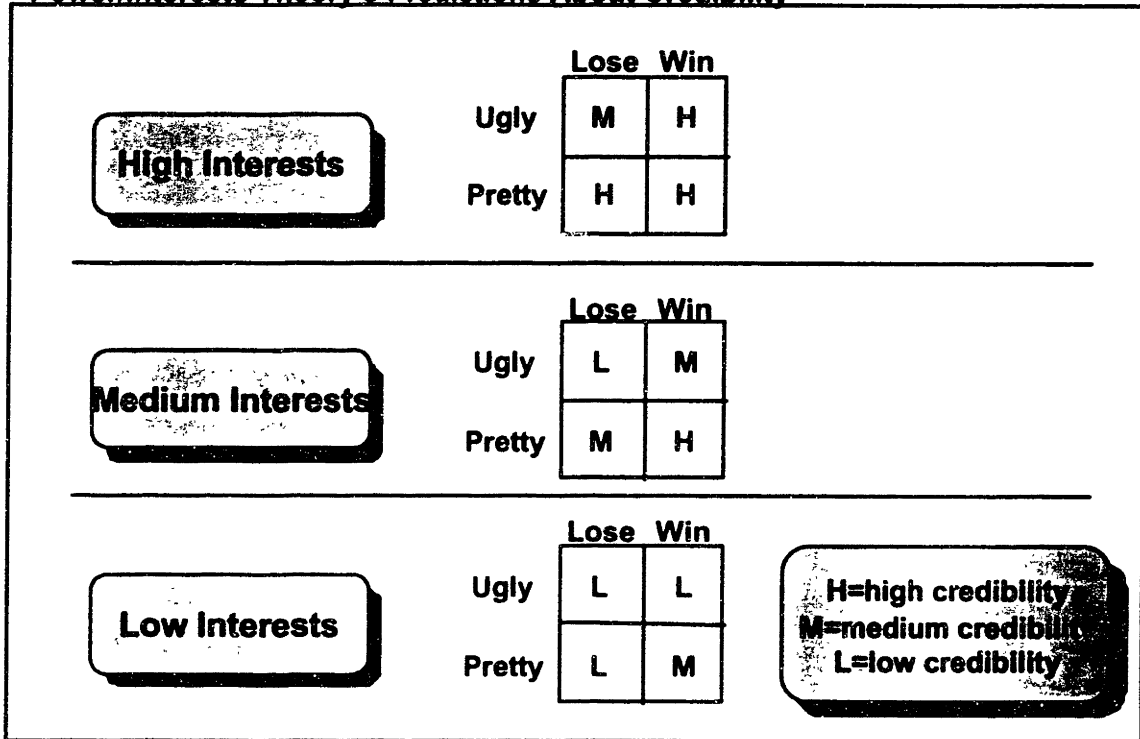
wars to further those interests. The United States, for example, intervened in Somalia in 1992 to prevent starvation, in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 to prevent the slaughter of people who we had urged to rise up against the Iraqi regime, and the U.S. recently pledged to intervene anywhere in the world to prevent genocide. According to the hypothesis, crises over values and principles engage smaller interests than crises over either the global balance of power or regional balances. A threat to do something that would simply promote one's values would have relatively low credibility.

To summarize, a crisis involves a state's *high* interests if the outcome of the crisis could either 1) directly endanger the state's continued sovereignty, or 2) substantially affect the ability of any state to control any of the major industrial centers of the world. A crisis involves interests of *medium* importance if the possible outcomes may have either a small effect on the global balance of power or a large effect on a regional balance of power. Crises over values, according to the hypothesis, engage *low* interests.

How does this discussion of interests interact with the previous discussion of power and credibility? Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between power, interests, and credibility. The Figure looks complicated, but the point is actually simple. The point of the figure is that if a country makes a threat to do something which will help it achieve a "high" interest (e.g., preserve sovereignty or promote a more favorable balance of power) the threat will be credible under almost any circumstances. If he can carry out the threat and "win pretty", "win ugly", or "lose pretty", the threat will be highly credible. Even if he will probably "lose ugly" the threat may be credible (medium credibility); states, after all, are usually expected to be willing to pay huge costs even if they have a small chance to win if their sovereignty or the global balance of power is on the line.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ For example, this framework suggests that U.S. credibility to fight to the end to defend NATO from the Soviets should have been *fairly* credible (i.e., medium to high). The interests at stake – keeping the Soviets from gaining control of Europe's industrial might – were high. But the likely outcome of a war

Figure 3:
Power/Interests Theory's Predictions About Credibility



In a different case, if an adversary threatens to do something which, if accomplished, would achieve some medium-level interest, his credibility is more uncertain. If he can “win pretty” he will be credible. If he will likely “win ugly”, or “lose pretty”, his credibility should be lower. And if by carrying out the threat he will “lose ugly”, his threat will not be believed.⁹⁵

would probably have been either “lose ugly” or “win ugly” for the United States, depending on how the conventional conflict went and on whether there was nuclear escalation. This framework *seems* to accurately reflect America’s allies’ views of U.S. credibility during the Cold War: it *seems* that they believed that the U.S. would very likely fight to defend them. But there were always some nagging doubts about whether we’d fight to the end.

⁹⁵ For example, this framework predicts that the credibility of U.S. threats to push Iraq out of Kuwait in January 1991 probably depended on how people expected the fighting to go for the U.S. The Gulf War involved medium level interests for the U.S. – a regional balance of power was at stake. To observers who anticipated that the U.S. would achieve a “win pretty” outcome, therefore, U.S. threats should have

The third set of cases involves an adversary's threat to do something which, if accomplished, would achieve some low-level interest. It is hard to make these threats credible. If the adversary can probably "win pretty", the threat may be credible; but if there is a reasonable chance that the adversary will fail, or will pay high costs, or both, his credibility will be low.⁹⁶

In sum, what does this theory tell us? The power/interests theory tells us that when decision makers sit down to assess the credibility of an adversary's threats they do not focus on the adversary's past actions. Instead they ask themselves two questions: Can the adversary do what he threatens to do and achieve his objectives at a reasonable cost? Second, are the interests involved sufficiently big to justify the adversary's costs and risks? The greater the adversary's chance for a cheap victory, and more at stake in the crisis, the more credible the adversary's threats are.

Other Theories About the Causes of Credibility.

The power/interests theory is not the only alternative to the reputation hypothesis. In this section I briefly describe two other theories which seek to explain what causes credibility.

appeared very credible. Observers who expected the Iraqis to inflict thousands of casualties on the U.S. (so the U.S. would "win ugly") should not have believed that U.S. threats were very credible. This seems to be consistent with what we believe about Saddam Hussein's expectations: most analysts agree that Hussein thought his army could inflict tens of thousands of U.S. casualties, and that this would cause the U.S. to halt its offensive. See, for example, Robert A. Pape, Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 241-53; and Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

⁹⁶ This may explain the difficulty that America has had in the past decade as it tried with mixed success to coerce weaker countries. Convincing states that you're credible when you have dubious interests at stake is hard. If the adversary can simply move you from the "win pretty" box to the "win ugly" box, he

Ingrained Lessons Theory

According to the “Ingrained Lessons” theory, decision makers are much more deeply affected by their *own* country’s recent history, and their own personal experiences, than they are by their adversary’s history. The implication is that when decision makers are in a crisis and try to figure out what the adversary is going to do they are not thinking about the *adversary’s* recent history, they’re thinking of their own past (or their country’s past). They are thinking about what happened to their country in its last crises. If their country’s previous adversaries backed down in past crises, they will expect the current adversary to back down. If their previous adversaries carried out their commitments, they will expect the current adversary to do the same.⁹⁷

This theory is, on its face, plausible. Decision makers’ memories of recent events involving their administration have two characteristics which make them particularly salient in a new crisis. First, the memories are shared by all, or almost all, of the key decision makers. They form a common base of understanding about foreign policy and how the world, supposedly, works. Second, a previous crisis which occurred during the same administration may be the source of the greatest professional successes or failures in the decision makers’ careers. It would not be surprising if these momentous events were on a decision maker’s mind when he confronted a similar situation.

The good news about testing the Ingrained Lessons theory is that the tests which I conduct of the reputation hypothesis, which I will describe in detail below, also function as good tests of the Ingrained Lessons theory. Because I study a series of confrontations

may hope to be able to deter you or stop your offensive. From the U.S. standpoint, trying to stay in the “win pretty” box is expensive and difficult. This is discussed in Chapter 6, Conclusions.

⁹⁷ Khong’s study of U.S. decision making in the early years of the Vietnam War lends some support to this hypothesis. He finds that U.S. decision makers considering escalation in Vietnam used *China’s* past actions against the U.S. during the Korean War to predict *Soviet* actions during the Vietnam War. See Khong, Analogies at War, p. 97-147.

between the same set of countries, drawing lesson's from one's *own* past (as the Ingrained Lessons theory predicts) and from one's *adversary's* past (as the reputation theory predicts) is the same thing. Said differently, because the cases I study here involve repeated iterations between the same set of countries, the Ingrained Lessons theory and the Reputation hypothesis make identical predictions.⁹⁸

"Never Again" Theory

A fourth theory, which like the third theory gets little attention, is what I call the "Never Again" theory. According to this view, decision makers look to their adversary's past to predict the future, but instead of inferring from the adversary's past irresolute behavior that future irresolute behavior is likely, decision makers predict the reverse. If the adversary has a history of breaking commitments, decision makers will think it is unlikely that they will back down again. Similarly, if the adversary has a history of keeping commitments, they will be more likely to expect the adversary to back down in the current crisis.

The logic behind this hypothesis is that decision makers might reason that an adversary who has backed down in the past cannot afford to back down again. If the adversary fears the domestic repercussions of repeated international failures they may be reluctant to back down if they have already suffered a recent setback – let alone a series of setbacks. Or if the adversary believes in the reputation hypothesis they may fear the consequences of repeated failures. By contrast, a history of being resolute in crises may have earned an adversary the "credit" he needs to back away from carrying out the current commitment.

⁹⁸ Both theories predict that the U.S. and British decision makers should have been evaluating Soviet credibility by looking at past Soviet actions.

In some respects, this theory seems to be the least plausible of the four theories presented in this thesis. This theory implies that a pattern of breaking commitments increases ones' credibility and this seems difficult to believe. Nevertheless, predictions can be drawn from this theory to test using the data from the crises studied in this thesis. This is done below.

Predictions from the Four Theories

To test these four theories – to determine what causes credibility – I study three aspects of crisis decision making. First, I examine the private statements that decision makers make about their adversary's credibility. As decision makers debate and formulate policies during a crisis, they often make explicit assessments of the likelihood that an adversary will carry out its threats and promises. I use these assessments to track the credibility of a country's threats throughout a crisis. In this study I rely primarily on decision makers' private assessments of their adversary's credibility. These are found in transcripts and minutes of secret meetings, memos, and telegrams. Public assessments, on the other hand, are more likely to be made for political purposes and are more likely to differ from actual beliefs about the adversary's credibility. In evaluating the evidence I also privilege statements which are made during the crisis as decisions are being made. Statements made after the fact are more likely to suffer from poor memory and motivated bias. These statements – private statements from decision makers while they tried to select policies during the crisis – are still not *perfect* measures of credibility, but they are very good.

Second, I use the policies that the decision makers adopt during a crisis to see how they assess their adversary's credibility. Because the credibility of an adversary's threats affects the choices that decision makers make during crises, the policies can be used to reason backwards about the adversary's credibility. My assumption is that a state's

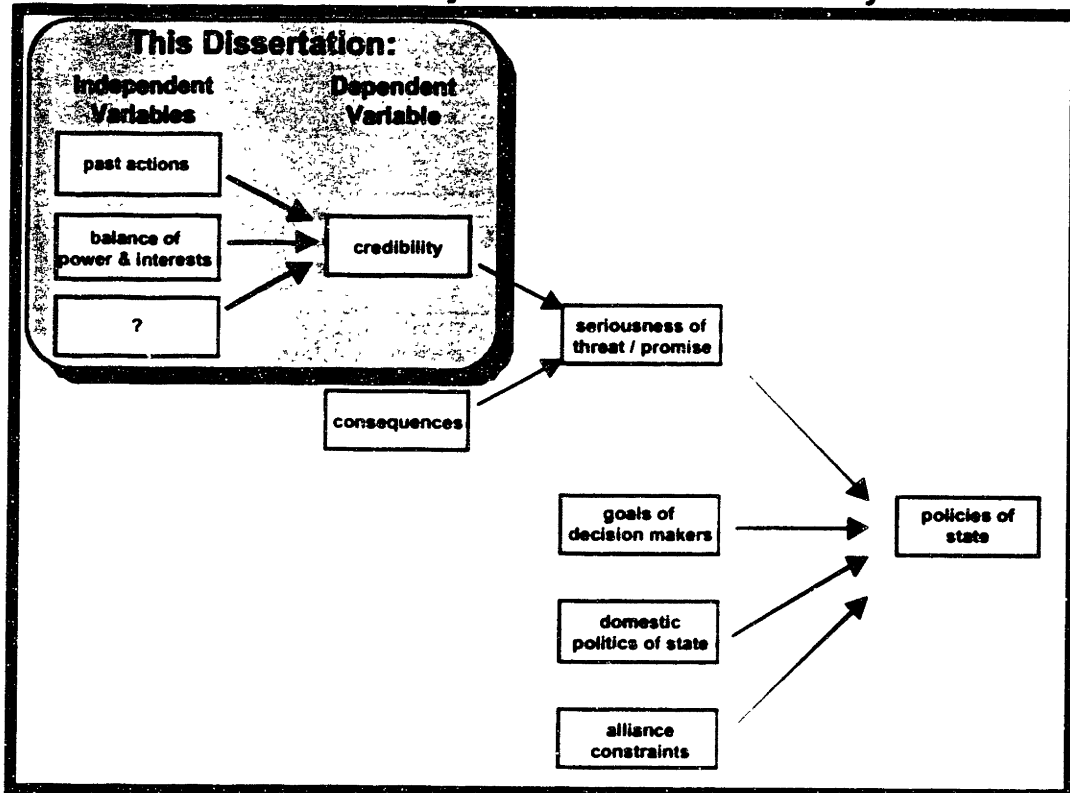
willingness to accommodate an adversary's demands depends on the seriousness of the threat it faces. Holding other things constant, the more credible an adversary's threat is, the more accommodations a state will make. Less credible threats will not lead to many concessions. So, reasoning backwards, if decision makers advocate making substantial concessions in the face of a threat, this is a sign that the threat is credible. If decision makers adopt hard-line policies, this is evidence that the threat is not credible.

This second test, using the policies adopted during the crisis to reason backwards about credibility, is less reliable than the first test. Using "policies" to draw inferences about credibility is hard because other things besides the adversary's credibility may affect a state's choice of policies during a crisis. A threat may be serious even if it is not very credible if the consequences of the threat being carried out are terrible to contemplate. Furthermore, things unrelated to the seriousness of a threat affect a state's choice of policies during a crisis. (See Figure 4) Nevertheless, looking at the policies which decision makers advocate during a crisis helps me ensure that the statements I use in the first test are not cheap talk. If decision makers say they do not believe an adversary's threats, but they act with extraordinary caution, this is a caution flag that the statements *may* be misleading.⁹⁹ And if decision makers' statements suggest that a threat is believed but the policies seem to disregard the threat, this would raise the same caution flag. But when the statements suggest high credibility and the policies reflect caution, or when the statements suggest low credibility and the policies disregard the threat, my confidence in the empirical findings is reinforced. Using both the explicit assessments of credibility and the policies adopted during a crisis as indicators of credibility provides a better basis for

⁹⁹ The statements may still accurately reflect the decision makers' views of the adversary's credibility. The cautious policies may be selected despite the fact that the threat is not credible. Other things, besides credibility, affect policy choices. But conflict between the indicators of statements and policies should raise a cautionary flag – agreement between these two indicators should reinforce my confidence in my conclusions.

estimating the credibility which decision makers give to an adversary's threats than either indicator alone.

Figure 4:
The Link Between Credibility of Threats and State Policy



Third, I look for instances in which decision makers explicitly explain the reasoning behind their assessments of their adversary's credibility; in other words, I look at the evidence which the decision makers themselves use during the crisis to justify their assessments of credibility. When decision makers argue about the adversary's credibility, what do they discuss? Do they talk about the adversary's past actions as the reputation and "never again" theories predict? Do they talk about the balance of power, and the value of the interests at stake as the power/interests theory predicts? Or do they discuss the past behavior of the their previous adversaries as the ingrained lessons theory predicts?

Using these three indicators of credibility, the decision makers' explicit *statements* about their adversary's credibility, the *policies* that decision makers adopt during crises, and the *reasoning* that they use to support their assessments of credibility, we can track a set of decision makers' assessment of their adversary's credibility during a crisis. I draw three sets of predictions that follow from each of the four theories: (These are summarized in Table 2 below)

Predictions: Reputation Hypothesis

Statements:

- a) if a group of decision makers are facing an adversary who has demonstrated a pattern of withdrawals and retreats, they will express doubts about the adversary's credibility to carry out future threats;
- b) if the decision makers face an adversary who has fulfilled his previous commitments, they will express confidence about the adversary's credibility to fulfill future commitments;

Policies:

- c) if a group of decision makers are facing an adversary who has demonstrated a pattern of withdrawals and retreats, they will be less willing to compromise and will adopt more "hawkish" policies;
- d) if the decision makers face an adversary who has fulfilled his previous commitments, they will be more likely to compromise and adopt conciliatory policies;

Reasoning:

- e) during a crisis, decision makers will discuss their adversary's history for keeping or breaking commitments, and they will refer to that history as the basis of their assessments of its credibility.

Predictions: Power/interests Hypothesis

Statements:

- a) if, during a crisis, a group of decision makers believe that the adversary lacks the power to carry out his threat successfully at low costs, and if the stakes do not justify the adversary's costs and risks, they will express doubts about the adversary's credibility;
- b) if, during a crisis, a group of decision makers believe that the adversary has the power to carry out his threat successfully at low costs, and if the stakes justify the adversary's costs and risks, the decision makers will express confidence in the adversary's credibility;

Policies:

- c) if, during a crisis, a group of decision makers believe that the adversary lacks the power to carry out his threat successfully at low costs, and if the stakes do not justify the adversary's costs and risks, they will be less willing to compromise and will adopt more "hawkish" policies;
- d) if, during a crisis, a group of decision makers believe that the adversary has the power to carry out his threat successfully at low costs, and if the stakes justify the adversary's costs and risks, they will be more willing to compromise and adopt more "dovish" policies;

Reasoning:

- e) during a crisis, decision makers will discuss the adversary's capability to carry out his threats at acceptable costs, and whether the interests at stakes justify the adversary's costs and risks. This will be the basis of their assessments of its credibility.

Predictions: Ingrained Lessons Hypothesis:

Statements:

- a) if a group of decision makers are evaluating the credibility of an adversary's threats, and if *their previous adversaries* demonstrated a pattern of withdrawals and retreats, they will express doubts about the *current* adversary's credibility to carry out future threats;
- b) if a group of decision makers are evaluating the credibility of an adversary's threats, and if *their previous adversaries* fulfilled their threats, they will express confidence about the *current* adversary's credibility to carry out future threats;

Policies:

- c) if a group of decision makers are evaluating the credibility of an adversary's threats, and if *their previous adversaries* demonstrated a pattern of withdrawals and retreats, they will be less willing to compromise and will adopt more "hawkish" policies;
- d) if a group of decision makers are evaluating the credibility of an adversary's threats, and if *their previous adversaries* fulfilled their threats, they will be more likely to compromise and adopt conciliatory policies;

Reasoning:

- e) during a crisis, decision makers will discuss their *previous adversaries'* history for keeping or breaking commitments, and they will refer to that history as the basis of their assessments of the current adversary's credibility.

Predictions: Never Again Hypothesis:

Statements:

- a) if a group of decision makers are facing an adversary who has demonstrated a pattern of withdrawals and retreats, they will express confidence about the adversary's credibility to carry out future threats;
- b) if the decision makers face an adversary who has fulfilled his previous commitments, they will express doubts about the adversary's credibility to fulfill future commitments;

Policies:

- c) if a group of decision makers are facing an adversary who has demonstrated a pattern of withdrawals and retreats, they will be more likely to compromise and adopt conciliatory policies;
- d) if the decision makers face an adversary who has fulfilled his previous commitments, they will be less willing to compromise and will adopt more "hawkish" policies;

Reasoning:

- e) during a crisis, decision makers will discuss their adversary's history for keeping or breaking commitments, and they will refer to that history as the basis of their assessments of its credibility.

The key aspects of the four theories are summarized below in Table 2.

Table 2:
Summarizing the Theories

	Reputation Theory	Power / Interests Theory	Ingrained Lessons Theory	Never Again Theory
Summary of Theory	An adversary's threats will be credible if the adversary kept his previous commitments	An adversary's threats will be credible if he has the power to carry it out without suffering serious costs, and if he has substantial interests in doing so.	An adversary's threats will be credible if our <u>previous</u> adversary kept his commitments.	An adversary's threats will be credible if he has violated his previous commitments.
Key Independent Variable	Adversary's history for keeping commitments	Current balance of power and interests	Previous adversary's history for keeping commitments.	Adversary's history for keeping commitments.
Predictions	<u>Decision Makers' Statements</u>	If adversary carried out previous commitments, decision makers DMs should say they believe the adversary's threats. Otherwise, DMs should say they don't believe the threats.	If balance of power favors adversary and significant interests are at stake, DMs should say they believe the adversary's threats. Otherwise, DMs should say they don't believe the threats.	If <u>previous</u> adversary kept previous commitments, decision makers DMs should say they believe the adversary's threats. Otherwise, DMs should say they don't believe the threats.
	<u>Policies</u>	If adversary carried out previous commitments, decision makers DMs should advocate soft-line policies. Otherwise, DMs should say advocate hard-line policies.	If balance of power favors adversary and significant interests are at stake, DMs should advocate soft-line policies. Otherwise, DMs should say advocate hard-line policies.	If <u>previous</u> adversary kept previous commitments, DMs should advocate soft-line policies. Otherwise, DMs should say advocate hard-line policies.
	<u>Decision Makers' Reasoning</u>	DMs should discuss the adversary's history for keeping commitments.	DMs should discuss the balance of power and the interests at stake in the dispute.	DMs should discuss their <u>previous</u> adversary's record for keeping commitments.

Methods and Case Selection

In the preceding sections I have described the theories that this dissertation tests: the two primary theories – the reputation and power/interests hypotheses – as well as the Ingrained Lessons theory and Never Again theory. In this section I describe the research method that I use to test these theories. First, I describe the methodological hurdles which we face when we test theories using case studies and describe the approach I use to overcome these obstacles. Next, I describe my case selection criteria and briefly describe the cases which I test in Chapters 4 and 5.

Testing Theories With Case Studies

Testing theories with case studies is possible, but in order to draw reliable, generalizable inferences from a small number of cases one needs to overcome substantial methodological hurdles.¹⁰⁰ The main problem with case studies is that the small number of cases makes it hard to determine whether the sample of cases being studied is representative of the total population of cases. Statistical studies either study an entire population of cases or a statistically representative sample of the population. Results which are true of the sample should, therefore, be generalizable to the population. But in projects that use case studies there is no guarantee that the cases are representative of the population of cases. The results, therefore, may not reveal much about the total population of cases. Stated differently, a theory which was true in a few cases may not be generally true in the total population, and a theory which failed in a set of cases may have strong explanatory power in the general population.

¹⁰⁰ Given the hurdles inherent in case study research, why not use statistical analyses to test these theories about credibility? This is the subject of Chapter 3, "Overcoming Selection Effects in Studies of Deterrence and Economic Sanctions."

I take three approaches to mitigate the weaknesses in the case study method. First, I test the reputation and power/interests hypothesis against multiple observations from each case. In other words, the three cases in this dissertation do not provide three data points against which I test the two theories; each of the cases provides tens of observations. The number of observations in this study, therefore, is not three but over thirty.

By treating each case as a source of many data points for theory testing I partially mitigate the problems of small samples, but only partially. The multiple data points within each case increases my confidence about my coding of the cases, but they do not solve the problem that the cases may not be representative of the population of cases. In other words, having thirty observations about the Eisenhower Administration's method of assessing Soviet credibility may give me substantial confidence that I know how the Eisenhower Administration assessed credibility. I would be in a much better position than if I only had one observation. But I still would not know if the Eisenhower Administration was a typical set of decision makers. Perhaps they thought differently than other American Administrations, or differently than most political leaders in the world.

The second approach to mitigating the problems of case study methods is closely related to the first. Not only do I look for multiple data points within each case, I process trace and look for the "transmission mechanisms" which connect, according to each theory, the IV to the DV.¹⁰¹ This allows me to see whether the internal logic of the theory is consistent with the evidence of the case, regardless of the final outcomes of the case. Studying the transmission mechanisms allows me to check for weak effects that might be

¹⁰¹ On process tracing, see Stephen Van Evera, Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1997), pp. 64-67; Alexander L. George and Timothy J. McKeown, "Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making," Advances in Information Processing in Organizations Vol. 2, 1985, pp. 21-58. See also George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of

too subtle and help me protect against spurious correlation. Demonstrating that the transmission mechanisms were working the way the theories predicted, even if the end result did not confirm the theory, suggests that the logic of the theory is correct, but that the relationships are weak or were overwhelmed by some other factors. Alternatively, demonstrating that the transmission mechanisms were inconsistent with the theory even if the final results are consistent, raises concerns that the correlation between the IV and the DV are spurious.

Finally, the third approach I take to mitigate the weaknesses of case studies is to intentionally select non-representative cases. By testing theories against a sample of cases which are either very easy or very hard cases for the theory we can draw inferences about how the theory would fare in the population of cases. More specifically, if the theory passes a set of hard tests, we can infer that it would do well in the population of cases; if the theory fails a set of easy tests, we can infer that it would do poorly in the population of cases. On the other hand, failing hard cases or passing easy cases tells us less about the general strength of a theory. The following example illustrates the logic behind this method.

Imagine that I have a theory that says that the blue marble in my left hand is bigger than most of the 500 red marbles in a hat.¹⁰² The large-N method of testing this theory would be to draw randomly red marbles from the hat until I have enough to constitute a representative sample of the marbles in the hat: I then compare the blue marble to the red marbles in the sample to see whether the blue one is bigger. If the blue marble is bigger than the random sample, I can reasonably conclude that the blue marble is bigger than the

Structured Focused Comparison," Paper presented at the Second Annual Symposium on Information Processing in Organizations, Carnegie-Mellon University, October 15-16, 1982.

¹⁰² By this I mean that the blue marble is bigger than most of the red marbles individually.

vast majority of marbles in the hat; I probably can not be sure that the blue marble is the biggest.

The method I use in this dissertation does the same thing – compares the blue marble to a sample of red marbles – but it picks the sample of red marbles differently. To conduct a “hard test” of the theory that the blue marble is bigger, I reach into the hat and search for the 4-5 largest red marbles that I can find and compare them to the blue marble. If the theory passed this “hard test” – if the blue marble is bigger than the large red marbles – I can infer that the blue marble is big compared to the population of red marbles. The blue marble may not be the biggest marble, but it is probably bigger than the vast majority of red marbles.

To conduct an “easy test” of the “blue marble theory” I reach into the hat and pull out the smallest 4-5 red marbles that I can find. If the blue marble fails the easy test – if the blue marble is smaller than the small red marbles – I can infer that the theory is false; in other words, I can infer that the blue marble is not bigger than the red marbles in the hat.

Conducting easy and hard tests usually does not lead to conclusive results. A theory which fails a hard test should not be discarded; even though it fails a hard test, the theory may have substantial explanatory power and large-N studies should be done, if possible, to investigate this. Similarly, passing an easy test should only be the first step in testing the strength of a theory; the theory should be given more rigorous tests. But a theory which passes a series of hard tests (i.e., a set of cases which are hard to pass) is probably very strong, and a theory which fails a set of easy tests (i.e., a set of cases which are easy to pass) is probably a very weak theory. ¹⁰³

¹⁰³ My methodological approach was greatly influenced by numerous discussions with Steve Van Evera and Eugene Gholz and by Steve Van Evera's excellent book, Van Evera, Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1997). Here, however, I diverge from Van Evera. He no longer uses “easy test” and “hard test” categories to select cases. Instead he categorizes tests as “strong” and “weak” on the basis of two criteria: the uniqueness of the predictions and the certainty of the predictions.

Two points should be made about the limitations of this method. First, this is probably not a good way to determine whether the blue marble is the biggest or the smallest marble because it is probably not possible to assume that I have chosen the absolute biggest or smallest red marbles from the hat. This test can, however, allow us to draw reasonable comparisons between the blue marble and the population of red marbles. Second, the validity of the comparisons using this method depends entirely on the ability of the researcher to effectively select red marbles which are very big or very small relative to the other red marbles (i.e., to select very easy or very hard cases for the theory).

How do I select easy cases for the reputation hypothesis?

If a theory makes unique predictions about a case – i.e., other theories do not make the same predictions – the test is stronger; if a theory makes certain predictions about a case – i.e., the theory is unambiguous about what it predicts in that case – then the test is stronger. If a theory makes predictions that are both unique and certain about a case, the test is very strong. See Van Evera, Guide to Methods, pp. 30-34.

Van Evera's framework for case selection would lead him to select the same cases that I select in this dissertation because, he would argue, the theories (particularly from the reputation hypothesis) make predictions about the cases that I select that are both certain and unique. They are certain because the value of the IV that the reputation hypothesis focuses on – Soviet past action -- is unambiguous. (The cases study a period in which the Soviets make repeated bluffs.) They are unique because the reputation hypothesis predicts that Soviet credibility should be low and declining in the cases I study, and no other theories of credibility that I know of predict the same thing.

The reason I have not used this aspect of Van Evera's methodological framework in this thesis is that I don't believe that conducting tests which are certain and unique adequately addresses the fundamental weakness of case study methodology: the cases which are tested may not be representative of the total population of cases, so the test may not indicate whether the theory has a lot, or a little, explanatory power across the population of cases. To be clear, if a theory makes certain and unique predictions about a case, and those predictions are validated in that case, we have learned that the theory is the best (and maybe only) explanation for what happened in that particular case. But the conditions of certainty and uniqueness do not in themselves suggest that the theory would be equally successfully if tested against the whole population of cases. Researchers who use statistical methods and conduct large-N studies solve the problem of generalizing the results of their tests by testing theories against statistically representative samples of the entire population of cases.

Categorizing cases as "easy" and "hard" tests of a theory, as I do in this thesis, allows case study researchers to draw inferences about entire populations of cases even though they only study a very small sample. If I can pick cases which are much more likely to fail my theory than the other cases in the population, and if I find that my theory gets these cases right most of the time, I can infer that the theory has strong explanatory power across the whole population of cases. On the other hand, if I select easy cases for the test, which are therefore much more likely to validate the predictions of my theory than the rest of the population of cases, and the theory still performs very poorly, I can infer that the theory does not have significant explanatory power across the population of cases.

Case Selection Criteria

As I described at the beginning of this chapter, this thesis has two, related objectives. One objective is to identify the causes of credibility. The second objective, is to test as thoroughly as possible one theory about the cause of credibility – the widely believed reputation hypothesis. In order to thoroughly test the reputation hypothesis, I select cases using two criteria. First, I select cases that will allow me to test as many of the nine versions of the hypothesis as possible. Second, I select cases which are “easy cases” for the reputation hypothesis. By this I mean that I look for cases in which the reputation hypothesis *should* be right, if it is *ever* right.

Testing Nine Versions of the Reputation Hypothesis

Earlier in this chapter I divided the reputation hypothesis into nine related theories. One version is the broad version of the theory – that a state’s credibility today depends on its history for keeping commitments, even if the past actions occurred long ago, in a different part of the world, in a crisis with a different adversary, over different issues, and involving different stakes, when different people led both countries. In addition to this broad version of the theory, I also identified eight narrower versions of reputation hypothesis. For example, one narrower version posited that the reputation hypothesis is true, but only if the past actions occurred in the same geographic region as the current crisis.¹⁰⁴

To test the broad theory and each of the eight narrower versions would require hundreds of cases. But there are two sensible places that I could start these tests. One option is to test the broad version of the reputation hypothesis. If the broad version passed the tests – if past actions affect credibility in future crises even if those crises are in

¹⁰⁴ For a list of these versions refer back to Table I.

different parts of the world, long in to the future, over different issues, etc..., then I would not need to test the narrower versions. I could reasonably infer that the reputation hypothesis would pass those tests, too. But if the broad version failed the tests I would not yet know if any of the narrower versions are correct.

A second strategy for testing the reputation hypothesis is to start by testing the narrowest version of the theory. In other words, I would find out whether decision makers use past actions to assess credibility if those past actions occurred in the same region, between the same two countries, over the same issues, etc... If the narrowest form of the reputation hypothesis fails these tests, it is difficult to believe that the broader version of the theory could be right. But if the narrow version passes the test, we will need to test the if broader versions of the theory.

Because previous studies have failed to find much evidence to support the reputation hypothesis I select a set of cases which will allow me to test as narrow a version of the theory as is possible. Ideally I will find a set of cases which match up perfectly with the conditions that are listed in Table 1.

Easy Cases for the Reputation Hypothesis

In the previous paragraphs I addressed the question: how can I test nine versions of the reputation hypothesis using only a few cases? The answer is to test the narrowest version of the theory – if the theory fails, the broader versions of the theory will undoubtedly fail, too.

In this section I address a similar-sounding, but different, question: how do I select cases in which the reputation hypothesis is most likely to apply? If decision makers ever look at an adversary's behavior to assess the adversary's credibility, when would they do it? Cognitive psychologists offer an answer to this question: people are most likely to use history to draw lessons for the present if that history is easily recalled by

them.¹⁰⁵ Historical lessons are easy to recall, cognitive psychologists argue, if the historical episode is recent, and if it has surface similarities to the present case.¹⁰⁶ The reputation hypothesis, therefore, is most likely to be correct if there are recent past actions by the adversary in circumstances which share surface similarities to the present circumstance. The availability heuristic, therefore, suggests that the easiest cases for the reputation hypothesis are the same ones I identified as the narrowest versions of the reputation hypothesis: recent cases, in the same geographic region, over the same issues, over similar stakes, between the same countries, involving the same leaders.

By selecting cases which satisfy the conditions for the narrow versions of the reputation hypothesis I accomplish two goals. First, I set up a set of tests that may tell me a lot about all the versions of the reputation hypothesis: if the reputation hypothesis fails the tests, I can infer that broader versions of the theory are probably not right, either. Second, by selecting the easiest cases for the theory, I create a test which may tell me about more than just the cases I study. If the theory fails the easy test I can infer that it is very weak and would perform badly against the population of cases (all crises).

Three Cases

In this study I test the reputation and power/interests hypotheses against three cases: 1) U.S. assessments of Soviet credibility during the Berlin Crises of 1958-1961, 2)

¹⁰⁵ This is called the "availability heuristic." See Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Judgement Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," and Tversky and Kahneman, "Availability: A Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability," both of which are in Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, eds., Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). There is an excellent short summary of these ideas in Khong, Analogies at War, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰⁶ Derrde Gentner, "The Mechanisms of Analogical Learning," in Stella Vosniadou and Andrew Ortony, eds., Similarity and Analogical Reasoning (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989). Again, see Khong, Analogies at War, pp. 35-36.

British assessments of Soviet credibility during the Berlin crises in the same periods, and
3) U.S. assessments of Soviet credibility during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

These cases match up extremely well with the case selection criteria that I describe in the previous section.¹⁰⁷ See Table 3. The Berlin Crises of 1958-1961 were a series of confrontations between NATO (but principally the U.S., U.K., and France) and the Soviet Union. The Soviets made a series of threats and set a series of ultimatums which challenged Western positions in West Berlin. The Soviets made their first threats against Berlin during this period in November 58; they followed these with new threats in early 1959 and then another set of threats against Berlin in the spring of 1961. These crises present a nearly perfect test of the reputation hypothesis. Focusing on U.S. assessments of Soviet credibility during these crises, the Berlin crises offers a series of Soviet threats, in the same geographic region, over a short period of time, between the same set of countries, and including nearly identical interests and stakes. Khrushchev was the Soviet premier during this entire period. The only criterion by which this is not a very easy case for the reputation hypothesis is the issue of U.S. leadership. For the first year of these crises the Eisenhower Administration led the U.S.; in 1961 the Kennedy Administration took office. Notwithstanding the change in U.S. Administration, this is a very easy test of the reputation hypothesis.

¹⁰⁷ A detailed history of the Berlin Crises is given in Chapter 4, along with a more detailed assessment of how it matches case selection criteria.

Table 3:
Cases and their Performance Against Selection Criteria

Case 1: U.S. Assessments of Soviet Credibility, Berlin Crises 1958-61								
Threat	Same Region?	Recent?	Same Issue?	Same Stakes?	Same States?	Same Leaders (#1)?	Same Leaders (#2)?	Patter of behav.?
Nov 58						(Soviet)	(U.S.)	
Early 59	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Jan 61	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	?
Case 2: U.K. Assessments of Soviet Credibility, Berlin Crises 1958-61								
Nov 58						(Soviet)	(U.K.)	
Early 59	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Jan 61	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	?
Case 3: U.S. Assessments of Soviet Credibility, Cuban Missile Crisis 1962								
Oct 62	No	Yes	Yes(?)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The second case, British assessments of Soviet credibility during the Berlin Crises, offers an even easier test. All the criteria, including geography, recency, stakes, and issues, are all favorable for this case, as they are for the U.S. case, and Khrushchev of course ruled the Soviet Union. But there was no change in British leadership during this period: the Macmillan Government was in power throughout the entire period.

The third case, U.S. assessments of Soviet credibility during the Cuban missile crisis, follows on the heels of the last Berlin Crisis. By the criteria described above, it is another easy case for the reputation hypothesis. The crisis occurred in a different part of the world than the Berlin crises, but it qualifies as an easy case along all the other

criteria.¹⁰⁸ It occurred soon after the last Berlin crisis, it involved a similar level of stakes, involved the same countries, and the leadership was unchanged on either side.

Several questions can be raised about my selection of cases. I address two of them here. The first question is about my focus on the assessments by Western democracies of the credibility of their non-democratic adversaries. The reputation hypothesis as it is used in U.S. foreign policy debates, holds that if the U.S. backs down, our adversaries (usually non-democracies) will not believe our threats in the future. So doesn't it reduce my confidence by switching the two sides? In other words, from the standpoint of U.S. foreign policy, we want to know how non-democracies assess U.S. credibility; my study shows how U.S. decision makers assess the credibility of non-democracies. Is this necessarily the same?

This is a fair question, but there are good reasons to adopt this research approach. First, there is nothing in either the reputation or the power/interests hypothesis (or in the other two hypotheses) to suggest that they only apply to some types of governments. The logic of the theories should apply regardless of regime type.

Second, there are advantages to looking at Western decisions which more than compensate for the small disadvantage of flipping around the regime types. Most importantly, the data available on decision making in Western countries, particularly U.S. and British decision making, makes it possible for scholars to develop very high-resolution pictures of what decision makers wrote, talked about, and thought during the crisis. The quantity and quality of primary evidence available to scholars of U.S. and British decision making allows scholars to draw conclusions about the decision making

¹⁰⁸ It may appear that the issues at stake in the Berlin Crises were different than the issues at stake in the Cuban Missile Crisis, but U.S. decision makers viewed both crises as being about the same things: the survival of Berlin and the strength of the NATO alliance.

process with much higher confidence than scholars who must deal with less open, or arbitrarily open countries.

Ideally, the very high quality, but slightly less-direct, evidence that I gather here should be interpreted along with the lower quality, but more-direct evidence, that scholars can uncover about decision making in non-democracies. As I argued earlier, this study and studies like Ted Hopf's are complimentary. Together we can increase each other's confidence about how decision makers do, and do not, assess credibility.

A second question which skeptics may raise is that my cases are not as easy for the reputation hypothesis as I suggest because they are also easy cases for the power/interests theory. Decision makers are most likely to think like realists – and hence think the way the power/interests hypothesis predicts – when the stakes are high,¹⁰⁹ and the CMC involved serious risks of great power conflict and nuclear war. So a result that favors the power/interests hypothesis over the reputation hypothesis would not demonstrate that the reputation hypothesis lacks explanatory power. The reputation hypothesis might be a strong theory, these skeptics argue, but it might simply be overshadowed by the power/interests hypothesis because of the stakes in the case.

It is true that realist analyses – like the type predicted by the power/interests theory – are most likely to be used when stakes are high, but this defense of the reputation hypothesis is both inconsistent with how the hypothesis is commonly used in foreign policy debates and, even more importantly, this defense would strip the reputation hypothesis of its relevance in the future. In debates over U.S. foreign policy, analysts and policy makers frequently argue that today's actions will affect U.S. credibility in future high-stakes crises. For example, a primary argument raised against U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam once the war was going badly was that an American defeat would reduce

America's credibility to defend Western Europe. This argument depends on the assumption that, if the Soviets were considering attacking NATO, they would evaluate America's credibility by looking at U.S. actions in Vietnam. Analysts and foreign policy makers apparently believe that reputation affects credibility even in very high-stakes crises.

Even more importantly, if the reputation hypothesis is "correct", but not in cases which involve serious risks and stakes, then for all practical purposes the hypothesis is irrelevant. In order to justify investing a lot of money and many lives in their country's reputation, decision makers need to believe that their country's enhanced reputation will pay off in future crises in which there are serious stakes. If reputation is not used when there are high stakes, it will be hard to re-coup the investment in reputation.

One final point should be made about my research design. As I have noted earlier, I have two goals in this study: 1) discover what causes credibility; and 2) test the reputation hypothesis as thoroughly as possible. I, therefore, selected cases that stacked the deck in favor of the reputation hypothesis.

One effect of this research design is that I have more confidence in some of my conclusions than in others. As I described in Chapter 1, the reputation hypothesis badly fails the tests I construct in this dissertation. Given that these are very easy tests for the reputation hypothesis, and given that I test the narrowest versions of the theory, I draw very strong conclusions against the reputation hypothesis. With high confidence I conclude that the reputation hypothesis is very weak. The power/interests hypothesis passes these tests, but the tests were not designed to present a particularly challenging test for the power/interests hypothesis. My findings in support of the power/interests hypothesis are, therefore, more suggestive than conclusive. The bottom line is that the reputation hypothesis badly fails an embarrassingly easy set of tests. This is a very strong

¹⁰⁹ Barry R. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the Wars

finding against the reputation hypothesis. The power/interests hypothesis passes a set of cases which are neither particularly easy nor particularly challenging. While the evidence here does lend support to the theory. Future studies should test it in a more demanding set of cases.

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Chapter 3:
Overcoming Selection Effects in Studies of Deterrence and Economic Sanctions

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Countries build powerful armed forces, create networks of alliances, and in some cases fight wars to demonstrate their power and credibility.¹¹⁰ Political decision makers seem to believe that these costly measures send important signals to their adversaries, but scholars' efforts to verify this have been inconclusive. Do these actions actually convey the defender's capability and resolve to potential adversaries? Can countries build a reputation for keeping its commitments? How do countries assess their adversaries' capability and credibility?

Scholars have approached these questions by studying every case of *extended immediate* deterrence in the past hundred years.¹¹¹ Unfortunately, even when these scholars agree about coding the cases, there is fundamental disagreement about the implications of the data. For example, Paul Huth and Bruce Russett conducted a series of

¹¹⁰ For the classic works on establishing credibility by creating a reputation for certain types of action see Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966); and Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). One of the chief rationales for America's participation in the war in Vietnam was the desire to preserve American credibility. On American decision making and the Vietnam war see George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Robert McNamara, *In Retrospect* (New York: Random House, 1995); and Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979).

¹¹¹ "Deterrence" is usually divided into "general deterrence" and "immediate deterrence." General deterrence is said to hold when potential attackers decide not to even threaten a defender; it has failed if a threat is made. Immediate deterrence refers to the interactions once a threat has been made. Immediate deterrence is said to hold when a potential attacker is dissuaded from carrying through with its threats; immediate deterrence has failed if the attacker launches an attack or gains its objectives by forcing the defender to back down.

Deterrence is also usually divided into the categories of "direct" and "extended" deterrence. Direct deterrence refers to an attempt by a defender to deter an attack on itself; extended deterrence involves deterring an attack on a third state, called the protégé. The cases studied by Huth and Russett in their joint work and Huth in his individual work are cases of extended immediate deterrence. See Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work?: Cases from 1900 to 1980," *World Politics* 36, No. X (month 1984); Huth and Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," *World Politics* 42, No. X (month 1990); and Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1988).

studies in which they analyzed the outcome of every military crisis from 1885 to 1983. Their principal conclusions are displayed in Table 4.¹¹²

Table 4:
Summary of Huth and Russett's Conclusions

Huth and Russett (1990)
Correlates With Deterrence Success: <ul style="list-style-type: none">¥ Local force balance favors the defender¥ Short-term balance of military forces favors the defender¥ Defender conducts firm-but-flexible diplomacy¥ Defender employs tit-for-tat escalation
Correlates With Deterrence Failure: <ul style="list-style-type: none">¥ Defender has history of intransigence in the last crisis with the same attacker¥ Defender has a history of backing down during the last crisis with the same attacker

According to Huth and Russett's analysis, several variables predict immediate deterrence success. If the local balance of military forces at the point of conflict is favorable to the defender; if the balance of global standing military forces (the "short term military balance") is favorable to the defender; if the defender is willing to compromise but resists bullying ("firm-but-flexible" diplomacy); and if the defender responds to escalation with "tit-for-tat" responses; immediate deterrence is likely to succeed. On the other hand, if during a previous crisis with the same attacker the defender has either acted

¹¹² Huth and Russett define an extended immediate deterrence crisis using two criteria. First, there must be an explicit threat to use force by the attacker against a specific protégé. The threat could be comprised of political or military actions, i.e. verbal threats by the leaders of the attacker or the movement or build up of military forces. Second, the defender must communicate a threat to retaliate. This threat can also either be political or military. Threats to retaliate or military movements by the defender constitute a defender's threat to retaliate. See Huth and Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory," pp. 482, 488, and 492-96, especially Table 2, column 2.

with complete intransigence or backed down entirely, extended immediate deterrence is likely to fail.

Less than five years later, James Fearon reassessed Huth and Russett's data but drew very different conclusions. Fearon argues that Huth and Russett systematically misinterpret their data; his principal conclusions are displayed in Table 5.¹¹³

**Table 5:
Summary of Fearon's Conclusions**

Fearon (1994)
Correlates With Deterrence Success:
¥ Local force balance favors the defender
¥ Short term force balance favors the defender
¥ Formal alliance between protégé and defender
¥ Possession of nuclear weapons by defender
¥ Protégé is geographically contiguous with defender
¥ Existence of previous, recent crisis between same attacker and defender

Fearon agrees with Huth and Russett that a balance of local and short-term forces in favor of the defender increases the prospects for deterrence. The rest of his conclusions, however, contradict Huth and Russett's findings. Fearon concludes that the presence of an alliance between the defender and protégé, the geographical proximity of the protégé to the defender, the possession of nuclear weapons by the defender and the existence of previous crises (regardless of their outcome) between the same attacker and challenger, all contribute to successful deterrence. Why do these scholars disagree?

¹¹³ James Fearon, "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38, No. X (month 1994), especially 257-67. See also Fearon, "Threats to Use Force: The Role of Costly Signals in International Crises," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1992.

The disagreement between Huth and Russett and Fearon is rooted in their assumptions about how we should model the *beginning* of military crises. Huth and Russett's analysis starts after a crisis has begun -- a challenger has threatened a protégé and a defender has responded with an explicit deterrent threat. Huth and Russett identify variables which correlate with successful immediate deterrence and infer that these variables make the defender's threats credible.¹¹⁴ Fearon's analysis, on the other hand, begins as prospective challengers choose who, if anyone, they will threaten. Fearon argues that the challengers who are willing to threaten highly credible defenders tend to be highly motivated themselves; challenger motivation, therefore, is correlated with defender credibility. Stated differently, our data on immediate deterrence crises is distorted by a selection effect. Because of this selection effect -- because a defender who demonstrates great interest in a protégé will tend to face highly motivated attackers -- highly credible defenders will be *less successful* at immediate deterrence. In contrast to Huth and Russett, Fearon argues that a pattern of failure at immediate deterrence success may indicate that a defender is perceived to be very credible.

A lot is at stake in this dispute: the Cold War is over but we still need to know how our capabilities and interests are assessed by potential aggressors. Does the creation of formal alliances significantly increase a potential aggressor's expectations that a defender will fight to defend a protégé? The answer to this question would inform the debate over the eastward expansion of NATO. Do adversaries assess our credibility in one part of the world by observing our actions elsewhere? The answer to this question would either support, or rebut, those who feel that America's credibility with our future adversaries is on the line in Bosnia.

¹¹⁴ Huth and Russett do not simply rely on empirical results to draw conclusions from their analyses. The variables that they concentrate on, and the expected relationships between these variables and deterrence outcomes, are derived from deterrence theory.

This dispute also has implications for scholars who study international political economy. Fearon's argument implies that we may systematically misinterpret our data on the effectiveness of economic sanctions. Before we understand when economic sanctions are most effective we need to resolve the argument between Huth and Russett and Fearon. In sum, until we resolve this dispute we risk wasting lives and dollars on dangerous national security policies, while we anger our trading partners with fruitless sanctions.

In this paper I make two central arguments. First, we cannot tell through deductive reasoning whether Fearon's model or Huth and Russett's model better captures the interactions during military crises. The selection effect Fearon describes might exist, but it is probably weaker than he implies. Furthermore, the strength of the selection effect probably varies among different samples of the universe of immediate deterrence crises. When the selection effect is strong, the world is best described by the Fearon model, but when the selection effect is weak Huth and Russett's conception of deterrence makes more sense. Unless we know how strong the selection effect is in a particular sample of crises, we can not tell whether success during these crises signifies high or low defender credibility. Until we can model the variation in the selection effect, and this appears to be a very complicated task, we cannot draw reasonable conclusions about deterrence from our data on crisis outcomes.

Second, a promising way to discover the sources of defenders' credibility, which avoids the problems caused by Fearon's selection effect, is through carefully constructed case studies. The selection effect complicates our analysis when we try to use crisis *outcomes* to draw inferences about credibility. Drawing inferences about credibility from crisis outcomes is difficult because it is unclear whether a string of immediate deterrence successes signifies high, or low, defender credibility. The best way to avoid the problem of the selection effect, therefore, is to find other measures of credibility. For example, archival records from crises can be used to track the rise or decline of a country's

credibility during a crisis and identify the evidence that decision makers use to assess credibility. The selection effect will still exist, and it will affect the frequency of deterrence successes and failures, but it will not affect the archival evidence that reveals how decision makers assess credibility during crises. Case studies suffer from other methodological hazards but they allow us to *avoid* the problems caused by Fearon's selection effect.

This paper is divided into four main sections. First, I briefly describe Huth and Russett's findings and introduce Fearon's argument about selection effects. I show how Fearon's Model requires us to draw different conclusions than Huth and Russett. In the second section I argue that Fearon's selection effect is likely neither as strong nor as regular as he implies. I demonstrate that the strength of the selection effect will likely vary across time and show that sometimes the world is best described by the Fearon Model, but other times by Huth and Russett. In the third section I demonstrate the relevance of these arguments to analyses of economic sanctions. I show that the problems which selection effects cause for our studies of military deterrence also complicate our analysis of the effectiveness of economic sanctions. In the last section I argue that carefully constructed case studies provide a promising way to avoid the pitfalls of Fearon's selection effect.

Two Models for Measuring Deterrence Success: Huth/Russett and Fearon Huth and Russett: Deterrence Success Implies Defender Credibility

In the 1980s Huth and Russett collected data on every case of extended immediate deterrence in the twentieth century. They identified, for each crisis, whether the attacker launched an attack or was deterred and whether the defender chose to fight or backed down. Huth and Russett used a list of variables which deterrence theory suggests *should* affect the outcomes of crises and ran regression analyses to see which of these variables correlated with crisis outcomes. They identified variables which correlated with immediate deterrence success and others which correlated with failure. They also discovered which

variables correlated with a defender actually fighting for the protégé and which correlated with the defender backing down.

Huth and Russett's articles sparked considerable controversy,¹¹⁵ but Huth and Russett and their critics all shared an important assumption: success in immediate deterrence crises is a sign that a defender effectively signaled its power and resolve to potential attackers. Huth and Russett and their critics assumed that, *ceteris paribus*, highly credible defenders (those who are expected to carry out their threats and commitments) will tend to be successful at immediate deterrence.¹¹⁶

Fearon: Deterrence Success Implies Low Defender Credibility

In 1994 James Fearon offered a different interpretation of Huth and Russett's data that turned many of their assumptions and conclusions upside down. According to Fearon, because of a selection effect, as a state's credibility increases it becomes *less* successful at immediate deterrence. A decrease in a state's credibility, on the other hand, will be reflected by an *increase* in immediate deterrence success. If Fearon's argument is correct the implications for our understanding of deterrence are profound -- many of the

¹¹⁵ See Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Stein, "Rational Deterrence Theory: I Think, Therefore I Deter," *World Politics* 41, No. X (Month 1989), pp. 208-224; Lebow and Stein, "Deterrence: The Elusive Dependent Variable," *World Politics* 42, No. X (month 1990), pp. 336-369.

¹¹⁶ On a few occasions Huth and Russett observed that the relationship between credibility and immediate deterrence success might not be straightforward, but the significance of these observations was not fully appreciated. For example, Huth and Russett find a surprising negative correlation between the existence of an alliance between the defender and the protégé and immediate deterrence success. They speculate that "[a]n attacker may threaten a protégé that is formally allied to the defender, fully realizing that the risks are very high precisely because of the formal alliance relationship. In such a situation, the potential attacker has made a firm decision to force the opponent to back down or go to war. Successful [immediate] deterrence is therefore much more difficult to achieve." Huth and Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work?", p.517. In other words, higher defender credibility may, in some cases, correlate with less deterrence success in crises. In later work Huth and Russett observe that results from studies of immediate deterrence may not necessarily apply to general deterrence, but they do not explore these argument in detail. Huth and Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory," p. 474.

conclusions that Huth and Russett drew from their cross-sectional studies of deterrence have been the exact opposite of what they should have actually concluded.¹¹⁷

Fearon predicts a negative relationship between credibility and immediate deterrence success because in crises, he argues, a defender's credibility is correlated with the attacker's motivation.¹¹⁸ Defenders with low credibility will be challenged by all kinds of potential attackers. Highly motivated attackers will challenge them because they are willing to pursue the confrontation even if it results in war. Many less motivated attackers will also challenge, trying to bluff their way to cheap victories. Defenders who are highly credible, on the other hand, will tend to only be challenged by highly motivated attackers. The prospective bluffers understand that highly credible defenders are likely to fight and will not want to be forced to back down. The pool of prospective attackers that challenge highly credible defenders, therefore, will be more motivated than the pool that challenge defenders with less credibility.

Because highly credible defenders will tend to be challenged by highly motivated attackers, they will usually fail at immediate deterrence. Only less credible defenders, who are frequently challenged by bluffers, will frequently succeed at immediate deterrence.

Figure 5 makes the mechanics of Fearon's selection effect more clear:

¹¹⁷ Fearon, "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests;" Fearon, "Threats to Use Force: The Role of Costly Signals in International Crises;" and his excellent unpublished manuscript, "Selection Effects and Deterrence."

¹¹⁸ I describe potential attackers as if they fall into two distinct categories. "Highly motivated" attackers are those that are willing to pursue a confrontation even if it will result in war. In other words, they are states that prefer war over peace. Highly motivated attackers, by this definition, are undeterrable. "Less motivated" attackers, on the other hand, would rather maintain the status quo than fight the defender. They may still initiate a crisis with the hopes of coercing the defender to back down, but might be deterred by a credible immediate deterrence threat. The "motivation" of potential attackers actually falls along a continuum. Nevertheless, thinking of them as two distinct groups is useful as a simplifying tool.

Figure 5:
Fearon's Decision Tree of General and Immediate Deterrence Crises

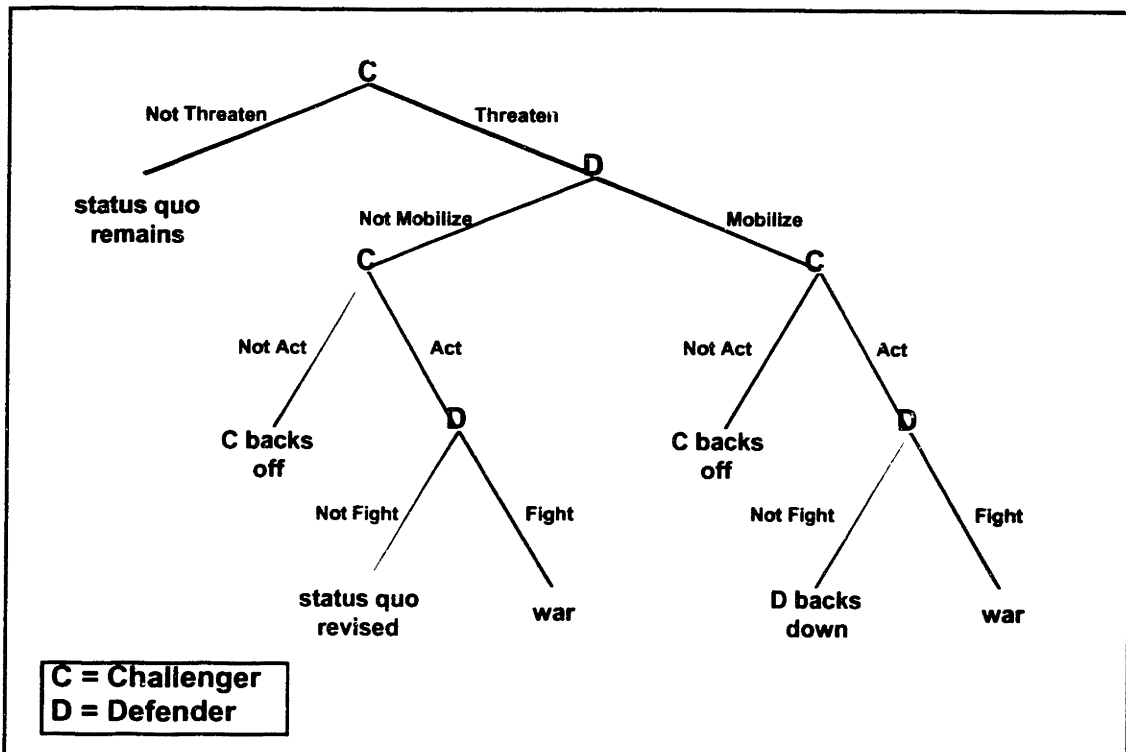


Figure 5 depicts an extended deterrence crisis in four stages. First, a prospective challenger must choose between making a threat against a protégé or accepting the status quo. If the challenger threatens, the defender must decide whether to signal its willingness to fight for the protégé (mobilize) or not. In either case, the challenger must then decide whether or not to act on its threats and attack the protégé. If the challenger acts, the defender must choose whether or not to fight against the challenger.

If a potential attacker believes that a defender is highly credible, it will not expect the defender to choose "not mobilize" or "not fight." When confronting a highly credible defender, therefore, an attacker must choose between the "status quo remains," "C backs off," or "war." If there are costs associated with backing down during a crisis, a potential attacker will prefer "status quo remains" to "C backs off." As a potential attacker

considers challenging a highly credible defender it is really choosing between "status quo remains" and "war;" a decision to threaten a highly credible defender, therefore, is tantamount to a decision to go to war. It follows that highly credible defenders will deter potential attackers from making a threat (at the top of the decision tree) or not at all. They will not frequently succeed at immediate deterrence.¹¹⁹

Three crucial points must be emphasized about Fearon's argument. First, Fearon is *not* arguing that an increase in credibility decreases a state's ability to deter its enemies. He is arguing that highly credible defenders will deter most opponents from even triggering a crisis. A defender with high credibility will deter less motivated attackers from even initiating a challenge, so on average it will only find itself in crises with highly motivated challengers. Even though higher credibility will lead to greater success at general deterrence, it will be correlated with less success at immediate deterrence.

Second, the key to the selection effect is that less motivated attackers will not often challenge highly credible defenders. Fearon only expects a selection effect, therefore, if the signals which prospective attackers use to evaluate defenders' credibility are visible *ex ante*, before the attackers initiate a crisis. For example, if potential attackers estimate the credibility of potential defenders by looking at the defenders' past behavior, then the less motivated attackers will avoid challenging the defenders who they believe are highly credible. On the other hand, if potential attackers base their assessments of defenders' credibility on variables which are not observable *ex ante*, for example the speed of the defender's response to the particular challenge, then there will be no selection effect. Another way of saying this is that less motivated challengers will *try* not to challenge

¹¹⁹ This selection effect has been noted before. As I discussed earlier, Huth and Russett observe that if a defender and its protégé have a formal alliance, immediate extended deterrence is less likely to succeed. They explain this finding by speculating that an attacker that challenges a formal alliance would likely already have decided to carry out its threats even if it results in war. Huth and Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory," pp. 516-17. See also Jack Levy, "Review Article: When Do Deterrent Threats Work?" *British Journal of Political Science* 18, No. X (Month 1988), pp. 507-510.

defenders who are highly credible, but if they cannot tell who is credible before they challenge they will be unable to avoid confronting highly credible defenders.¹²⁰

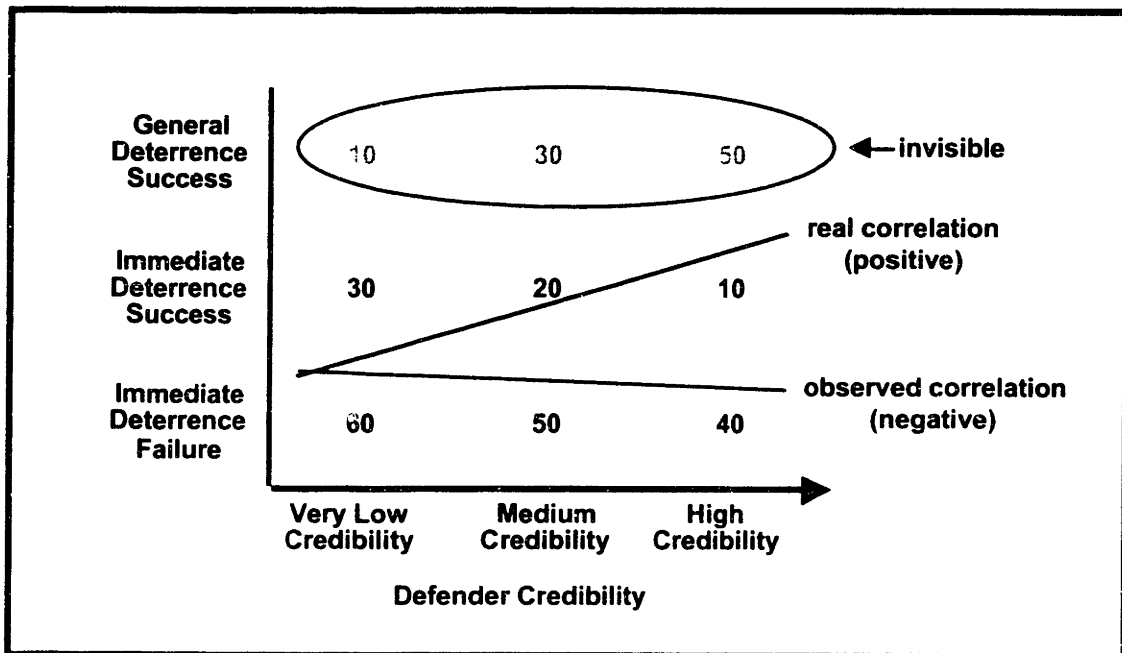
The third crucial point is that Fearon's argument depends on the assumption that backing down during a crisis is costly. The reason that unmotivated attackers usually do not challenge a highly credible defender is because there are costs associated with backing down during a crisis. As Fearon explains, audience costs, in the form of punishment from domestic political opponents, usually make political decision makers reluctant to back down. If prospective attackers faced no audience costs, if they could bluff and back down with impunity, then there would be no selection effect. In Fearon's words, "*if it is costly for a leader to make a threat and then back down...a state with relatively low resolve will be less likely to challenge general deterrence than will a state with higher resolve (emphasis added),*" and "this is not the case with a cost-free signal -- also known as cheap talk."¹²¹

Figure 6 depicts the impact which Fearon expects the selection effect will have on our data on crisis outcomes. The vertical axis of the figure displays the three possible outcomes of deterrence. At the top, general deterrence holds; in the middle, general deterrence fails but there is successful immediate deterrence. At the bottom of the vertical axis, both general and immediate deterrence fail. The horizontal axis represents a range of defender credibility. Three types of defender -- one with low credibility, one with medium credibility, and one with high credibility -- are indicated on the horizontal axis. The numbers represent the way, according to Fearon, that 100 potential attackers will interact with each of these defenders. For each hypothetical defender, therefore, the numbers add up to 100.

¹²⁰ Fearon. "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests," p. 238.

¹²¹ Fearon. "Selection Effects and Deterrence," p. 15 and fn. 15.

Figure 6:
The Impact of Selection Effects on the Data Sets of Crises: Fearon's View



The logic of Fearon's argument is reflected in Figure 6. The defender with high credibility deters most prospective attackers (50 / 100) from even making a challenge. Most of the time that this defender is challenged, however, immediate deterrence fails; the defender with high credibility is successful at immediate deterrence only 20% of the time (10 / 50). The defender with low credibility, on the other hand, is challenged more frequently (by 90 out of 100 potential attackers) but succeeds at immediate deterrence more often; it is successful at immediate deterrence more frequently than the highly credible defender, 33% of the time compared to 20%. The exact numbers in the figure are arbitrary but were selected to depict Fearon's model of the world. In his model highly credible defenders deter more challengers than defenders with less credibility, but if there is a crisis a highly credible defender is less likely to succeed at immediate deterrence. The point is that although there is a real positive correlation between defender credibility and deterrence

success (as traditional deterrence theory posits), because the cases of successful general deterrence never make it into our data sets the *observable* correlation between defender credibility and deterrence success is negative.

The Fearon Model: The Distinction Between Power and Interests

Fearon's general argument, as described above, is that a defender's credibility will be inversely related to its success at immediate deterrence, but he draws a distinction between two sources of credibility: the defender's *interest* in the protégé and the defender's *power*. Fearon claims that any indicators of a defender's interest in a protégé that are visible to the attacker before the crisis should be correlated with immediate deterrence failure.¹²² This is his general selection effects argument: in most cases, challengers will only threaten a protégé in which a defender has demonstrated great interest if they are willing to fight the defender. The challengers which make these threats, therefore, will be difficult to deter.

Indications of the defender's power, on the other hand, should have a positive correlation with immediate deterrence success. Fearon's hypothesis about a defender's power is consistent with the expectations of traditional deterrence theory, but the process driving Fearon's hypothesis is different from the traditional arguments about deterrence. Usually it is argued that a defender's power can be used during a crisis to coerce an opponent to back down. But Fearon disagrees with this explanation. He points out that measures of a defender's power which are visible to the attacker *ex ante* (before the attacker initiates a crisis) will be considered by prospective challengers before the crisis

¹²² In Fearon's words, "Measures of the strength of the defender's interest in the protégé that are available before a crisis begins should be related to general deterrence success, but to immediate deterrence failure." See Fearon, "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests," p. 246.

begins. Therefore, if the defender's power is sufficient to deter the attacker, the attacker will not initiate a crisis.

A defender's power, according to Fearon, has a more indirect effect on crises: the greater the defender's power, the less likely that the defender will be challenged where its interests are large. Powerful defenders will tend to be challenged only where their interests appear to be small. In these cases, because the defender is believed to have a weak interest in the protégé, a strong signal of the defender's interest during the crisis will likely deter all but the most motivated attackers.¹²³

Fearon vs. Huth and Russett: Summary of Two Models

The dispute between Fearon and Huth and Russett poses a dilemma. We cannot infer lessons from the data on crisis outcomes unless we can first agree whether deterrence success in a crisis is a sign of high or low defender credibility. For some variables Fearon agrees with Huth and Russett's conclusions. Variables which indicate a defender's power, they agree, should correlate with immediate deterrence success.

¹²³ In Fearon's words, "The more the ex ante balance of capabilities favors the defender, the more challengers will threaten only on issues of dubious importance to the defender, and in consequence, the more likely is a costly signal (an immediate deterrent threat) to succeed." See Fearon, "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests," p. 247.

This argument that powerful defenders will tend to be challenged only where their interests are perceived to be low is consistent with the finding that in most failures of American deterrence during the Cold War, the attackers underestimated America's commitment to defend the protégé. See Alexander George and Smoke, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974) on the clarity of American deterrent threats during the Cold War and Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995) on the ambiguity of American commitments prior to the Gulf War.

**Table 6:
Huth/Russett and Fearon Agree About Interpreting Measures of Defender Power**

if...	Huth and Russett s Interpretation is...	Fearon s interpretation is...
a measure of defender s <u>power</u> correlates with immediate deterrence success...	that measure <u>strengthens</u> defender credibility	Same as Huth and Russett
a measure of defender s <u>power</u> correlates with immediate deterrence failure...	that measure <u>weakens</u> defender credibility	Same as Huth and Russett

For other variables, which are classified as indicators of a defender's interest in the protégé, there is no agreement about what immediate extended deterrence success means.

**Table 7:
Huth/Russett and Fearon Disagree About Interpreting Measures of Defender Interest**

if...	Huth and Russett s Interpretation is...	Fearon s interpretation is...
a measure of defender s <u>interest</u> correlates with immediate deterrence success...	that measure <u>strengthens</u> defender credibility	<u>Opposite</u> of Huth and Russett
a measure of defender s <u>interest</u> correlates with immediate deterrence failure...	that measure <u>weakens</u> defender credibility	<u>Opposite</u> of Huth and Russett

Weak and Varying Selection Effects

If Huth and Russett are right, we know how to interpret the data on deterrence crises. On the other hand, if Fearon is right we can quickly correct Huth and Russett's analysis and infer meaningful conclusions from their data. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to tell who is right in any given sample of cases or in the universe of immediate deterrence crises. It may be true that Fearon's model is better for some samples of immediate deterrence crises while the Huth / Russett model is better for other samples. The reason for this uncertainty is that although Fearon's selection effect may exist, it is probably weaker than his argument implies and it probably varies over time. If the selection effect is weak, or if it varies, we can not tell if the world is best described by Fearon or by Huth and Russett. Until we can model the strength of the selection effect, and this will be very difficult, it will be impossible to draw useful conclusions from our data on deterrence outcomes.

Below I discuss several reasons that we should expect Fearon's selection effect to be weak and to vary. First, audience costs appear to vary between states and over time. As audience costs vary the strength of the selection effect should also vary. Second, even if there is a relatively strong selection effect, we should not expect it to cause a negative correlation between defender credibility and immediate deterrence success unless there are many "highly motivated attackers" in the world. In a world with few highly motivated attackers, the selection effect will reduce the observed correlation between defender credibility and deterrence success without making the correlation appear to be negative. Third, there are two fundamental problems with Fearon's distinction between power and interests. Most actions which states take to signal their power also signal their interests, and vice versa. Furthermore, the logic behind Fearon's distinction between the variables which signal a defender's power and those which signal a defender's interest seems *ad*

hoc. It seems that by Fearon's own logic *both* a defender's power and its interest in a protégé should correlate with immediate deterrence success.

Audience Costs: Evidence for a Weak and Varying Selection Effect

At the heart of Fearon's argument is the assumption that states face audience costs if they back down during a crisis. Highly credible defenders will only tend to be challenged by highly motivated attackers because less motivated attackers fear the costs of being forced to back down. If backing down were cost-free, then bluffers would challenge even highly credible defenders and the selection effect would disappear.

Understanding the central role of audience costs in Fearon's argument is essential for evaluating the dispute between Huth and Russett and Fearon. As I argue below, audience costs may be large or small, they may vary between states and they may change over time. Recognizing the variation in the size of audience costs is critical because *if the size of audience costs varies, then the size of the selection effect will also vary*.

The cost of backing down during crises varies. Sometimes decision makers are not punished for backing down; in some cases they even appear to be rewarded. Fearon recognizes this and speculates that audience costs may vary systematically with the size of countries. He observes that "when a small state confronts a much bigger one, the leaders of the small state sometimes may actually be applauded by domestic audiences for 'standing up to the bully,' even if they ultimately back down."¹²⁴

Audience costs might also vary across types of regime, but it is not intuitively obvious which regimes would be most sensitive to audience costs. We may speculate that the leaders of democratic countries might face higher audience costs than the leaders of authoritarian states, because democratic leaders must run for election and diplomatic

¹²⁴ Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88, No. X (month 1994), pp. 577-592.

failures may cost them votes. On the other hand, authoritarian rulers might be more sensitive to audience costs than democratic leaders; although they are probably more insulated from the daily vicissitudes of public opinion, the costs of being removed from office are often higher for leaders of authoritarian states.¹²⁵ Regime type may affect audience costs, but the direction of this effect is not obvious.

Another hypothesis is that audience costs vary systematically over time. The increased openness of modern diplomacy, the communications revolution, improvements in literacy rates, and the spread of democracy may have increased the level of audience costs throughout the twentieth century. Years ago crises were secret affairs; only a few members of the ruling elite knew the details of international diplomacy. Now, greater numbers of people observe international politics. Audience costs may have risen as the "audience" has grown.

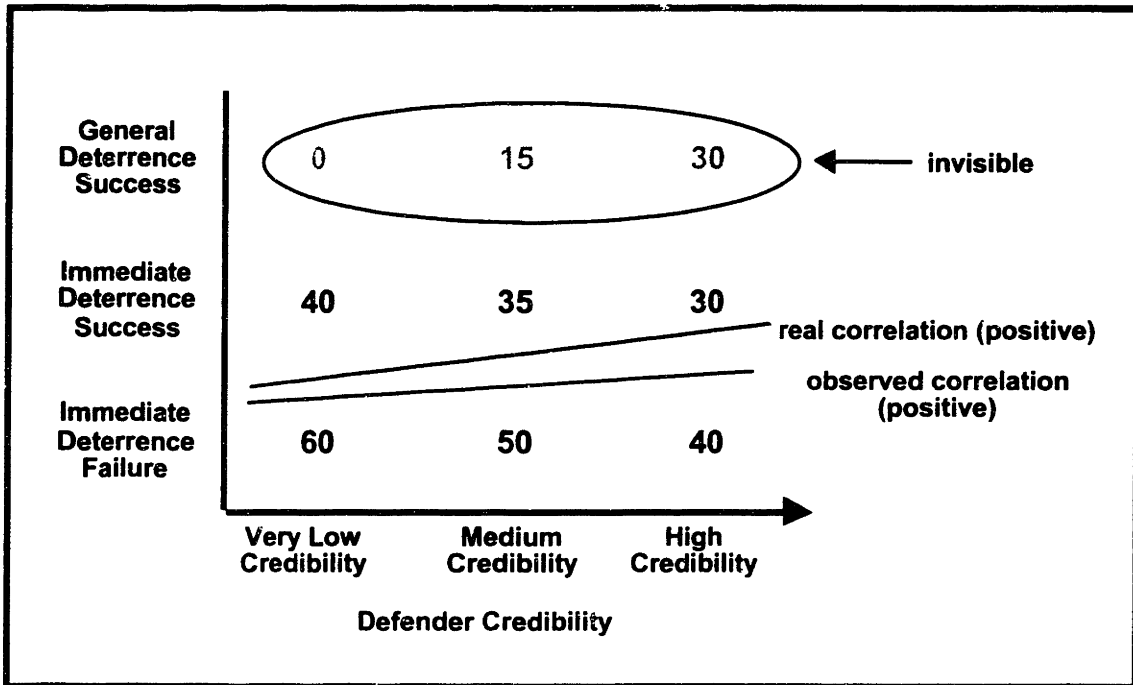
If the size of audience costs varies then the strength of the selection effect will also vary. If audience costs are low for an attacker, then the attacker has little to lose by "probing" a defender. If the defender does not respond, the bluff has worked and the attacker reaps the rewards; if the defender mobilizes, then the attacker simply backs down at little cost. Saddam Hussein, for example, challenged the U.S. in 1994 when he massed military forces near the Kuwaiti border; it is doubtful that he suffered large audience costs when he backed down. If some states can back down during crises with impunity, and others will even be applauded (and gain "audience rewards") for initiating a challenge and then backing down, then we should expect that highly credible defenders will be challenged by less motivated attackers more often than Fearon's argument implies. And in many of these cases the highly credible defender will succeed at immediate deterrence, so the selection effect will be weak.

¹²⁵ Thanks are due to Hein Goemans for suggesting the hypothesis that authoritarian leaders may be very sensitive to audience costs.

If audience costs exist but are on average small, we should expect that there is a weak selection effect. If the selection effect is weak the positive relationship between credibility and immediate deterrence success that Huth and Russett assume may not "flip over" and become negative as Fearon argues. A small selection effect may reduce the observable positive correlation between credibility and immediate deterrence success without making the correlation appear to be negative.

Figure 7 illustrates the relationship between defender credibility and deterrence outcomes in a world with low audience costs. In most respects, Fearon's general argument is still valid; as a defender's credibility increases more potential attackers are deterred from beginning a crisis. With lower audience costs, however, more bluffers are willing to probe to test the defender's resolve, so even highly credible defenders deter a fair amount of challengers during crises. There is still a selection effect -- and it reduces the observed correlation between defender credibility and deterrence success -- but the observable relationship between defender credibility and immediate deterrence success may still be positive, just as Huth and Russett expect. If audience costs are on average small, the selection effect may cause us to observe a weaker relationship between defender credibility and deterrence outcomes than really exists without "flipping over" the relationship.

Figure 7:
The Impact of Selection Effects if Audience Costs are Low



If audience costs are usually small, then Huth and Russett probably describe the relationship between credibility and immediate deterrence better than Fearon. If audience costs are sometimes small and other times large, it is unclear what relationships to expect in our aggregated data sets. If audience costs vary systematically, we will have to model the changing audience costs, and the changing selection effect, as part of our analysis. Without a good sense for which variables cause variation in audience costs (let alone a complete list of variables which cause variation in the selection effect), without knowing even the direction of the relationship between many of these variables and audience costs,¹²⁶ and without an obvious way to verify any models we create, it seems that we cannot be sure whether Huth and Russett or Fearon are closer to being correct.

¹²⁶ For most of the variables which we might speculate should affect audience costs, it is unclear whether they should have a positive or negative effect. Deductive arguments could be made in favor of the

Attacker Motivation: More Evidence for a Weak and Varying Selection Effect

The strength of Fearon's selection effect also depends on the number of highly motivated attackers in the international system. If there are many highly motivated attackers in the international system then Fearon's selection effect, *ceteris paribus*, will be more likely to cause an inverse relationship between credibility and immediate deterrence. This is because highly credible defenders will be challenged frequently (by the highly motivated attackers) and will fail often at immediate deterrence. In Figure 6, which represents a world in which Fearon's selection effect acts the way Fearon describes, there are many highly motivated attackers: an astonishing forty percent of the potential attackers choose to attack the protégé of the highly credible defender (40 out of 100 potential attackers carried out an attack on a defender they considered to be highly credible). Figure 6 depicts a world in which a great number of states have expansionist desires and are willing to fight to conquer new territories. These are not simply opportunists looking for defenders with poor credibility; these are highly aggressive, expansionist states.

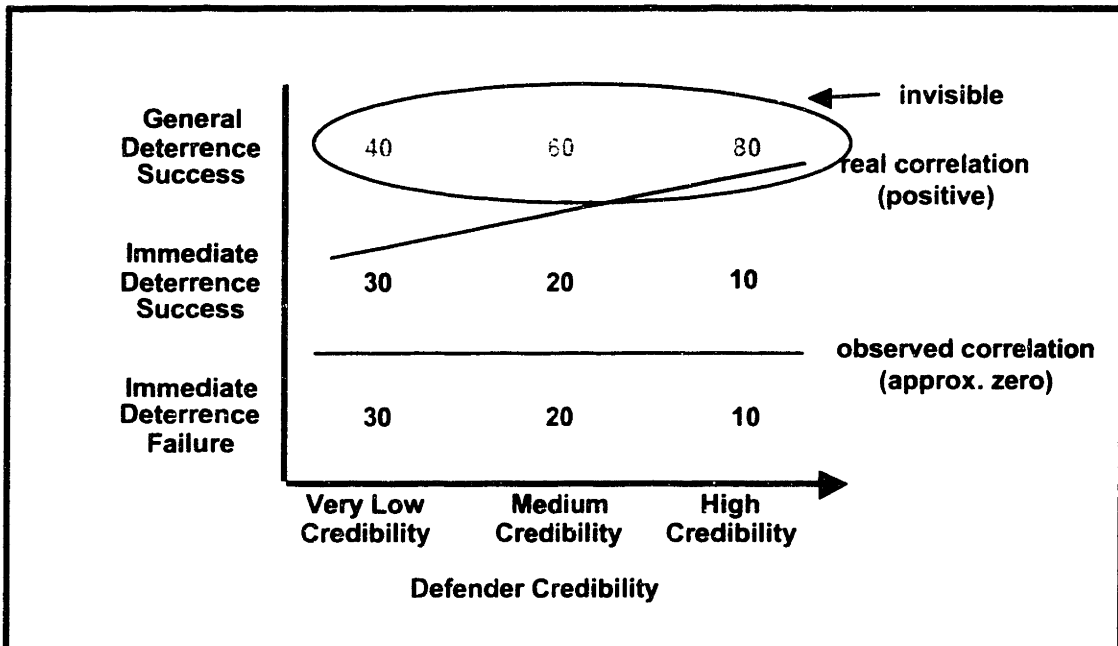
If there are fewer of these hyper-aggressive states in the international system, however, it is less likely that the selection effect will create an inverse relationship between credibility and immediate deterrence success. Figure 8 is similar to Figure 6 except that instead of nearly 40% of the states being "highly motivated attackers," roughly 10% are.¹²⁷ This change eliminates the negative relationship between credibility and immediate

hypothesis that leaders of democracies face higher audience costs than authoritarian leaders. On the other hand an equally persuasive argument could be made in the opposite directions. It could also be argued that advances in communications and literacy increase audience costs. This may be true but they also might increase the possibility of "audience rewards" (negative audience costs), which would drive down the average level of audience costs. Modeling variations in Fearon's selection effect will be particularly difficult because we do not even know the direction of the relationships of the variables which we *speculate* affect it.

¹²⁷ This still seems like too large a fraction of highly aggressive countries. See below for evidence that the proportion is much lower.

deterrence which we see in Figure 6. We should note that the *magnitude* of the difference between the "real correlation" and the "observed correlation" is still large -- so the selection effect is still strong. With few highly motivated attackers, however, it is unlikely that the relationship between credibility and immediate deterrence success will be negative.

Figure 8:
The Impact of the Selection Effect if Few Attackers are Highly Motivated



There are reasons to believe that the number of undeterrable attackers is usually very low, and that this number may be changing over time. Throughout the Twentieth Century, at any given time, only 3.2% of all countries were at war.¹²⁸ Since wars can erupt without any of the belligerents being a "highly motivated attacker,"¹²⁹ and since

¹²⁸ Chan, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Are the Freer Countries More Pacific?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 28, No. X (month 1984), pp. 617-48.

¹²⁹ Potentially deterrable attackers may choose to attack because they doubt a defender's credibility, and not because they were undeterrable by the defender.

every country which is a highly motivated attacker should be at war (or bullying defenders into backing down), it appears that significantly *less* than 3.2% of the world's countries have been highly motivated attackers at any given time.

Furthermore, it may be true that there has been systemic change in the number of highly motivated attackers. The development and spread of nuclear weapons greatly increases the potential costs of war. As nuclear weapons spread further, it may become rarer -- although not impossible -- for a country to have a higher expected value for war than for peace. Wars will still happen -- in many cases attackers may not expect their adversaries to use nuclear weapons and may intentionally limit their challenges to issues which are not of great enough significance to risk nuclear escalation. Nevertheless, as nuclear weapons spread, the proportion of states which would rather fight than remain at peace is likely to decline.

Unless we believe that the world is filled with many states who are committed to military expansion, and who are willing to fight a credible defender in order to expand, we should doubt that Fearon's selection effect will "flip over" the relationships between credibility and immediate deterrence success.

"Interest" versus "Power:" A Third Argument for a Weak and Varying Selection Effect

Fearon's distinction between variables which indicate a defender's "interest" and those which indicate the defender's "power" suggests another set of reasons we should expect that his selection effect has a different impact on our data than he implies. There are at least two problems with distinguishing between indicators of interest and power. First, distinguishing between the variables which reflect a defender's interest from those that reflect a defender's power is more difficult in practice than in theory. Second, there appears to be a contradiction within Fearon's argument. He claims that variables which indicate a defender's interest should correlate with immediate deterrence failure, while variables which indicate power should correlate with immediate deterrence success. But

the logic of Fearon's argument does not support this distinction. According to Fearon's own argument, both a defender's interest and power should correlate with immediate deterrence success.

One problem with Fearon's distinction between the effects of variables which indicate a defender's power and those which indicate its interests is that these variables are frequently indistinguishable. Many of the important indicators of a defender's power also signal its interest in fighting for its protégés. Huth and Russett and Fearon all suggest that when the *local* balance of forces is favorable to the defender, immediate deterrence is more likely to succeed. Fearon treats the local balance of military forces as a measure of the defender's relative power, but it is also an indicator of the defender's interest. Frequently, countries deploy military forces during peacetime to signal their commitment to defend a protégé. The United States maintained more than three hundred thousand troops in Western Europe throughout most of the Cold War to oppose a Soviet invasion and, perhaps more importantly, to signal America's interest in its European allies.

The deployment of military forces in the prelude to a crisis is a common tool which countries use to indicate their interests. In some cases, defenders rush forces to a protégé to act as a "trip-wire" and signal the defender's commitment. Shortly after Iraq invaded Kuwait, the U.S. rushed forces to Saudi Arabia. The top American military and political leaders did not believe that these initial deployments could stop a large Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia. The deployment was used to send a powerful signal that the U.S. would fight to defend Saudi territory.¹³⁰

An increase in a defender's aggregate military power, another variable which Fearon treats as an indicator of power, may also signal prospective attackers about a

¹³⁰ General Schwarzkopf told President Bush that the lightly armed U.S. forces of the 82nd Airborne Division could not stop an Iraqi attack. They were used to draw a "line in the sand." See U.S. News and

defender's interest in protecting all, or specific, protégés. The American military buildup during the 1980s was partially intended to demonstrate that the U.S. would never let the Soviets gain a decisive military advantage in Europe. Additionally, the Reagan build-up significantly increased America's capabilities to intervene in the Third World, signaling an increased commitment to oppose Soviet expansionism around the world.

Variables which Fearon considers to be measures of interest may also indicate a defender's power to protect a protégé. Fearon interprets arms transfers as a signal of a defender's interest in a protégé, but they also increase the protégé's military capability.¹³¹ Since the attacker must overcome the protégé's military forces, any actions which strengthen the protégé increase the power of the defender-protégé coalition.¹³² Formal alliances, which certainly signal interest, also enhance political and military cooperation, facilitate joint training, and affect power.

Perhaps the reason that neither Fearon nor Huth and Russett observe a significant correlation between a defender's aggregate military power, or the arms transfers it makes to allies, and immediate deterrence outcomes is that these actions affect the attacker's perception of both the defender's power and its interest, and *perhaps*, as Fearon argues, these have conflicting effects on immediate deterrence outcomes.

World Report, Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf War (New York: Times Books, 1992), pp. 67-68, and 144) and Gordon and Trainor, The Generals' War.

¹³¹ Arms transfers may also indicate a *lack* of interest in a protégé. A defender who decides it is unwilling to defend a particular protégé may build up the protégé's military to justify a reduction in the defender's own forces. This is similar to the U.S. attempts to build up the South Vietnamese Army during the last years of the Vietnam war.

¹³² It could be argued that transfers from the defender to the protégé do not change the power of the "defender-protégé" coalition -- the transfers merely redistribute power from one member of the coalition to the other. This argument may be incorrect for several reasons. First of all, in many "arms transfers," the protégé receives military training as well as equipment. The training benefits both the protégé and the defender. Second, if potential attackers judge a defender's power based largely on the local balance of military forces, as Fearon, Huth and Russett imply, then equipment may impress a defender more once it is in the protégé's hands than if it is far-away in the defender's stockpiles. The point is that arms transfers, and most other acts of diplomacy, send information about a country's power and its interests.

In sum, most of the variables which affect credibility likely affect both the perception of a state's power and its interests. *If* Fearon is correct that indicators of power and indicators of interest have conflicting effects on immediate deterrence success, then it is unclear what we should see in our data on crises, or how we should interpret our results.

There is another, more fundamental, problem with Fearon's distinction between interests and power; by Fearon's own logic, it appears that variables which indicate a defender's power, and those which indicate its interests, should both correlate with success in immediate deterrence crises. With respect to power, Fearon's reasoning has three steps: 1) Most challenges against powerful defenders will occur where the defender is perceived to have low interests. More specifically, the more power a defender has, the more likely it is that any challenge it faces is directed against a protégé to which its commitment is questionable. 2) In these cases, if the defender responds to the challenge (and an immediate deterrence crisis begins) its actions increase the attacker's perception of the defender's interests and -- in most cases -- immediate deterrence will succeed. 3) The more powerful a defender is, the more frequently attackers' challenges will be directed against the protégés that the defender appears to value least, the more the defender's willingness to fight over these protégés will surprise the attackers and make them question their previous assessments of the defender's interests, and the more success the defender will have at immediate deterrence.¹³³ In other words, more defender power means more deterrence success in the data set.

¹³³ In many cases attackers will correctly assess that a powerful defender has a low interest in defending a particular protégé. In these cases the defender may not react to the attacker's challenge in which case there is no extended immediate deterrence crisis. These cases will not appear in the Huth and Russett data sets. Fearon's point is that in the cases in which the defender does decide to mobilize in response to a challenge, its mobilization will often surprise the attacker (update its perception of the defender's interest) and lead to successful immediate deterrence.

What is surprising about this reasoning is that Fearon does not also apply it to the variables which indicate a defender's interests; by the same logic, a defender's interest in a protégé should correlate with immediate deterrence success. We can repeat Fearon's three steps substituting, with only minor changes, the word *interest* for *power*, and vice versa: 1) Most challenges against protégés in which a defender has expressed great interest will occur when the defender is perceived to have insufficient military capability to respond. More specifically, the more interest a defender has in a group of protégés, the more likely it is that any challenges which are made will be directed against the protégé whose defense would be most difficult for the defender. 2) In these cases, if the defender responds to the challenge (and an immediate deterrence crisis begins) its actions increase the attacker's perception of the defender's power and -- in most cases -- immediate deterrence will succeed.¹³⁴ 3) The more interest a defender shows toward its protégés, the more frequently attackers' challenges will be directed against the protégés the defender appears to be least capable of defending, the more the defender's willingness to fight over these protégés will surprise the attackers and make them question their previous assessments of the defender's power, and the more success the defender will have at immediate deterrence.¹³⁵

In other words, of all the protégés in which a defender has demonstrated a high level of interest, attackers will tend to challenge those which are the most difficult for the defender to protect. In these cases, if the defender reacts to the attacker's provocation it

¹³⁴ By mobilizing the defender may also signal that it has even greater interest than the attackers previously assumed.

¹³⁵ In many cases the attackers will correctly assess that the defender is incapable of defending the protégé or sufficiently punishing the attacker. In these cases the defender will not likely mobilize (because they risk the costs of an unsuccessful war or the audience costs of mobilizing and then backing down) and the case will not become an extended immediate deterrence crisis. The cases that appear in our extended immediate deterrence data set, therefore, will tend to be the ones in which the attacker underestimated the defender's power and, in these cases, immediate deterrence will likely succeed.

signals greater power to defend the protégé than the attacker anticipated and is likely to deter all but the most motivated attackers. So the more interested a defender has in a protégé, the less likely it is that the defender will actually mobilize when the protégé is challenged (because the defender probably cannot easily defend its ally), but *if* it mobilizes, the more likely it is to be successful at deterrence. *According to Fearon's own logic, a defender's interest and its power should both correlate with immediate deterrence success.*

One explanation for why Fearon does not apply the same reasoning in his arguments about a defender's interest and its power is that he is skeptical of the ability of an attacker to learn much about a defender's power during a military crisis.¹³⁶ If attackers can accurately assess a defender's power prior to a crisis they will not learn much about the defender's military capabilities when the defender reacts to a challenge. If this is true, Fearon's logic with respect to power and interests is sound. An attacker who challenges a highly valued protégé of a defender with questionable military capabilities would not learn much from the defender's mobilization; it would still believe that the defender cared about the protégé but was unable to do much to defend it, invalidating the second step of the above reasoning. If attackers only learn about defenders' resolve during crises, and not about their power, then as Fearon expects, the variables which indicate interests should correlate with immediate deterrence failure.

This counter-argument is unconvincing for two reasons. First, the actions of defenders during crises often transmit important new information about their ability to defend their protégé. Second, the act of provoking a crisis often *changes* the power of the

¹³⁶ It appears that Fearon does not believe that attackers learn much about a defender's power during the course of a crisis. He writes that "[c]rises...[are] a mechanism that serves to separate states according to their *value* for the issues at stake versus the gamble of conflict," and "the military risks and...political costs of crisis bargaining are...means for allowing states to learn about each other's true *values* for various policy positions." See Fearon, "Threats to Use Force," pp. 159-160, emphasis added.

defender; provocations frequently cause shifts in alliances which significantly alter the power of the defender to defend its protégé.

In cases of extended deterrence, a defender promises to protect a protégé from attack. In many of these cases, however, the defender and protégé are far apart, and the ability of the defender to project its power in defense of a far-away ally may be doubted. During the 1980s, the United States' commitment to NATO required that if NATO mobilized, the U.S. would have ten divisions in Europe in ten days. Roughly six U.S. divisions were stationed in Europe, but the ability of the United States to get the remaining four divisions to Germany in 10 days was often questioned by both allies and adversaries. Had NATO mobilized during a crisis, the Soviets would certainly have learned much about America's ability to meet this challenging requirement.

In 1990, Iraq probably did not expect the Saudis to invite a massive U.S. force to the Gulf, or expect the United States to accept the invitation if it was issued: the speed of the American deployment, however, was likely another unpleasant surprise. In the first two weeks of Operation Desert Shield the United States deployed 193 combat aircraft, a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division and a brigade of Marines to Saudi Arabia. Within the next two and a half weeks an additional brigade of Marines, a second brigade of the 82nd Airborne, a heavy mechanized division and several hundred more combat aircraft made the 8,000 mile trip from the U.S.¹³⁷ The historically unprecedented speed of the American deployment undoubtedly updated Saddam's estimate of American interest in the Gulf, but it also likely updated his assessment of our *ability* to project overwhelming power far from home.

¹³⁷ On the deployment of U.S. aircraft to the Gulf see Winnefeld, Niblack and Johnson, *A League of Airmen: U.S. Airpower in the Gulf War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1994), pp. 25-54. For numbers on the deployment of ground forces see U.S. Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992).

There is another reason to believe that states learn about their adversary's power during military crises: in some cases the act of provoking a crisis significantly *changes* the capability of the defender. Crises often cause shifts in alliances which alter the balance of power. When the Argentines considered attacking the Falklands they undoubtedly assessed British capabilities; their assessments, however, were based on the assumption that the United States would remain neutral.¹³⁸ After fruitlessly trying to settle the confrontation between two allies, the United States decided to support the British and provided critical military support that helped make the British counterattack possible. The British Navy had spent the previous generation preparing for a war against Soviet submarines in the North Atlantic and was unprepared to project air, sea and ground forces thousands of miles from home. American transport aircraft, fuel tankers, ammunition, intelligence and military communication facilities significantly increased British military capabilities during the crisis.¹³⁹

There are many other examples of crises causing changes in the relative power of the attacker and defender. In the weeks prior to World War I, British commitments to France and Russia were ambiguous. On July 29, however, at the peak of the crisis, Britain threatened to intervene if Germany attacked France.¹⁴⁰ German assessments of the military power of its adversaries prior to the crisis (Serbia, Russia and France) had to be updated as the alliance against them changed. A third example can be found in the origins of the Crimean War. Russia's threats against Turkey caused the British and

¹³⁸ Hastings and Jenkins, The Battle for the Falklands (New York: Norton, 1983), pp. 48-49.

¹³⁹ Hastings and Jenkins, The Battle for the Falklands, pp. 141-42.

¹⁴⁰ Turner, Origins of the First World War (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 107.

French to ally with the Turks.¹⁴¹ This crisis began as a case of direct immediate deterrence and ended as a case of extended immediate deterrence; nevertheless, the point is that the act of provoking a crisis can substantially change the power of an adversary. Military crises are certainly mechanisms through which states learn about their adversaries' interests, and the Germans did learn much about British interests by its unexpected commitment to fight for the French, but they are also mechanisms for learning about an adversary's power, whether the adversary is a single defender or an alliance of states.

If Fearon expects attackers to only challenge credible defenders where their interests are low, it is unclear why he does not expect them to only challenge highly credible defenders where their power is low. According to Fearon's logic, but contrary to his argument, indicators of both power and interests should correlate with immediate deterrence success.

In sum, if Fearon's distinction between interests and power makes logical sense, it is unclear how we should interpret the data gathered by Huth and Russett; most of the variables which Huth and Russett and Fearon consider indicate both a defender's power and its interests. Furthermore, there appears to be a logical inconsistency in Fearon's argument. By Fearon's reasoning, the variables that indicate a defender's power and those which indicate its interests should both correlate with immediate deterrence success. The evidence which Fearon presents to support his model of deterrence -- a positive relationship between immediate deterrence success and the supposed "power" variables, and a negative relationship to the "interest" variables -- should actually reduce our belief in

¹⁴¹ Goldfrank, The Origins of the Crimean War (New York: Longman, 1994); Rich, Why the Crimean War? A Cautionary Tale (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985).

his model.¹⁴² Fearon's model predicts a positive relationship with the interest variables; his finding of a negative correlation undermines his reasoning.

Weak and Varying Selection Effects: A Summary of the Arguments

There are many reasons to believe that Fearon's selection effect does not have the impact on our data that he concludes. First, audience costs may in general be low, or they may vary across time -- significantly reducing the selection effect in our data sets of crises. Second, if the number of highly motivated attackers is low, the selection effect will probably not "flip over" the relationship between credibility and immediate deterrence success.

Third, almost any action a defender takes to establish its commitment to a protégé sends signals about both its power and interests. Therefore, these actions will be expected to correlate with both an increase and a decrease in immediate deterrence success. If this is the case, it will be seemingly impossible to interpret our data on deterrence crises. Lastly, there are logical inconsistencies in Fearon's argument. It appears from Fearon's argument that indicators of both power and interest ought to correlate with immediate deterrence success. If this is true, then even if we accept Fearon's division of variables into one group which indicates power and another group which indicates interest, Fearon's empirical findings do not support his model.

The point here is not that the selection effect does not exist; in fact it may, especially when audience costs are high and attackers are motivated. But until we learn more about the selection effect we cannot draw conclusions with any confidence about the

¹⁴² For a summary of the evidence he offers, see Fearon, "Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests," pp. 255, 261-62, 264-65. Even if indicators of power and interest both correlate with immediate deterrence success, Fearon's logic could still hold: there still might be a negative correlation between credibility and immediate deterrence success. In cases in which the attacker perceived that the defender's power and interests were *both* high, for example, Fearon would expect that immediate deterrence would almost never succeed.

larger phenomenon of "deterrence" by studying the *outcomes* of immediate deterrence crises. After all, if Fearon is right then many variables which have a negative correlation with immediate deterrence success imply increased success at "deterrence." On the other hand, if the selection effect is very weak, or if his distinction between "power" and "interest" is arbitrary, many of our conclusions about the variables that he studies should be exactly reversed. Even if we discover that a certain variable has no observable correlation to immediate deterrence success, we cannot conclude with confidence that the variable has no effect on credibility. A moderate selection effect could result in the correlation between credibility and immediate deterrence being close to zero -- or a variable which affects both a defender's reputation for power and interest in its protégés could have no observable relationship to crisis outcomes.

Ultimately, with two contradictory models about the relationship between defenders' credibility and immediate deterrence success, the data we collect on immediate deterrence will offer alternative and contradictory policy prescriptions. Before we can interpret the lessons of immediate deterrence encounters we need to find ways of avoiding the problems raised by Fearon's selection effect.

Weak and Varying Selection Effects: Measuring the Effectiveness of Economic Sanctions

The arguments presented here have all been discussed in the context of military deterrence, but the selection effect described by Fearon raises problems *any* time we attempt to assess the effectiveness of threats and punishments. The problems posed by a weak and varying selection effect are equally serious whether we are considering military

or non-military threats and whether we are studying *deterrence* or *compellence*.¹⁴³ For example, the same type of selection effect which distorts our analyses of military crises also obscures our understanding of the effectiveness of economic sanctions.

Economic sanctions are typically used as instruments of compellence; they are frequently used to coerce a trading partner to remove trade barriers or respect human rights. Sanctions which are used for compellence, however, can also have a deterrent effect -- the fear of sanctions might deter states from taking actions which could provoke them. Because states which fear sanctions the most will try the hardest to avoid provoking them, the states which do provoke sanctions will tend to be those which fear sanctions the least.¹⁴⁴

Once again, the selection effect enters our data sets: the states which are threatened with sanctions will tend to be the states which fear sanctions the least. Furthermore, if a country develops a reputation for always imposing sanctions in response to a particular type of action (or if a multinational sanctions regime gets stronger), only states which do not fear sanctions will take actions that risk provoking them. So, as state's credibility for imposing sanctions rises, its sanctions will appear to succeed less often.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, if a state does not have a reputation for imposing sanctions on the states which violate some agreement, many states may begin to violate the agreement. In the face of sanctions some of these will back down. When sanctions are expected they will not

¹⁴³ *Deterrence* is usually defined as an attempt by one actor to *prevent* another actor from taking some action through the threat of punishment. *Compellence*, on the other hand, is an attempt to convince another actor to *undertake* some specific action. See Huth and Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory," p. 475; and Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. XX.

¹⁴⁴ The states which "fear" economic sanctions the most are those that 1) gain the least from the policies which might provoke sanctions, and 2) would suffer the most from the sanctions.

¹⁴⁵ I use the word "appear" because the sanctions are working -- invisibly. The sanctions are working to deter states from provoking them, but when the sanctions are actually employed they usually fail.

usually appear to succeed. Sanctions will work only when they are unexpected -- when credibility to impose sanctions is low.

For example, if every country became convinced that violations of human rights would always result in economic sanctions from the United States, then only countries which were willing to suffer sanctions from the U.S. would continue to violate human rights. Those that were unwilling to suffer the costs of economic sanctions would end their abuses. Consequently, the only countries that would actually be threatened with sanctions would be those that were least likely to back down. As a state's credibility to use economic sanctions increases, Fearon's argument implies, the "success rate" of its economic sanctions decline.

For many of the reasons discussed earlier, the strength of this selection effect on our data sets of economic sanctions probably varies. The selection effect exists if audience costs make decision makers reluctant to back down from a confrontation. If audience costs are high, states which fear sanctions will try very hard to avoid doing things which might provoke other states to threaten to impose sanctions. On the other hand, if audience costs are low, even states which fear economic sanctions may act in ways that risk provoking sanctions -- they know that they can always "back down."

When audience costs are high, therefore, we should expect that only states which are willing to suffer sanctions will tend to provoke them -- and against these states the sanctions will usually fail. When audience costs are low, we should expect that many more states will risk provoking sanctions, but when faced with the threat of sanctions many of them will back down. When audience costs are low, sanctions will frequently work.

One could argue that audience costs will likely be higher in the context of economic sanctions than military crises. Economic sanctions are usually used for compellence rather than deterrence, and acceding to compellence probably exacts higher costs from decision

makers than giving in to deterrence. Decision makers who are deterred from taking an action can claim that they had no plans to act regardless of the threat. Changing an ongoing policy in the face of threats, however, is harder to deny and may be more costly for decision makers.

On the other hand, one could make an equally plausible argument that audience costs are probably lower during crises involving economic sanctions. "Backing down" in a dispute over a complex set of non-tariff import barriers may be much easier to hide than backing down in a military dispute. It is not clear why Saddam Hussein chose not to invade Kuwait in October 1994, but it is clear that he backed down. In trade disputes, on the other hand, it may be less clear exactly what constitutes "backing down."¹⁴⁶ How many incremental tariff concessions must be made to be classified as backing down? In the summer of 1995 the U.S. and Japan became entangled in a trade dispute; both sides claimed victory and it is hard for experts, let alone the wider political "audience," to figure out who gave in. If backing down is easier to obscure during economic confrontations, audience costs might be lower in the realm of economic sanctions than in military crises and the selection effect may be weaker.

A quick glance at some of the empirical findings relating to the effectiveness of economic sanctions demonstrates the difficulties posed by the selection effect. Many scholars have attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of economic sanctions with an approach that is similar to the one used by Huth and Russett to study deterrence. Scholars have compiled lists of the cases in which sanctions were threatened or actually imposed on

¹⁴⁶ Saddam Hussein may have "backed down" in 1994 because he never intended to invade Kuwait in 1994. The point, however, is that the whole world saw that, for whatever reason, Saddam's behavior was in accordance with American demands. The result of an economic crisis may not be as clear.

If Japan decides to give in during a trade dispute with the United States, the actions which constitute "backing down" may be far less transparent. The whole world, and perhaps even the Japanese and American publics, may be unable to tell who won in the confrontation.

a target state.¹⁴⁷ If the target of the sanctions significantly changes its policies after sanctions are threatened or imposed, then the sanctions are classified as a “success.” If there is no significant change in the target’s policies, the sanctions are considered to have failed. Regression analyses reveal the variables which correlate with success and failure of economic sanctions.¹⁴⁸

One of the interesting observations that arises from these studies is that the effectiveness of economic sanctions appears to have significantly declined over the past 75 years. Table 8 shows the number of times that sanctions were threatened or implemented since World War I and the frequency with which these threats or sanctions succeed.¹⁴⁹ The cases are divided into two periods -- 1914-1972 and 1973-1985 -- to highlight two significant trends: in recent years, the use of sanctions has dramatically increased while the rate of success has apparently decreased.

¹⁴⁷ The authors of these studies are aware that they exclude cases in which the threat of sanctions is made secretly. For example, see Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott, Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy (Washington D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1985), p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott, Economic Sanctions Reconsidered; Bayard and Elliott, “Aggressive Unilateralism’ and Section 301: Market Opening or Market Closing?” *World Economy* 15. No. X (month 1992), pp. 685-706.

¹⁴⁹ Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott, Economic Sanctions Reconsidered, chapter 5, especially 79-81 and Table 5.2

Table 8
The Frequency and Success of Economic Sanctions

	1914-1972	1973-1985
Sanctions	61	47
Sanctions per year	1.05	3.9
Success rate	44%	26%

The obvious questions which arise from this table are “why has the effectiveness of sanctions dropped?”, “why has the frequency of sanctions increased?”, and “isn’t the increase in frequency especially surprising given the decrease in effectiveness?” But the argument presented here raises a more fundamental question: does the decline in the “success rate” *really* mean that economic sanctions have become less effective?

If we believe that Fearon’s selection effect is strong, than our interpretations of Table 6 will differ sharply from the conventional interpretation. If the selection effect is strong, the decline in the success rate of economic sanctions implies that the states which are most vulnerable to coercion through economic sanctions have modified their behavior to avoid becoming the target of sanctions. According to this interpretation, the past sixty years have witnessed a great increase in the power of economic sanctions. Sanctions, in fact, have become so effective that they now *deter* states from doing things that they once had to *compel* states to stop.

On the other hand, if the selection effect is weak, the meaning of Table 6 fits the conventional interpretation. According to this interpretation, sanctions have lost much of

their power to coerce. The increased rate at which sanctions have recently been used can be explained several different ways. Perhaps decision makers understand that sanctions are largely ineffective and now use them freely for symbolic purposes. Alternatively, perhaps potential “targets” have realized that sanctions are ineffective, they no longer fear them, and are more willing to adopt policies which run the risk of provoking sanctions.

The problem we face here is nearly identical to the one which plagues our studies of deterrence: we have two competing models which draw completely contradictory conclusions from the same set of data. Until we find a way to measure the selection effect, or escape it, our studies of economic sanctions, like our analyses of deterrence, will continue to run the risk of systematically misinterpreting the lessons of history. If we are to discover “what makes deterrence work” or “what makes economic sanctions work” we must first find a way to navigate around this selection effect.

Avoiding Selection Effects: The Case for Case Studies

As long as we attempt to study deterrence by looking at the pattern of outcomes of crises we will face a serious methodological problem. Fearon’s insight about Huth and Russett’s work is important. Because Fearon might be correct, because the selection effects he describes *might* exist and *might* be large, we should be very cautious about the conclusions we draw from Huth and Russett's regressions. The outcomes of crises may reflect either high or low defender credibility -- depending on how strong the selection effect is. Until we are able to model the size of the selection effect with confidence, we should be careful about drawing conclusions based on the data on immediate deterrence crises.

Analysis of deterrence and economic sanctions, however, is *not* doomed. *We can* discover when the leaders of potential attackers take the threats of defenders seriously. We can discover how decision makers assess the power and credibility of the defenders

they face. And we can do this without any of the complications caused by Fearon's selection effect.

One promising approach for avoiding Fearon's selection effect in our studies of deterrence lies in focusing on the *process* of deterrence, rather than deterrence *outcomes*. The problem raised by Fearon's selection effect is that *any* pattern of crisis outcomes -- a pattern of immediate deterrence failures or a pattern of successes -- could imply two totally contradictory conclusions. But by studying the process of deterrence crises we can avoid using the outcomes of crises as the dependent variable. For example, to discover what makes a defender's threats appear credible we can study what decision makers discuss during crises as they evaluate their adversary's credibility. We can read the transcripts from closed-door meetings and see the internal memos which the political and military leaders sent to each other. We can "listen in" as decision makers attempt to assess their adversary's credibility. We might find that they tend to focus entirely on the local military balance as the best sign of their adversary's credibility. Or we may find that they are greatly interested in the past actions of the adversary in previous crises. The point is that if Fearon's selection effect is strong it will affect the types of attackers that get themselves into crises with particular defenders, but it should not affect the process by which attackers assess their adversaries' credibility. Stated differently, Fearon's selection effect may affect the observable frequency of immediate deterrence success and failure, but it should not distort the observable process that decision makers use to assess an adversary's credibility.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ There is a substantial literature on qualitative methods. For two of the most recent and best sources, see Stephen Van Evera, Guide To Methods for Students of Political Science (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). See also Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," American Political Science Review Vol. 65, No. 3 (September 1971), pp. 682-98.; Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., Handbook of Political Science, vol. 7 (Reading, Mass:

This argument is not a broad critique of the deductive methods employed by Fearon, or of the statistical methods used by Huth and Russett. Formal deductive theory, large-N statistical studies and case studies play a complementary role in developing a better understanding of international relations. The value of Fearon's methods should be obvious -- Fearon raised our awareness of a possible flaw in our reasoning which could have had costly effects on our understanding of deterrence. My argument is specific to issues of coercion -- deterrence or compellence, economic or military. Because successful coercion is often invisible we run the risk that our data will be distorted -- because we may over-count the cases of successful deterrence, under-count them, or because we may fall victim to a selection effect like the one Fearon describes. In these cases case studies may offer a promising way to avoid the problems posed by Fearon's selection effect.

Conclusions

In "Selection Effects and Deterrence" James Fearon demonstrates that we may be systematically misinterpreting our data on "what makes deterrence work." While many of Fearon's insights about selection effects are fundamentally correct, the selection effect which he describes is probably neither as strong nor as regular as he implies. A weak and varying selection effect creates severe methodological problems which we ignore at our peril. In this paper I have highlighted some of the problems associated with a weak or varying selection effect and have argued that a good way to escape this selection effect is by conducting case studies that focus on the process decision makers use to assess other countries' credibility, rather than on the frequency of deterrence success.

Addison-Wesley, 1975); and Alexander George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured Focused Comparison," Paper presented at the Second Annual Symposium on Information Processing in Organizations, Carnegie-Mellon University, October 15-16, 1982.

After fifty years of Cold War confrontation we still have only vague ideas regarding "what makes deterrence work." At least now we may understand why so many of our studies have been inconclusive. This paper has attempted to accomplish three objectives: to warn scholars and policy makers that we may not know as much about deterrence as we think, to steer scholars away from methods which risk the systematic misinterpretation of history, and to guide our future inquiry into deterrence and sanctions away from the methodological obstacles of selection effects.

Chapter 4:

**Testing the Reputation and Power/interests Hypotheses:
U.S. and U.K. Assessments of Soviet Credibility During the Berlin
Crises, 1958-61**

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In this chapter I test the reputation and power/interests hypotheses using American and British decision making during the Berlin crises of 1858-61. This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I briefly summarize the background and the main events of the Berlin crises. In the second section I draw predictions about U.S. and British decision making during the crises. Third, I test these predictions against evidence from the crises. Finally, in the fourth section I summarize the findings from this case.

The Berlin Crises of 1958-1961

In 1958 the United States, the United Kingdom, and France still maintained military forces in West Berlin; the troops in Berlin were remnants of the Western occupation force from the end of World War II. Years earlier, the American, British, and French zones of occupation in Germany had been consolidated into West Germany (the FRG). The Soviets had formed an East German State in their zone (the GDR), but they continued to administer the access routes which the Allied forces used to get to West Berlin through East German territory. None of the Allied powers, nor the FRG, recognized the East German regime.

Economic conditions in East Germany were bad in the 1950s and for years East Germans had used West Berlin as an escape route into the West. Not only was the flight of East Germans embarrassing evidence of the unpopularity of the GDR, it drained the long-term health of the East German economy. Five years before the beginning of the 1958 Berlin crisis there were serious riots in East Germany.¹⁵¹ The Soviets were understandably worried about the future of their most important Warsaw Pact ally.

¹⁵¹ Martin McCauley, *The Khrushchev Era: 1953-1964* (New York: Longman Press, 1995); Vladislav Zubok, *Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1962* (Washington, D.C., Cold War International History Project, 1994).

While East Germany staggered, West Germany flourished. The economic contrast between the GDR and the FRG was stark. Even worse for the Soviets, the West Germans had joined NATO and were rearming rapidly. It even looked, in 1958, like the West Germans would soon have nuclear weapons.¹⁵² The warheads would probably "belong" to the United States, but America's history of loose control over its nuclear weapons in allied countries was probably known by the Soviets and would not have reassured them.¹⁵³

In November 1958 Khrushchev began to send signals that a crisis over Berlin was imminent. On November 10 he demanded in a speech that Allied troops leave Berlin.¹⁵⁴ On the 14th of November an American military convoy was stopped on one of the access roads and prevented from either continuing toward West Germany or returning to Berlin. For several hours the convoy was detained.¹⁵⁵ Finally, on November 27, the Soviets made their threats official. Each Allied power received a note from the Soviets which said:

¹⁵² Marc Trachtenberg, History and Strategy (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 180-191; Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace.

¹⁵³ Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, pp. 188-189, and 189fn; and Scott D. Sagan, Moving Targets: Nuclear Strategy and National Security (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 138. It was routine during the late 1950s and early 1960s for French and British pilots to sit in French and British aircraft armed with American nuclear weapons. As Dean Acheson pointed out to President Kennedy and British Prime Minister Macmillan in 1961, "The United States control of these weapons was in some cases theoretical; ...sometimes the control amounted to nothing more than a United States sergeant who was supposed to see that the weapons were not released without authority. There was no way at present of guaranteeing that those Allies who held nuclear weapons would in fact seek the President's agreement before using them." The U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense and the President's National Security Advisor were all present during this meeting and none of them contradicted this statement. Record of a meeting held at the White House on Wednesday, 5 April, 1961, at 3:15 p.m., CAB 129/105 C. (61) 54, British Public Records Office [PRO].

¹⁵⁴ Alistair Horne, Harold Macmillan: Volume II, 1957-1986 (New York: Viking Press, 1989), p. 117.

¹⁵⁵ William Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope: The Eisenhower Administration and the Berlin Crisis, November 1958-1959," Diplomatic History Vol. 18, No. 3 (spring 1994), pp. 184-185; Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, p. 194.

- 1) the Allies could no longer use their status as the victors of World War II to traverse East German territory and occupy West Berlin;
- 2) the Soviets were prepared to sign a peace treaty with the GDR and hand over control of the Allies' access routes to the East Germans;
- 3) if the Allies want to continue to use these routes they must work out new arrangements with the East Germans;
- 4) any attempt to continue to cross -- or fly over -- East German territory without GDR consent will be interpreted as an attack upon a member of the Warsaw Pact and the Red Army "will rise in its ally's defense."

The only way for the West to avoid this chain of events would be to turn West Berlin into a demilitarized city. Otherwise the Soviets would sign their treaty in six months.¹⁵⁶

To the West, this note contained ominous threats. If the Soviets signed their peace treaty, the Allies would have three unpalatable options. They could give in to Soviet demands and pull their forces out of West Berlin. The second option was to let the deadline pass and, after the Soviets signed their treaty with the East Germans, negotiate with the GDR for continued access to Berlin. The third option was to refuse to deal with East German authorities and try to supply the Western garrisons in Berlin without Soviet or East German permission. For example, the West could launch an airlift, like they did in 1948, to maintain access to West Berlin. Alternatively, Allied ground forces could try to push their way through East German checkpoints to forcefully reestablish contact with West Berlin.

None of these options were attractive to the West. They certainly did not want to pull out of Berlin, especially in the face of Soviet threats. The second option, negotiations with the East Germans, was unattractive, too. The GDR might restrict the times and frequency of Allied traffic as a way of slowly squeezing the West out of Berlin. Even more importantly, negotiating with the East Germans would cause problems between the

¹⁵⁶ For the text of the Soviet note see Department of State, Bulletin, January 19, 1959, pp. 81-89.

Allies and the FRG. The most critical political issue in NATO at the time was to convince the West Germans that their best long term prospects for security and reunification were through membership in NATO.¹⁵⁷ West German leaders warned NATO that negotiations with the East Germans would amount to de facto recognition, and this could force West Germany to consider "other approaches" for making progress toward reunification. The "other approach" that the West feared was a deal between the West Germans and the Soviets which would lead to German reunification as a neutral country, unaligned with either of the military blocs.¹⁵⁸ The West, therefore, did not want to negotiate with the East Germans for continued access to Berlin.

The third option, supplying West Berlin without dealing with the East Germans, was dangerous. The Soviets threatened to shoot down any aircraft that violated East German airspace without East German permission. Forcing their way down the ground access routes could easily escalate to war. The Western Allies did not want to deal with the GDR -- but nor did they look forward to risking war with the Soviets over Berlin.

The crises went through a number of stages over the next few years. By January 1959 the Soviets were already backing away from their six-month ultimatum. Soviet Foreign Minister Mikoyan quickly back-tracked from the November 27th ultimatum, and he suggested that the six month time period would not be a firm deadline if negotiations

¹⁵⁷ With hindsight, it seems unimaginable that West Germany would have withdrawn from NATO. At the time, however, this was a very serious concern for U.S. decision makers. Whether or not this fear was justified, it was real. See Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope," p. 179; Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, p. 176.

¹⁵⁸ As it turns out, the United States and the Soviet Union both feared this. The U.S. feared that a neutral Germany would be susceptible to subversion by the Soviets; the Soviets feared that a re-unified Germany would continue to rearm and would eventually try to reclaim the land they lost in World War II. See, Vladislav M. Zubok, "Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis (1958-1962)," Working Paper No. 6, Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 1993, p. 3.

began during this period.¹⁵⁹ In February Khrushchev reiterated his threat to sign the treaty, but he officially extended the May 27 deadline, offering to give the West until June or July.¹⁶⁰ In May the Soviets reiterated their threats, but they agreed to summer-long meetings of the American, British, French, and Soviet Foreign Ministers in Geneva to discuss Berlin. The summer passed, no progress was made, and the Soviets still did not sign a treaty with the East Germans.

In September 1959, Khrushchev agreed to state publicly that there was no deadline at all for resolving the Berlin problem in exchange for a public American commitment to negotiate in good faith.¹⁶¹ These “good faith” negotiations went nowhere, and the May 1960 summit was canceled by Khrushchev in the wake of the U-2 affair. A year-and-a-half had passed since the original six month deadline was issued, the Berlin situation was unchanged, and the Soviets had not carried out any of their threats.

The Soviets did not wait until Kennedy was inaugurated before they launched a new volley of threats about West Berlin. On New Years Eve, 1960, Khrushchev told the FRG's Ambassador to the Soviet Union that the Berlin problem would have to be settled before the West German elections in September.¹⁶² A few days later, on January 6, Khrushchev delivered a blunt speech in which he promised to "eradicate the Western

¹⁵⁹ Telegram from U.K. Ambassador Caccia to the British Foreign Office, telegram number 97, 13 January 1959, PREM 11/2715, PRO; Schick, Berlin Crisis, pp. 37-38.

¹⁶⁰ Telegram from the Prime Minister's Moscow delegation to the Foreign Office, telegram number 373, 26 February 1959, PREM 11/2715, PRO; and Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 4 March 1959, CAB 128/33 C.C. (59) 14th (1), PRO.

¹⁶¹ Eisenhower made this public commitment, and he privately told Khrushchev privately that the West could not remain in West Berlin forever, but he made no commitment to pull out any time soon, and he categorically refused to make any concession under conditions of Soviet ultimatums.

¹⁶² Telegram from U.K. Ambassador Steel to British Foreign Office, 30 April 1961, telegram number 429, FO 371/160534, PRO.

splinter from Eastern Europe."¹⁶³ Repeated threats in the spring locked-in Khrushchev to sign a treaty with the GDR by the end of 1961. The crisis grew more tense when Kennedy and Khrushchev met in Vienna in June. The Soviets passed Kennedy a new note on Berlin that officially reestablished a six month deadline for solving the Berlin impasse. In July Kennedy declared, in response to the Soviet note, large increases in defense spending, greater numbers of nuclear-armed bombers on alert, and improvements in American civil defense plans. In August, Khrushchev ordered the construction of the Berlin Wall, and in October, two months before the ultimatum was scheduled to expire, Khrushchev again rescinded the threat. He said that he was confident that the allies would negotiate about the future of West Berlin in good faith and he promised not to sign a treaty with the GDR until the status of West Berlin had been worked out with the West.¹⁶⁴

Soviet Objectives During the Berlin Crises

To test the reputation hypothesis it is necessary to determine what the American and British leaders thought the Soviets were trying to accomplish with their threats against Berlin. The fact that the Soviets never signed a treaty with the GDR does not, in itself, prove that the Soviets backed away from their threats, because all the Soviet threats were contingent upon a failure to resolve the Berlin problem to Soviet satisfaction. If U.S. and British decision makers thought that the Soviets were achieving their objectives, then they would not consider the lack of a Soviet-East German treaty as a Soviet failure. So what did Western leaders think the Soviets were trying to achieve?

¹⁶³ Sorensen, p. 584; Schlessinger, p. XX.

¹⁶⁴ Telegram from British Embassy in Moscow to British Foreign Office, 18 October 1961, telegram number 1883, FO 371/159550, PRO; British Department of State Research Memorandum, 20 October 1961, FO 371/159550, PRO.

Soviet objectives during the Berlin crises are a subject of controversy but a consensus appears to be forming among diplomatic historians who have examined the Soviet and Western archives. The developing consensus is that Soviet fears about West Germany acquisition of independent nuclear forces were at the root of Khrushchev's threats against Berlin. By this interpretation the primary issue at stake was never Berlin *per se*; Berlin was merely a lever which Khrushchev could use to pressure the West about German armaments.¹⁶⁵

The important issue for this research, however, is not what the Soviets were actually trying to achieve, but what Western decision makers thought the Soviets were trying to achieve. If Western decision makers *thought* that the Soviets were failing to reach their objectives, and observed that the Soviets were not carrying out their threats, then the reputation hypothesis predicts a decline in Soviet credibility. So what did Western leaders think motivated Soviet threats?

There was division, within both the American and British senior leadership, about Soviet objectives during the Berlin Crises. A group of senior American and British leaders believed that Khrushchev had modest objectives. His main goal, according to this view, was to stabilize the situation in Eastern Europe. Khrushchev wanted de facto recognition of the GDR, recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as the German-Polish border, and pledges from the West to eliminate their propaganda and subversion operations from Berlin against East Germany.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, pp. 169-234; Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace; William Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope: The Eisenhower Administration and the Berlin Crisis, November 1958-January 1959, *Diplomatic History*, 18 (Spring 1994); Vladislav M. Zubok, "Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis (1958-1962), Working Paper No. 6, Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 1993; and Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev, pp. 194-202.

¹⁶⁶ For American analyses which saw moderate objectives in Soviet threats see "Record of discussion between Dulles and the UK Secretary of State," 4 February 1959, PREM 11/2715, PRO; "Memorandum

At the same time, another strong element among American and British decision makers believed that Khrushchev's objectives were much more ambitious: they involved squeezing the Western forces out of Berlin, absorbing West Berlin into the GDR, dividing West Germany from its NATO allies and, ultimately, breaking up the NATO alliance.¹⁶⁷ As Secretary Rusk wrote to the President, the Soviets had been trying to "dislodge the Allies from West Berlin" since 1958.¹⁶⁸

Western views on Soviet goals were surprisingly constant throughout the crises; there was also great similarity between the views of American and British decision makers. German acquisition of nuclear weapons was sometimes discussed by American and British leaders as a possible Soviet motive but this was always listed as a secondary objective, or as one of many possibilities. If the crises were principally about German nuclear weapons, the West never figured this out.¹⁶⁹

from Hillenbrand titled "The Berlin Problem in 1961," January 10, 1961 Folder: Germany-Berlin, General, Box 81, National Security Files, JFKL; "Memo from Ambassador Thompson to Secretary Rusk," June 19, 1961, Folder: Germany-Berlin, General 6/16/61, Box: 81, National Security Files, JFKL.

For similar British views see Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 28 July 1961, CAB 128/35 C.C. (61) 45th (4), PRO; "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the Cabinet on East-West Relations," 19 July 1961, C. (61) 97, CAB 129/105, PRO.

¹⁶⁷ For American analyses which saw very ambitious objectives in Soviet threats see "Memorandum from Secretary Rusk to President on Berlin Crises," January 28, 1961 Folder: Germany-Berlin, General, Box 81, National Security Files, JFKL; "Letter from Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy," February 2, 1961. 762.00/1-2861, Central Files, Department of State, FRUS.

For examples of similar British analyses see "Telegram from Ambassador Reilly to Foreign Office," telegram number 1567, 29 November 1958, PREM 11/2715, PRO; "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the Cabinet on East-West Relations," 19 July 1961, C. (61) 97, CAB 129/105, PRO.

¹⁶⁸ Memorandum of January 28, 1961 from Secretary Rusk to President on chronology of Berlin Crises, Folder: Germany-Berlin, General, Box 81, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Library

¹⁶⁹ While Trachtenberg argues that the Soviet goal in the crisis was to prevent the nuclearization of West Germany, he notes that the subject of West German nuclear weapons "did not receive much attention at the highest levels of the [Western] government[s]; it was never treated by Eisenhower and Dulles -- or for that matter by Kennedy and his associates -- as the most central issue, the real heart of the problem." He

The Balance of Power During the Berlin Crises

In this section I address two questions: What was the military balance between NATO and the Warsaw Pact during the Berlin Crises? and How did Western decision makers perceive the balance? Answers to these questions must address the balance of both conventional and nuclear forces, but the central issue was the nuclear balance because the West had no intention of fighting a conventional war, and they made this clear to the Soviets.

In the late 1950s and early 60s there was widespread agreement within NATO that the Alliance lacked the capability to mount a conventional defense in the face of a committed Warsaw Pact attack.¹⁷⁰ While a conventional NATO defense seemed implausible, the prospects for a NATO offensive to fight across East Germany to Berlin were even worse. As Secretary of Defense McNamara told President Kennedy in 1961, an American-led attack toward Berlin could probably be defeated by East German forces alone.¹⁷¹ The presence of Soviet forces in the GDR made a successful conventional offensive a non-starter.

The West was weak in conventional forces precisely because they had no intention of fighting a conventional war against the Soviets. NATO war plans called for the early

explains, "the Soviets, in diplomatic contacts, did not stress the issue nearly as much as one might have expected." Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, p. 207.

¹⁷⁰ By the mid-1960s, some analysts argued that NATO's conventional forces were more powerful than most policy makers believed. Their arguments are persuasive, and they suggest that NATO had a reasonable chance of *defending itself* with conventional forces during the time of the Berlin Crises of 1958-61. Even these "optimistic" analyses, however, suggest that NATO lacked the conventional military power to launch an *offensive*, which would be needed in any mission to open the ground access routes to Berlin. Furthermore, there is widespread agreement that Western policymakers did not believe from 1958-61 that they had any good conventional options in a Berlin crisis. For a good account of the optimists position, see Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, How Much is Enough: Shaping the Defense Program, 1961-1969 (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

¹⁷¹ McNamara reported to the President that the largest ground operation contemplated in American contingency plans for Berlin was a one-to-two division probe. This probe could be stopped by the East Germans without requiring Soviet intervention. Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Kennedy, 5 May 1961. Vol. 14, Doc. 22, FRUS.

and massive use of nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union. The crucial element of the military balance during this period was, therefore, the nuclear balance.¹⁷²

The nuclear balance can be summarized by three facts of paramount importance. First, by 1958, the Soviets had built a substantial arsenal of nuclear weapons that could hit America's European allies. Second, throughout the Berlin crises the United States enjoyed overwhelming nuclear superiority over the Soviets and had a good chance of carrying out a nuclear first strike that could destroy the Soviet capability to retaliate *against the United States*. Even after a successful first strike, however, the Soviets would probably be able to retaliate with substantial numbers of nuclear weapons against the Europeans.¹⁷³ Third, America's nuclear superiority was gradually disappearing.

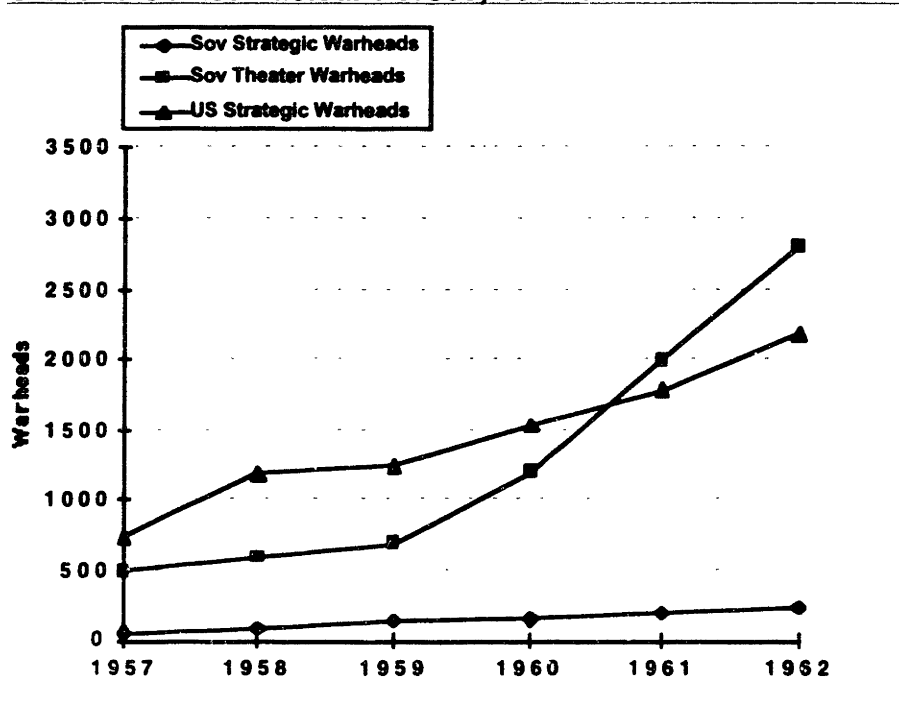
Figure 9 displays the main trends in the nuclear balance during the Berlin Crises. The top line on the graph indicates the maximum number of nuclear warheads that the United States could deliver against Soviet targets with submarines, long range bombers, and ICBMs. The bottom line shows the number of nuclear warheads that the Soviets had aboard weapon systems which could attack the U.S. The middle line depicts the number of warheads that the Soviets could have used against the Europeans if all of their warheads on strategic launchers were used against the United States.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² See Peter J. Roman, *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Craig Campbell, *Destroying the Village* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

¹⁷³ This fact did not escape the Europeans. See, for example, the discussion of the effects of nuclear war on the U.K. in Chiefs of Staff Committee Meeting, 1 January 1959, Defe 4/115 C.O.S. (59) 1st (1), PRO. The British Chief of Staff angrily reminded his staff and an representative of the Foreign Office that "If a global war did occur in the near future it was the United Kingdom and the European members of NATO rather than the United States who would suffer; this must be made abundantly clear to the Americans."

¹⁷⁴ All data for Figure 9 come from Natural Resources Defense Council, "Nuclear Weapons and Waste: In Depth: Technical Brief," which can be found on the NRDC website at <http://www.nrdc.org>. The U.S. figures include warheads from intercontinental range bombers, nuclear missile launching submarines, and I.C.B.M.s. I include the B-52 bombers which are categorized as PAA (i.e., Primary Authorized Aircraft) which are the only ones which are assigned to operational units, the Polaris SSBN nuclear missile launching submarines, and the Atlas D, E, F, and Titan I missiles that became operational during this

Figure 9:
U.S. and Soviet Nuclear Forces, 1957-62



From 1958 through 1961 the size and diversity of the Soviet strategic (intercontinental) arsenal was growing substantially. In 1958, the Soviets had 85 long range bombers and 2 submarines which could have been used for attacks on the U.S. By 1961 their force had grown to 133 bombers, 19 nuclear missile submarines, and about 10 ICBMs.¹⁷⁵

period. For Russian strategic systems I include Bison and Bear bombers. The original Bison bombers had insufficient range to reach the United States, but by the mid-to-late 1950s Bison were using aerial refueling and engine design improvements to extend their range. I also include Soviet SS-6 and SS-7 ICMBs, and the Soviet Golf I, Golf II and Hotel I/II nuclear missile launching submarines. On the Bison bomber, see "Molot M-4 / Mya-4 / 3M Myasishchev 'Bison,'" in the Nuclear Forces Guide of the Federation of American Scientists. This can be found on their website at <http://www.fas.org>. For all other information see NRDC, as cited above.

¹⁷⁵ In 1958 the Soviets had 85 bombers (45 Bears and 40 Bisons) and 2 nuclear missile submarines (Golf I SSBs) which could have been used for nuclear attacks against the United States. In 1961 the Soviet

The window for a U.S. first strike narrowed during this period for three reasons. First, the number of Soviet strategic launch platforms nearly doubled while the number of deliverable U.S. warheads only increased by 20%. Second, even a proportional increase in Soviet launchers and American warheads would have partially closed the first-strike window. If there had been proportional increases in Soviet launchers and American nuclear warheads, the probability of destroying any particular Soviet launcher in a first strike would have remained constant. The expected number of surviving Soviet launchers, however, would have increased as a function of the number of launchers. So the *disproportionate* increase in Soviet launchers substantially increased the expected number of surviving warheads after an American first strike. Finally, Soviet deployment methods were starting to diversify. Early Soviet SSBs were noisy, but as their numbers grew they complicated U.S. targeting and raised the chances that a small number of Soviet warheads could survive and destroy several American cities.¹⁷⁶

American decision makers were appropriately cautious when confronting the potential costs and risks of nuclear war. Nevertheless, there is evidence that American leaders were aware of their strategic superiority. Eisenhower dismissed exaggerated estimates of the Soviet strategic arsenal, and privately expressed confidence that if it ever came time to -- as he once said -- pushing America's blue chips into the pot, the U.S.

strategic nuclear force had grown to 133 bombers, 19 Golf I SSBs, and no more than 10 ICBMs (6 SS-7s and 4 SS-6s). See National Resources Defense Council, "U.S. and U.S.S.R./Russian Strategic Offensive Nuclear Forces, 1945-1996."

¹⁷⁶ Soviet Golf I submarines each carried 3 nuclear armed missiles. Each missile carried a 1 megaton warhead (which is eighty times as big as the Hiroshima bomb). See John M. Collins, U.S.-Soviet Military Balance: Concepts and Capabilities, 1960-1980 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), pp. 452-53. For analyses of the changing strategic balance at the time, the perceived balance, and changes in U.S. target intelligence, see William C. Wohlforth, The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Lawrence Freedman, U.S. Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat (London: Macmillan Press, 1977).

could win the war with acceptable casualties.¹⁷⁷ In 1959 Eisenhower told then-Senator Johnson, "If we were to release our nuclear stockpile on the Soviet Union the main danger would arise not from retaliation but from fallout in the earth's atmosphere."¹⁷⁸ The Kennedy Administration may have rated the risks higher than the Eisenhower Administration -- which was appropriate because the Soviet arsenal was growing -- but there is evidence that they, too, understood that they had an unpleasant, but *possible* nuclear option which the Soviets simply did not have.¹⁷⁹

In sum, by 1958 the Soviets and Europeans were both in the world of mutual assured destruction. The U.S., on the other hand, still enjoyed strategic superiority -- and its top political leaders knew it -- but the margin of that superiority was closing.

Drawing Predictions From the Theories About the Berlin Crises

How would we know if decision makers in the Berlin crises assessed Soviet credibility in the manner that the reputation hypothesis predicts? How would we know if the power/interests hypothesis was correct? Both of these hypotheses make predictions about three aspects of the decision making process: the *statements* of the decision makers, the *policies* that the decision makers adopted, and the *reasoning* that they used in their

¹⁷⁷ See Peter J. Roman, Eisenhower and the Missile Gap, pp. XX.

¹⁷⁸ Cited in Marc Trachtenberg, History and Strategy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 191. Eisenhower grew steadily more concerned about the wisdom of massive retaliation in late 1959 and 1960 as the Soviet strategic stockpile grew, but even at the end of his Administration he remained convinced that if pushed to war, the United States should launch an unrestrained nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. Eisenhower argued at a 1959 NSC meeting against moving away from massive retaliation. He said: "What could our objectives [be] in...a general war beyond the objective of hitting the Russians as hard as we could?...The only form which you could expect to get a peace offering would be from that side in the conflict which was putting up the white flag. The US will never do this so we should go ahead and hit the Russians as hard as possible. We could not do anything else. They...will have started the war, we will finish it. That is all the policy [I have]." Cited in Peter J. Roman, Eisenhower and the Missile Gap (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 82-84.

¹⁷⁹ See the descriptions of one U.S. first-strike plan in Kaplan, Wizards of Armageddon and Trachtenberg, History and Strategy.

internal debates. These predictions are described in this section and summarized, at the end of the section, in Tables 11 and 12.

Statements.

The Soviet threats about Berlin had two main elements. The first element was the threat to sign a peace treaty with the GDR and turn over control of the Berlin access routes to the East Germans. The second element was the threat to take actions (or allow the East Germans to take actions) after a treaty was signed that substantially raised the risks of war over Berlin, such as harassing Western convoys along the ground access routes, severing Western access to Berlin, or firing on Allied forces that tried to force their way through to Berlin. While signing a treaty with the GDR would have increased East-West tensions and somewhat raised the risk of war, harassing convoys, severing access, or firing on Western forces, would have dramatically increased the risks of escalation and nuclear war.

Reputation Hypothesis:

According to the logic of the reputation hypothesis, the Soviet decision to withdraw their original November 1958 ultimatum, and then their repeated willingness to delay and rescind their threats, should have substantially reduced Soviet credibility. This drop in credibility should be reflected in the private statements of American and British decision makers as they tried to predict whether the Soviets would sign the treaty with the GDR and, if they the signed the treaty, whether the Soviets would take steps which would seriously raise the chance of war with the West. The statements of American and British decision makers from early 1959 through 1961 should have rated Soviet credibility as

"low," and throughout the period these statements should reflect a decline in Soviet credibility.¹⁸⁰

Power/interests Hypothesis:

The power/interests hypothesis makes four predictions about Soviet credibility which should be reflected in the statements of Western decision makers. First, since signing a treaty and placing GDR officials on the autobahn would cause political problems for the Western allies, and since the West could do nothing to prevent the Soviets from doing this, Soviet threats to sign the treaty should have appeared credible. Second, since changes in the balance of power during this period had no effect on the West's ability to prevent a treaty between the Soviets and the GDR, the credibility of Soviet threats to sign the treaty and turn over the access routes should have remained constant throughout the period. Third, since the U.S. enjoyed strategic superiority over the Soviets, Soviet threats to take steps which substantially increased the risk of war (e.g. cutting access, firing on

¹⁸⁰ Skeptics might argue that the reputation hypothesis really makes no predictions about the credibility of Soviet threats to risk war after a treaty was signed because all of Khrushchev's retreats were on the issue of signing the treaty, not on the issue of what he would do after he signed it. This argument misses the mark for two reasons. First, the Soviet threat to sign the treaty and hand over control of the access routes to the East Germans should have been inherently more credible than the threat to risk war by cutting access because signing the treaty would be far less dangerous than cutting access along the autobahn. If Khrushchev was hesitating about signing a peace treaty with the GDR, Western decision makers using the reputation hypothesis should reason, then he will certainly hesitate to block the road to Berlin.

Second, the central concept of the reputation hypothesis is that commitments are interconnected. The Soviet willingness to carry out one of its threats toward West Berlin ought to, by the logic of the reputation theory, affect Soviet credibility to carry out its threats. If, on the other hand, the reputation hypothesis is defined so narrowly that backing down on one issue only creates a reputation for weakness on that exact issue, then for all practical purposes the reputation hypothesis is false because decision makers will not be able to use past behavior to predict future actions. The reputation hypothesis requires that commitments be interconnected, so backing down over signing the treaty should reduce credibility over cutting the access routes.

Western convoys) should not be credible. Fourth, the growth in Soviet strategic nuclear forces should have, over time, increased the credibility of Soviet threats to risk war.¹⁸¹

These predictions are summarized in Tables 11 and 12 at the end of this section.

Policies.

Drawing predictions from the reputation and power/interests hypotheses about the policies that Western leaders adopted during the Berlin Crises is more complicated than drawing predictions about the policymakers' statements about Soviet credibility. Many factors could affect the policies that a country adopts in reaction to a threat, including the credibility of the threat, the cost that would be incurred if the threat was carried out, the interests at stake, domestic political concerns, domestic institutional constraints on certain policies, etc. (See Figure 4 in Chapter 2) In order to use the fluctuations in Western policies as an indicator of changing Soviet credibility, I need to track changes in the other factors which might affect these Western policies.

Luckily, many of the factors which might affect Western policies were constant throughout the Berlin crises. For example, American and British interests in defending Berlin did not change from 1958-61, there were no changes in American and British domestic political institutions, and there were no important changes in domestic politics in the U.S. or U.K. regarding Berlin policy. But there were important changes in the costs that some members of the Western Alliance would pay if the crisis escalated to war. Therefore, to draw predictions from the reputation and power/interests hypotheses about changes in Western policies toward Berlin I must consider 1) what each hypothesis predicts about the change in Soviet credibility over time, and 2) the changes from 1958

¹⁸¹ As the Soviet arsenal increased, the expected costs to the U.S. of launching a nuclear strike against the Soviet union grew. Knowing this, according to the power/interests hypothesis, the Soviets should have discounted American threats and been emboldened to take greater risks over Berlin.

through 1961 in the costs that the U.S. and U.K. would suffer if the dispute over Berlin escalated to war.

To be clear, the question in this paper is “what causes credibility?” (This is highlighted in the upper left-corner of Figure 4.) I use the change in American and British policies as one indicator of shifts in Soviet credibility over time. But to draw inferences about changes in credibility from shifts in policies, I must consider how the other factors which affect American and British policies were changing at the same time.

Changes in the expected costs of a war, and changes in Soviet credibility, should affect Western policies in predictable ways. A reduction in Soviet credibility should reduce the Allies’ need to compromise over Berlin and allow them to take “hard-line” policies in the crises. A reduction in the costs which the allies would bear if the crises escalated to war should also allow the West to take increasingly hard-line policies. On the other hand, an increase in Soviet credibility, or an increase in the costs that the West would suffer in a war, should make the West adopt more conciliatory and flexible policies.

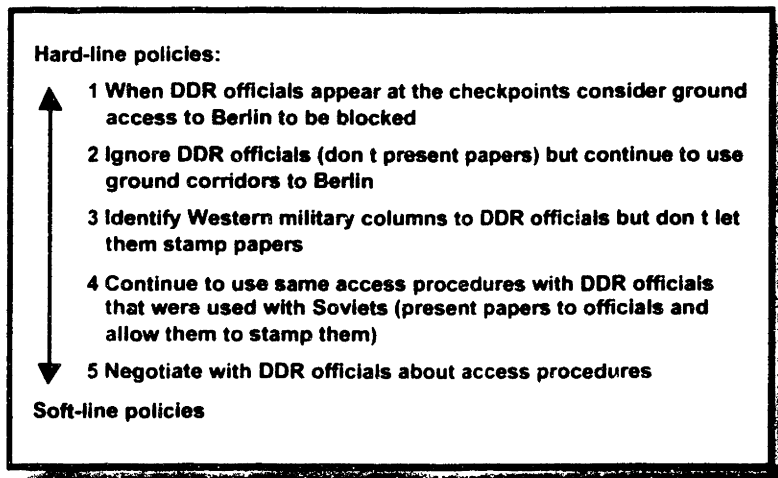
For example, if the reputation hypothesis predicts a decline in Soviet credibility during a time in which there was no change in the cost of war, the hypothesis would predict a shift to more “hawkish” policies from the West. If Soviet credibility declined while the cost of war to the West was also declining, we would still predict a hawkish shift in Western policies. But if Soviet credibility dropped during a time in which the cost of war to the West rose, then we would have no clear prediction about the changes in Western policies. In that case, the decline in credibility would suggest more hawkish Western policies, but the increase in the costs of war would suggest more cautious Western policies.

So what do the reputation and power/interests hypotheses, together with changes in the costs of war, predict about American and British policies during the Berlin Crises? What were the policy options that the West considered?

The Berlin Crises raised two central planning questions for the NATO allies. The first question was: If the Soviets gave control of Western access roads to the GDR, how much de facto recognition should the West give to the East Germans? The second question involved the course of action that the West would take if ground access to Berlin was severed.

The Allies discussed a range of options for dealing with GDR officials along the access corridors. (See Table 9) The central goal of the West in the crises was to retain as much of the status quo as possible, and grant the East Germans as little recognition as possible, without fighting a war over Berlin.

**Table 9:
Alternative Western Policies Toward DDR Officials from Hard-line
to Soft-line**

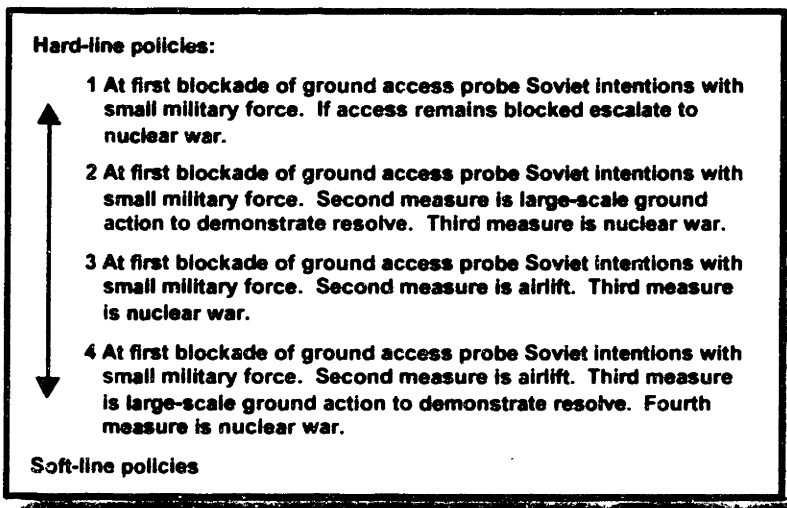


At one extreme, some Western officials argued that the West should refuse to deal with East German officials in any capacity. According to this view, the West should consider East German control over the access routes as tantamount to a blockade, and should react to this scenario by executing Western contingency plans for restoring access to Berlin. At the other extreme, the soft-line policy was to negotiate with the East German

officials and seek permission from them to continue using the air- and ground-access routes to supply the Western garrisons in Berlin.

With respect to military contingency plans, the West again debated several options. (See Table 10) The trade-off that decision makers faced here was between provocative reactions that could force the Soviets to back down but would substantially increase the risk of war, and less-provocative steps that would be less-likely to force the Soviets to back down but also less-likely to escalate to war.

Table 10:
Alternative Western Contingency Plans from Hard-line to Soft-line



What do the reputation and power/interests hypotheses predict about U.S. and U.K. policies during the Berlin crises? Should they have become more "hawkish" during the crisis or more "dovish"?

Power/interests Hypothesis:

The power/interests hypothesis predicts that American assessments of Soviet credibility to risk war should have been increasing from 1958 through 1961. At the same

time, from an American perspective, the costs of war over Berlin were rising. The increase in Soviet intercontinental nuclear forces increasingly brought the U.S. homeland into jeopardy in the case of a war. Because Soviet credibility was increasing, and the costs of war to the United States were increasing, American policies should have become more dovish over time.

The power/interests hypothesis also predicts that British assessments of Soviet credibility should have been increasing from 1958-61. During this same period, the costs of war with the Soviet Union did not change significantly. As early as 1959, British analyses concluded that even after an American first strike, the Soviets would have enough bombers and missiles to hit Britain with 30-50 nuclear warheads.¹⁸² The increase in the Soviet capability to deliver warheads against Britain from 1958-61 was superfluous; 30-50 nuclear detonations would have destroyed Britain. The increase in Soviet credibility, and the lack of change in the costs of war to the U.K., suggest that the British should have become more dovish over time.

Reputation Hypothesis:

The reputation hypothesis predicts that American assessments of Soviet credibility should have decreased from 1958-61. At the same time, the costs of a war to the United States were increasing. These two forces, pushing in opposite directions, make it impossible to draw a clear prediction from the reputation hypothesis about the change in U.S. policies from 1958-61.

The reputation hypothesis predicts that British assessments of Soviet credibility should have been dropping from 1958-61. Because the costs of war to the U.K. were essentially constant throughout the Berlin crises (a nuclear war anytime from 1958-61

would have been devastating) the reputation hypothesis predicts that British policies should have become more hawkish throughout the crises.

A summary of these predictions can be found in Tables 11 and 12 at the end of this section.

Reasoning

The reputation and power/interests hypotheses make clear predictions about the type of evidence that American and British decision makers should use as they discuss Soviet credibility. According to the reputation hypothesis, Western decision makers should frequently refer to Khrushchev's pattern of failing to carry out threats against Berlin. They should talk about missed deadlines and empty ultimatums. According to the power/interests hypothesis, decision makers should talk about the balance of power and interests in the present standoff rather than Soviet behavior in the past.

The predictions drawn from these theories are summarized below in Tables 11 and 12.¹⁸³

¹⁸² See British Chief of Staff Report on "Effects of Nuclear War on Great Britain." C.O.S., Defe 4/XXXX, PRO.

¹⁸³ Whenever the theories predict a reduction in credibility, I list the predictions as "decreasing or very low." Predictions about increases in credibility are listed as "increasing or very high." I do this because my data is not precise enough to identify shifts from "high credibility" to "very high credibility" or from "low credibility" to "very low credibility." In a similar vein, if the theory predicts "more dovish policies" I list the prediction as "more dovish/very dovish" because my data is not precise enough to distinguish movement from very dovish to very, very dovish policies."

Table 11:
Predictions From the Reputation and Power/Interests Hypotheses About American Decision Making During the Berlin Crises

		Reputation Hypothesis	Power/Int. Hypothesis
Statements	Sov. Cred. to Sign Treaty	Initial Assessment: Low	High
		Change Over Time: Decreasing/Very Low	Constant
	Sov. Cred. to Risk War	Initial Assessment: Low	Low
		Change Over Time: Decreasing/Very Low	Increasing/Very High
Policies	Dealings With DDR	No Prediction	More dovish/Very dovish
	Military Contingency Plans	No Prediction	More dovish/Very Dovish
Reasoning		History	Power and Interests

Table 12:
Predictions From the Reputation and Power/Interests Hypotheses About British Decision Making During the Berlin Crises

		Reputation Hypothesis	Power/Int. Hypothesis
Statements	Sov. Cred. to Sign Treaty	Initial Assessment:	Low High
		Change Over Time:	Decreasing/ Very Low Constant
	Sov. Cred. to Risk War	Initial Assessment:	Low Low
		Change Over Time:	Decreasing/ Very Low Increasing/ Very High
Policies	Dealings With DDR	More Hawkish/ Very Hawkish	More Dovish/ Very Dovish
	Military Contingency Plans	More Hawkish/ Very Hawkish	More Dovish/ Very Dovish
Reasoning		History	Power and Interests

Testing the Predictions

Each of the predictions listed above can now be tested against the evidence from Berlin. First I report on the statements that American and British decision makers made about the credibility of Soviet threats to sign the peace treaty and to risk war over Berlin. Next, I describe the policies that the U.S. and U.K. advocated throughout the crises. Finally, I describe the evidence that American and British decision makers used during their internal debates over Soviet credibility.

Statements.

Throughout the crises, American decision makers expected the Soviets to sign a peace treaty with the East Germans. This assessment never wavered. There was, however, change over time in the U.S. assessment of Soviet credibility to take steps which substantially increased the risk of war over Berlin. In 1958-59, these threats were dismissed. By the end of the crises, American decision makers worried frequently that the Soviets might push things too far and trigger a war. U.S. decision makers never worried that the Soviets would intentionally start a world war; they worried that the increasingly confident Soviets would take risky steps which would entail high risks of escalation.

From 1958 through 1961 American leaders were convinced that Khrushchev would carry out his threat to sign a treaty with the GDR and then turn over the access routes to the East Germans. U.S. Secretary of State Dulles said this publicly in November 1958, and he indicated that the U.S. would be willing to live with GDR officials manning the autobahn checkpoints, virtually giving Khrushchev a "green light" to go ahead with the treaty.¹⁸⁴ In private, Dulles' assessment was the same: he told Prime Minister Macmillan during the Secretary of State's visit to London in early 1959 that Khrushchev was likely to sign the treaty.¹⁸⁵ These views were shared by the other senior officials of the Eisenhower Administration and never changed. The top officials in the Kennedy Administration held the same position. The new Administration spent much of the summer of 1961 scrambling to develop a Berlin policy, and among the hundreds of

¹⁸⁴ Dulles said publicly that it was "a foregone conclusion" that Khrushchev would sign a treaty with the GDR and hand over control over the access routes. Dulles' comments were reported in the New York Times, November 19, 1958, p. 1. Cited in Jack M. Schick, The Berlin Crisis: 1958-1962 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 32.

¹⁸⁵ Record of discussion between Dulles and the UK Secretary of State in the afternoon on 4 February 1959, PREM 11/2715, PRO.

assessments of Soviet credibility that the process generated, there was virtually unanimity that Khrushchev would sign his treaty as threatened.¹⁸⁶ Llewelyn Thompson, the influential American Ambassador to the Soviet Union, repeatedly reported to the Department of State and to Secretary Rusk that he expected Khrushchev to sign the treaty.¹⁸⁷ In July 1961 John McCloy, in Russia on behalf of the President, told Khrushchev that Kennedy expected the Soviets to sign the treaty with the East Germans.¹⁸⁸

American statements about Soviet credibility to risk war over Berlin did change over time. In 1958-59 the Eisenhower Administration dismissed Soviet threats to risk war over Berlin. But by 1960, and throughout 1961, U.S. decision makers grew increasingly concerned that the Soviets would pursue a dangerous strategy of "salami tactics" which could escalate to war.

Secretary Dulles told everyone who would listen late in 1958 and early 1959 that the Soviets were bluffing about Berlin. He dismissed the notion that the Soviets would willingly fight over Berlin in his conversations with the French, British, and within the

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Record of meeting held in the U.S. State Department 4 April, 1961, FO 371/160534, PRO; and Record of a meeting held on President Kennedy's Yacht on Thursday, 6th April, 1961, at 4 p.m., CAB 129/105 C. (61) 54, PRO.

¹⁸⁷ Telegram from Ambassador Thompson to Secretary Rusk, 16 March 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 11, FRUS. Thompson wrote: "I do not believe that Khrushchev is bluffing and believe that he will at least go through with his separate peace treaty." Memo from Ambassador Thompson to Secretary Rusk, June 19, 1961, Folder: Germany-Berlin, General 6/16/61, Box: 81, National Security Files, JFKL. On another occasion: "My own view is that...he would in these circumstances [no ongoing negotiations with the West] almost certainly conclude separate treaty..." See also, Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope," pp. 184-185.

¹⁸⁸ Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 28 July 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 84, FRUS. There would be no reason to tell Khrushchev this unless it accurately reflected Kennedy's views because, like Dulles' statement in 1958, this essentially gave Khrushchev a green light to sign the treaty.

Eisenhower Administration.¹⁸⁹ Other U.S. officials agreed with this assessment. Eisenhower himself dismissed the Soviet bravado, denigrating calls from Congress to increase defense spending in reaction to Soviet threats as an "over-reaction." The Soviets, he said, wanted "to upset the United States" but certainly not to fight them.¹⁹⁰ The Eisenhower Administration recognized the risk of Soviet miscalculation but believed that the Soviets could be convinced that the U.S. would fight for Berlin, and that there would, therefore, be no war.

By 1960, the U.S. assessment of Soviet credibility to take steps over Berlin that involved substantial risks of war had changed. There was still widespread agreement that the Soviets "undoubtedly" wanted to avoid war,¹⁹¹ but, increasingly, senior American leaders worried that the Soviets would take real risks and perhaps trigger a process that led to unwanted escalation.¹⁹² Ambassador Thompson wrote a series of frantic telegrams from Moscow to the State Department in which he warned that a Soviet-East German

¹⁸⁹ Dulles told the British Ambassador to the U.S. "that his own view was that the Russians would not risk a war for the sake of putting through their plans for Berlin." Telegram from Caccia to Foreign Office, telegram number 184, 21 January 1959, PREM 11, 2715, PRO. He told the French Foreign Minister that "The Soviet Union would not want war because it was in a position of 'relative weakness.'" Burr, pp. 193-94.

¹⁹⁰ Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, pp. 209-212.

¹⁹¹ Telegram from Ambassador Thompson to Secretary Rusk, 16 March 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 11, FRUS. According to the British Foreign Office, "Broadly speaking, the Americans and ourselves both believe that the Russians do not want war over Berlin..." Memorandum by E. E. Tomkins (UK) on Berlin contingency planning, 13 March 1961, FO 371/160485, PRO. See also Record of a meeting held on President Kennedy's Yacht on Thursday, 6th April, 1961, at 4 p.m., CAB 129/105 C. (61) 54, PRO; Memo from Arleigh Burke to JCS, June 19, 1961, Folder: Germany-Berlin, General 6/16/61, Box: 81, National Security Files, JFKL; Position Paper Prepared in the Department of State, 25 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 26, FRUS.

¹⁹² Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union (Thompson) to the Department of State, February 4, 1961. 762.00/2-461, Central Files, Department of State, FRUS.; Memorandum of Conversation, 31 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 31, FRUS.; Briefing paper for the President. The U.S. view was summarized in a briefing paper given to the President to prepare for his meetings with de Gaulle. It said: "Although Khrushchev is undoubtedly reluctant to risk a major war, the real danger is that he might risk just such a war without realizing he is doing so." See Position Paper Prepared in the Department of State, 25 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 26, FRUS.

peace treaty “would bring about [a] highly dangerous situation and one which could get out of hand,” and, three months later, that a peace treaty “will lead to [a] really major crisis and that war will hang in the balance...”¹⁹³ The State Department summarized their views of the situation by noting that Khrushchev did not want war, but “the real danger is that he might risk just such a war without realizing he is doing so.”¹⁹⁴

British perceptions of Soviet credibility were very consistent throughout the crisis. The British never stopped believing Soviet threats to sign the treaty. The Foreign Office, the Foreign Minister, and Prime Minister Macmillan all held to their initial beliefs that the treaty was imminent.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ For the first telegram, see Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union (Thompson) to the Department of State, February 4, 1961. 762.00/2-461, Central Files, Department of State, FRUS. For second telegram see, Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 24 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 25, FRUS.

¹⁹⁴ Position Paper Prepared in the Department of State, 25 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 26, FRUS. See also Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 27 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 28, FRUS, in which Thompson writes “...I consider [that] K has so deeply committed his personal prestige and that of Soviet Union to some action on Berlin and German problems that if we take [a] completely negative stand suggested by Berlin, this would probably lead to developments in which chances of war or ignominious Western retreat are close to 50-50.” See also Harriman’s report to Kennedy, reported in Schick, *The Berlin Crisis: 1958-1962*, p. 91. In August Rusk warned Kennedy that “Even a small [U.S.] probe could quickly get out of control.” Record of Meeting, 3 August 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 91, FRUS.

¹⁹⁵ Macmillan told his Cabinet in 1959 that the Soviets “were resolved to go forward with their policy of concluding a peace treaty with East Germany.” Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 4 March 1959, CAB 128/33 C.C. (59) 14th (1), PRO. The British assessment did not change over time. In February 1961 the Foreign Office reported that “Khrushchev...means what he says in threatening to sign a separate peace treaty with the D.D.R. if he cannot reach a negotiated agreement with the West. He seems to be prepared to wait a bit in order to see whether President Kennedy is more flexible than his predecessor but it does not look as if he will wait beyond the summer.” Memorandum from Foreign Office to Macmillan on Soviet foreign policy, 13 February 1961, FO 371/159547, PRO. Later in 1961 the Foreign Secretary wrote to the Cabinet: “It is now clear that Mr. Khrushchev intends to bring the Berlin question to a head this year. He will probably take the occasion of the XXIInd Party Congress on the 17th October for an announcement of the signature of a separate peace treaty with East Germany, unless in the meantime something has occurred to deter him.” Memorandum from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on Berlin, 26 July 1961, CAB 129/106 C. (61) 116, PRO. In the Cabinet, a week later, “The Foreign Secretary said that Mr. Khrushchev seemed to be determined to conclude a separate peace treaty with the [GDR] and would probably use the occasion of the Communist Party Congress on 17th October to announce that the signature of such a treaty was imminent.” Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 28 July 1961, CAB 128/35 C.C. (61) 45th (4), PRO.

British perceptions of Soviet credibility to risk war were also generally consistent over time. The British shared the American view that the Soviets would not intentionally risk war over Berlin¹⁹⁶ but, from the very beginning of the crisis, British leaders were very worried that the Soviets might miscalculate and take actions that led to war. While the U.S. officials worked to reduce the problem of miscalculation by reiterating the Western commitment to Berlin, the British worked to avoid it by looking for symbolic concessions to Soviet demands. The British did not believe the Soviets would intentionally begin a war with the West; they worried that Khrushchev's blunders and American aggressiveness would combine to start a war that no one wanted.

Policies

The American position on how to deal with GDR officials at the checkpoints hardened *slightly* from 1959 to 1960 but then returned, during the Kennedy Administration, back to the original position. The American policy on contingency plans grew more dovish as time went on.

When the crisis began in 1958, NATO policy was that if the Soviets replaced their officials with East German border guards, the guards would be permitted to fulfill all the same functions as the Soviets had performed. Specifically, the convoys would present papers to the East German officials which identified the convoy as part of the West Berlin occupying force. The officials would be allowed to stamp the convoy's papers, implicitly giving their permission of the convoys to use the access routes.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ See Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 4 March 1959. CAB 128/33 C.C. (59) 14th (1), PRO. The Foreign Office reports: Memorandum from the British Foreign Office on the upcoming talks in Washington, 20 March 1961, FO 371/160485, PRO.

¹⁹⁷ The Western position in 1958 was that GDR officials could process Western convoys on that autobahn as long as they continued the same procedures previously carried out by the Soviets. Memorandum from the Director of the Office of German Affairs (Hillenbrand) to the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Kohler), 25 April 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 21, FRUS. On November 24th, 1958,

In late 1958, a struggle erupted within the Eisenhower Administration over Western policy toward GDR officials on the autobahn. The "doves," including Secretary Dulles, argued in favor of the current "soft-line" procedures. The "hawks" argued that accepting a stamp from GDR officials was like getting a visa, and it implied that the GDR officials could control -- and therefore refuse -- Western access to Berlin. The hawks won the day, and the U.S. forced a change of policy on its allies. From early 1959 until the end of the Eisenhower Administration, official Western policy was to refuse any stamps from GDR officials.¹⁹⁸

When the Kennedy Administration came into office they reviewed Western defense policies. The renewed Soviet threats at the Vienna Summit in June 1961 focused the Administration on the Berlin problem. By August the Administration had sorted through its options and decided that only two things mattered in the crisis -- in Kennedy's words: "our presence in Berlin, and our access to Berlin."¹⁹⁹ Whether the Allied convoys had

Eisenhower told Dulles that if the Soviets handed over their responsibilities in the access corridors to Berlin to the East Germans "we would have to go along" and that if the East Germans continued to administer the routes as the Soviets had before them "the U.S. really had no basis for reacting violently." Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, pp. 194-96. Dulles agreed, and he told this to the West German Ambassador. See Burr, 185-86.

¹⁹⁸ Burr 193-94; Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, pp. 197-200. Telegram from UK Ambassador Caccia to Foreign Office, telegram 488, 18 February 1959, PREM 11/2715, PRO. It is not clear that Eisenhower himself was ever persuaded that the West should make a stance on issues like stamping documents. See Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope," November 1958-January 1959, *Diplomatic History*, 18 (Spring 1994), p. 195. According to Burr, "Eisenhower...evidently remained unconvinced of the danger of contacts with the East Germans. [Eisenhower] observed that...[the United States had] low-level contacts with governments like mainland China and the GDR and that recognition had never been implied." Burr, p. 195. Nevertheless, the "no stamps" policy persisted right to the end of the Eisenhower years. "After a Soviet withdrawal...the [Western] powers would put into effect new procedures for the purpose of identifying Allied movements as being entitled to unrestricted access to Berlin. The procedures involve handing over to the East German personnel at each check-point a copy of the Allied travel order, but not accepting the stamping of a travel order as a condition of passage." Memorandum from the Foreign Ministers of France, the UK, and the US to their Heads of Government on Berlin Contingency Planning, 18 May, 1960, PREM 11/3005, PRO.

¹⁹⁹ Memorandum of Discussion in the National Security Council, 13 July 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 66, FRUS.

their papers stamped by Soviets or East Germans was irrelevant.²⁰⁰ As a senior Administration official explained, the U.S. was "not prepared to risk war over rubber stamps."²⁰¹

The American position on military contingency plans underwent a more fundamental shift during the Berlin crises. Since the early 1950s, U.S. policy had been that if access to Berlin was severed, a small military probe would attempt to advance along the autobahn. If the probe was stopped, the U.S. would escalate to war -- including nuclear strikes on the Soviet Union and the rest of the Communist Bloc.²⁰² These plans remained in place until the Kennedy Administration finished its review of military plans at the end of August 1961.²⁰³ The Kennedy Administration adopted a much more dovish position: if ground access to Berlin was clogged, the U.S. would send a small probe down the autobahn. If the probe was blocked, the West would begin an airlift. If the airlift was

²⁰⁰ The British Foreign Secretary told the Cabinet that "It seemed that the United States...now agreed that a requirement to obtain passes from the East German, instead of Soviet, authorities, would not of itself justify military action, and that the test should be whether allied access was in fact obstructed or the freedom of West Berlin threatened." See, Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 11 May 1961, CAB 128/35 C.C. (61) 27th (5), PRO. See also Sorensen, p. 585; Statement of US, UK and France to North Atlantic Council, 7 June 1961, FO 371/160486, PRO; Minutes of Meeting of the Interdepartmental Coordinating Group on Berlin, 26 July 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 82, FRUS.

²⁰¹ Record of meeting held in the U.S. State Department 4 April, 1961, FO 371/160534, PRO.

²⁰² According to NSC 5803, dated February 7, 1958, the U.S. would launch a general war with the Soviet Union after only limited attempts to break a blockade of Berlin. See Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Kennedy, 5 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 22, FRUS. The text of NSC 5083 can be found in FRUS Vol. 9, 631-644.

²⁰³ As McNamara reported to the President, the plans in force at the end of the Eisenhower Administration imply that the U.S. "will be prepared to go immediately to general war after using only limited military force to attempt to reopen access to Berlin." See Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Kennedy, 5 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 22, FRUS.

Senior members of the Eisenhower Administration, including the President, did grow increasingly uncomfortable with the lack of options in the massive retaliation doctrine and the dangers of the growing Soviet nuclear arsenal. But, as Roman demonstrates, Eisenhower refused to abandon massive retaliation for a more flexible alternative. Roman writes that records of Eisenhower's private statements...reveal a willingness to employ wholesale nuclear strikes against the Soviet Union and Communist China without reservation or interruption. Eisenhower envisioned no alternative in a nuclear war except the total

unsuccessful, a large ground force would try to fight its way to Berlin. Only after the large ground force was engaged would the West move to implement its nuclear options.²⁰⁴

British views on these policy questions were different from the American position and, in contrast to the American policies, were constant throughout the crises. From 1958-1961 British officials found it trivial and dangerous to quibble over stamping papers.²⁰⁵ They agreed in 1959 to the official Western position that no stamps would be accepted from GDR officials, but only under "great duress."²⁰⁶ They never supported the Western policy on this issue and looked for opportunities to undermine it.²⁰⁷ The eventual U.S. reversal on dealing with the GDR was met with great satisfaction in the U.K.²⁰⁸

destruction of the Soviet Union since the conflict would be fought to the finish." Peter J. Roman, Eisenhower and the Missile Gap (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 86-87.

²⁰⁴ Report by Dean Acheson, 28 June 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 49, FRUS: "As opposed to the situation of 6 or 7 years ago, we are agreed that, under present conditions, military action re Berlin is an action of the last resort...Measures such as an economic embargo, an air lift, and a 'roaring debate' in the UN should all be resorted to prior to shooting....If Khrushchev shoots down an airlift, the move into the second phase may come rapidly. The US paper proposes to engage East German and Soviet forces with significant Allied conventional forces to confront Khrushchev with the decision before nuclear war....If Khrushchev is not deterred, then resort to nuclear weapons would follow."

²⁰⁵ Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, p. 197-201; Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope," p. 187; Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 11 March 1959, CAB 128/33 C.C. (59) 14th (5), PRO.

²⁰⁶ In a meeting of the Interdepartmental Coordinating Group on Berlin, Acheson notes that the British had agreed to the current "no stamping" doctrine under "great duress" and that they don't want to make stamping a casus belli. Minutes of Meeting of the Interdepartmental Coordinating Group on Berlin, 26 July 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 82, FRUS.

²⁰⁷ The British felt that the French and Germans were free-riding on their efforts at moderating U.S. policy. The British were paying the price of looking weak while the French and West Germans pretended, in the British view, to accept U.S. positions which they actually opposed. The British consciously decided to stop opposing the U.S. openly on this and, if necessary, argue against the position later if push came to shove -- presumably with French and FRG support. Cite.

²⁰⁸ Record of a meeting held at the White House on Wednesday, 5th April, 1961, at 3:15 p.m., CAB 129/105 C. (61) 54, PRO;

British policy regarding contingency plans was also consistent throughout the period. From the beginning of the crisis in 1958 through 1961 the British argued that an airlift was the best response to a Soviet or East German restriction on ground access. They agreed to participate in the preparation of hard-line contingency plans, but only under the condition that the existence of the plans did not, in any way, commit the Western governments to execute them. At the same time, the British worked secretly to prevent the West from executing any of the hard-line contingency plans. For example, they argued persistently that even though West Berlin was strictly the responsibility of the British, French and Americans, no Western military operation could be launched to reopen access to Berlin without the approval of NATO. The British were explicit during secret, internal meetings that they wanted to bring NATO into the discussion because they knew NATO would never approve a risky operation to free Berlin.²⁰⁹ The British consistently fought against plans for ground operations and in favor of plans for an airlift. When the U.S. finally adopted the British position, the British welcomed that change with considerable relief.

²⁰⁹ "...a land operation could only be undertaken with the full agreement of all the NATO nations and also, in our own case, of the Commonwealth countries." Chiefs of Staff Committee Meeting, 1 January 1959, Defe 4/115 C.O.S. (59) 1st (1), PRO, and Chiefs of Staff Committee Meeting, 26 May 1959, Defe 4/117 C.O.S. (59) 32nd (1), PRO. The British were confident that it would be impossible to get a majority of NATO members to support a ground operation up the autobahn, let alone get the unanimous support that the Alliance would require for approval. "It appeared that the [NATO] Council held much the same views as the Chiefs of Staff on the use of armed force to break a blockade," namely, the NATO Council thought such an operation would be foolhardy. Chiefs of Staff Committee Meeting, 27 January 1959, Defe 4/115 C.O.S. (59) 8th (2), PRO.

The British were looking for ways to undermine Western contingency plans without opposing them directly. For example, the American General Lucius Norstad led a staff of Western military planners (called LIVE OAK) to develop mutually agreeable contingency plans for Berlin crises. The British initially opposed General Norstad's request to make his staff report directly to him rather than to their own governments. The British opposed this because they feared American hawkishness and wanted to prevent the preparation of a series of plans which, to them, were unacceptable. Revealingly, the British changed their position on Norstad's staff when, "[i]n a subsequent private conversation General Norstad had explained that by the arrangements he had proposed he hoped to exercise some restraint over the more

Reasoning

American and British decision makers were rarely explicit in their conversations about the evidence they used to evaluate Soviet credibility. Out of the many thousands of pages of archival records on U.S. and U.K. decision making, there were few explicit statements which directly revealed the evidence that Western decision makers were relying on to evaluate Soviet credibility (e.g. the Soviet record of withdrawals or the balance of power and interests). Nevertheless, most of the evidence that I did find supports the power/interests hypothesis; almost none of the statements is consistent with the reputation hypothesis.

For example, during the debate in the State Department in 1959 that resulted in the adoption of the more hawkish position on GDR officials. Department of State officials argued that it was "U.S. nuclear superiority" that "would ensure Soviet acquiescence" if it came to a confrontation.²¹⁰ Dulles, speaking to the French Foreign Minister, said that the Soviets would not fight over Berlin because of their "relative weakness" they had too few bombers and "an inadequate supply of missiles."²¹¹ On the British side, decision makers worried about the consequences of American hawkish contingency plans but they understood the source of American confidence: "The American [position] appeared to be based on the assumption that, during the next two or three years, until they reached a state of nuclear sufficiency, the Russians would always give way under pressure." After all: "If a global war did occur in the near future it was the United Kingdom and the European members of NATO rather than the United States who would suffer..."²¹² As for their

dangerous elements in the Pentagon." See, Chiefs of Staff Committee Meeting, 14 April 1959, Defe 4/117 C.O.S. (59) 26th (3), PRO.

²¹⁰ Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope," p. 190.

²¹¹ Burr, "Avoiding the Slippery Slope," p. 193-94.

²¹² Chiefs of Staff Committee Meeting, 1 January 1959, Defe 4/115 C.O.S. (59) 1st (1), PRO.

own position, the Foreign Office commented that "Khrushchev's willingness to fight the West over the areas of disagreement depends not on his varying foreign policy approach -- his mood of détente or confrontation -- but on the military realities" and "if the military balance remains as now, or if the West achieves military superiority, then I do not think that we need be nervous in our dealings with the Soviet Union even though the Soviet Government started to talk in a belligerent way..."²¹³

As for straight-forward reputation analyses, the only example I have found from the U.S. and British leaders was the statement made during a British cabinet meeting that "though Mr. Khrushchev had been threatening for some time to conclude a peace treaty with East Germany, he had not done so; and this might mean that it would not be to the advantage of the Soviet Government to resolve the problem in this way."²¹⁴ It should be noted that this statement was not accompanied by any hardening of the British position.²¹⁵

²¹³ Memorandum by British Foreign Office on Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence, 10 October 1960, FO 371/159547, PRO.

²¹⁴ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, Tuesday 6 June 1961, CAB 128/35 C.C. (61) 30th (7), PRO.

²¹⁵ I found one other example of straight-forward reputation analysis. In 1961 De Gaulle told Kennedy that "...for two and a half years, Mr. Khrushchev has been saying and repeating that his prestige is engaged in the Berlin question and that he will have to have a solution of it in six months, and then again in six months and then still in six months. This seems to indicate that Mr. Khrushchev does not want war. If he had wanted war about Berlin he would have acted already." Memorandum of Conversation, 31 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 30, FRUS. This is not evidence that bears directly on either of my cases -- American and British decision making during the Berlin crises -- but it is a clear example of the use of reputation.

There is a good reason, however, to not take de Gaulle's statement at face value. Since early 1959 de Gaulle had been telling the Americans and British that Khrushchev's threats were not serious. The British Foreign office reported in February 1959 that de Gaulle "remained certain that Khrushchev was not prepared to push things to the point of war and that if the West remained calm and firm in the assertion of its rights there was not likely to be any real interference with our communications with Berlin." Telegram from the Foreign Office to the UK Embassy in Moscow, telegram number 383, 27 February 1959, PREM 11/2715, PRO. There was no change in de Gaulle's assessment of Khrushchev's credibility as a result of his pattern of withdrawals.

Assessing the Reputation and Power/interests Hypotheses: Summary

The Berlin crises offer very powerful evidence against the reputation hypothesis. In the case of American decision making, the reputation hypothesis only passed one of five predictions -- and the correct prediction was also consistent with the power/interests hypothesis. The power/interests theory, on the other hand, passed six of seven predictions. (See Table 13.) Furthermore, the failed prediction -- that U.S. policies would become more dovish toward GDR officials -- is a "close call." The policies did become more dovish during the Kennedy Administration, but they merely reversed the hardening of the position that occurred during the Eisenhower period. This is hardly an alarming shortcoming for the power/interests hypothesis.

Table 13:
Predictions From the Reputation and Power/Interests Hypotheses About
American Decision Making During the Berlin Crises

		Reputation Hypothesis	Power/Int. Hypothesis
Statements	Sov. Cred. to Sign Treaty	Initial Assessment: Low	High
		Change Over Time: Decreasing/ Very Low	Constant
	Sov. Cred. to Risk War	Initial Assessment: Low	Low
		Change Over Time: Decreasing/ Very Low	Increasing/ Very High
Policies	Dealings With DDR	No Prediction	More dovish/ Very Dovish
	Military Contingency Plans	No Prediction	More dovish/ Very Dovish
Reasoning		History	Power and Interests

The reputation hypothesis fared even worse in the case of the British decision making, failing all seven predictions. See Table 14. The power/interests hypothesis passed five of seven predictions.

Table 14:
Predictions From the Reputation and Power/Interests Hypotheses About British Decision Making During the Berlin Crises

	Reputation Hypothesis	Power/Int. Hypothesis
Statements	Sov. Cred. to Sign Treaty	Initial Assessment: L^w High
		Change Over Time: Decreasing/ Very L^w Low Constant
	Sov. Cred. to Risk War	Initial Assessment: L^w L^w
		Change Over Time: Decreasing/ Very L^w Low Increasing/ Very L^w High
Policies	Dealings With DDR	More Hawkish/ Very Hawkish More Dovish/ Very Dovish
	Military Contingency Plans	More Hawkish/ Very Hawkish More Dovish/ Very Dovish
Reasoning	History	Power and Interests

Conclusions

The evidence that I find argues strongly against the reputation hypothesis. The evidence suggests that decision makers do not assess their adversaries' reputation during crises on the basis of the adversary's past behavior. Despite the fact that the Berlin crises of 1958-1962 present exceptionally easy cases for the reputation hypothesis, only 1 out of 12 predictions passed the test. This is a surprisingly poor showing for the reputation hypothesis. The power/interests hypothesis, by contrast, performed very well, passing 11

of its 14 predictions. This case suggests that decision makers are very unlikely to predict an adversary's behavior during a crisis on the basis of that adversary's past actions, and that they are much more likely to base their predictions on an assessment of the balance of power.

In November 1962, four years after Khrushchev made his first threats about Berlin, and immediately after the most humiliating defeat of Khrushchev's tenure, the Prime Minister Macmillan told his Cabinet: "The fact that the Soviet Government had agreed to withdraw their missiles and their aircraft from Cuba was not evidence of weakness but of realism. Mr. Khrushchev had made an opportunist move...[and] the move had failed. But Berlin was an entirely different question; not only was it of vital importance to the Soviet Government but the Russians had overwhelming conventional superiority in the area..."²¹⁶ He was still reasoning by interests and power and the Soviets still hadn't lost their credibility.

²¹⁶ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 27 November 1962, CAB 128/36 C.C. (62) 71st (1), PRO.

Chapter 5

**Testing the Reputation and Power/interests Hypotheses:
U.S. Assessments of Soviet Credibility During the Cuban Missile Crisis,
1962**

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In this chapter I test the reputation and power/interests hypotheses using American decision making during the Cuban missile crises. This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I briefly summarize the background and main events of the Cuban missile crises. I review the Soviet pattern of withdrawals prior to the Cuban missile crisis and I describe the balance of power – both the reality and the perception of the balance held by American decision makers. In the second section I draw predictions from the reputation and power/interests hypotheses about American decision making during the Cuban missile crisis. In the third section I test these predictions against evidence from the crisis. Finally, in the fourth section, I summarize the findings from this case.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

In the following section I briefly summarize the events of the Cuban missile crisis. I then describe in detail the balance of power during the crisis. Finally, I describe the specific predictions made by the reputation and power/interests hypothesis about U.S. decision making during the CMC.

History of the CMC

The Cuban Missile Crisis began on the heels of a series of superpower crises. In 1958 Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev issued a firm ultimatum about the status of Berlin: within six months, the U.S., France, and UK had to recognize the East German regime. If they failed to do so, they could no longer use ground or air access routes across East Germany to supply their garrisons in West Berlin. The Western allies refused to recognize

East Germany, warned the Soviets that cutting the access routes would cause war, and ignored the deadline. The Soviets backed down. A year later, the Soviets issued the same threat. Again there was an ultimatum over Berlin; again the West had six months to negotiate an end to their occupation of West Berlin; again Khrushchev threatened war. And again, when the West ignored the deadline, the Soviets backed down.²¹⁷

Soon after the Kennedy Administration took office in January 1961, the Soviets trotted out their familiar threats over Berlin. In June 1961, at the summit in Vienna, Khrushchev handed the President a note that re-issued the same ultimatum, re-established a six-month deadline, and warned dire consequences (a blockade of Berlin) if the West did not either pull their troops out of West Berlin or recognize the East German regime. Again, the deadline was ignored and Khrushchev backed down. By October 1962, when the Kennedy Administration discovered that Soviet medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) were being secretly installed in Cuba, the U.S. had plenty of experience with Khrushchev's threats. Three times in four years, Khrushchev had issued ultimata, threatened nuclear war, and backed down.²¹⁸

When the Kennedy Administration discovered Soviet missiles in Cuba, they viewed this new crisis as the latest round of crises over Berlin for three reasons. First, they assumed that Khrushchev deployed the missiles to Cuba in order to gain leverage over the West in a new Berlin crisis. In this sense, American decision makers believed, Berlin was the cause of CMC.²¹⁹ Second, the Kennedy Administration feared that a weak

²¹⁷ See Chapter 4, "Testing the Reputation and Power/Interests Hypotheses: American and British Decision Making During the Berlin Crises of 1958-61."

²¹⁸ Tests of the power/interests and reputation hypotheses in these three Berlin crises are the topic of Chapter 4 of this dissertation, "Testing the Reputation and Power/interests Hypotheses: American and British Decision Making During the Berlin Crises of 1958-61."

²¹⁹ There are innumerable papers, memos, and conversations which connect the missile deployment with the Berlin situation. See, for some representative examples, William Bundy, "Possible Soviet Courses of Action against Overseas Bases and their Vulnerability to Such Actions," October 20, 1962, Folder: Cuba,

U.S. response to the Soviet deployment would undermine the U.S. position in Berlin. The Administration believed that U.S. credibility – in the eyes of both allies and adversaries – depended on a firm response in Cuba.²²⁰ Third, the Administration feared that a firm response in Cuba – one that involved any military action against the island – would provoke a Soviet attack on Berlin. In the minds of the U.S. decision makers, the CMC was inextricably tied to Soviet threats against Berlin.²²¹ How did the crisis unfold?

On October 14th, an American U-2 spy plane flying near Cuba took photographs of what were quickly identified as Soviet MRBM sites. The film was developed and, by the morning of the 16th, the President was informed of the Soviet missiles. This began the Cuban missile crisis.

For nearly a week, an ad-hoc group of advisors, later designated the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (or the “Ex Comm”), met in secret to formulate a U.S. response to the Soviet deployment. The group initially discussed five broad options: 1) an ultimatum to Khrushchev to remove the missiles; 2) a blockade of Cuba to “squeeze” missiles out; 3) a limited air strike against the missile sites to destroy them in a *fait accompli*; 4) a large air strike that would hit a broad set of Cuban military

General, Box: 36, National Security Files, JFKL; “Cuba and Berlin: The Basic Relationship,” October 19, 1962, Folder: Cuba, General, Box: 36, National Security Files, JFKL; “Cuba and Berlin -- Some Hypothetical Questions,” Author unknown, October 20, 1962, Folder: Cuba, General, Box: 36, National Security Files, JFKL; W. W. Rostow, “Memo to the Secretary,” October 22, 1962 Folder: Cuba, General, Box: 36, National Security Files, JFKL. The CIA believed, even after the crisis, that the standoff had been started by Khrushchev to get leverage over Berlin. See “Current Intelligence Weekly Review,” 7 December 1962, Cuba: Subjects, Intelligence Material, December 1962, Box 51, JFKL.

²²⁰ Again, there are many documents which make this point. See for example Kennedy’s statement to British Prime Minister Macmillan: JFK: “The clandestine way that the Soviets have made their buildup in Cuba would have unhinged us in all of Latin America. To allow it to continue would have thrown into question all our statements about Berlin.” Quotation is from: “Memorandum of Conversation between the President and Macmillan,” October 22, 1962, Cuba General Macmillan Telephone Conversations 10/62-11/62, NSF, JFKL.

²²¹ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964 (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 223-26

targets; and 5) the large air strike followed by an invasion. On October 20th, the group decided that the initial U.S. policy would be a blockade.²²²

On October 22nd, the President revealed the existence of the Soviet missiles to the world. He announced the initiation of the blockade (which in reality would not begin for several days), and explicitly warned the Soviets not to retaliate in Berlin.²²³ Over the course of the next four days, U.S. leaders worked on the details of the naval blockade and traded threatening letters with Khrushchev. The first break in the crisis came on October 26th. Late that evening, the U.S. received a long letter from Khrushchev that appeared to include a way out of the crisis. The Soviet deal was simple; if the U.S. made an open pledge not to invade Cuba, the Soviets would withdraw their missiles.²²⁴

On the morning of the 27th, just as the crisis appeared to ebb, three ominous events occurred in rapid succession. First, the Ex Comm received another note from Khrushchev recanting his earlier offer. Khrushchev's price was now higher; he would remove the missiles from Cuba only if the U.S. removed its Jupiter missiles from Turkey.²²⁵ Second, reports arrived that an American U-2 aircraft had accidentally strayed into Soviet airspace. Soviet fighters had chased the U-2, which retreated safely.²²⁶ The Kennedy

222 Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964 (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 233-34.

223 "Radio-TV Address of the President to the Nation," October 22, 1962, in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader (New York: New Press, 1992), pp. 150-54.

224 For the text, see "Khrushchev's Letter to Kennedy," October 26, 1962, in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader (New York: New Press, 1992), pp. 185-88.

225 "Khrushchev Communiqué to Kennedy," October 27, 1962, in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader (New York: New Press, 1992), pp. 197-99.

226 During this incident, U.S. fighter aircraft that scrambled to protect the U-2 were armed with nuclear-tipped air-to-air missiles. Fortunately, they did not arrive until the U-2 had left Soviet airspace and was safe.

Administration was reminded by this incident that actions outside their control could trigger rapid escalation. Third, another escalatory event occurred when Cuban and Soviet air defenses fired at several U.S. reconnaissance planes flying over Cuba. One of these planes, a U-2, was shot down and the pilot was killed.

By the evening of the 27th, the crisis seemed to be careening out of control. The President established a secret subgroup of the Ex Comm which agreed that Robert Kennedy would meet the Soviet Ambassador to the United States that evening. RFK was authorized to accept the second Soviet offer—the U.S. would trade the Jupiters to get the Soviet missiles out of Cuba. But the U.S. had one condition: the deal had to remain secret. Publicly the United States agreed to the Soviet's first letter; privately they agreed to the second. The Soviets accepted the U.S. proposal and the crisis was over by the morning of October 28th.²²⁷

Understanding The Balance of Power During CMC

Before it is possible to describe the balance of power during the Cuban missile crisis, two questions must be answered. First, *which* balance of power was relevant during the crisis? Possibilities include the conventional military balance in the Caribbean, the conventional balance in Europe, and the strategic nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union. Second, to the extent that the strategic nuclear balance played a key role in the crisis, what do the concepts “balance” and “superiority” mean in the context of nuclear weapons?

²²⁷ On Robert Kennedy's meeting with Dobrynin, see Jim Hershberg, “More On Bobby And The Cuban Missile Crisis,” and Hershberg, “Anatomy of a Controversy: Anatoly F. Dobrynin's Meeting with Robert F. Kennedy, Saturday, 27 October 1962,” both of which are published on the website of the excellent Cold War International History Project [CWIHP], which is part of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for

Relevant Aspects of the Balance of Power.

The balance of conventional military forces in the Caribbean, the conventional balance in Europe, and the strategic nuclear balance of power all affected the way the Kennedy Administration saw the balance of power during the crisis, but the Administration interpreted the balance in a way that focused on the strategic nuclear balance. Because the United States enjoyed conventional military superiority in the Caribbean, the Kennedy Administration predicted that *if* the Soviets retaliated for U.S. military action against Cuba, the retaliation would likely be against Berlin; around Berlin the conventional balance favored the Soviets. In the early 1960s, NATO had substantial conventional military power; in fact, the Kennedy Administration understood that NATO had a reasonable chance of successfully defending Western Europe from a major Soviet conventional attack.²²⁸ But a Berlin scenario would probably require NATO's conventional forces to mount an *offensive* into East German territory. NATO's ground forces may have been competitive against the Warsaw Pact in a defensive role, but they were not strong enough to launch an offensive into East Germany.²²⁹ In 1962, therefore, NATO had only one way to defend Berlin: nuclear weapons. In other words, the Soviets could trump U.S. conventional superiority in the Caribbean through their conventional superiority over Berlin. Whether or not the U.S. could deter an attack on Berlin or defeat the Soviets in a conflict would ultimately depend on the strategic nuclear balance.

Scholars. The CWIHP website is at: <http://cwihp.si.edu>. These articles contain the text of RFK's and Dobrynin's memoranda recording the content of their meetings.

²²⁸ See, for example, Enthoven and Smith, *How Much is Enough*, pp. 138-55.

²²⁹ In 1961 U.S. military planners warned that even a large NATO offensive up the autobahn to break a blockade of Berlin could probably be stopped by the East Germans alone without requiring assistance from the Soviet divisions deployed near Berlin. See Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Kennedy, 5 May 1961, Vol. 14, Doc. 22, FRUS.

This is not merely the logic of abstract deterrence theory; this is how the Kennedy Administration saw things at the time. President Kennedy understood the connection between U.S. strength in the Caribbean, Soviet strength in Berlin, and the role of the strategic nuclear balance as the final arbiter. As he said to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the middle of the CMC (on October 19th), "If we go in and take them out [destroy Soviet missiles in Cuba] on a quick air strike...there's bound to be a reprisal from the Soviet Union, there always is – they're just going in and taking Berlin by force. Which leaves me only one alternative, which is to fire nuclear weapons -- which is a hell of an alternative..."²³⁰

The only way for the U.S. to wage war over Berlin in 1962 would have been to initiate general nuclear war. *If* U.S. decision makers were thinking about Soviet credibility the way that the power/interests hypothesis suggests – if they were assessing Soviet credibility on the basis of the balance of power – the balance that they should have focused on was the strategic nuclear balance.

²³⁰ See Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 144. Note that in the transcription of the tapes by May and Zelikow, they interpret the President as saying: "their just going in and taking Berlin by force." I think that "they're just going in and taking Berlin by force" makes more sense and would sound identical on tape.

NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons in a Berlin contingency had also been discussed the previous day in an Ex Comm meeting (Oct 18, 11:00 AM). JFK and his advisors talked through the likely Soviet reaction to a US blockade of Cuba. JFK and others assumed that the Soviets would likely retaliate by overrunning Berlin. The President asked what the US response to this would be.

"General Taylor: Go to general war.

Bundy: It's then general war.

JFK: You mean a nuclear exchange?

Unidentified: Mmm-hmmm.

Unidentified: That's right."

The transcript for this conversation can be found in May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, p. 176.

This does not mean that the conventional balance in the Caribbean and the conventional balance in Europe did not matter. In fact, they did. It was precisely because the U.S. had superiority in the Caribbean that U.S. decision makers expected that any Soviet military response would be in Europe, and probably against Berlin. And it is precisely because of the conventional balance in Europe, and the fact that NATO had no good option for an offensive to free Berlin, that U.S. leaders understood that the crisis came down to the strategic nuclear balance.²³¹ If U.S. leaders used the balance of power to assess Soviet credibility during the CMC, they should have focused on the strategic nuclear balance.

Strategic Nuclear Forces, "Superiority," and Assessments of Soviet Credibility.

When assessing the balance of power between nuclear-armed adversaries, the meaningful aspects of the balance can be described using four categories. These are summarized in Table 15.

²³¹ In other words, U.S. leaders reasoned along the lines of the "escalation ladders" of nuclear deterrence theory. America's leaders assumed that if the Soviets retaliated they would do it in Berlin where they would have the advantage. So U.S. leaders calculated that their ability to prevail with either threats or force in Berlin would depend on America's ability to win at the higher run on the escalation "ladder" – strategic nuclear war.

Table 15:
First-strike Capabilities and Nuclear Superiority

Case	First-strike capability?		Who has nuclear superiority?	Are the threats of "B" credible?
	Country A	Country B		
1	Y	N	"A" has nuclear superiority.	Not credible.
2	N	N	Neither.	Depends on conventional balance.
3	Y	Y	Neither.	?? (Very dangerous situation)
4	N	Y	"B" has nuclear superiority.	Credible.

In case 1 country A has a first strike (i.e. disarming strike) capability, but country B does not. In this case, Country A has nuclear superiority in a meaningful sense. In case 2 neither country has a first-strike capability, so neither country has nuclear superiority. The third case is the most dangerous one. In this case, both countries have a good first-strike capability – neither country has a secure second strike force. In this case neither country has nuclear superiority; superiority belongs to whichever country attacks first. Finally, in case 4, country B has a first strike capability but country A does not. In this case country B has nuclear superiority.²³²

If decision makers assess their adversary's credibility during a crisis by looking at the strategic nuclear balance of power, and if the decision makers believe that the balance of power falls into the first category, they will be very confident and doubt their opponent's credibility. If the balance falls into either the second or third category, they should be far less confident and be more likely to see the opponent as more credible.²³³

²³² This way of thinking about nuclear weapons is heavily influenced by Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

²³³ There are differences between conditions two and three. In case 2, the credibility of a country's threats probably depend on the balance of conventional forces (or tactical nuclear forces) because neither

Finally, if decision makers believe that the nuclear balance falls into the fourth category, the adversary's credibility should be high. An adversary's credibility, by this framework, should be "lowest" in condition one, higher in condition two and three, and "high" in condition four.

An assessment of the nuclear balance of power is different than an assessment of a conventional military balance because nuclear weapons are fundamentally different than most conventional weapons. In general, conventional arsenals can only be evaluated in relative terms. The power of a country's conventional forces is only meaningful relative to the power of its adversaries' armed forces. Ten armored divisions are powerful relative to two divisions, but they are weak if the opponent has fifty. The power of most conventional military forces is relative because the primary function of these forces is to destroy the armed forces of a country's opponents.

Nuclear forces are different; they are absolute weapons. The difference comes from the fact that nuclear weapons can destroy an enemy's cities even if the enemy still possesses a powerful arsenal of conventional or nuclear forces. Unlike most conventional forces, nuclear weapons do not need to destroy the enemy's military forces before they can wreak havoc on the enemy's society, so the strength of one's arsenal is not dependent on the strength of the opponent.²³⁴ A country that has 50 survivable nuclear weapons which it can deliver against its enemy's cities is, for all practical purposes, just as powerful as one that can deliver 500 nuclear weapons against its enemy. Traditional

side has an incentive to escalate to strategic nuclear war. So in case 2, the side that can prevail in a conventional military conflict should, all things being equal, be more credible. Condition two is much more stable and less frightening than condition three. It's not clear who can make themselves credible in case 3 without risking a nuclear preemptive attack in the process.

²³⁴ The principal that conventional weapons are relative weapons has exceptions. For example, some conventional weapons, like submarines or mines, are more like absolute weapons if they are primarily used to harass sea lanes. In these cases, like in the case of nuclear weapons, the weapons can inflict their destruction even if the enemy's military forces are not defeated.

concepts of military advantage, being related to the relative size and quality of military forces, does not apply to nuclear arsenals.

In a crude sense, therefore, the analysis of the strategic nuclear balance between any two countries only needs to answer two questions: 1) does country A have a first-strike capability against country B; and 2) does country B have a first-strike capability against country A? Between any two states, either, neither, or both of these conditions could be present. If a country has a first-strike options but its adversary does not have one, the country with the first strike option has a meaningful superiority; its threats to risk nuclear war in a crisis over a vital interest should be credible. If both countries have first-strike capabilities, or neither have first-strike capabilities, their credibility to risk a nuclear crisis, or initiate a nuclear exchange, should be lower. Finally, if one's opponent has a first-strike options but one does not, the opponent's threats should be credible. This framework which reduces the complexity of a nuclear balance to the question of first-strike capability is simple, but it captures the logic of the balance of power theory as it should affect credibility.²³⁵

What Was the Strategic Nuclear Balance of Power During the CMC?

Who, if anyone, had a nuclear first-strike capability during the Cuban missile crisis? The answer to this question can be summarized in two points: First, the CMC occurred during a period of strategic transition from a condition in which the U.S. (and only the

²³⁵ One question emerges when one considers the definitions of first-strike capabilities, and this question leads to a slight muddying up of this simple framework. The question is: what qualifies as a first-strike capability? Deterrence theory defines this as the ability to destroy enough of an opponent's deliverable nuclear forces such that the remaining arsenal is too small to inflict *unacceptable* retaliation. But what is "unacceptable?" The answer is that it depends on the circumstances. To preserve its own physical survival, a country might consider the likely retaliation by 1-5 nuclear weapons to be "acceptable." When dealing with most, less-important national objectives, the chance of 1-5 nuclear detonations in one's cities would probably deter any decision maker from considering a nuclear first strike. In this project I allow the decision makers from the cases in question to determine for themselves whether they had a reasonable first-strike option which promised them victory at acceptable levels of risk and cost.

U.S.) had a nuclear first strike capability to a condition of mutually assured destruction. Second, U.S. decision makers understood this; they understood that their first strike capability was either disappearing fast or had already disappeared. U.S. decision makers, by the CMC, were no longer confident that the U.S. could strike first at the Soviet Union without receiving unacceptable levels of retaliation from the Soviets. In sum, because the U.S. no longer held decisive strategic nuclear superiority, and because the Soviets had conventional military superiority over Berlin, U.S. decision makers should have been very uneasy about the balance of power during the CMC.

In the following sections I describe the numerical balance of strategic nuclear forces in 1962. Then, and more importantly for this argument, I demonstrate how U.S. leaders interpreted the strategic nuclear balance in terms of the possibility of a U.S. first strike.

The Strategic Nuclear Balance, 1962 – the Numbers. In 1962, the numbers behind the strategic nuclear balance paint a very one-sided picture; the U.S. appears to have a decisive advantage in strategic nuclear forces. In 1962, the U.S. could quickly have launched 1-2,000 nuclear weapons against Soviet targets, depending on the alert level of U.S. forces.²³⁶ (See Table 16) A U.S. first strike along these lines might include 500 intercontinental bombers, 175 ICBMs, and however many Polaris SSBN ballistic missile submarines were at sea at the time of the attack.

²³⁶ This assumes that a U.S. first strike against the Soviet Union would use only those nuclear forces stationed in the continental United States – because attacks from overseas bases would significantly raise the chance of tipping off U.S. allies. The allies might try to stop the U.S. by preventing the use of the local forces or by threatening to reveal the preparations, thereby destroying the critical element of surprise. The other possibility is that allied governments might be penetrated by Soviet spies who might warn the Soviets.

Table 16:
U.S. Nuclear First Strike Forces, 1962

Type	System	#	Warheads per	Total Warheads	Notes
Bomber					Best First Strike Weapon in U.S. Arsenal
	B-52	555 ²³⁷	3.3 ²³⁸	1,830	+ Reliable weapon system + Accurate delivery - Long flight time to target - Possible early detection – may give warning - Possible interception
ICBM ²³⁹					
	Atlas D	30	1	30	+ Fast to target – makes reaction difficult - Less reliable weapon system - Less accurate (about 1nm CEP)
	Atlas E	27	1	27	
	Atlas F	72	1	72	
	Titan I	54	1	54	
SLBM ²⁴⁰					
	Polaris	9	16	144	+ Fast to target ? Reliability +/- Pretty good accuracy (CEP about 1/2 nm)
			Total	2,200	• Not all of these warheads would have been on alert at any given time

Compared to an attack of this magnitude, the Soviet strategic force looks negligible. A U.S. first strike would have had to destroy about 140 long-range bombers.

²³⁷ This number is the total number of B-52s which were designated as "Primary Authorized Aircraft." These are the aircraft which are assigned to operational units. Other B-52s existed, but they were assigned to training units or were undergoing maintenance work. See "Table of U.S. Strategic Bomber Forces," in Nuclear Weapons and Waste, NRDC, which can be found at <http://www.nrdc.org>. See also, Collins U.S.-Soviet Military Balance.

²³⁸ The number of nuclear warheads per B-52 changed over time. This is an estimate for 1962. See "Table of U.S. Strategic Bomber Forces," in Nuclear Weapons and Waste, NRDC, which can be found at <http://www.nrdc.org>. See also, Collins U.S.-Soviet Military Balance.

²³⁹ All ICBM numbers are from "Table of U.S. ICBM Forces," in Nuclear Weapons and Waste, NRDC, which can be found at <http://www.nrdc.org>. See also, Collins U.S.-Soviet Military Balance. These numbers are consistent with Garthoff, "Commentary on Document D: A Retrospective Evaluation of the Soviet Missiles in Cuba in 1962," in Raymond L. Garthoff, Reflections On The Cuban Missile Crisis (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1987), p. 142. Note that after the Cuban Missile Crisis, about 20 Minuteman I I.C.B.M.s became operational, but there were no operational Minuteman wings during the crisis.

about 35 ICBMs, and about 25 nuclear missile submarines (which spent most of their time in port). (See Table 17) To destroy these weapons the U.S. would need to target at most 140 airfields, plus 10-25 individual missile sites for the ICBMs, and up to 30 sub bases.²⁴¹ A U.S. first strike would have attacked other targets too, including Soviet command and control sites, leadership facilities, air defense radars and missile sites, and other airfields used for tactical air defense aircraft, but the *critical* targets – those which might hold nuclear weapons on intercontinental delivery vehicles – numbered about 200. Compared to the 2,000 nuclear warheads that the U.S. could use, this appears to be a very one-sided “balance.”²⁴²

²⁴⁰ All SLBM numbers are from “U.S. Ballistic Missile Submarine Force,” in Nuclear Weapons and Waste, NRDC, which can be found at <http://www.nrdc.org>. See also, Collins U.S.-Soviet Military Balance.

²⁴¹ Scott D. Sagan, “SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy,” *International Security* 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 32-33.

²⁴² U.S. decision makers had a good sense for the numerical balance. See, for example, “Commentary on Document D: A Retrospective Evaluation of the Soviet Missiles in Cuba in 1962,” in Raymond L. Garthoff, Reflections On The Cuban Missile Crisis (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1987), p. 142.

**Table 17:
Soviet Strategic Nuclear Forces, 1962**

Type	System	#	War-heads per	Total War-heads	Notes
Bomber ²⁴³					
	Tu-95 Bear A	80	1 ²⁴⁴	80	
	MYA-4 Bison	58	1	58	
ICBM ²⁴⁵					
	SS-6	4	1	4	• Not clear that any of the SS-6s were operational
	SS-7	32	1	32	
SLBM ²⁴⁶					
	Golf I SSB	22	3	66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short range missiles – 300 miles²⁴⁷ • Had to surface before firing • Small number deployed at any given time
	Golf II SSB	1	3	3	• 900 mile missile ²⁴⁸
	Hotel I/II SSB	1	3	3	• Had to surface before firing
			Total	250	• Not all of these warheads would have been on

²⁴³ The number for Soviet bombers, like the number for U.S. bombers, is the number which were assigned to operational units (i.e., which were "PAA"). These figures are from "Table of USSR/Russian Strategic Bomber Forces," in Nuclear Weapons and Waste, NRDC, which can be found at <http://www.nrdc.org>. See also, Collins U.S.-Soviet Military Balance. The figures for Soviet bombers is also consistent with Garthoff, "Commentary on Document D: A Retrospective Evaluation of the Soviet Missiles in Cuba in 1962," in Raymond L. Garthoff, Reflections On The Cuban Missile Crisis (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1987), p. 142.

²⁴⁴ For long range nuclear strike missions, Bear and Bison bombers would likely only have carried one atomic bomb See Collins, "U.S.-Soviet Military Balance," p.455.

²⁴⁵ All Soviet ICBM figures are "Table of USSR/Russian ICBM Forces," in Nuclear Weapons and Waste, NRDC, which can be found at <http://www.nrdc.org>. See also, Collins U.S.-Soviet Military Balance. These numbers are a bit smaller than the numbers cited in Garthoff. See "Commentary on Document D: A Retrospective Evaluation of the Soviet Missiles in Cuba in 1962," in Raymond L. Garthoff, Reflections On The Cuban Missile Crisis (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1987), p. 142.

²⁴⁶ SLBM figures are from "Table of USSR/Russian Ballistic Missile Submarine Forces," in Nuclear Weapons and Waste, NRDC, which can be found at <http://www.nrdc.org>. See also, Collins U.S.-Soviet Military Balance.

²⁴⁷ Collins, "U.S.-Soviet Military Balance," p. 453.

²⁴⁸ Collins, "U.S.-Soviet Military Balance," p. 453.

alert at any given time

Simply counting the number of U.S. warheads and Soviet targets, however, does not give a good picture of the U.S. ability to conduct a first strike on Soviet nuclear forces. There were weaknesses in the U.S. nuclear war plans, and there were other causes for uncertainty, which raise reasonable doubts then and now about the prospects for a successful first strike.

The biggest real impediment to a successful U.S. first strike was probably U.S. nuclear war plans themselves. Details of the war plans are still classified, but the picture that has emerged suggest that they were not constructed in a way that would give the United States its best chance for a successful nuclear first strike. The plans for strategic nuclear war against the Soviet Union had originally been created in the 1950s in a time with very different strategic conditions and they had not evolved sufficiently to accommodate the new conditions of the early 1960s. In the 1950s, the United States already had a large nuclear arsenal but the Soviets had very few nuclear weapons and no good means for delivering them against targets in the Western Hemisphere. U.S. nuclear war plans, therefore, were not optimized for a quick, surprise attack against the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Instead the plans envisioned an enormous strike against thousands of targets throughout the Soviet Union. The targets were chosen to so devastate the Soviet economy, political leaders, industrial base, transportation network, and population centers, that an ongoing Soviet invasion of Western Europe would grind to a halt.²⁴⁹ Rather than focus attacks immediately on Soviet nuclear systems, the initial waves of

²⁴⁹ Alan David Rosenberg, "A Smoking Radiating Ruin at the End of Two Hours: Documents on American Plans for Nuclear War with the Soviet Union, 1954-1955," *International Security* Vol. 6, No. X (Winter 1981/1982), pp. 3-38; and Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945-1960," *International Security* Vol. 7, No. 4 (Spring 1983), pp. 3-71.

attacks would use nuclear weapons against air defense sites throughout Eastern Europe, and then roll east in subsequent waves to destroy targets deeper in the Soviet Union.²⁵⁰

By the early 1960s, however, the Soviets had several hundred strategic nuclear warheads. A first strike against these strategic nuclear weapons would need to destroy them before the Soviet knew they were under attack. Under these circumstances the traditional doctrine of destroying air defense sites first and then proceeding to key targets should probably have been reversed, but by 1961 the U.S. nuclear war plan had not significantly changed. Based on what we know of the still secret plans, the President had a few "options" in the nuclear war plans, but none of the options was optimized for a quick, disarming strike of the Soviet Union. Each "option" was a full strike against the range of targets across the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union; furthermore, the attack would still roll back Soviet air defense sites West to East rather than strike first at Soviet missiles sites and bomber bases.²⁵¹ The options in the SIOP were distinct primarily in that one launched all available nuclear forces that could be readied after two hours of alert,

²⁵⁰ Rosenberg, "A Smoking Radiating Ruin at the End of Two Hours;" and Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill," pp. 3-71.

²⁵¹ Sagan writes that SIOP-62, the war plan in place from April 1961 – July 1962 wasn't very creative or very flexible. It was, Sagan writes, a plan to hit the Soviet strategic forces, government and other "control" assets, and major urban-industrial sites. "There is little consideration shown in the briefing for prioritization: for specialized bomber routing and evasion techniques or options designed to strike Soviet nuclear forces as promptly as possible in order to limit damage to the United States." General Lemnitzer describes the SIOP-62 bombing plan: "Peripheral defenses are scheduled to receive the first weapons" and the following forces penetrate Soviet airspace and "bomb as you go" hitting targets sequentially as they reach them. Scott D. Sagan, "SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy," *International Security* 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 35-36.

The next SIOP, SIOP-63, which was the war plan in operation during the CMC, was only different "in superficial ways. While it did contain provisions to refrain from attacking certain Soviet satellite countries, it was at heart the same type of war plan as that approved by Eisenhower - a massive, pre-programmed strategic nuclear attack that contained almost no flexibility." Francis J. Gavin, "The Myth of Flexible Response: American Strategy in Europe During the 1960s," manuscript, p. 21-22 and fn. 43. McNamara's assessment of SIOP-63 is the same: "SIOP I(a) [the US first strike plan within SIOP-63] was a totally unreal war plan....It called, for example, for huge strikes on Eastern Europe to take out air defenses, and the Soviets could have inflicted massive casualties on Western Europe --much more than on the US -- in return." James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), p. 33.

the next plan launched everything available after a four hour alert period, etc. In other words, by 1962 the U.S. had a nuclear force structure which had something close to a first strike capability, but U.S. war plans substantially reduced U.S. military capabilities for conducting a successful first strike.²⁵²

Overly rigid war plans were one reason why the numerical balance exaggerates U.S. chances at a successful first strike. A second reason relates to the many sources of uncertainty involved in a massive, surprise nuclear attack. First, there was uncertainty regarding the performance of key weapon systems. The ideal weapon for a first strike would be ballistic missiles, either submarine-launched or ground-launched. Because of their short flight time (about 30 minutes) and the long time it would have taken for the Soviets to launch their liquid-fueled ICBMs, ballistic missiles gave the U.S. the best chance to hit Soviet missiles in their silos, bombers on the ground, and submarines in their pens. However, ICBM technology was not mature in 1962. The missiles were still relatively unreliable.²⁵³ Furthermore, the missiles, particularly the ICBMs, were the least accurate U.S. delivery systems. Finally, the U.S. arsenal of ICBMs during the CMC was not very large. Given the uncertainties listed above, the 175 missiles in the U.S. arsenal may not have provided enough redundancy to give war planners confidence that every

²⁵² According to Scott Sagan, "...SIOP-62 was a highly inflexible plan for massive retaliation, or massive preemption, against all categories of targets within the Sino-Soviet bloc..." This problem didn't go away with SIOP-63 or later versions of the SIOP. Very little was done to change the SIOP in the JFK or Johnson Administrations. In fact, in 1969 the Nixon Administration concluded that the DOD "had the number and types of weapons" but lacked the "planning and command and control capability" to launch anything but full nuclear strikes on the Soviets. On SIOP-62 see Scott D. Sagan, "SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy," *International Security* 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 23. On the lack of changes in the SIOP over the years, see also Francis J. Gavin, "The Myth of Flexible Response: American Strategy in Europe During the 1960s," manuscript, p. 16.

²⁵³ Scott D. Sagan, "SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy," *International Security* 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 32-35.

critical target would be hit: given the potential costs of missing one air base or missile battery, U.S. first strike capabilities may not have seemed so clear-cut.²⁵⁴

There was also uncertainty about the effectiveness of U.S. long-range bombers in a first strike. The key to a successful first strike was hitting the Soviet weapons before they could be launched or dispersed. Bombers, especially the new B-52s, provided a much more reliable way of delivering nuclear weapons against Soviet targets than ICBMs. But if the bombers were detected too early in their mission the Soviets might have time to retaliate or disperse some of their weapons. B-52s might take 8-10 hours from take-off until they reached their targets in the Soviet Union. If the Soviets got any warning of an attack as the bombers launched, they would have more than enough time to ready missiles for launch, disperse their aircraft, and maybe even get submarines to sea on an emergency basis. More likely, the B-52s might be detected by Soviet air defense radars as they approached Soviet air space. The U.S. would try to prevent this by flying low and exploiting gaps in the air defense radar system, but early discovery of the bombers was certainly a possibility. Because of the relatively slow speed of the bombers, detection as they approached Soviet airspace might still give the Soviets a chance to disperse aircraft and fire ICBMs at the United States. And if the B-52s were detected as they approached Soviet airspace, some fraction of them would likely have been intercepted by Soviet Air Defense fighters, increasing the chances that some Soviet strategic nuclear forces would survive the attack.

A third source of uncertainty was the quality of U.S. intelligence on Soviet nuclear weapons and their operating bases. We now know that American leaders had very good intelligence in 1962 about the location of Soviet strategic nuclear weapons systems. But in

²⁵⁴ Sagan agrees with this assessment: "The uncertainties and risks confronting US military planners were real and profound, despite the massive US nuclear superiority of 1961, and General Lemnitzer was

1962, American leaders had to consider the possibility that U.S. intelligence had missed something. If a single heavy bomber base, or ICBM battery, or submarine pen, had escaped U.S. spy planes and satellites, the costs to the U.S. could have been catastrophic.²⁵⁵ The fact that U.S. intelligence turned out to be very good is not the point; in 1962 U.S. leaders did not know that the intelligence reports were largely correct.²⁵⁶

Finally, a first-strike against Soviet nuclear forces would hinge entirely on the ability of the U.S. to conduct the attack in complete surprise. If the Soviets somehow learned of the attack a few hours before the strike, they could have taken emergency measures to reduce the vulnerability of their forces. Could U.S. leaders be *sure* that they would achieve surprise? The United States, at the time, had a spy in the very senior ranks of the Soviet military; could the U.S. be sure that the Soviets had not penetrated the senior ranks of the U.S. military – particularly the Strategic Air Command?

correct to provide a warning to that effect to the President." Scott D. Sagan, "SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy," *International Security* 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), pp. 34-35.

²⁵⁵ If a handful of Soviet submarines survived, the U.S. Navy had a good chance to destroy them before they were able to move close to the U.S. shore, surface, and launch their missiles. The Navy was confident that it could get almost all the Soviet subs which were at sea before they launched nuclear weapons at the United States, but said that a couple of submarines might get through the defenses. Scott D. Sagan, "SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy," *International Security* 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 34-35. The evidence from the CMC supports the conclusion that U.S. ability to track Soviet submarines at this time was by no means foolproof. An authoritative monograph on U.S. ASW capabilities during the Cold War notes that "five Soviet submarines deployed from the Kola peninsula area...to support Soviet naval operations in late October, 1962 in the Caribbean during the Cuban Missile crisis. They were not detected until they encountered American quarantine forces in the region, and the sub-air barrier off Argentina that was established after the quarantine began therefore missed them." Owen Cote, "The Third Battle: Innovation in the U.S. Navy's Silent Cold War Struggle with Soviet Submarines," manuscript, March 2000, p. 46.

²⁵⁶ The U.S. intelligence community had bungled estimates of Soviet nuclear capabilities frequently. On one hand, parts of the intelligence community had consistently over-estimated Soviet nuclear capabilities since the nonexistent "bomber gap" of the mid-1950s, and the Kennedy Administration knew this. But the intelligence community had also failed in the other direction, failing to anticipate the speed of development of the first Soviet atomic bomb, hydrogen bomb, or the launch of Sputnik. The Kennedy Administration had also had its own recent unhappy experiences with U.S. intelligence. A year before the CMC the U.S. intelligence community had given the Bay of Pigs operation a good chance of success; Kennedy felt betrayed by his military and intelligence advisors. More recently, the intelligence community had assured the President that the Soviets would not put missiles into Cuba. Again they were wrong. While the discovery of the missiles, and the impressive U-2 photographs of the missile sites were impressive, it would not be surprising if the President and his key advisors were at least wary about intelligence claims.

From the safety of the present, the U.S. prospects for a clean first strike of Soviet strategic nuclear weapons in 1962 look pretty good. An attack would not have required everything to go right to succeed – there was enough redundancy to allow a fair amount of failures, foul-ups, mechanical problems, and bad luck, and still destroy most or all of the Soviet strategic nuclear force on the ground. But there was still substantial uncertainty, which must have looked even bigger in 1962.²⁵⁷

The numerical balance of strategic nuclear forces lends itself to two possible interpretations – both of which are correct. The first plausible interpretation of the numerical balance is that the U.S. had substantial superiority and, in extreme circumstances, could have launched a first strike against the Soviet Union that *appears* to have had a significant chance of destroying most or all Soviet strategic nuclear forces on the ground. A second interpretation of the same data is also justified: A U.S. first strike could have failed. If U.S. intelligence was imperfect, U.S. plans might spare an entire ICBM battery, or an entire bomber wing, from the attack, leaving the U.S. vulnerable to devastating retaliation with tens of nuclear weapons. Alternatively, if the American attempt to achieve surprise failed, a large fraction of the Soviet arsenal could be launched before U.S. forces destroyed them. By 1962 the Soviets had 250 nuclear weapons assigned to their strategic forces; any attack on a nuclear force of this size would have been a gamble, even if the dice were heavily loaded in America's favor.

²⁵⁷ Another alternative bears consideration. The discussion up to this point has only focused on Soviet strategic nuclear forces. The Soviets also had several hundred theater nuclear forces, many of which might have survived a U.S. first strike, especially if the strike was optimized to maximize the chances of destroying the strategic nuclear weapons. Surviving theater nuclear forces could have been used to destroy America's NATO allies. But part of this theater nuclear force was loaded on medium range Badger bomber aircraft. Badgers did not have the range to reach the United States on roundtrip missions, but the possibility of one-way retaliatory strikes can not be ruled out. Analysts have probably overstated the likelihood of one-way nuclear bombing missions when considering their role in a first-strike. But motivating pilots to fly a one-way retaliatory mission against an enemy who has just dropped a thousand nuclear weapons on their country might be far easier. As second-strike nuclear weapons, the Badger medium range bomber needed to be considered.

The key question is: How did U.S. leaders interpret these odds? Did they believe that they had a good first-strike option, or did they think that the window of a meaningful nuclear advantage had already closed?

U.S. Perceptions of the Strategic Nuclear Balance, 1962. When the Kennedy Administration came into office in January 1961 they were greeted by good news about the strategic nuclear balance: the U.S. intelligence community was coalescing in agreement that the number of Soviet ICBMs – like Soviet bombers a half-decade earlier – had been greatly exaggerated. There was a “missile gap” in 1961, the new President was told, but the gap favored the United States.

The good news about the strategic nuclear balance continued to roll in. By September of 1961 satellite photographs from the new CORONA satellite had settled any remaining doubts about the strategic nuclear balance of power – the American lead in strategic nuclear forces was very large; the Soviets had been bluffing about the size of their arsenal for years. To dispel the American public’s fears of the missile gap, to relieve pressure on his Administration to close the nonexistent gap, and to warn the Soviets that their bluff had been discovered, the Kennedy Administration had Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric announce in a speech that the United States

“has nuclear retaliatory force of such power than an enemy move which brought it into play would be an act of self-destruction....Our forces are so deployed and protected that a sneak attack could not effectively disarm us....In short, we have a

second strike capability which is at least as extensive as what the Soviets can deliver by striking first.”²⁵⁸

The Gilpatric speech has been misinterpreted by some historians. Some scholars of the period read in the speech a statement of confidence by the Kennedy Administration that the U.S. still had a meaningful nuclear first strike option if it came to war. But Gilpatric never said this: what he said was that the Soviets had no first strike option, that “sneak attack could not effectively disarm us.” It did not say that the U.S. could disarm the Soviets. This distinction is critical. The implication of the CORONA pictures and the Gilpatric speech is that the U.S. did not need to fear Soviet nuclear bullying or the possibility of a Soviet nuclear first strike. But it did not follow that the Kennedy Administration had any reasonable nuclear options if a crisis escalated to the verge of general nuclear war.

In September of 1961 President Kennedy got a briefing from his Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) on the new U.S. nuclear war plan, called SIOP-62. As discussed earlier, SIOP-62 was not a flexible plan with multiple options that could be tailored to particular scenarios. It was an extraordinarily complex plan for releasing the U.S. nuclear arsenal against the Soviets and their Eastern European allies in a single spasm.²⁵⁹ General Lemnitzer, the CJCS, told the President that SIOP-62 gave the U.S. a reasonable first-strike option if it came to war. The U.S. would “prevail” in this war but, he cautioned, “under any circumstances – even a preemptive attack by the U.S. – it would be expected that some portion of the Soviet long-range nuclear force would strike the

²⁵⁸ Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 33.

²⁵⁹ Scott D. Sagan, “SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy,” *International Security* 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 23.

United States.”²⁶⁰ In other words, Kennedy’s senior military advisors warned him in 1961 that even a “successful” first strike would involve some nuclear retaliation on the U.S.

A year later, one month before the CMC, President Kennedy was briefed on the new war plan, SIOP-63. It is not clear what the CJCS told Kennedy in the new SIOP briefing about the likelihood of Soviet retaliatory forces surviving a first strike, but it seems unlikely that they predicted complete destruction of the Soviet strategic arsenal. A year earlier, in September 1961, they had warned that after a U.S. first strike, a few Soviet warheads would likely survive and then penetrate American defenses. And a year later, in September 1963, the prospects of a successful first strike had worsened. By September 1963 the JCS told the President that the U.S. now no longer had a reasonable chance of prevailing after a first strike.²⁶¹

In other words, by September 1961 – a year before the CMC – the President was told that he *had* what the JCS considered to be a first strike option, though this still meant some nuclear weapons would likely hit the United States. By September 1963 – a year after the CMC – even the dubious achievement of prevailing with only a few nuclear retaliatory hits was not achievable. How did the picture look in October 1962 to senior U.S. leaders?

Analyses of the documents from the CMC and the statements made by decision makers after the crisis strongly suggest that neither the President nor his key advisors felt any confidence that the U.S. had a meaningful first strike option during the CMC.

²⁶⁰ Sagan, Moving Targets: Nuclear Strategy and National Security (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 25-26; and Sagan, “SIOP-62,” p. 30. The words are quoted from General Lemnitzer’s briefing notes for the President.

²⁶¹ The President was told, during his briefing on the new nuclear war plan – SIOP-64 – that the U.S. no longer had a reasonable chance of conducting a disarming strike against the Soviet Union. See Francis J. Gavin, “The Myth of Flexible Response: American Strategy in Europe During the 1960s,” manuscript, pp. 20-21.

Defense Secretary McNamara has repeatedly claimed that during the crisis he was convinced that the U.S. had no meaningful option to conduct a first strike. As he explained in 1989,

“...there was no reasonable chance that we could get away with a first strike unscathed. We simply didn’t know where all the Soviet warheads were. And don’t forget that our accuracy then wasn’t what it is today. Even if we put ten warheads on each target, we didn’t have a very high probability of getting all of the Soviets’ nuclear forces.”²⁶²

According to McNamara, the first strike option in the SIOP at the time of the CMC “was a totally unreal war plan” because “it would have led to unacceptably high casualties both in Europe and in the United States.”²⁶³ Launching the SIOP in 1962 “would have destroyed us as well as the Soviets.”²⁶⁴ During the CMC, “if we’d tried a first strike, the Soviets might have had 25 percent of their original three hundred [strategic nuclear warheads] left...”²⁶⁵

All of these comments were made long after the CMC, and McNamara made few comments about the nuclear balance of power during the crisis to confirm that these were his beliefs then. One memo to the President, however, was written only three weeks after the crisis and confirms that these views were consistent with his thoughts in 1962.

McNamara wrote to the President in a memo dated November 21, 1962:

262 James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), p. 29-30.

263 James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink, p. 33.

264 James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink, p. 52. See also p. 33.

265 James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink, p. 90-91.

“I am convinced that we would not be able to achieve tactical surprise, especially in the kinds of crisis circumstances in which a first-strike capability might be relevant. Thus, the Soviets would be able to launch some of their retaliatory forces before we had destroyed their bases.”²⁶⁶

McNamara was not alone in these beliefs.²⁶⁷ McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy’s National Security Advisor, has written extensively since the CMC about his belief at the time that the U.S. had no meaningful nuclear superiority.²⁶⁸ Like McNamara, Bundy’s comments during the CMC on the strategic nuclear balance of power were rare. Only two months after the CMC, however, an aide recorded a conversation which captures Bundy’s views of U.S. war plans and the prospects for victory in a nuclear exchange with the Soviets:

“Bundy said in the most serious way that he felt there was really no logic whatever to ‘nuclear policy.’ What he meant by this was that the military planners who calculate that we will win if only we can kill 100 million Russians while they are killing 30 million Americans are living in total dreamland.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Scott D. Sagan, “SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy,” *International Security* 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 30.

²⁶⁷ In his recent book on the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis agrees with my assessment of McNamara’s views. See John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 268.

²⁶⁸ McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*, New York, Vintage, 1988.

²⁶⁹ Comments of Colonel Lawrence J. Legere, Assistant to the President’s Military Representative, cited in editorial note 127, FRUS vol. 8, p. 463.

President Kennedy, of course, never had the opportunity to explain after leaving office how he saw the military balance during the CMC. In this case, however, there were statements during the crisis which – while always frustratingly broken and clipped – suggest that he didn't feel that he had a significant strategic superiority. On October 19th the President met with the JCS to explain his thoughts and his reasons for leaning toward a blockade rather than an air strike on Cuban missile sites. He said:

"Of course General Shoup's point, which he's offered for many years, is there isn't any doubt [that] if it isn't today, within a year they're going to have enough [unclear] stocked [unclear] the number of ICBMs they have. They may not be quite as accurate. But you get to put them on a city, whether it's 80 or 100, you're talking about the destruction of a country, so that our problem is that we begin to duplicate that here. And we're losing all our cities."²⁷⁰

In this quote Kennedy is relating General Shoup's opinion, but he does this in a way that suggests that he shares the view. Note that Kennedy doesn't take a strong position on the question of whether or not the Soviets were already at the point in which 80-100 Soviet ICBMs might survive a U.S. first strike.²⁷¹ The Soviets might have this capability right then, but they certainly would "within a year." More revealing is that the President wasn't comparing the number of Soviet warheads to the number of U.S. warheads – a meaningless numerical comparison. He was thinking about the effect of a fraction of the Soviet arsenal hitting the U.S.: "we're losing all our cities."

²⁷⁰ Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 183-184.

²⁷¹ This suggests that JFK does not have complete confidence in U.S. intelligence estimates.

Later in the conversation the President explains why he doesn't believe, from a strictly military sense, that the Soviet missiles in Cuba mattered much; his explanation gives another glimpse into his assessment of the nuclear balance of power.

“Right there [in the Soviet Union] now they've got enough to keep us, between submarines and ICBMs, whatever planes they do have, and now they discovered the [unclear] country [unclear], they pretty well got us here anyway.”²⁷²

On one other occasion, during a debate in the Ex Comm about the effect of the Soviet missiles on the balance of power, the President wishes aloud that he had never pledged to prevent Soviet nuclear missiles into Cuba because, in his view, the Soviet deployment of missiles in Cuba didn't matter much from a military perspective: “What difference does it [the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba] make? They've got enough to blow us up now anyway.”²⁷³ His words are not conclusive but it's hard to see anywhere in these statements – or anywhere in the documents from the crisis – evidence that the President was confident that he had the upper hand in a nuclear crisis.

Kennedy's statements about the balance of power are reinforced by what is known about his relationship with his military and intelligence advisors in 1962. The CMC happened only 18 months after the most embarrassing foreign policy defeat of his Administration – the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Kennedy felt that he had been let down by the military who had not been frank with him about the serious risks of failure at the Bay of Pigs. Before the operation, JFK had asked the JCS for their assessment of the

²⁷² The brackets in this quote are not my own. May and Zelikow put these brackets into the text to make the conversation easier to follow. Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 183-184.

chance that the operation would work. The JCS had said that the plan had “a fair chance of success.” After the plan failed, JFK learned that the JCS had assessed the odds as being three-to-one against -- this is what they meant by “fair chance of success.”²⁷⁴ JFK was outraged and felt betrayed. He complained that “Those sons-of-bitches with all the fruit salad just sat there nodding, saying it would work...”²⁷⁵ The President came out of the experience with less confidence that he would get good assessments from his military advisors.

The Bay of Pigs was not the only time that he felt let down by the military. Only two weeks before the CMC Kennedy had ordered the Army to help ensure order in Mississippi during the unrest surrounding the integration of the University of Mississippi. In the President’s opinion, the Army had been slow and unresponsive. Again he was angry and vented his frustrations with the military to an aide (with the tape recorder running): “They always give you their bullshit about their instant reaction and their split-second timing, but it never works out. No wonder it's so hard to win a war.”²⁷⁶

Does it make sense to believe that Kennedy was confident that the military could be as “successful” at a first strike as they promised – that all the split second timing and elaborate plans of the SIOP would work? Does it make sense to believe that he took their estimates at face value, or that he was sure that the same intelligence services which said

²⁷³ Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 91-92.

²⁷⁴ Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 27.

²⁷⁵ Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 28.

²⁷⁶ Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 174.

that the Soviets would never put missiles into Cuba was really certain that they had discovered every missile battery, bomber base, and submarine pen in the Soviet Union?

Other evidence gives another glimpse into U.S. beliefs about the nuclear balance – another glimpse that suggests that the U.S. did not believe that it had any meaningful first strike options during the crisis. During the crisis the Kennedy Administration tried – successfully – to conduct coercive diplomacy. What is striking about the threats and negotiations that went on during the CMC is that the U.S. never warned the Soviets that the U.S. had nuclear superiority, or that the U.S. could prevail in a nuclear war. To the contrary, at every possible opportunity the Kennedy Administration told the Soviets that the U.S. *couldn't* win a nuclear war. Given the U.S. efforts to leverage threats of nuclear war into Soviet concessions, America's repeated denial of its nuclear superiority is hard to explain if U.S. leaders felt they had a meaningful first strike advantage and wanted to use it to coerce the Soviets.

In both public and private statements during the CMC, the Kennedy Administration denied that the U.S. could prevail in a nuclear war. In his speech to the world on October 22nd, Kennedy did not reassure the American public that the United States could prevail in a nuclear war, nor did he warn the Soviets that they better back down because the U.S. knew it could win if the crisis escalated into fighting. Instead the President told the nation that in a nuclear war “even the fruits of victory will be ashes in our mouths.”²⁷⁷ Kennedy's private communications to Khrushchev during the crisis sent the same message. Kennedy wrote: “[No] sane man would, in this nuclear age,

²⁷⁷ “Radio-TV Address of the President to the Nation,” October 22, 1962, in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader (New York: New Press, 1992), p. 152; Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 278.

deliberately plunge the world into war which it is crystal clear no country could win and which could only result in catastrophic consequences to the whole world..."²⁷⁸

Finally, in Robert Kennedy's top secret meetings during the crisis with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, RFK emphasized to the Soviets that an attack on Cuba was becoming likely, that the crisis was about to escalate, and that the U.S. needed the Soviets to make a deal immediately. He was applying tremendous coercion to get the Soviets to accept the latest U.S. proposal (a secret deal on the Jupiters).²⁷⁹ There is some disagreement about exactly what was said during this meeting, but both Robert Kennedy's and Dobrynin's account of the meeting agree that RFK made no suggestion that the U.S. could prevail in a war with the Soviets, nor that U.S. nuclear superiority gave the U.S. any additional leverage. Robert Kennedy's account has him warning that if the crisis escalated "while there might be dead Americans there would also be dead Russians."²⁸⁰ Dobrynin's account suggests that RFK went farther and said that a war would be a catastrophe for both countries. According to Dobrynin, RFK said that if the crisis escalates "A real war will begin, in which millions of Americans and Russians will die. We want to avoid that any way we can, I'm sure that the government of the USSR has the same wish."²⁸¹ Here was another opportunity for the United States to gain bargaining

²⁷⁸ "President Kennedy's Letter to Premier Khrushchev," October 22, 1962, in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader (New York: New Press, 1992), p. 148; Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 281.

²⁷⁹ The Soviets had offered a public trade. RFK conveyed the President's counter-proposal, which was a secret trade. The secret trade would appear to the world like another Soviet withdrawal under American threats.

²⁸⁰ Robert F. Kennedy, "Memorandum for Dean Rusk on Meeting with Anatoly F. Dobrynin on 27 October 1962," published in Hershberg, "More On Bobby And The Cuban Missile Crisis," *Bulletin of the CWIHP*, <http://cwihp.si.edu>.

²⁸¹ Anatoly F. Dobrynin, "Cable to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, 27 October 1962," published in Hershberg, "Anatomy of a Controversy: Anatoly F. Dobrynin's Meeting with Robert F. Kennedy, Saturday, 27 October 1962." *Bulletin of the CWIHP*, <http://cwihp.si.edu>.

leverage from its supposed nuclear superiority; the U.S. could have applied the leverage privately without publicly embarrassing the Soviets. We know that RFK did not do this – he never hinted that the U.S. had nuclear superiority. And if we believe Dobrynin's account RFK specifically admitted that a nuclear war meant millions of casualties for both the Americans and Russians.

All the evidence suggests that the U.S. did not feel it had a meaningful measure of nuclear superiority during the CMC. The senior decision makers in the Kennedy Administration were convinced that a nuclear first-strike against the Soviet Union would result in some number of Soviet nuclear warheads hitting the U.S. Whether this would cause millions or tens of millions of U.S. casualties was irrelevant to them.

Drawing Predictions from the Theories About the Cuban Missile Crisis

Given this history and this assessment of the balance of power, what do the reputation and power/interests theories predict about the CMC? The reputation hypothesis predicts that the Soviets should have entered the CMC with very low credibility. They had issued an ultimatum to the U.S. over Berlin three times in four years. Each time the U.S. refused to concede and the Soviets simply let their deadline pass without taking the threatened action. If the reputation hypothesis is correct, three things should emerge from the evidence on U.S. decision making. First, U.S. assessments of Soviet credibility should have been low throughout the crisis. The U.S. had heard the Soviet bluster too many times to still believe it. Second, the U.S. should have adopted hard-line policies: there was no need to concede much to the Soviets. The Soviets would buckle in the face of a sustained blockade or even if the U.S. launched a direct attack on Cuba. Third, U.S. decision makers should explain their low assessment of Soviet credibility to each other during the crisis by referring to the Soviet pattern of backing down during crises.

The power/interests hypothesis predicts a very different set of events. The balance of power had been shifting slowly for the past decade. Years ago the U.S. could calmly threaten that Soviet attacks on NATO – including attacks on Berlin – would be met with nuclear escalation. Now U.S. nuclear threats would sound hollow. The U.S. nuclear first strike option had disappeared and nuclear war, in the mind of U.S. leaders, meant catastrophe for both sides. So the U.S. had no good response to Soviet attacks on Berlin. Strategic nuclear parity meant that the Soviets could leverage their conventional superiority in Europe. Berlin was highly vulnerable.

The power/interests hypothesis makes three predictions about U.S. decision making during the CMC. First, Soviet threats during the crisis should have been very credible to U.S. decision makers. Second, they should have adopted conciliatory positions; their hard-line resistance from 1958-61 should be gone. Third, decision makers should explain their assessments of Soviet credibility to each other during the crisis by referring to the balance of power.

How do these predictions perform in the crisis?

Testing the theories against U.S. Decision Making in the CMC

In the following section I test the reputation hypothesis against the power/interests hypothesis using U.S. decision making during the Cuban missile crisis. The two theories make conflicting predictions about 1) the assessments made by U.S. decision makers of Soviet credibility, 2) the policies selected by U.S. decision leaders, and 3) the evidence U.S. decision makers refer to as they explained their assessments of Soviet credibility.

U.S. Assessments of Soviet Credibility During the CMC

At various points in the crisis, the Ex Comm considered a range of possible policies to get the Soviets to remove the missiles from Cuba. In a general sense, U.S.

decision makers considered five broad alternatives. From least escalatory to most escalatory they were 1) an ultimatum to Khrushchev and Castro, demanding that the missiles be removed; 2) a blockade of “offensive” military equipment into Cuba – “offensive” being defined as anything involved with nuclear weapons or means of delivering them; 3) a small air strike directed at the missile sites; 4) a larger air strike, hitting the missile sites, air defense sites, and bomber aircraft; and 5) a large air strike followed by an invasion. There was no significant discussion about allowing the missiles to stay. Fears about the loss of U.S. credibility, concerns over the effect of the missiles on the strategic balance of power, and some concern about Kennedy’s domestic political position, pushed the entire committee to agree from the outset that the goal was the elimination of the missiles. The only questions were how the U.S. could get the missiles out and what price they would have to pay.

What was Soviet credibility to respond to any of these U.S. actions? What did U.S. decision makers expect the Soviet response would be to any of these alternatives?

What is striking about U.S. evaluation of these options throughout the crisis is that while there was vehement disagreement among the members of the Ex Comm about the best course for the U.S., the Ex Comm was *virtually united* on two key points: Soviet credibility to resist any of these U.S. approaches was *very* high, and *none* of these approaches were expected to eliminate the Soviet missiles in Cuba without triggering a significant Soviet military response against NATO.

Option 1: The Ultimatum.

There were two main variations of the ultimatum strategy. In one version, the U.S. would approach Khrushchev privately, let him know that the missiles had been discovered, and tell him that unless they were immediately dismantled and removed, the United States would enforce a naval blockade around Cuba. A second version would

threaten that, unless Khrushchev removed the missiles, the U.S. would destroy them with air attacks.

Although several Ex Comm members favored this strategy, no one in the Ex Comm expressed any confidence that the Soviets would back down in the face of an ultimatum from the United States. On the first day of the crisis, McNamara laid out a list of U.S. alternatives and made it clear that he did not expect an ultimatum to work. This option, McNamara said, was “likely to lead to no satisfactory results...”²⁸² This pessimistic assessment was never seriously challenged. Dillon opposed an ultimatum because, he argued, it was unlikely that Khrushchev would give up and say “sorry, I’ll pull them out.” (141) Ambassador Thompson, the most respected Soviet expert in the room, agreed. Thompson thought it was possible that Khrushchev might agree to temporarily stop construction at the missile sites while the two sides negotiated, “But,” he said, “I don’t think he would ever just back down.” (141) Even Rusk and Ball, who both favored the ultimatum, expected it to fail. Rusk said that “we have no reason to expect that” Khrushchev would back down, but the effort to find a peaceful solution will strengthen the American public’s support for future military actions. (128-29) George Ball, the most frequent advocate of making an ultimatum to Khrushchev, did not expect the Soviets to back down. He favored the ultimatum because he felt that giving the Soviets a chance to back down will strengthen America’s position with the NATO allies. “[Y]our position with the rest of the alliance is going to be stronger if you give Khrushchev a chance,” even if that chance is “illusory.” (141-43) To be clear, Ball felt that giving Khrushchev a chance to back down would be “more for appearance than reality. Because obviously.” Ball argued, “you’re not going to get that kind of response.”

²⁸² This cite is from Ernest R. May and Philip d. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 86.

(93) The most optimistic assessment of the ultimatum approach was made by McNamara. At one point in the discussion McNamara said about the prospects of an ultimatum getting Khrushchev to back down: there was “a fair possibility; not great.” (143) That lukewarm assessment was by far the rosier judgment. Nobody expected the Soviets to cave in to an American ultimatum.

The Ex Comm disagreed among themselves in their evaluation of the wisdom of an ultimatum but they all agreed that the ultimatum would likely fail. Soviet credibility was high; no one expected them to fold in the face of American threats.

Option 2: Blockade.

The U.S. rejected the ultimatum strategy in favor of a blockade – was this because the U.S. expected the Soviets to cave in to American military coercion? Not at all. *No one* in the Ex Comm said he expected the blockade to work. Everyone – even those who advocated the blockade – expected the Soviets to resist and probably retaliate with military force elsewhere.

McNamara, the strongest, loudest, and most persistent advocate of the blockade did not expect it to bring Khrushchev to his knees. “Oh, he’s not going to stop building [the missile bases in Cuba]. He’s going to continue to build.” (166) McNamara did not expect the Soviets to attack U.S. ships enforcing the blockade, but the missile construction, he argued, would continue with supplies already in Cuba. He explained on the 25th: “I never have thought we’d get them [the missiles] out of Cuba without the application of substantial force.” (417) No one disagreed with this assessment; no one expected the blockade to coerce Khrushchev into an about-face.

Future citations to the Kennedy Tapes will be made by simply indicating the page number of the citation in parentheses in the text.

In fact, the general view was that a blockade had a good chance of triggering Soviet escalation, probably against West Berlin. Thompson said that he preferred a blockade to immediate air strikes on Cuba because, he warned, air strikes would provoke Soviet retaliation and increase the risks of war. But the blockade would probably provoke Soviet military retaliation, too: “I think we should be under no illusions, this is probably in the end going to lead to the same thing.” (137-38). He explains: “My guess is that he [Khrushchev] would not *immediately* attack Berlin,” but Khrushchev would not back down either. Instead he would use the blockade as a pretext to “precipitate the real crisis,” over Berlin. (144)

The President was more pessimistic than Thompson. He was sure, by the 18th, that Khrushchev would not pull out the missiles or even stop building the sites because of a U.S. blockade of Cuba. In fact, Khrushchev would escalate. Kennedy explained: “He’ll grab Berlin, of course.” (144) McNamara asked the President what he meant – whether he expected that Soviet troops would invade West Berlin. The Presidents said, yes. “That’s what I would think.” (144)

The President did not change his mind about this. A day later JFK explained to the Joint Chiefs of Staff why each of his options was bad. After explaining the escalatory risks associated with a direct attack on Cuba he explained that a blockade did not look much better: “If we begin the blockade that we’re talking about, the chances are they will begin a blockade [of Berlin] and say we started it.” (176) Another day later, on the 20th, JFK reaffirmed that he expected that the blockade would provoke Soviet military retaliation – possibly a blockade of Berlin. (197-98)

On the 21st, the day after the President had decided on the blockade option, he was still highly skeptical that it would work. The President predicted that the Soviets would respond to the blockade with three hard-line counter-measures: they would accelerate construction of the Cuban missile sites, they would issue a deterrent threat, warning that a

U.S. attack on Cuba would trigger an attack using the Cuban missiles against the U.S., and the Soviets would “possibly make a move to squeeze us out of Berlin.”²⁸³ (211) No one was predicting a Soviet about-face on the missile deployment. When JFK reiterated that the *minimum* U.S. position had to be eliminating the current Soviet missiles in Cuba and ensuring that no other missiles would be deployed there, McNamara said that “in order to achieve such a result we would have to invade Cuba.” (213) For a group of men who had, just the previous day, adopted the blockade as their preferred course of action, there was not a lot of confidence that a blockade would precipitate any Soviet concessions.

President Kennedy grew no more confident about the prospects for the blockade as the crisis continued. Talking to members of the Ex Comm on the 24th, he predicted that if, in the course of enforcing the blockade, the U.S. has to sink a ship heading to Cuba, “then we would assume there would be a blockade and possibly one of the [other] responses in Berlin.” (357)

The clearest view of the Ex Comm’s assessment of Soviet credibility to resist a blockade came during a meeting at about midnight on the 18th. Bundy argued against the blockade or any other option because “inevitably” the Soviets would retaliate against West Berlin. Revealingly, no one on the Ex Comm – most of whom supported the blockade – disagreed. But

“Everyone else felt that for us to fail to respond would throw into question our willingness to respond over Berlin, [and] would divide our allies and our country.

²⁸³ The President’s skepticism about the blockade remained until the end of the crisis. Throughout the 26th, during the morning and afternoon Ex Comm meeting, he stated repeatedly that the blockade would never get the missiles out of Cuba. For example, in the morning session on the 26th he stated emphatically, “The only thing that I am saying is, that we’re not going to get them out with the quarantine. I’m not saying we should lift the quarantine or what we should do about the quarantine. But we have to all now realize that we’re not going to get them out. We’re either going to trade them out, or we’re going to have to go in and get them out ourselves. I don’t know of any other way to do it.” (464) This was typical of several similar statements by the President on the 26th and 27th.

[They felt] that we would be faced with a crunch over Berlin in 2 or 3 months and that by the time the Soviets would have a large missile arsenal in the Western Hemisphere which would weaken our whole position in this hemisphere and cause, face us with the same problems we're going to have in Berlin anyway.”
(172)

In other words, Soviet credibility in the face of a blockade was very high. Most members of the Ex Comm supported the blockade because they feared that a weaker response would just delay the conflict a few months – and it would occur on even less favorable terms.

Option 3: Military Strikes.

How did the Ex Comm expect the Soviets to respond to an American attack on Cuba – either a small air strike, a large air strike, or a full scale invasion? Once again, the Ex Comm was united. Everyone agreed that the Soviets would not intentionally start a nuclear war over Cuba. If some nuclear missiles survived an air strike, the Soviets would not authorize a nuclear attack from Cuba (or from anywhere) against the U.S. At the same time, the Administration was virtually unanimous that the Soviets would retaliate with military force, and that the risks of general war would be grave.

Everyone agreed that the Soviets would not authorize nuclear attacks, and begin World War III, in retaliation for U.S. attacks on Cuba.²⁸⁴ But everyone also agreed that the Soviets were very likely to retaliate against U.S. allies somewhere. McNamara held this view throughout the crisis: “It seems to me almost certain that any one of these forms of direct military action will lead to a Soviet military response of some type, some place in the world.” (87) Two days later he was just as adamant: the Soviets “must” have “a

²⁸⁴ See the statements along these lines by Rusk (pp. 59, 89); JFK (pp. 89, 133); Bundy (p. 89). McNamara (p. 133); Taylor (p. 89).

strong response, and I think we should expect that...I think the price [for eliminating the missiles] is going to be high....The very least it will be, will be to remove the missiles in Italy and Turkey.” (143) On the 20th he was still arguing along these lines: the Soviets will respond to U.S. air strikes against Cuba with a “very major response” (197); despite the fact that the Soviets did not want a general war with the U.S., the U.S. attack on Cuba and the Soviets’ likely retaliation “could result in escalating actions leading to general war.” (p.193-94)

Rusk felt the same way as McNamara. Right from the 16th, Rusk warned that if the U.S. attacked the missile sites in Cuba, “the Soviets would almost certainly take some kind of action somewhere.” (p. 84) Bigger attacks on Cuba would be more dangerous than the limited air strike option (127-28) but any air attack “raised serious risks of escalation which could lead to general war.” (198)

Adlai Stevenson sent a memo to the President on the 17th warning that air strikes against Cuba might lead to Soviet attacks on Turkey or West Berlin. (118-19) On the 20th he weighed in against the air strike and in favor of the blockade, arguing that an air strike could easily escalate. (198-99)

Thompson and Dillon, who didn’t agree on much, agreed that an air attack or invasion would provoke serious military retaliation from the Soviets. As Thompson told the Ex Comm on the 18th, “I think if we just made the first strike, then I think his answer would be, very probably, to take out one of our bases in Turkey, and make it quick too and then say: ‘I want to talk.’” (138) Dillon expected quick Soviet retaliation in Germany. He explained: “Well, I think they’ll take Berlin.” (143)

Most importantly, JFK fully expected the Soviets to retaliate to an American attack on Cuba. Every day the President kept coming back to this assessment. After Thompson explained that Khrushchev would not respond to an attack on Cuba by launching nuclear weapons at the U.S., Kennedy interjected: “I think it is more likely he would just grab

Berlin.” (138) On the 19th he spelled out his worries about the air strike option to the JCS: “If we attack Cuban missiles, or Cuba, in any way, it gives them a clear line to take Berlin...” (175) A minute later he clarified himself: After an air strike “there's bound to be a reprisal from the Soviet Union, there always is -- [of] their just going in and taking Berlin by force.” (176) Finally, on the 20th, as the group was reaching its final consensus in favor of the blockade option, JFK restated his belief that an air strike would provoke a major Soviet response “such as blockading Berlin.” (197-98)

For all his doubts about the blockade course, his reasons for choosing it over an air strike or invasion are equally clear: Kennedy was convinced that the Soviets would retaliate if the U.S. attacked Cuba, and that the retaliation would likely be against Berlin. As Kennedy explained to congressional leaders on the 22nd, “If we invade Cuba, we have a chance that these missiles will be fired on us. In addition Khrushchev will seize Berlin...” (256) Later in the conversation he reiterates that “the inevitable result” of an invasion “would be the immediate seizure of Berlin.” (271) When Senator Fulbright disagreed, arguing that an invasion might be less escalatory than a blockade because it would target Cubans, rather than Soviet ships and sailors, Kennedy quickly countered his argument: An invasion would be even more dangerous because it would involve attacks on 7-8,000 Russians. “And I think that the inevitable end result will be the seizure of Berlin.” (272) Kennedy was convinced that an invasion of Cuba would “inevitably” trigger the “immediate” Soviet action to “seize Berlin.”²⁸⁵

Only one senior government official disagreed with this assessment and argued that the U.S. could attack Cuba without provoking reprisals in West Berlin or anywhere – Curtis LeMay. On October 19th he told the President, “I don’t share your view that if we

²⁸⁵ Kennedy’s views on this did not change. On the 27th, at the peak of the crisis, he argued that if the U.S. attacks Cuba, “this will be, in my opinion, not a blank check, but a pretty good check [for the Soviets] to take action in Berlin...” (512-13)

knock off Cuba, they're going to knock off Berlin..." (177-78) JFK asked "what do you think their reply would be?" The ever-confident LeMay answered, "I don't think they're going to make any reply if we tell them that the Berlin situation is just like it's always been. If they make a move, we're going to fight. I don't think it changes the Berlin situation at all, except you've got to make one more statement on it." (177-78) The members of the Ex Comm did not share the General's confidence. Interestingly, LeMay was also the only one of the group who claimed that the U.S. had a clear first-strike capability.²⁸⁶ In other words, the one person who thought that the U.S. had the Soviets decisively outgunned was also the only one who predicted that the Soviets would fold in the face of U.S. pressure – even if the U.S. bombed and invaded Cuba.

The Ex Comm agreed in their assessments of likely Soviet responses to an air strike or invasion of Cuba: no one really disputed the point that an air strike would very likely lead to retaliation against Turkey or Berlin. Those who advocated the air strike option did it because they felt that the blockade would be ineffective and that it would come down to war in either case. But everyone agreed that the Soviets were very credible.

Testing the theories -- U.S. Policies During the CMC

If the reputation hypothesis is correct, U.S. decision makers should have had little to fear in the CMC. Over and over the Soviets had blustered and threatened the U.S. with war. After four years of Soviet withdrawals, the U.S. should have been in no mood to compromise over Cuba. According to the reputation hypothesis, the U.S. should have adopted hard-line policies throughout the crisis. On the other hand, if the power/interests

²⁸⁶ According to Ernst May, "I interviewed Curtis LeMay in the seventies on the question of the SIOP during the Cuban missile crisis, and he said to me then that it was his belief that at any point the Soviet Union could have been obliterated without more than the normal expectable SAC losses on our side --" James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), 91-92.

hypothesis is correct, U.S. decision makers should have viewed the new Soviet threats with substantial concern. The balance of power had shifted and the U.S. no longer enjoyed a good nuclear first strike option. According to the power/interests hypothesis, U.S. decision makers should have looked for compromises and conciliatory steps that would defuse the crisis. U.S. policies should be on the “soft-line” end of the policy continuum.

Major U.S. decisions during the CMC came in two phases. The first major decision was made in the first week of the crisis, October 16-20, when the U.S. selected the blockade as the initial U.S. policy. The second major decision came on October 27th. With the crisis apparently spinning out of control, U.S. leaders had to decide how to respond to the two Soviet notes as well as the attack on U.S. reconnaissance planes over Cuba. At this point, the U.S. made two very conciliatory decisions to try to end the crisis without further escalation.

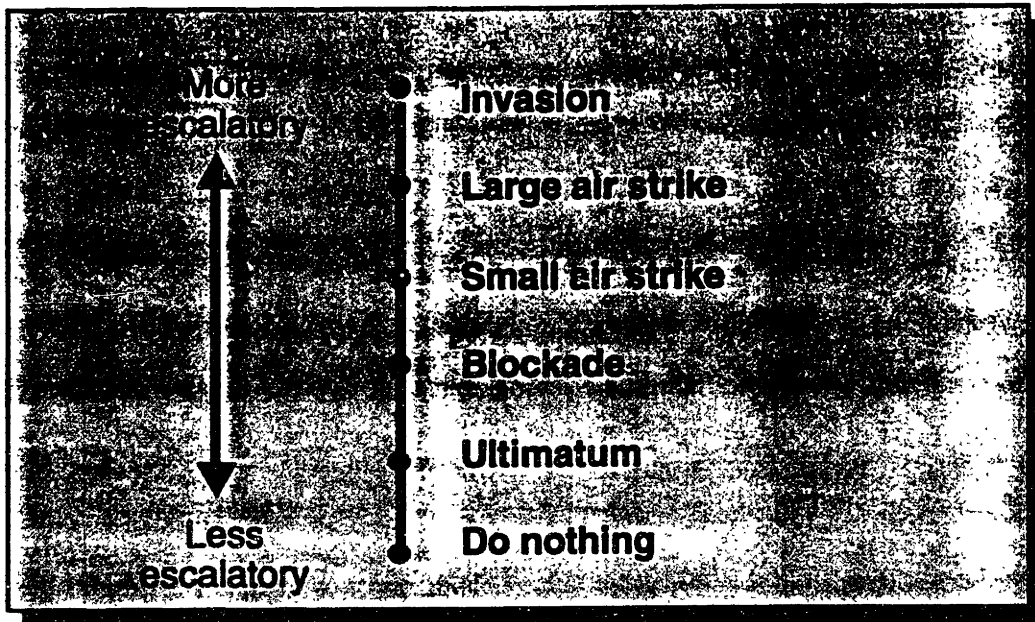
Decision I: October 16-20.

During the first week of the CMC, the Ex Comm debated five options, but really six routes were possible. (See Table 18) Listed from the most conciliatory policy to the least, U.S. options were: 1) do nothing – this was never really discussed because the firm goal of getting the missiles out of Cuba was clearly enunciated from the beginning of the crisis; 2) send Khrushchev an ultimatum demanding that he remove the missiles;²⁸⁷ 3) blockade – more specifically, this was a blockade of any military equipment associated in any way with nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles; 4) a small air strike – this would be confined to the missile sites themselves; 5) a large air strike – this would expand the target

²⁸⁷ There were several versions of the ultimatum approach, depending on what threats were tied to the “or else” side of the ultimatum. One of these versions threatened that if the Soviets did not withdraw the

list to include surface to air missile sites (SAMs), airfields, Soviet-made bombers, and other military infrastructure; 6) a large air strike followed by an invasion.

**Table 18:
U.S. Options at Start of CMC**



The U.S. adopted option #3 – the blockade. The blockade option was a middle-of-the-pack option. This was neither one of the most conciliatory nor the most hard-line policy. What does this tell us about the reputation and power/interests hypothesis? For three reasons, the choice for the blockade provides evidence, albeit weak evidence, for the power/interests hypothesis.

First, the choice of a blockade reflected significant movement by the Ex Comm (particularly the President) from a very hard-line initial policy on the 16th to a more moderate position on the 20th. The President's initial reaction to the crisis was emotional:

missiles from Cuba, the U.S. would initiate a blockade. Another version threatened that if the Soviets left the missiles in Cuba the U.S. would launch air strikes.

he was angry and, before he considered all the possible implications of a U.S. air strike against the missiles, he strongly favored an air attack on the missile sites. As the President said at the end of the first Ex Comm meeting:

“We’re certainly going to do number one [the small air strike against the missiles sites]. We’re going to take out these missiles. The question will be whether, what I would describe as number two, which would be a general air strike. That we’re not ready to say, but we should be in preparation for it. The third [option] is the general invasion.” (71-72)

The President reiterated a moment later: “At least we’re going to do number one... We ought to be making those preparations [for the air strike #1].” (71-72) But by the 20th, the President, and the rest of the Ex Comm, had agreed on the blockade. The blockade was more conciliatory than the initial position that the President preferred.

Second, the blockade was preferred to more escalatory options because, as the power/interests hypothesis predicts, the less conciliatory options involved excessive risks of Soviet retaliation and war. The Ex Comm seriously considered other policies, especially the two air strike options, but the Ex Comm concluded that air strikes would almost certainly provoke immediate Soviet military retaliation. No one expected a blockade to work, and many people thought the Soviets would retaliate to the blockade with military strikes. But any operation by the U.S. which was more hard-line than the blockade would be even more likely to trigger a Soviet response.²⁸⁸

The blockade was chosen over the ultimatum for reasons more consistent with the power/interests hypothesis than the reputation hypothesis. First, decision makers did not

²⁸⁸ On these points cite McNamara’s comments on the 18th; Rusk’s on the 19th, and Ball’s on the 19th. See also JFK’s comments on the 17th and 19th.

expect either policy to work; the Soviets were seen as highly credible; the American did not expect the Soviets to back down in the face of either an ultimatum or a blockade. That said, the blockade was more attractive to U.S. decision makers because they feared that any weaker response would hurt the credibility of the U.S. commitment to Berlin. In other words, the blockade was chosen because the Kennedy Administration believed that it was the most-conciliatory position possible which would not destroy U.S. credibility. The U.S. was not trying to be as strong and unyielding as possible; to the contrary, the Kennedy Administration was being as conciliatory as possible within their strategic constraints, as they saw them.

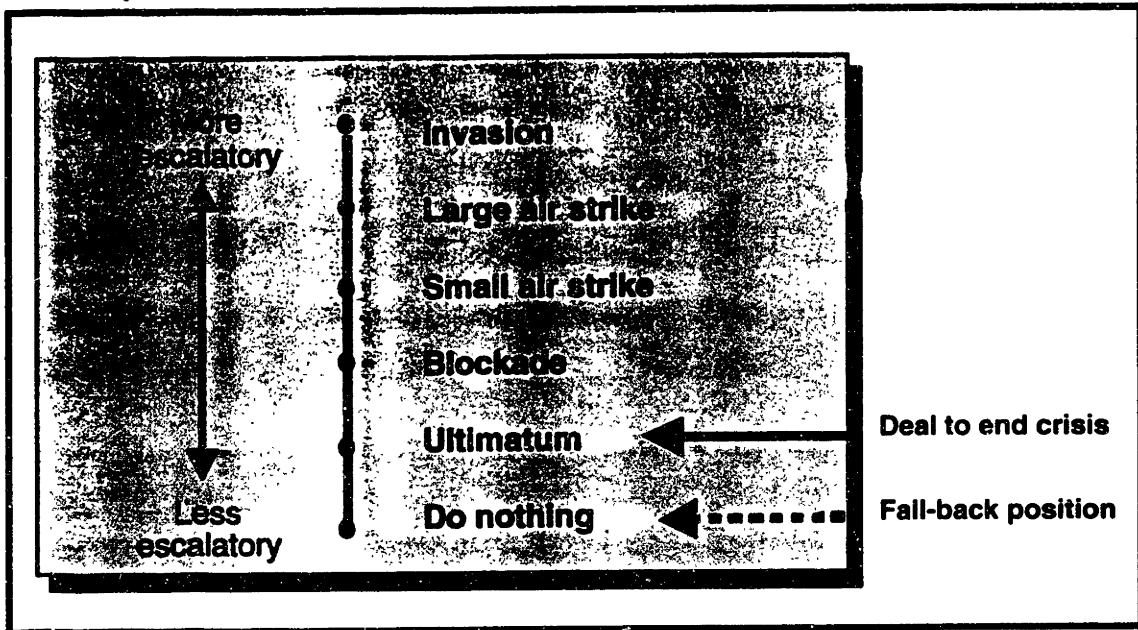
Decision II: October 27th:

On October 27th, the U.S. had an important decision to make. The Soviets had made one offer to remove the missiles in Cuba in exchange for a U.S. commitment to not invade Cuba. But then they apparently withdrew this offer; a second Soviet proposal was received in the morning of the 27th in which the Soviet raised their price for a deal. The Soviets, according to the second letter, would withdraw the missiles from Cuba only if the U.S. withdrew the Jupiters from Turkey. This harsher second letter arrived amid other events that suggested that the crisis was escalating – most serious was the attacks on U.S. reconnaissance planes over Cuba.

The U.S. had eight main options at this stage in the crisis – all of which were considered. (See Table 18) Listed from the most- to the least-conciliatory, the U.S. options were: 1) accept the Soviet proposal and openly trade away the Jupiters to end the crisis; 2) trade the Jupiters to end the crisis, but do it secretly, 3) accept the first Soviet proposal and give the Cubans a “non-invasion pledge;” 4) continue the blockade; 5) tighten the blockade to include all petroleum products. This would give the blockade more “bite” against the Cuban civilian economy; 6) launch limited air strikes against the missile

sites in Cuba; 7) launch major air strikes against the missiles sites and other military targets throughout Cuba; and 8) launch the major air strikes followed by an invasion.

Table 19:
U.S. Options, offer to the Soviets, and fall-back position



Of these eight options, the U.S. chose the second most-conciliatory. The President, and the secret subgroup of the Ex Comm, sent Robert Kennedy to meet Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin on the night of the 27th to work out a deal and end the crisis.²⁸⁹ The U.S., RFK told Dobrynin, would accept the second (more costly) Soviet offer, but with one condition – the trade had to be a secret. The Soviets would remove the Cuban missiles immediately and then, within a few months, the U.S. would remove the missiles from Turkey.²⁹⁰ The next morning the Soviets announced that they accepted the deal

²⁸⁹ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, pp 605-07.

²⁹⁰ For RFK's and Dobrynin's accounts of their meeting on the 27th, see the CWIHP website. RFK's memo of conversation is "Robert F. Kennedy, Memorandum for Dean Rusk on Meeting with Anatoly F.

(without revealing the secret conditions), and the crisis was over. It's hard to make the case that the U.S. actions on the 27th were hard-line policies. The U.S. gave the Soviets *almost* everything they wanted.

Furthermore, there are several pieces of circumstantial evidence that suggests that the U.S. was willing to go even further to reach a settlement; evidence suggests that the U.S. would have given the Soviets an open trade of the Jupiters for the missiles in Cuba if the Soviets had pressed a bit harder. First, on the 27th, the President had Rusk give a note to Andrew Cordier, the President of Columbia University (and a friend of U Thant, the Secretary General of the United Nations). The note to Cordier was actually the text for a proposal to end the crisis which the U.S. might ask U Thant to make. Cordier was only authorized to give the text to U Thant if Rusk specifically requested that he do so. The mystery proposal was a request from the UN Secretary General that, in the interest of peace, the Soviets remove their missiles in Cuba, and the United States remove its Jupiter missiles from Turkey.²⁹¹ The implication is that the U.S. could then accept the trade openly under the guise of acceding to the wishes of the United Nations. The Soviets accepted the "secret trade" deal so Cordier was never asked to convey the message to U Thant.

This evidence, by itself, does not prove conclusively that the U.S. was willing to openly trade the Jupiters to remove the MRBMs from Cuba. The fact that the President established a contingency plan does not mean that he had decided to execute it, but it does show that the "open trade" was, at least, being considered.

Dobrynin on 27 October 1962." which can be found on the CWIHP website in a document by Jim Hershberg, "More On Bobby And The Cuban Missile Crisis." Dobrynin's record of the conversation is recorded in "Dobrynin's Cable to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, 27 October 1962." This can also be found on the CWIHP website, in a document by Jim Hershberg, "Anatomy of a Controversy: Anatoly F. Dobrynin's Meeting with Robert F. Kennedy, Saturday, 27 October 1962."

²⁹¹ James G. Blight and David A. Welch. On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), pp. 83-84; May and Zelikow, p. 606, fn. 3.

A second piece of evidence suggests that the U.S. was willing to accept the open trade, if pressed a bit harder by the Soviets. This evidence is in the transcripts of the Ex Comm meetings around the peak of the crisis. In several of these meetings, the President raises over and over again the possibility of ending the crisis by openly trading away the Jupiters. Time and again he is told by a few of his advisors that trading away the Jupiters would be too damaging to U.S. credibility, but each time the President came right back to this idea.²⁹² Finally, by the 27th, several members of the Ex Comm had apparently come around to the President's view about trading the missiles. Even some hard-liners like McCone and Dillon favored an open trade.²⁹³ By the 27th the President was not alone in his willingness to compromise; several members of the Ex Comm seem to have shifted to much more conciliatory policies than they had held only a day before.

U.S. Policies During the CMC – Conclusions:

Evidence from U.S. policies during the CMC supports the power/interests and not the reputation hypothesis. America's initial reaction to the discovery of the missiles in Cuba was emotional: the U.S., the President promised, would *at least* launch the small air strike. The only question was whether or not to execute the large air strike and invasion options. But within a couple of days cooler heads were prevailing, the U.S. was carefully assessing its options, and careful review of these options was moderating U.S. policies. The Administration adopted the most conciliatory policy that, in their view, they could accept without undermining U.S. credibility in Europe. By the end of the crisis, the U.S.

²⁹² Cite debates from October 26th and 27th. Gaddis agrees with my interpretation that the Cordier letter, along with the evidence from the tapes of the Ex Comm meetings that show that the President was repeatedly pushing for the trade, suggests strongly that he would have done the public trade if necessary. See John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 271.

²⁹³ McCone on the 27th: "I don't see...Why don't we make the trade then?" (581) and "...I would trade these Turkish things out right now. I wouldn't be talking to anybody about it." (585).

had softened its policies considerably more. The final agreement that ended the crisis gave the Soviets *almost* everything they wanted.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, documents suggest that the Soviets never got to the American bottom-line position. If pushed, it appears that the U.S. would have given the Soviets the open trade – the Turkish Jupiters for the missiles in Cuba -- that the Soviets desired.

Testing the theories – Evidence Discussed by U.S. Decision Makers During the CMC

When U.S. decision makers tried to assess Soviet credibility, and when they discussed their assessments with each other, what type of evidence did they discuss? Did they talk about past Soviet actions in Berlin or elsewhere as the reputation hypothesis predicts? Or did they support their assessments by referring to the balance of power and interests at stake?

The historical record from the crisis does not confirm the prediction of either theory in this regard – U.S. decision makers very rarely explained the reasons that they believed what they believed about Soviet credibility. The transcripts of the Ex Comm meetings and the thousands of other documents in the archives show that decision makers talked frequently about their beliefs about Soviet credibility (usually agreeing that the Soviets were highly credible) but were almost never explicit about the evidence which they used to formulate or support these views.²⁹⁵ U.S. decision makers were nearly unanimous in their expectation that that Soviets would not give in to a blockade, but they were never very explicit about why they believed this.²⁹⁶ They were also nearly united in

²⁹⁴ The Soviets would have preferred to get the “open trade” rather than the secret deal.

²⁹⁵ This is consistent with my findings from the Berlin Crises. There were very few times when U.S. or British decision makers explicitly tied their assessments of Soviet credibility to either past Soviet actions or to the balance of power.

²⁹⁶ Statements made during Ex Comm meetings about Soviet credibility to resist a blockade of Cuba are plentiful; in almost no cases do the decision makers explain why they are so sure that the Soviets will not

their belief that the Soviets would retaliate if the U.S. launched airstrikes against Cuba, but they never made their reasoning explicit on this, either.²⁹⁷ The Crisis offers little direct evidence to evaluate the third prediction of the two theories.

What is interesting about the documents, however, is that in more than six hundred pages of transcripts from Ex Comm meetings, and thousands of pages of other documents from the archives at the Kennedy Presidential Library, I could only find three statements in which decision makers referred to past Soviet actions as they debated likely Soviet actions in the future, all of which occurred in a conversation between the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At one point in this discussion the President suggested that the Soviets might react to U.S. attacks on Cuba with retaliation in Europe, “as they were able to do in Hungary under the Anglo war in Egypt [Suez Crisis].” (175) At another point in the same discussion the President said the Soviets were likely to retaliate to any hostile U.S. steps, and he referred to the recent tit-for-tat expulsions of suspected Soviet and American spies from the two countries.²⁹⁸ The third statement is by General LeMay. He argued that the Soviets backed down when the U.S. showed resolve in the past over Lebanon, and argued that the U.S. should take a harder-line over Cuba.²⁹⁹

The striking thing about these examples is how much these quotes stand out from the rest of the statements preserved in thousands of pages of documents on the crisis. No

back down. For some examples, see May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, pp 137-38, 144, 166, 176, 197-98, 211, 213, 357, and 417.

²⁹⁷ See, for example, May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, pp 84, 87 118-19, 127-28, 138, 143, 175-78, 193-94, 197-99, and 256.

²⁹⁸ Kennedy: “When we grabbed their two UN people [as spies] and they threw two of ours out [of the Moscow embassy]” they showed that they “can’t let us just take out, after all their statements, take out their missiles, kill a lot of Russians and not do anything.” May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, p. 179.

²⁹⁹ LeMay: “Where we have taken a strong stand they have backed off. In Lebanon, for instance.” May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, p.179. Remember that LeMay was also unique in his conviction that the U.S. had a good first strike capability during the Crisis. He apparently believed that the Soviets had

other discussions had the decision makers trying to use history like this. These examples – Soviet actions in Suez, in Lebanon, and the expulsion of suspected spies – were not mentioned in any context in other discussions by senior American leaders during the Crisis. Hour after hour, the Ex Comm debated what to do in the crisis and – other than this one meeting between the President and the JCS – no one ever said “the Soviets will back down because they backed down in the past” or that “Soviet history shows they won’t back down to our threats.” Page after page of the transcripts contains assertions about high Soviet credibility with essentially no explanations to support them.

The lack of even one statement during the Cuban Missile Crisis predicting Soviet behavior in the Crisis from their past behavior in Berlin is especially surprising given the extraordinary focus by U.S. decision makers on both Berlin and on the issues of reputation and credibility. There are literally hundreds of references to Berlin in the Ex Comm transcripts (and more in the other documents from the Crisis) and most of these statements explicitly connect Berlin with the issues of reputation and credibility.³⁰⁰ But

shown they were weak (in Lebanon) and that Soviet caution was justified: the U.S. had clear nuclear superiority.

³⁰⁰ U.S. decision makers were convinced that their actions in the crisis over Cuba would have a defining effect on U.S. credibility to defend Berlin and to defend NATO more generally. Seemingly any action (or non-action) that the U.S. might choose in the Crisis, they believed, would cripple U.S. credibility in Europe. Sorensen summarized the Ex Comm’s consensus opinion that the U.S. would lose credibility in Europe if they did nothing and allowed the Soviets to build missiles in Cuba: “...it is generally agreed that the United States cannot tolerate the known presence of offensive nuclear weapons in a country 90 miles from our shore, if our courage and our commitments are ever to be believed by either allies or adversaries. Retorts from either our European allies or the Soviets that we can become as accustomed as they to accepting the nearby presence of MRBM’s [sic] have some logic but little weight in this situation.” See Sorensen, “Summary of Agreed Facts and Premises, Possible Courses of Action and Unanswered Questions,” October 17, 1962, reprinted in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader (New York: New Press, 1992), p. 114. Letting the missiles stay would undermine U.S. credibility, U.S. decision makers believed, but so would trading away the Jupiters deployed in Turkey. Bundy warned the President: “...if we sound as if we wanted to make this trade [the Jupiters for the missiles in Cuba], to our NATO people and to all the people who are tied to us by alliance, we are in real trouble...[W]e should tell you that that is the universal assessment of everyone in the government that’s connected with these alliance problems.” May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, p.529. Attacking the missile sites would also throw U.S. alliances into question, because the U.S. would appear to reckless in its willingness to use force. The President is clearly very frustrated by this sense

these statements always revolved around the feared effect of U.S. actions in the current crisis on America's future credibility in Berlin. They never reversed the formulation, as the reputation hypothesis would predict, and explored what Soviet past actions in Berlin suggest about Soviet future behavior in Cuba. In other words, U.S. leaders were obsessed with concern about America's reputation, but they never looked at past Soviet actions in Berlin to evaluate their adversary's reputation. I have not found one statement in which a U.S. decision maker, in any context, said that Soviets actions in Berlin suggest that they can be pressured to back down over Cuba.

Conclusions

The Cuban Missile Crisis provides resounding evidence against the reputation hypothesis, and it lends considerable support to the power/interests hypothesis. If the reputation hypothesis was correct, if backing down hurt one's credibility, then the Soviets would not have had any credibility left when the CMC began. Bluffing and backing down during crises had been Khrushchev's *modus operandi* since 1958. But when U.S. decision makers assessed Soviet credibility during the missile crisis, they were united by their conviction that the Soviets were quite resolved. In fact, American decision makers considered the Soviet threats in 1962 to be more credible than Soviet threats in any of the previous crises over Berlin. In direct contrast to the predictions of the reputation hypothesis, and in line with the predictions from the power/interests hypothesis, Soviet credibility grew from 1958-62.

Two things are particularly striking about U.S. decision making during the CMC. First, throughout the crisis, U.S. leaders were obsessed with Berlin and obsessed with U.S. credibility and reputation, but they never connected past Soviet actions in Berlin with

that the U.S. is damned no matter what course it takes. See his repeated complaints along these lines on October 27th, May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, p.540-45.

Soviet reputation. The Ex Comm worried constantly about how U.S. actions in Cuba would affect U.S. credibility in Berlin, but no one ever asked what past Soviet actions in Berlin revealed about Soviet credibility in Cuba.

Second, U.S. decision makers were remarkably unified in their assessments of Soviet credibility throughout the crisis. There were plenty of disagreements among the members of the Ex Comm – some decision makers favored more hawkish policies than the group selected, and others wanted the U.S. to adopt even more-dovish policies than they did. But despite the differences within the group, they shared a common view that the Soviets were highly credible, were unlikely to bend to U.S. coercion, and would retaliate against U.S. allies if the United States used force against Cuba. There was virtually no dissent against this view. The Cuban Missile Crisis is a very easy case for the reputation hypothesis, but once again the hypothesis fails the test.

Chapter 6:
Conclusions

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For four years, from 1958-1962. Nikita Khrushchev and the Soviet Union pounded on the table and threatened war. Over and over again the Soviets said that if their demands were not met, they would sever the access routes which connected West Germany with West Berlin. Time and again, the Soviet deadlines came and went, but the Soviets failed to carry out their threats. But despite this pattern of broken promises, Soviet credibility did not suffer. In fact, the Soviets were considered, by both American and British leaders, to be *more* credible in the 1961 Berlin crisis than they had been in the previous standoffs over Berlin. And in 1962, during the Cuban missile crisis, Soviet credibility was even higher: no one in the Kennedy White House doubted Soviet credibility during the missile crisis. Despite four years of unfulfilled threats, Soviet credibility rose from 1958-1962. This finding levels a very powerful blow to the reputation hypothesis and offers substantial support to the power/interests hypothesis.

This chapter summarizes the principal findings of this thesis. It is divided into four sections. In the first section, I summarize the results of the three empirical cases. These cases provide very strong evidence against the reputation hypothesis and lend substantial support to the power/interests hypothesis. In the second section, I briefly review what these findings reveal about the strength of the two other theories which I discussed in Chapter 2, the “never again” hypothesis and the “ingrained lessons” hypothesis. Third, I describe the limitations of this study and describe a set of follow-up studies which would bolster these findings. Fourth, I describe some of the other implications of this research. This study sheds light on an important, and timely, question about nuclear deterrence, and it helps explain some aspects of America’s recent foreign policy experiences.

Summary of Empirical Findings

This dissertation uses three cases to test the reputation and power/interests hypotheses. These cases are: 1) U.S. decision making during the Berlin crises of 1958-61; 2) U.K. decision making during the same Berlin crises; and 3) U.S. decision making during the Cuban missile crisis. I summarize the results of each case below.

Berlin Crises, 1958-61

In 1958, the Soviet Union initiated the first of a series of crises over Berlin. In November 1958, the Soviets gave the Western powers a six-month deadline: renegotiate the status of West Berlin within six-months or the Soviets would begin a new Berlin blockade.³⁰¹ Almost immediately, the Soviets began to backpedal from their threat. Over and over in the spring and summer of 1959, the Soviets extended their deadline without cutting access to Berlin.

In 1961, soon after the Kennedy Administration took office, the Soviets renewed their ultimatum and imposed a new six-month deadline. The U.S. responded by increasing defense spending, stepping up civil defense measures, and placing more nuclear-armed bombers on alert. Again, the deadline passed and the Soviets took no steps against Berlin. For four years, the Soviets issued threats and set deadlines, but they failed to carry out their threats.

Berlin Crises: Testing the Reputation and Power/interests Hypotheses

If the reputation hypothesis is correct, Soviet credibility should have begun to plummet by early 1959. Each time the Soviets disavowed their threats or extended their

deadlines, their credibility should have suffered. By 1961, neither British nor American leaders should have given much credence to the latest round of Khrushchev's ultimatums.

By contrast, the power/interests hypothesis predicts that Soviet credibility should have increased from 1958-61. The foundation of NATO's military plans in the late 1950s and early 1960s was that if war came the United States would launch a massive nuclear strike on the Soviet Union. NATO's strategy, therefore, hinged entirely on the ability of the United States to conduct a successful nuclear disarming strike. But as the Soviet nuclear arsenal grew, the prospect of a successful American first strike diminished. By 1961 NATO's military plans looked increasingly dubious. According to the power/interests hypothesis, therefore, Soviet threats should have grown more credible during the Berlin crises.

The evidence from the Berlin crises strongly refutes the reputation hypothesis and lends substantial support to the power/interests hypothesis. Neither British nor American decision makers believed that Soviet credibility was dropping from 1958-61. Neither of the Western allies believed that the Soviets wanted a war over Berlin, but as time passed, both became convinced that the Soviets were becoming emboldened and might take actions (e.g., cutting off Berlin) which would entail serious risks of war. Even more striking, evidence from American and British archives reveals that while Western decision makers were consumed with concerns about their own credibility, they paid virtually no attention to the Soviet pattern of withdrawals.

Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

In October, 1962, only a year after the last Berlin crisis, the United States and Soviet Union found themselves in another crisis. The crisis began when the U.S.

³⁰¹ The details of the Soviet threats are complicated; here I simply summarize what happened in the

discovered that the Soviets were secretly deploying nuclear-armed ballistic missiles in Cuba. For a week the Kennedy Administration deliberated secretly over the best response to the Soviet missiles. After considering steps that ranged from an invasion of Cuba (on the most belligerent side) to a diplomatic protest (on the least-belligerent side), the Americans chose a middle-of-the-road strategy and enacted a blockade of Cuba. A week later, after exchanging a series of threatening letters, the Soviets offered the U.S. a trade: if the U.S. would remove NATO's nuclear-armed missiles from Turkey, the Soviets would remove their missiles from Cuba. The U.S. accepted the deal provided that the Soviets keep the agreement secret. The Soviets agreed, and the crisis was over.

Cuban Missile Crisis: Testing the Reputation and Power/interests Hypotheses

The reputation hypothesis predicts that Soviet credibility should have been very low by the time that the Cuban missile crisis began. Four years of empty Soviet threats over Berlin should have proven to the United States, according to the reputation hypothesis, that the Soviets would back down in the face of American threats. American decision makers, according to the reputation hypothesis, should have discussed the Soviet pattern of backing down during crises and should have favored strong steps which would remove the Soviet missiles from Cuba and force the Soviets, once again, to retreat.

The power/interests hypothesis predicts the reverse. During the early 1960s, the balance of power had continued to shift towards the Soviet Union. While the Soviets nuclear arsenal still lagged behind the American force, the ability of the United States to conduct a nuclear first strike against the Soviet Union was on the verge of disappearing. American plans for defending Western Europe, and Berlin specifically, ultimately depended on the ability of the United States, as a last resort, to conduct a nuclear first

crisis. For a more detailed account, see Chapter 4.

strike against the Soviet Union. By October 1962, however, the prospects of a successful nuclear strike had narrowed, and more importantly, the top officials in the Kennedy Administration – including the Secretary of Defense, the National Security Advisor, and probably the President and his brother – were convinced that their first strike option had disappeared. The power/interests hypothesis, therefore, predicts that the Soviet threats would be more credible than they had been in the past. The Soviets, after all, now had the ability to resist the United States. If they couldn't directly defend Cuba, they could certainly retaliate in Europe, particularly against America's weakest point: Berlin.

What does the evidence from the Cuban missile crisis show? The evidence from the crisis is unambiguous. American decision makers were thoroughly convinced that the Soviets were highly credible during the crisis. The senior officials in the Kennedy Administration disagreed about the best course of action to pursue during the crisis, but despite these disagreements they were unanimous in their view that the Soviets would resist any attempts by the United States to get the missiles out of Cuba, and that the Soviets would retaliate if the United States used military force against Cuba. Strikingly, the Kennedy's senior advisors during the crisis (called the Executive Committee, or "Ex Comm") were unanimous in their belief that the approach they chose – the blockade – would *fail*. But they were also unanimous in the belief that a more aggressive U.S. response, like an airstrike against the missile sites, would provoke a severe Soviet retaliation against NATO. Most members of the Ex Comm, including the President, believed that the Soviets would retaliate against Berlin, though there was some speculation that the Soviets might strike Turkey instead. But they were all convinced that the Soviets would not back down after an American attack on Cuba: American threats notwithstanding, the Soviets would retaliate.

Summary of the Cases

The cases studied in this thesis offer a set of exceptionally easy tests for the reputation hypothesis. If decision makers ever use a country's past actions to assess their credibility in a new crisis, they should do this when the past actions occurred recently, in a crisis in the same part of the world, between the same countries, over the same issues and the same level of stakes, and involving the same political leaders on both sides.

By these criteria the Berlin Crises and the Cuban missile crises presented very easy tests of the reputation hypothesis. The Berlin crises occurred in rapid succession with little time for decision makers to forget how the adversary had acted in the past. Their memories should have been very fresh. The crises occurred in the same part of the world, over the same issues, between the same countries, and involving the same level of stakes. Khrushchev was the Soviet leader throughout the entire period. On the American side, there was a change from the Eisenhower Administration to the Kennedy Administration in 1961, but on the British side Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister throughout the period. It is hard to believe that decision makers assessing Soviet threats over Berlin in 1961 *didn't* look back at Soviet actions in 1958-60 to learn about Soviet credibility. But they didn't do it.

The Cuban missile crisis provides another extremely easy test for the reputation hypothesis. The crisis happened only a year after the last super power confrontation over Berlin. The same countries were involved in the Cuban crisis as were involved in the Berlin crises. The level of stakes involved in the Cuban missile crisis – the possibility of nuclear war – were the same as in the Berlin crises. Khrushchev was still in power, as was Kennedy. Even the issues involved were the same. As the Kennedy Administration saw it, the Cuban missile crisis was about Berlin. The Soviets put the missiles in Cuba,

they thought, to gain leverage over Berlin.³⁰² And American attacks on Cuba would provoke a Soviet response in Berlin. The only thing which makes the Cuban missile crisis a slightly harder case for the reputation hypothesis than the Berlin Crises is the shift in location from the previous crises in Central Europe to the current one in the Caribbean. But this was another very easy test of the reputation hypothesis.

Nevertheless, in the Berlin crises and the Cuban missile crisis, American and British decision makers acted the way that the power/interests hypothesis predicts. There is no evidence that Soviet withdrawals from 1958-1961 – their repeated pattern of setting deadlines, extending them, and then letting them pass – had any adverse effect on Soviet credibility. In fact, as the power/interests hypothesis predicts, Soviet credibility rose throughout the period as their nuclear arsenal grew and America's first strike capabilities declined. What is most striking about these crises is that in the thousands of pages of documents I examined from the crises, I only found one document in which a decision maker said that previous Soviet withdrawals suggested that the Soviets would withdraw again.³⁰³ American and British decision makers worried constantly about how their actions would affect their future credibility, but they almost never used Soviet past actions to assess Soviet credibility.

³⁰² Historians do not think that this was really one of Khrushchev's primary goals in putting the missiles in Cuba. Nevertheless, the Kennedy Administration thought the crisis was about Berlin. Because they perceived the crisis to be about Berlin, they should have been cued to look to Soviet behavior in past Berlin crises to predict Soviet behavior in Cuba.

³⁰³ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, Tuesday 6 June 1961, CAB 128/35 C.C. (61) 30th (7), PRO. Note that this document did not accompany any shift in British policies.

Testing the “Ingrained Lessons” and “Never Again” Theories

This dissertation focuses on testing the power/interests and reputation hypotheses. But the evidence that I gathered also bears on the two other theories I described in the theory chapter: the “Ingrained Lessons” theory and the “Never Again” theory.

The Ingrained Lessons Theory

The ingrained lessons theory is similar to the reputation hypothesis. Like the reputation hypothesis, it is based on the idea that past actions are the source of credibility. It diverges from the reputation hypothesis, however, in its assumption about *whose* past actions affect credibility. According to the ingrained lessons theory, when decision makers need to assess an adversary’s credibility, they don’t think about the adversary’s history for keeping or breaking commitments. They think about the previous crises that *their own country* has been involved in, and they remember how their previous adversaries acted in those crises. If their previous adversaries kept their commitments, the current adversary will be credible. But if the previous adversaries broke their commitments, they will doubt the current adversary’s threats.

The cases which I study in this dissertation allow me to test the ingrained lessons theory as thoroughly as I test the reputation hypothesis. Because I study a series of cases which involve the same set of countries, the predictions of the reputation hypothesis and the ingrained lessons theory are identical. In other words, if American decision makers in the midst of the Cuban missile crisis assessed Soviet credibility the way the reputation hypothesis predicts, they would have looked at their current adversary’s previous behavior (i.e., Soviet behavior during the Berlin crises). But if they assessed credibility the way the ingrained lessons theory predicts, they would have assessed their current adversary’s behavior by looking at their *previous adversary’s* past behavior (i.e., Soviet behavior

during the Berlin crises). Because these crises involve repeated confrontations between the same sets of countries, the two theories make the same predictions.

All the evidence which fails the reputation hypothesis also fails the ingrained lessons theory. The fact that Soviet credibility rose from 1958-62 contradicts the ingrained lessons theory, as does the fact that American decision makers adopted increasingly conciliatory policies during these crises. The fact that U.S. leaders virtually never referred to the record of Soviet withdrawals as they tried to assess Soviet credibility further undermines the theory.

In sum, the ingrained lessons theory has an element of plausibility to it: it would not be surprising if decision makers were highly affected by their own country's experiences in crises, especially if the current decision makers were the ones who were in charge during the past crisis. But the evidence from these cases overwhelmingly refutes this theory.

The Never Again Theory

The last theory that I test is what I call the "never again" theory. According to this theory, decision makers look to their adversary's past to assess the adversary's credibility, but instead of positing that a history of keeping commitments increases one's credibility, the never again theory posits the reverse. If the adversary has a history of breaking commitments, decision makers think it is unlikely that they will back down again. Similarly, if the adversary has a history of keeping commitments, they will be considered more likely to back down in the current crisis.

The cases that I study in this thesis are good for testing the power/interests and reputation hypotheses because the two theories predict opposite trends in Soviet credibility during the period that I study. But because the never again theory makes the opposite

predictions as the reputation hypothesis, most of its predictions are the same as the predictions from the power/interests hypothesis.

Nevertheless, distinguishing between the power/interests and the never again theory is not difficult. Decision makers in these crises – both American and British – spoke frequently about the balance of power, and the impact of the military balance on the outcome of the crisis. As discussed earlier, they almost never discussed the adversary's history for keeping or breaking commitments, as the never again theory predicts. Furthermore, in the thousands of pages I searched I never found anyone in 1961 make the argument that the Soviets would carry out their latest threats over Berlin because they had broken their previous threats, nor anyone in 1962 who argued that the Soviets would carry out their threats because they had backed down repeatedly over Berlin. Given that this study was designed to maximize the leverage to test the power/interests and reputation hypotheses, it is not ideal for testing the never again theory. But I find no data in these cases to suggest that the never again theory has any explanatory power.

Limitations of the Cases and Areas for Future Research

This study marshals substantial evidence against the reputation hypothesis and offers significant evidence in support of the power/interests hypothesis. But more work on reputation, credibility, and deterrence should be done. More studies should be conducted to try to replicate the findings here and to expand the research to test these theories in other realms of international relations. In this section I identify four areas in which more research is needed.

“Two-cornered” and “Three-cornered” Tests

There is an important distinction between “two-cornered” and “three-cornered” tests which needs to be clarified.³⁰⁴ A two-cornered test is one in which two theories are pitted against each other to see which has more explanatory power. Two-cornered tests allow researchers to determine the relative strength of the two theories, but they tell less about the absolute power of each theory. In other words, the “winner” of the two-cornered test may be very weak, even though it is stronger than the loser. On the other hand, the theory that loses the two-cornered test may be very powerful, but slightly less powerful than the winning theory.

A three-cornered test, on the other hand, compares two theories to each other and to the null hypothesis.³⁰⁵ A three-cornered test not only determines which theory is more powerful, it also reveals whether either or both theories has much explanatory power.

This dissertation is set up more as a two-cornered test than a three-cornered test. The majority of the evidence demonstrates that when the predictions of the power/interests hypothesis diverge from the predictions of the reputation hypothesis, the predictions of the power/interests hypothesis are fulfilled much more frequently. Nevertheless, some of the evidence presented here tells us about the overall strength of the theories, and not just their relative strength, especially with regard to the reputation hypothesis.

The reputation hypothesis failed almost all of its predictions. Does this suggest that it is very weak, or simply that it is weaker than the power/interests theory? The evidence from this thesis shows that the reputation hypothesis is very weak – it is not just

³⁰⁴ This terminology comes from Imre Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes.” in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 115. My thanks are due to Steve Van Evera for bringing this to my attention.

³⁰⁵ The null hypothesis holds that none of the theories being tested explain the variation of the dependent variable. In this study, the null hypothesis is that neither power and interests nor past actions affect credibility.

weak relative to the power/interests theory, it appears to have very little (or no) causal effect on credibility in the cases I studied. Two pieces of evidence support this conclusion. First, one piece of evidence that I used to test the reputation hypothesis during the Berlin crises is American and British perceptions of Soviet credibility to sign a peace treaty with the East Germans. The Soviets threatened to do this over and over again from 1958-61, they kept setting deadlines for the treaty, and they kept breaking their commitment. The reputation hypothesis makes a strong prediction that Soviet credibility to sign the treaty should have dropped throughout this period.

The power/interests theory predicts that Soviet credibility to sign a treaty should have remained high, but the effect of the power/interests variables on Soviet credibility to sign the treaty should have been pretty weak. The Soviets had *something* to gain by signing the treaty – they would put the U.S. in an awkward position with its allies – but not much to gain. So the Soviets had an interest in signing the treaty, but the interest was certainly small. At the same time, the Soviets had the power to sign a treaty, but mainly because the West could not bring its superior military (nuclear) power to bear to stop the signing of a peace treaty. So although the power/interests theory predicts that the Soviets should sign the treaty, the effects of power and interest on credibility should be relatively weak: there were only small interests at stake, and the power considerations favored the Soviets but in a tangential way.

Nevertheless, despite the presumed strong effect of reputation and the weaker effect of the power/interests theory in this case, backing down over and over again seemed to have no effect on Soviet credibility. Even where the power/interests theory should have applied tangentially, its effect outweighed the effect of the reputation hypothesis.

There is a second reason to believe that the reputation hypothesis is very weak, and not just weak relative to the power/interests hypothesis. In the series of crises over Berlin, the documents I discovered suggest that American decision makers virtually never talked

about the Soviet pattern of withdrawals as they tried to assess Soviet credibility. This just was not on their mind. In thousands of pages of British documents I found only one remark along these lines.³⁰⁶ And in the U.S. records from the Cuban missile crisis, there was almost no mention of Soviet past actions as the Americans tried to assess Soviet credibility. The data, therefore, does not suggest that decision makers think about and discuss their adversary's reputation, only to have these considerations swamped by the power/interests factors. To the contrary, the archival records suggest that they just did not think about the adversary's past actions. The most striking thing from these documents is the frequent reference by American and British decision makers to the hazards of weakening their own reputation, while they consistently failed to assess the adversary's reputation. It seems that the reputation hypothesis is not simply weaker than the power/interests hypothesis. The evidence suggests that it is very weak overall.

Unfortunately, the evidence from this thesis tells us less about the strength of the power/interests hypothesis relative to the null hypothesis. As I found in the Berlin crises, and even more strongly in the Cuban missile crises, decision makers rarely explained the reasoning behind their assessments of the adversary's credibility. So although they spoke frequently about the balance of power, and the capabilities and interests of the adversary, and although they made assessments of the adversary's credibility that matched the evidence about the balance of power which they had been discussing, there is little evidence that *explicitly* ties the assessments of credibility to the assessments of the balance of power. The power/interests hypothesis looks very strong, but further tests should be done.

³⁰⁶ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, Tuesday 6 June 1961, CAB 128/35 C.C. (61) 30th (7), PRO. Note that this document did not accompany any shift in British policies.

Additional Cases Needed to Bolster Findings

Several aspects of this study suggest that additional cases should be conducted to bolster the findings. First, as I discussed on several occasions, the findings from this research fail the reputation hypothesis more conclusively than they support the power/interests hypothesis. To increase the confidence of these findings in support of the power/interests hypothesis, one would need to either a) conduct many more cases to determine whether these findings for the power/interests hypothesis are generally true in a large sample of cases, b) construct a set of hard cases for the power/interests hypothesis, or c) find a way to test the power/interests hypothesis using a large-n data set without running into the selection effects problems discussed in Chapter 3.

A second set of additional cases would be helpful to test the reputation hypothesis in two cases in which it is widely believed to be correct. First, other studies have found support for the reputation hypothesis in one case: German assessments of Russian credibility prior to World War I.³⁰⁷ There is also widespread support for the reputation hypothesis in another case, although I know of no studies which support this through systematic investigation: this case is German assessments of British and French credibility prior to World War II. People generally believe that British and French weakness at the Munich conference convinced Hitler that his adversaries “were worms.” Two additional case studies which tested the reputation hypothesis in these two cases would be illuminating.

Finally, this thesis focuses on the way that countries assess their adversaries’ credibility during military crises. Research should be conducted to determine how countries assess the credibility of their *allies* during crises. Reputation may matter, even if it doesn’t affect one’s credibility with one’s adversaries. Losing credibility in the eyes of

one's allies may be costly, too.³⁰⁸ Other studies should assess whether credibility during peacetime is formed differently than credibility during military crises. And other studies should continue to investigate whether reputation affects credibility in other aspects of international relationships, such as finance and trade.³⁰⁹

Other Implications of This Research

The purpose of this thesis is to test the reputation and power/interests hypotheses to determine the cause of credibility during military crises. But the theories and evidence I reveal in this study also shed light on other important issues. These are discussed briefly here. In this section I do not draw any firm conclusions; I simply discuss what the evidence *suggests* and highlight the research that should be done to build on these preliminary findings.

First, the cases which I study in this thesis may reveal *critically* important insights about nuclear deterrence between unequal nuclear powers. The period from 1958-62 was one in which the nuclear relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union went through fundamental changes. At the beginning of this period, the Soviet Union had a small and very vulnerable intercontinental nuclear arsenal. They had the ability to destroy

³⁰⁷ See Snyder and Diesing, Conflict Among Nations; Huth, Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War.

³⁰⁸ Although the best studies of alliance behavior that I know of suggest that states balance against threats. If this is the case, then having one's allies doubt one's credibility may not be a bad thing; the allies will simply take steps to protect themselves from the threat. This may be advantageous from a burden-sharing perspective. On balancing behavior, see Steve Walt, The Origins of Alliances (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). For another good study which builds on Walt, and which also concludes that states balance against threats, see Randall Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," International Security Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72-107.

³⁰⁹ Mike Tomz, for example, recently found that a debtor's history of repaying its debts does affect the terms of its future loans. See Tomz, "Do Creditors Ignore History? Reputation in International Capital Markets," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1999. A useful line of further research would be to try to bring these findings together and discover why reputation seems to matter in one aspect of international relations but not in this one – military threats during crises.

America's European allies in a nuclear attack, but only a very modest ability to threaten the American homeland. By 1962, the Soviet nuclear arsenal had grown and diversified. They were still outmatched numerically, and their arsenal was still vulnerable to preemption, but the chances of a successful American disarming strike which would destroy all of the Soviet weapons which could hit the United States was disappearing.³¹⁰ How did this transition affect the military relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union? When did the United States begin to treat Soviet threats with greater caution – when the Soviets deployed its first nuclear weapons? When the Soviets developed the capability to destroy America's close allies? When the Soviets developed a modest ability to deliver nuclear weapons against the American homeland? Or when the Soviets developed a secure second-strike nuclear deterrent force?

The evidence from this thesis suggests that the deterrent relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union changed dramatically once the Soviets deployed a modest ability to deliver nuclear weapons against American cities. In other words, Soviet threats to destroy American allies did not force the U.S. to shelve its doctrine of "massive retaliation" or to offer compromises over Berlin. The Eisenhower Administration was willing to fight for Berlin down to the last European city. In 1961, the Kennedy Administration was similarly unwilling to give meaningful concessions to defuse the Berlin situation. But when nuclear weapons were pointed at the United States homeland in 1962, the Americans quickly accepted a compromise solution to end the crisis. It is no coincidence that the United States pushed to enhance NATO's conventional military power soon after the threat of Soviet nuclear weapons stretched across the Atlantic.

³¹⁰ By 1962, U.S. civilian leaders had been convinced that they no longer had a reasonable first-strike option. The Joint Chiefs of Staff officially came to this conclusion a year later and reported it to the President.

If this interpretation is correct, and more research should pursue this line of inquiry, there are many implications. First, America's allies need to think seriously about the wisdom of remaining under the American nuclear umbrella. The problem for the allies is not the one which is usually discussed. The problem is not that America may not keep its commitments; the problem is that the United States might be too willing to keep its commitments, even if that involves the risk of an adversary's nuclear attack on the allies' cities. The history from the 1950s suggests that the United States would stand up to North Korean nuclear coercion, even if North Korea had the ability to destroy South Korean and Japanese cities. South Korea and Japan may pay dearly for relying on the American nuclear umbrella, if the United States responds to North Korean threats the same way that it responded to Soviet threats in the late 1950s.

Similarly, the example of the 1950s suggests that a handful of Iraqi nuclear weapons with medium-range deliver systems could not deter the United States from intervening in the Persian Gulf to protect U.S. interests. As long as it is America's allies who are threatened by the Iraqi warheads, America will likely fight, if necessary, to defend those interests.³¹¹

The other side of this equation is that the Cold War evidence suggests that an adversary may not need a fully-secure, second strike nuclear force to deter the United States. In 1962 the Soviet nuclear force structure was still vulnerable to preemption. An American first-strike would probably have destroyed most of the Soviet nuclear weapons

³¹¹ For an analysis of this question in the context of the 1991 Gulf War, see Barry Posen, "U.S. security policy in a nuclear-armed world, or: What if Iraq had had nuclear weapons?" *Security Studies* Vol. 6, No. X (spring 1997), pp. 1-31. Posen argues that even if Iraq had had nuclear weapons in 1991, the United States would have launched Operation Desert Storm and liberated Kuwait.

The implication of this part of my argument is that Posen is right; the United States would have pushed Iraq out of Kuwait even if the Iraqis had nuclear weapons in 1991. The evidence from the Gulf War strongly supports this conclusion. Threats of Iraqi biological attacks – which like nuclear weapons could kill hundreds of thousands of civilians – did not deter the United States in 1991. But the evidence from

on the ground, and it might have destroyed all of them.³¹² Yet the possibility of nuclear retaliation against the American homeland was enough to cause the United States to compromise during the Cuban missile crisis and to force NATO to change its military doctrine. As America's adversaries deploy medium sized, semi-survivable arsenals of intercontinental-range nuclear weapons, the United States may find it impossible to conduct military operations against the adversaries as we have in the past.

Another issue which this thesis sheds light on is the difficulty America has had in recent years in coercing relatively weak adversaries. Since the Cold War, the U.S. has faced a series of adversaries with far less power than the United States, yet the U.S. has had great difficulty coercing them. The balance of power in these disputes has not been in question, so America's credibility must have been lacking. How can this be consistent with the power/interests hypothesis? Shouldn't Muhammad Farah Aidid, and Slobodan Milosovic have believed U.S. credibility?

The power/interests framework that I develop in Chapter 2 sheds light on America's difficulty coercing weak adversaries. The answer, in short, is that the America's confrontations with Aidid and Milosovic have involved relatively small interests for the United States. The power/interests hypothesis suggests that it is very difficult to coerce one's adversaries unless one's national interests are significantly engaged. (**See Figure 3, Chapter 2**) Trying to coerce a country over an issue which one does not care that much about is difficult and requires massive military superiority. If the framework I develop in Chapter 2 is correct, the U.S. will only look credible in disputes over tangential interests if it is clear that the United States will "win pretty." In other

this thesis suggests that if Iraq had a small number of intercontinental-range delivery vehicles, its prospect for deterring American intervention would grow dramatically.

³¹² American air defenses would also probably have shot down many Soviet bombers as they penetrated North American airspace.

words, not only is U.S. victory very likely, it is unlikely that the U.S. will pay many costs. If an adversary has a reasonable chance of holding out and denying the U.S. victory, of finding a way to impose unexpected costs on the United States, the U.S. will have a tough road establishing credibility over relatively low-stakes confrontations.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2 I critiqued previous empirical studies of reputation and credibility and raised what I believe are serious questions about their findings. The next set of scholars who study reputation and credibility will undoubtedly find faults in my study, too. But the cumulative weight of evidence against the reputation hypothesis is becoming overwhelming.

For decades American foreign policy has operated under the assumption that generating a pattern of keeping one's commitments enhances one's credibility in the future. Lives and dollars were spent before anyone did even rudimentary empirical studies to check this assumption. Now, finally, several studies have been done and they all point against the reputation hypothesis. Until believers in the reputation hypothesis can produce a body of empirical studies which document a clear link between keeping commitments and credibility, it makes no sense to continue to pay the serious costs – in dollars and lives – that adherence to the reputation hypothesis requires.

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