Assessing Credibility: A Qualitative Analysis of Public and Private Signals in the Cuban Missile Crisis

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Credibility has long been a subject of interest in international relations. However, recent works minimize some of the earliest and most intriguing credibility questions. To what degree is accuracy related to credibility, do private signals exist solely in the shadow of their public counterparts or do they have credibility of their own? Moreover, how do leaders weigh concurrent public and private signals during a crisis? In this thesis, I examine the nature of public and private signals in the Cuban Missile Crisis in an inductive, qualitative manner. I find that in the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, despite some rationalist assertions, private signals are at times meaningful. Moreover, the divergences between public and private signals are limited. As such, the two exist in an interactional, almost double-helical state. This finding has distinct importance for the future of credibility scholarship.

Dedication

To Courtney. For everything.

Contents

Acknowledgements

My thanks go out to Professor's Peter Feaver, Joseph Grieco, Jack Knight, Simon Miles and Rachel Myrick for their substantive comments and mentorship. I also thank Rebecca Dudley, Andrew Kenealy, Phuong Pham, and Nolan Yager for their valuable input. Finally, I thank the America in the World Consortium for their generous funding.

1. Introduction

The morning edition of the May 29th, 1972, New York Times was riddled with eye-catching headlines. "Duke of Windsor Dies," "Saigon Stalled in Drives To Open Roads in 2 Towns," "6 Killed by Bomb in Belfast."[1] A noteworthy day in the news indeed. Shunted to the side of the front page is another headline that reads "Nixon Talks On TV To Soviet People and Hails Accord."[2] These accords, SALT I for short, were hitherto unequaled. From them came the first limit on how many nuclear missiles the major Cold War players could keep in their arsenals, perhaps it deserved a better position over a squabble between McGovern and Humphrey. But as was often the case during the period, Nixon's address to the Soviet Union was the news of yesterday, May 28th.[3] Thousands of miles away, President Richard Nixon was saying something very different on May 29th.

Much of what was spoken behind closed doors during the Cold war remains classified. Wargames played during the period are only now being studied.[4] Yet some meeting minutes are available; among them are those from May 29th. During a private

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[1] The New York Times. "TimesMachine: Monday, May 29, 1972 - NYTimes.Com." Accessed March 18, 2023. http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1972/05/29/issue.html.
[2] Ibid.
[3] "Milestones: 1969–1976 - Office of the Historian." Accessed March 18, 2023. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/salt.
[4] Pauly, Reid B.C. "Would U.S. Leaders Push the Button? Wargames and the Sources of Nuclear Restraint." *International Security* 43, no. 2 (November 2018): 151–92. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00333.

meeting held in General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev's Kremlin office, President Nixon said the following:

"…privately or publicly, I shall take no steps directed against the interests of the Soviet Union. But the General Secretary should rely on what I say in private channel, not what anyone else tells him."[5]

Nixon, it seems, was supremely concerned with the assessments of what that afternoon he labeled "superficial observers."[6] This is puzzling, given that credibility studies in the pantheon of international relations (IR) scholarship would amend or altogether reverse Nixon's statement. Authors such as Keren Yarhi-Milo would likely agree that a credible word between Brezhnev and Nixon could be shared privately but also point out that 'superficial' observation might also generate credibility. Scholars more convinced by the rationalist paradigm, however, would almost assuredly urge both leaders to ignore the private channel in favor of more trustworthy public means of signaling – the allure of bluffing in private is too great, and bargaining too often devolves into a "zero-sum" game. Yet, throughout history, leaders have settled matters

[5] Kremlin meeting minutes quoted directly from Dallek, Robert. *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*. London: Penguin, 2008, p. 398.
[6] Ibid.

behind closed doors away from that very same credibility-generating scrutiny.[7] Of course, not all these negotiations lead to crisis de-escalation.[8] However, leaders spend valuable time engaged in such private diplomacy. States invest significant sums of national treasure in maintaining diplomatic channels. Nevertheless, IR literature mainly perceives that which happens privately as cheap which makes for an intriguing avenue of investigation.

The literature on the nature of public and private signaling – the terms ascribed to material actions or public statements and private negotiations or diplomacy, respectively – is divided. IR scholars assert that conflict is a game of bargaining; war is costly, so there should be costs short of war that actors find preferable. Yet, war occurs – and recurs. Adequately demonstrating, or signaling as it is termed in the literature, one's position on the bargaining spectrum can theoretically prevent settlement breakdown. But how does an actor best signal their position? Credibility literature has two divergent answers: public or private signaling. Some researchers see public signals as superior because they engage a mechanism known as audience costs. For a small but influential minority, however, private signals can become credible given the proper circumstances. While credibility is a well-researched concept, four broad questions cut across this

[7] A prime example is the secret negotiations between the great powers in 1916 during WWI. See Zelikow, Philip. *The Road Less Traveled: The Secret Battle to End the Great War, 1916-1917*. First edition. New York: PublicAffairs, 2021.

[8] The private negotiations between Neville Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler come to mind.

literature for which there are only convoluted answers. First is whether accuracy is synonymous with credibility in leaders' minds; second, to what degree (if at all) are private signals a by-product of a crisis's public prosecution; and third, under what conditions are leaders encouraged to share private information? Fourth, why do leaders turn to private diplomacy despite the relatively popular categorization of these negotiations as cheap? Though there are antecedents to these questions in international relations research, specifically Robert Jervis, I find that his original avenue of investigation is at times overlooked in favor of the contemporary debate over reputation for resolve. As a result, though a narrow gap, its investigation is a worthwhile endeavor.

In this thesis, I use the Cuban Missile Crisis as an exploratory case study to illuminate the nature and effect of private vs. public signals on U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.[9] Such a design allows me to penetrate the black box of leader-level cognitive perceptions, while tracing the direct outcomes of signals. The first section of my article reviews the literature on credible signaling, differentiating between rationalist and behavioral credibility literatures. I find that these two literatures interplay in an almost helical manner, much like the strands of a DNA

[9] Public signals are defined as material actions or public statements that can plausibly be noticed by domestic audiences or an international audience distinct from the intended recipient of the signal; in this definition, I do not assume an exclusivity; a public signal can be viewed by both an international or domestic audience simultaneously. Private signals are verbal agreements, diplomatic exchanges, or secret reassurances sent directly by the sender to the recipient or perceived as such.

molecule. The second provides justification for my chosen research design and the third presents my chosen case study, the Cuban Missile Crisis. Given the inductive nature of my study, I analyze the study fourth and build inductive theory from that analysis. From this, several arguments are generated. Based on the evidence, public signals do not wholly eclipse their private counterparts but neither do private signals as a rule overcome what is sent publicly. Instead, the two exist symbiotically. Furthermore, Kennedy and Khrushchev struggled to credibly signal their interests to one another – both in public and private. Also, both leaders viewed the gap between their adversary's private information and the content of a private signal as narrower than that expressed publicly. In other words, though Kennedy and Khrushchev were aware of the propensity to bluff, they still found credibility in private signals. After making these arguments, I conclude with the limitations of my work and implications for future study.

2. Literature Review

Early international relations scholars asserted that an inability to perceive and interpret an adversary's intentions could theoretically fuel conflict.[10] As the Cold War progressed, the concept of credibility – a statement's speculative believability – became a topic of interest to international relations scholars and foreign policy practitioners. Thomas Schelling and Robert Jervis were among the earliest academics investigating the link between credibility, signaling, and deterrence. Both scholars postulated that measuring credibility is an act of demonstrating commitment via signaling costs to an adversary.[11] However, neither fully agreed on the types of signals that either normatively or descriptively demonstrated costs and commitment.

For Schelling, an economist by training, credibility is best conveyed through "deed rather than word." [12] According to his theory, material actions occur publicly and are therefore subject to sunk costs and public "constrain[t]."[13] As such, these signals demonstrate high credibility in scenarios where deception is likely. More influenced by psychology, Jervis disagreed, claiming that words – especially when broken or exposed

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[10] Butterfield, Herbert. "The Tragic Element in Modern International Conflict." *The Review of Politics* 12, no. 2 (April 1950): 147–64. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500044983; Herz, John H. "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (January 1950): 157–80. https://doi.org/10.2307/2009187.
[11] Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 5.
[12] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 134.
[13] Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 73.

as falsehoods – "can also be costly."[14] Furthermore, Jervis asserted that costs were a matter of perception.[15] Credible signaling, therefore, is not simply a matter of demonstrating costs but penetrating the recipient's veil of misperception.

Moreover, a signal's credibility is not contingent on its accuracy – deception, either detected or undetected – can be revelatory.[16] As a result, Jervis theorized that private diplomatic exchanges could be seen as credible under the proper conditions. Over time, as successive scholarship expanded upon, empirically demonstrated, and at times problematized these early theories, two helical veins of credibility literature evolved: one, rationalist, grew from the work of Schelling; the other, behavioral, rose from the scholarship of Jervis.[17]

Fully unpacking the complex interplay of this literature and all its points of friction is, admittedly, beyond the scope of my work. However, this review shows that early theorists of the rationalist and behavioral credibility literature observed a

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[14] Jervis, *The Logic of Images,* p. 19.
[15] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.
[16] Ibid.
[17] It is important to note that this theoretical structure allows for points of convergence. A primarily rationalist study can share assumptions with prior behavioral works and *vice versa*. Many of the articles included in this review have a similar quality; for example, Anne Sartori uses a mixture of formal modeling and large-N analysis to demonstrate the credibility of diplomatic negotiations, which would, on the surface, fall under the category of rationalist. However, her theory is primarily derived from the early behavioral supposition that diplomatic exchange can indeed be credible. In short, the labels are directed at the theory of a work rather than empirics though they certainly influence the latter. Given this limitation, the double-helix structure should be considered a simple framing device rather than a hard rule.

difference between public and private signaling but never fully articulated a distinction. As credibility literature evolved, audience costs became the dominant paradigm through which we understand and discuss signaling. This and other theoretical assumptions in both veins have somewhat limited our current understanding within international relations literature on whether private signals affect credibility assessment distinct from their public counterparts. Until recently, I argue, the rationalist vein of credibility scholarship assumed away the potential credibility of private signals. While more recent works find some efficiency in private signals, their efficacy is contingent on the public specter of a crisis. This, in turn, prohibits development of a distinct private signaling theory. Despite building on the early work of Jervis, behavioral credibility literature posits theories of private signaling that are either overbroad or too parsimonious, making them difficult to verify empirically. Furthermore, the behavioral sub-literature has devoted much recent attention to resolve, commonly seen as a variable in the credibility equation, credibility = capabilities x interests x resolve. [18, 19]

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[18] There is a significant debate among credibility scholars over reputation for resolve. Early credibility authors like Jervis theorized that an actor's past actions could plausibly inform their adversary's credibility assessments. Later scholarship, pioneered by Ted Hopf and Johnathan Mercer, empirically demonstrated the opposite. These authors, along with the later scholarship of Daryl Press, find that the specific stakes and interests in each conflict outweigh the importance of past actions. Moreover, because similar actions can elicit different reactions depending on the perceiving entity, it stands to reason that two actors behaving similarly can develop entirely different reputations – if one develops at all. However, more recent scholarship on reputation for resolve sees this argument as logically flawed and empirically unfounded. In her book *Reputation for Resolve: How Leaders Signal Determination in International Politics*, author Danielle Lupton uses a close qualitative examination of primary source documents from the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Khrushchev period of the Cold War – the same general period used by Daryl Press – to demonstrate that reputations do indeed form in the minds of leaders. Most significantly, leaders also use these

While there is much debate over which of these variables has the most influence over credibility, there is widespread consensus that credibility writ large is "some combination" of the three.[20] With such attention on the interaction between interest and capabilities and the current debate surrounding resolve, the small gap in private signals is a far less well-worn path. My literature review proceeds in two parts: first, I analyze what both strands of credibility literature to date say about credible signaling, highlighting advances, limitations, and gaps along the way. Second, I explore the implications of these cleavages for our understanding of a private signal's ability to exist outside a public signal's shadow, arguing that a credibility distinct to private signals is an avenue of investigation worthy of disinterring.

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reputations as an analytical framework for interpreting new information. These findings are further supported by the works of authors such as Keren Yarhi-Milo, Joshua Kertzer, Alex Weisiger, and Harvey & Mitton. While an interesting point of friction in the field of credibility, I intend to take up a different thread. See Yarhi-Milo, Keren. *Who Fights for Reputation: The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict*. Princeton Studies in International History and Politics. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018; Lupton, Danielle L. *Reputation for Resolve: How Leaders Signal Determination in International Politics*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020; Harvey, Frank P., and John Mitton. *Fighting for Credibility: US Reputation and International Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018; Weisiger, Alex, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. "Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics." *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (2015): 473–95. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818314000393; Press, Daryl Grayson. *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Evaluate Military Threats*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2005; Hopf, Ted. *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965-1990*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

[19] Shipping Tang first postulated this specific equation. See Tang, *Reputation, Cult of Reputation and International Conflict,* p. 38.

[20] Jervis, Yarhi-Milo, and Casler, *Redefining the Debate Over Reputation and Credibility in International Security: Promises and Limits of New Scholarship*, p. 174.

2.1 Rationalist Credibility Literature

Thomas Schelling represents the foundation of rationalist credibility literature. Not only was Schelling the first to articulate a definition of credibility - proof that "the threat which leaves something to chance" isn't hollow – he also showed via formal modeling and several thought experiments, along with historical examples, that "public opinion" and material actions could limit the bargaining range of players in a game.[21] For Schelling, "actions…prove something" because they are costly, are subject to curation by the sender, and therefore more likely to be seen as credible. In Schelling's view, when divorced from other costly actions, words are not subject to the same level of intentionality.[22] Instead, verbal exchanges are part of a "fine print" that weighs less on credibility calculations and even "perceptions." [23] Though Schelling never claimed that accuracy was synonymous with credibility, he noted that states share a general understanding of action.[24] This shared language makes misunderstanding material actions, such as displays of power or troop movements, rare.[25] The idiosyncrasies of verbal diplomacy are a far more uncontrolled and unfiltered medium that, according to Schelling, creates greater space for misinterpretation and misrepresentation. Therefore,

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[21] Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 72.
[22] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 149.
[23] Ibid, p. 135, 189.
[24] Ibid, p. 140.
[25] Ibid.

we should expect to see public statements and actions generating higher degrees of credibility through clarity. However, as Snyder and Diesing show, this is not always true.

Though Snyder and Diesing agree with Schelling that "making [statements] public" augments "their credibility," they also note that doing so restricts the potential range of settlements.[26] Conversely, "private negotiations" increase the chance of settlement because they "allow for more flexibility" in negotiations.[27] Though possible during said negotiations, deception carries with it the potential for rendering future threats less effective – a suboptimal strategy.[28] In other words, public statements and actions, while more credible than their private counterparts, carry a greater capacity to lock actors into a narrow range of bargaining options. James Fearon later capitalized on this thread.

According to Fearon, democracies in a crisis can credibly signal their interests and resolve by publicly pronouncing either – or both.[29] Doing so effectively 'ties' the democratic leaders 'hand;' in other words, the leader will incur costs at the ballot box if

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[26] Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision making, and System Structure in International Crises*, p. 251.
[27] Ibid, p. 252.
[28] Ibid, p. 247.
[29] Fearon, James D. "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes." *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994): 577–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/2944796.

they renege on their public signal.[30] Because these signals and the costs they incur are visible, adversaries should infer that a leader is honestly representing their bargaining position instead of withholding private information or bluffing.[31] On the surface, this is an incremental progression from the works of Schelling, Snyder, and Diesing. However, Fearon's great contribution to the rationalist credibility literature was explicitly articulating and empirically testing the theory of tying hands.[32] Prior works saw the path dependency created by public signaling as a potentially suboptimal strategy. Fearon, on the other hand, saw it as a potential benefit. A rational actor would only willingly tie their hands when they had "observable" superior capability or their interests and resolve outweighed "inferior" capabilities.[33] An adversary of equal rationality would perceive this signal and interpret it as credible because the incentive for honesty outweighed the motivation for bluffing. Critical to his theory of tying hands is the mechanism of audience costs, which, according to Fearon, democratic states are singularly adept at generating.[34] This contribution, as it relates to my work, is essential for two reasons.

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[30] Fearon, James D. "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (February 1997): 68–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002797041001004.
[31] Fearon, *Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes.*
[32] Schelling touched on the concept in both The Strategy of Conflict and Arms and Influence, but he did not empirically test them to the degree of Fearon.
[33] Fearon, *Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,* p. 2.
[34] Ibid.

First, Fearon's mechanism of audience costs spurred a large body of follow-on literature with highly disparate findings. Many early articles that tested Fearon's mechanism found compelling evidence for its explanatory power.[35] Yet, later large-N analyses by authors such as Downes and Sechser find little evidence for the supposed comparative advantage held by democracies issuing compellent threats.[36] Further research into audience costs shows that the direct threats needed by audience costs rarely appear in the historical record.[37] Given high enough stakes, democratic leaders in a crisis prefer delivering ambiguous statements publicly to avoid needlessly constraining their bargaining options.[38] Yet, if democratic leaders are prone to issuing vague public statements, it also stands to reason that public signaling is more a matter of perception than Fearon assumed. Therefore, audience costs may be a "secondary

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[35] See Partell, Peter J., and Glenn Palmer. "Audience Costs and Interstate Crises: An Empirical Assessment of Fearon's Model of Dispute Outcomes." *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (June 1999): 389–405. https://doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00125, p. 1.; Gelpi, Christopher F., and Michael Griesdorf. "Winners or Losers? Democracies in International Crisis, 1918–94." *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 3 (September 2001): 633–47. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055401003148; Schultz, Kenneth A. "Looking for Audience Costs." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 1 (February 2001): 32–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045001002; Tomz, Michael. "Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach." *International Organization* 61, no. 04 (October 2007). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818307070282, p. 821.

[36] Downes, Alexander B., and Todd S. Sechser. "The Illusion of Democratic Credibility." *International Organization* 66, no. 3 (July 2012): 457–89. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818312000161.

[37] Trachtenberg, Marc. "Audience Costs: An Historical Analysis." *Security Studies* 21, no. 1 (January 2012): 3–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.650590.

[38] Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*. Matthew Baum and Brown and Marcum's works support an overall leader-level reticence to make clear public statements in scenarios where audience costs are likely to be incurred. See Baum, Matthew A. "Going Private: Public Opinion, Presidential Rhetoric, and the Domestic Politics of Audience Costs in U.S. Foreign Policy Crises." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 5 (October 2004): 603–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704267764; Brown, Jonathan N., and Anthony S. Marcum. "Avoiding Audience Costs: Domestic Political Accountability and Concessions in Crisis Diplomacy." *Security Studies* 20, no. 2 (April 2011): 141–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.572671.

mechanism" in a complex, interrelated web of factors, including perception, the individual policy preferences of a leader's electorate, and the leader's individual dispositions.[39] Fearon conceded that audience costs might share the stage with other cost-generating mechanisms, but he only allowed room for those other public mechanisms.[40] Prior formal models developed by Fearon show that private signals – termed cheap talk – have a null effect on the likelihood of conflict and pre-conflict settlement.[41] However, more recent rationalist works formally demonstrate the early intuitions of Snyder and Diesing that private negotiations allow actors to reach publicly intolerable agreements. Suppose these models demonstrate an efficiency of private negotiations, a common form of private signaling. In that case, it stands to reason that private signals can plausibly have inherent value – but not necessarily credibility - despite prior rationalist assumptions.[42]

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[39] See Snyder, Jack, and Erica D. Borghard. "The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound." *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (August 2011): 437–56. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305541100027X, p. 437. On the dispositional nature of audience costs, see Brutger, Ryan, and Joshua D. Kertzer. "A Dispositional Theory of Reputation Costs." *International Organization* 72, no. 3 (2018): 693–724. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000188. For recent research on the effects of leader dispositions on the efficacy of public statements and actions, see Yarhi-Milo, Keren, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Jonathan Renshon. "Tying Hands, Sinking Costs, and Leader Attributes." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 10 (November 2018): 2150–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002718785693.

[40] Fearon, *Signaling Foreign Policy Interests*, p. 69.

[41] Fearon, James D. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379–414. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300033324.

[42] Interestingly, new research in mathematical economics illustrates that there are certain equilibria where disclosing information publicly rather than privately results in skepticism of the sender and the signal itself. See Harbaugh, Richmond, and Theodore To. "False Modesty: When Disclosing Good News Looks Bad." *Journal of Mathematical Economics* 87 (March 2020): 43–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmateco.2018.10.004.

Since the late 1990s, researchers have published compelling formal models demonstrating conditions under which actors may rationally pursue private negotiations.[43] Scholars such as Tarar and Leventoglu, and Shuhei Kurizaki each show that public statements of resolve limit bargaining options via the mechanism of audience cost.[44] As a result, private negotiations can re-balance the bargaining equilibrium toward a peaceful settlement, away from conflict.[45] However, in each work, the authors assert that private signals are not more credible but more efficient. This thread of efficiency is pulled by Katagiri and Min, who find that private signals effectively cut through noise. [46] In other words, private signals sent in a crisis are more targeted and are therefore more capable of influencing leader perception than "public statements" but less capable than costly actions.[47] This is an important distinction. According to the study, Katagiri and Min find empirical evidence for the hypothesis that "private diplomatic statements have smaller effects on evaluations of resolve than material actions."[48] While their study is rigorous and highly compelling, I take issue with the assumption that private diplomatic

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[43] Tarar, Ahmer, and Bahar Leventoğlu. "Public Commitment in Crisis Bargaining: *Public Commitment in Crisis Bargaining*." *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (September 2009): 817–39. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2009.00557.x.; Kurizaki, Shuhei. "Efficient Secrecy: Public versus Private Threats in Crisis Diplomacy." *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 3 (August 2007): 543–58. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055407070396.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Tarar & Leventoglu, *Public Commitment*.
[46] Katagiri, Azusa, and Eric Min. "The Credibility of Public and Private Signals: A Document-Based Approach." *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 1 (February 2019): 156–72. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000643.
[47] Ibid, p. 156.
[48] Ibid, p. 158.

statements exist "in the shadow of costly [public] material actions."[49] Material actions produce sunk costs, but in terms of simple logic, so too can private diplomacy. The findings of Anne Sartori further support this logic.

In 2002, scholar Anne Sartori published *The Might of the Pen: A Reputational Theory of Communication in International Disputes.* In her work, Sartori uses a formal model to demonstrate that "diplomacy works in the absence of domestic audience" costs.[50] This is because leaders value an international reputation for honesty when bargaining; being caught in a bluff can tarnish a reputation and make future diplomatic bargaining difficult.[51] *The Might of the Pen*, along with Sartori's later work *Deterrence by Diplomacy*, represent what are, to my knowledge, some of the few examples of a theory of private signals operating separately from public signals.[52] The author rightly points out that bluffing during private negotiations is an ever-present reality, but the cost of inhibiting future diplomacy outweighs the temptation to bluff.[53] Private diplomacy, therefore, is not necessarily dependent on a domestic but an international audience.

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[49] Ibid, p. 157.
[50] Sartori, *The Might of the Pen*, p. 122.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Sartori, Anne E. *Deterrence by Diplomacy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. Another work, entitled *Cheap Talk Diplomacy* by Kristopher Ramsay pursues the same avenue of investigation and generates highly similar findings to Sartori. See Ramsay, Kristopher W. "'Cheap Talk' Diplomacy, Voluntary Negotiations, and Variable Bargaining Power." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2011. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1800074.
[53] Sartori, *The Might of the Pen*.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that for Sartori, the credibility of a private signal is also tied to reputation. However, credibility studies highly debate this concept, particularly within the behavioral strand. Therefore, we are still left to wonder under what circumstances private diplomacy generates costs equal to material actions.

2.2 Behavioral Credibility Literature

Where Schelling was more rationalist in his approach, Jervis was more behavioral, focusing on the interaction between belief, behavior, and inference and how this interaction affected credibility.[54] Specifically, Jervis theorized two broad categories of behaviors, each of which could influence an actor's beliefs and pursuant deductions. The first behavior, "signals," are any "statements or actions" that are ambiguous enough to allow for deception.[55] "Indices," on the other hand, are "statements or actions" that exist beyond plausible deception because the perceiver of the index sees it as "inextricably linked to the [senders] capabilities or intentions."[56] Significantly, both

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[54] Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, p. 3 & 12. This is not to say that Schelling was unconcerned with beliefs. See *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 160 and chap. 8.
[55] Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, p. 18. Jervis distinguishes between "Signals" and "signals" in his later work *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, which largely aimed at clarifying his early ideas in *The Logic of Images*.
[56] Ibid.

signals and indices can be expressed via material actions or words and are distinguished by the degree to which a sender can influence perception.[57]

The distinct possibility of deception and cheap talk "lead[s] actors to treat signals skeptically," but this skepticism is weighed against the perceivers' understanding of the senders' interests.[58] According to Jervis, these perceptions (or misperceptions) form the basis of credibility assessment. That the perception of a signal is open to manipulation resembles Schelling's early theory of cheap talk, a form of costless action most likely to appear in verbal exchange.[59] However, Jervis does not strictly confine cheapness to private, verbal exchanges nor assert that material actions are necessarily accurate signals.

For Jervis, the imperative consideration of any credibility assessment is the leader, specifically, that leader's perception. The information a decision-maker uses to develop credibility inferences is attenuated by a process commonly referred to as cognitive dissonance.[60] While actions and words can be potential inputs for these inferences, leaders psychologically prefer information – used synonymously with signals – that maintain cognitive comfort and stability. Creating such stability, according

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid, p. 68-69.
[59] Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 117.
[60] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, chap. 11.

to Jervis, requires the leader to take those actions which maintain the previously held "self-image" and overvalue "sunk costs," which in turn puts the leader on a path that favors a spiral model of conflict, evaluate alternative policies irrationally and pursue other generalizable "patterns of interaction."[61] As in his earlier work, *The Logic of Images*, Jervis holds actions and dialogue as plausible equals regarding their revelatory capacity. The decision of which signal to view as most costly, and therefore act upon, is modulated by the complex interaction of the leaders' psychology and the context of the decision. Importantly, what a leader finds costly might go unnoticed by a credibility researcher.[62] A bellicose statement might be more believable in a specific crisis than repositioning a combat battalion.[63] Conversely, material actions can surmount private signals, but these actions should not be seen as "automatically less ambiguous than words."[64] In short, Jervis is chiefly concerned with how a specific signal is received – the behavior that follows determines costs and, therefore, credibility, which is not tantamount to accuracy.

Though persuasive, the authors' first-image behavioral concern of reception has specific drawbacks. Across many of his works, Jervis is over-reliant on broad behavioral

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[61] Ibid, p. 405, 3. Indeed, Jervis theorized that the attempt to maintain a self-image of rationality could adversely "[impair]" a leader's ability to act economically rationally. See p. 405.
[62] Jervis, *The Logic of Images*, p. 301.
[63] Ibid, p. 20.
[64] Ibid, p. 19.

explanations for behavior observed *ex-post*. For example, much of the author's work details how misperceptions can be inaccurate but offers relatively little on accurate perceptions. In other words, while Jervis claims that wars can theoretically begin and end without misperception, we know less about the perceptions that lead to a peaceful settlement.[65] Furthermore, Jervis is adamant that cost is not the sole purview of material action, stating that "some actions are not costly, but are indeed informative because they can only be undertaken by a certain type of actor."[66] However, Jervis is reticent in providing directional hypotheses for later works to build on. His limitations, then, are a different side of the coin than his counterpart Schelling; where Schelling was perhaps too parsimonious, Jervis was overbroad, offering few testable patterns despite claiming otherwise.[67] As a result, though Jervis had much more to say about cheap talk, the power of words, and the promise of private signals, he did so in a way that was wanting for empirical attractiveness. Perhaps this explains why some of the works that followed Jervis did not immediately take up private signaling but instead focused on extrapolating and testing reputational theories.

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[65] Jervis, Robert. "War and Misperception." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 675. https://doi.org/10.2307/204820, p. 678.
[66] Jervis, Robert. *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 114.
[67] Ibid.

As I have stated, the current debate surrounding reputation, i.e., whether they form, matter, and adhere to the state or leader, is not the focus of my study. However, it is essential to highlight that many influential behavioral credibility studies concern themselves with this topic at the expense of adding richness to the private vs. public signaling debate. Indeed, the works of Hopf, Mercer, Press, and Lupton all fall into this category. Notably, both Press and Lupton use private statements as evidence for their reputation theories but say little about their reasoning for why private signals are revelatory.[68] Furthermore, while Press and Lupton also utilize the Cuban Missile Crisis in their empirics, only Lupton incorporates the perceptions of Nikita Khrushchev into her findings.[69] This is not a direct criticism of either work. Instead, it is an acknowledgment that two pieces concerned with private signals and the Cuban Missile Crisis direct their arguments towards rectifying the resolve debate. As a result, they create rather than settle questions of private signaling. This is not to say that behaviorally grounded credibility works are entirely unconcerned with private signaling.

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[68] Press offers a one sentence explanation on the credibility of private statements. See Press, Daryl Grayson. *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Evaluate Military Threats*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 30. Lupton has more to say on the subject; however, her focus is narrowly constrained toward answering how leaders assess resolve rather than credibility writ large. See Lupton, Danielle L. *Reputation for Resolve: How Leaders Signal Determination in International Politics*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020.

[69] Lupton, *Reputation for Resolve*, chap. 5.

In his book *Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Social Neuroscience and International Relations*, scholar Marcus Holmes assert that face-to-face interactions allow humans to perceive the intents of others accurately.[70] Utilizing cues from body language, intonation, and other non-verbal means of expression, in-person communication enables persons to assess better the message being conveyed.[71] Furthermore, this type of communication allows individuals to "pick up on deception."[72] Harkening back to the early ideas of Jervis, the author asserts that much of 'what is said' during face-to-face communication, a form of private signaling, is beyond the control of the person speaking, i.e., it falls under the category of an index. Supported by advances in neuroscience and behavioral psychology, the fact that face-to-face communication coveys accurate information is an intriguing concept.[73] Not only is this theory bolstered by recent scholarship in the psychological sciences, but credibility studies have also picked up on this thread.

According to Nicholas Wheeler, when leaders engage in negotiation, they test the information they perceive against available information.[74] When searching for

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[70] Holmes, Marcus. *Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Social Neuroscience and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 252.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid, p. 21.
[73] See Hollenbaugh, Erin E. and Amber L. Ferris. "Predictors of Honesty, Intent, and Valence of Facebook Self-Disclosure." *Computers in Human Behavior* 50, (2015): 456-464; Conrads, Julian and Sebastian Lotz. "The Effect of Communication Channels on Dishonest Behavior." *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics* 58, (2015): 88-93.
[74] Wheeler, Nicholas J. *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict*. First edition. Oxford, United Kingdom ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 54.

confirmation or refutation, leaders look for "an index" instead of a signal.[75] That the author uses the word index instead of signal is essential. Holmes claims that face-to-face negotiations offer leaders a way to identify the veracity of a signal, much of what we say non-verbally is beyond our control for all but the most well-trained.[76] Adhering to the original definitions of Jervis, these signals are not signals at all but indices. However, Wheeler fails to acknowledge that recent behavioral and political psychology advances depict an asymmetric rather than strictly Bayesian updating process.[77] When he originally postulated about the processes and effects of misperception, Jervis held much the same, stating that actors are more likely to seek information that confirms what was previously known rather than altering old beliefs in light of new evidence. So, while Holmes and Wheeler offer a theory for the circumstances under which private diplomatic signals might be viewed as credible and accurate, the matter is no more settled than the current debate around the importance of reputations. As such, the theory offered is somewhat unsatisfying. The most direct treatment of private signals that also accounts for advances in political and behavioral psychology comes from Keren Yarhi-Milo.

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid, p. 55. See also Holmes, Marcus, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. "The Psychological Logic of Peace Summits: How Empathy Shapes Outcomes of Diplomatic Negotiations: Table 1." *International Studies Quarterly*, September 20, 2016, sqw034. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqw034.

[77] See Sharot, Tali, and Neil Garrett. "Forming Beliefs: Why Valence Matters." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 1 (January 2016): 25–33. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2015.11.002; Kertzer, Joshua D., Brian C. Rathbun, and Nina Srinivasan Rathbun. "The Price of Peace: Motivated Reasoning and Costly Signaling in International Relations." *International Organization* 74, no. 1 (2020): 95–118. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818319000328.

In *Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance* Yarhi-Milo claims that private concessions have an inherent cost because an adversary always has the option to reveal the contents of the negotiation publicly.[78] As a result, private signals are not cheap but are imbued with costs. Drawing on the earlier ideas of Jervis, Yarhi-Milo goes on to assert that private signals "convey information" independent of their efficiency.[79] Therefore, private signals impose costs on the sender and communicate credibility. Yet, as the title suggests, Yarhi-Milo still grounds her argument in audience costs theory.

Yarhi-Milo posits that valuable information can be inferred from cheap talk, i.e., private communications.[80] She then postulates that "secret reassurance" can become credible so long as there is a risk that the assurance is made public during or after negotiations.[81] In other words, the shadow of the public eclipses private signals. This is problematic for two reasons. First, Yarhi-Milo claims that the threat of exposing private negotiations creates a "future cost."[82] Notably, the adversary must recognize that the originator of the negotiations faces "significant [domestic] opposition" to the details of

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[78] Yarhi-Milo, Keren. "Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance." *Security Studies* 22, no. 3 (July 2013): 405–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2013.816126.
[79] Ibid, p. 410.
[80] Yarhi-Milo, *Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors*, p. 414.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid, p. 409.

the settlement.[83] A requirement of this recognition is an understanding of the originator's domestic political structures.[84] This understanding implies a mutual language – much like the one initially theorized by Schelling.[85] However, it is not widely accepted that this type of understanding occurs.[86] Yarhi-Milo admits this particular limitation but, as a result, narrowly confines the applicability of her theory to only those cases where "public assurances are not an option for the initiator."[87] In other words, her theory only has explanatory power in cases that include covert operations or situations wherein domestic opposition is exceptionally high. While plausible in the circumstances Yarhi-Milo ascribes, these cases do not represent a majority.[88] This limited applicability, though not problematic for Yarhi-Milo's work, underscores a narrow gap in knowledge of when private signals are viewed as credible. With this point, I now turn to a summation of what is still unknown.

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[83] Ibid, p. 416.
[84] Ibid.
[85] This argument is reflected in a later article co-authored by Yarhi-Milo entitled *Covert Communication*. Instead of using domestic audience costs to build their theory, the authors utilize Schelling's early notion of a shared language surrounding action among international actors. See Carson, Austin, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret." *Security Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 124–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1243921.
[86] Snyder and Borghard, *The Cost of Empty Threats*, p. 437.
[87] Yarhi-Milo, *Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors*, p. 410.
[88] Especially if we consider that domestic audiences do not punish evenly across foreign policy outcomes.

2.3 Gaps

Throughout this review, four cross-cutting themes appear: first, whether accuracy is synonymous with credibility in leaders' minds; second, to what degree (if at all) are private signals a by-product of a crisis's public prosecution; and third, under what conditions are leaders encouraged to share private information. Fourth, why do leaders turn to private diplomacy despite the relatively popular categorization of these negotiations as cheap. Many of the antecedents to these themes are reviewed above and are 'present at the beginning.' However, as I note, as rationalist and behavioral credibility literature evolved, these discussions were dropped in favor of the audience cost paradigm and the standard credibility equation.

From the beginning, Jervis and Schelling were concerned with credibility in its broadest sense. Each author offered different terminology for signaling and theorized different plausible inputs for signaling itself. While the two disagreed on the full list of complete signals (or indices) that have credibility, a disagreement brought on in no small part by their differing units of analysis, both agreed that private signals could plausibly contain some degree of credibility. This plausibility was, however, overshadowed by the explanatory power of the audience cost lens which is currently used by both strands of credibility literature to understand a private signals credibility.

Furthermore, neither Schelling nor Jervis saw credibility as synonymous with accuracy. Current credibility literature inadvertently conflates the two by focusing on efficacy as a way of achieving credibility. Though a signal cuts through noise and elicits a response from a leader, it is not entirely logical to assume that the leader saw the signal as an accurate representation of interests, capabilities, or resolve. Several works examine how leaders update information, but the most recent advances in this psychology line have yet to work their way into IR literature fully. Furthermore, given the focus that most credibility scholars place on stakes, it is plausible that a leader may choose to act on as many signals as possible in the least escalatory manner available in a high-stakes crisis.

The second and third themes are of equal interest. Many rationalist works of credibility assume a shared language around material actions but assert that the language of diplomacy and other private signals is cheap. Importantly, it has only been in the last decade that public statements were removed from the schema. Originally, all that occurred publicly was theorized as credible. Over the years, public statements were labeled as vague and sometimes desultory, but their private counterparts are not afforded the same progression. If the theory of public signaling can evolve and gain clarity and nuance but remain broadly applicable to a wide range of cases as the literature reviewed suggests, it stands to reason that their private counterparts can as well. Multiple studies within the behavioral vein have attempted to illustrate the

credibility of private signals, but either do so too parsimoniously or tie the credibility of private signals to the public specter of a crisis. Other studies highlight the potential scenarios when leaders might engage in private concessions or negotiations, but again, these circumstances rely on the public stage.

Finally, many of the studies reviewed can capture why leaders engage in private diplomacy, despite the 'cheapness' of private negotiations. For some, it is a matter of efficiency. For others, it is a maneuver induced by a leader's fear of audience costs. However, if we consider that audiences are selective in their punishment, this second answer struggles logically. A leader in a given crisis is unlikely to predict the specific decision which will generate a cost, so according to the audience cost inducement logic should always seek private negotiations. Yet, it is unknown whether leaders always seek private settlement first during a crisis.[89] Furthermore, it also unknown to what degree leaders perceive past negotiations, or what a state spends on maintaining diplomatic channels, as a sunk cost. This last consideration is intriguing as it points to why many leaders perceive private signals as more directed. The recipient of a private signal understands that certain costs were shouldered to maintain the signaling channel so does not immediately discount the signal as cheap. Rather, the signal is perceived as efficient, directed and perhaps clear which, potentially, culminate in what might be

[89] No such data set exists to test such a query.

termed accuracy – or, at least, perceived accuracy. This accuracy might be increased because private diplomatic statements are open to high degrees of scrutiny by analysts who can either corroborate or refute the statements veracity.

Given these gaps, what is needed is an inductive study that examines a crisis in depth wherein private, and public signals were sent concurrently. From this study, a general theory (if possible) of signals should be attempted. One that is broader than Schelling yet more parsimonious than Jervis; more widely applicable than Yarhi-Milo but more equal in its treatment with public and private signals than Fearon; one that does not necessarily rely on public signaling but neither fully excludes their validity.

3. Research Design and Case Selection

The central focus of this study is a better understanding of the nature of private and public signals sent concurrently in a crisis and whether the public aspect of a crisis overshadows or influences that which occurs privately. Put differently, I am attempting to generate a general statement about this nature rather than test a specific casual effect. Though qualitative studies can estimate causation, multiple cases are required, which sacrifices the depth of investigation.[90] Given this aim, I employ an inductive, qualitative single case study design of the deviant-exploratory typology.[91] Such a design is appropriate for several reasons. First, case study research is particularly well-suited for interrogating a single phenomenon in-depth. Within the realm of case study research, several typologies exist. From these differing typologies, the deviant-exploratory was chosen for its suitability for behavioral investigations.[92]

Second, the tools available to qualitative researchers are highly adapted to triangulating an actor's cognitive steps that get them from stimulus to response.[93] Specifically, the instrument of process tracing allows me to develop a cognitive chain

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[90] See George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. BCSIA Studies in International Security. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005, p. 181.
[91] See Gerring, John. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 106.
[92] Ibid, 105.
[93] See Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Strategies for Social Inquiry. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 6.

that aids in clarifying the inputs received by both Kennedy and Khrushchev.[94] Furthermore, it will enable me to create a cognitive and behavioral chain that links signals to responses, tease out any relationship between credibility and accuracy, and determine which signals were prioritized and why. Finally, an inductive approach to my research was motivated by notable calls by current scholars that a greater amount of such work is needed.

Researchers Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth assert that without "improved theory," large-N studies are unlikely to remain "compelling."[95] They note that "careful qualitative work" rich in data can be a better method for directly investigating perceptual-level concerns.[96] This call for increased qualitative research in credibility studies is echoed by Jervis, Yarhi-Milo, and Carson, who claim that the literature needs to strike a "balance" between deductive large-N analyses and case studies that build theory "inductively."[97] Indeed, most studies presented in my review –quantitative or qualitative – build their theories deductively, often using the audience cost paradigm as a launching point. For this reason, I employ an inductive approach. In sum, the extant

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[94] For more on process tracing, see Gerring, *Case Study Research*, chap. 7.
[95] See Dafoe, Allan, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth. "Reputation and Status as Motives for War." *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 1 (May 11, 2014): 371–93. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-071112-213421, p. 389.
[96] Ibid, 384.
[97] See Jervis, Robert, Keren Yarhi-Milo, and Don Casler. "Redefining the Debate Over Reputation and Credibility in International Security: Promises and Limits of New Scholarship." *World Politics* 73, no. 1 (January 2021): 167–203. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887120000246, p. 196.

literature on qualitative typologies posits that case study research is well suited in scenarios where causal mechanisms are missing, current theories cannot explain observed outcomes, or a sharper understanding of observed variation is needed.

The specific case study I present is the Cuban Missile Crisis, temporally constrained from October 16th, 1962, to October 28th, 1962. [98] Though heavily studied by both historians and political scientists, I argue that the Cuban Missile Crisis is both appropriate for my study, and has continued relevance. First, the Cuban Missile Crisis is perhaps the closest the U.S. and the USSR came to a nuclear exchange during the Cold War, and, as a result, the crisis has intrinsic importance. The theory of credibility signaling predicts that public signals are more credible and should therefore be the signals that elicit a response. Given the high stakes and publicity of the crisis, public signals should be weighed more heavily than private signals in the minds of both John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev. If costly signaling operates as predicted by rationalist literature, Kennedy and Khrushchev should favor material actions above public and private signals.

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[98] On October 16th, President Kennedy was first notified that the Soviets had installed missiles in Cuba. Nikita Khrushchev accepted Kennedy's terms on October 28th, the dispositive event ending the crisis for the U.S-Soviet portion of the crisis. Though ICB codes the crisis from Oct. 16th – Nov. 20th, this is because ICB also codes Cuba as an actor in the crisis. Cuban involvement falls outside my scope conditions. For ICB coding, see "ICB Data Viewer | International Crisis Behavior Project." Accessed March 10, 2023. http://www.icb.umd.edu/dataviewer/?crisno=196.

Second, there is a plethora of within-case evidence available to researchers that satisfies the generally accepted requirements for qualitative data.[99] This high volume of evidence, though challenging to parse, allows me to exploit and measure variation within the case. Third, and as a corollary, the evidence for the ExComm deliberations is taken from direct White House audio recordings. In other words, the evidence used is of high quality. That these deliberations and conversations were being taped was at the time known only to President John F. Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Evidence of this kind eliminates the bias usually found in memoirs or autobiographical historical documents – participants in the conversations likely did not think it necessary to censor themselves.[100] Though primary sources constitute much of my evidence, where appropriate second-hand historical evidence is also utilized – particularly in situations where Russian-to-English translation is needed. Fourth, not only is there a wealth of information about U.S. decision-making calculus, but there is a large amount of quality historical scholarship that investigates the Soviet aspect of the crisis, which I find largely missing from political science research on the crisis.[101] In

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[99] Gerring, *Case Study Research*, p. 172.

[100] Of course, one could argue that the President and Attorney General were aware of the recordings and may have censored some of their language. While true, I believe that given the extreme stakes of the crisis, JFK's well-documented poor health, and his direct relationship with his brother Robert, self-censoring by either of the two was likely minimal.

[101] Several studies in political science use the Cuban Missile Crisis as a case study, most notably Press, Snyder, Brown, Marcum, Schelling, and Jervis. However, some of these cases were conducted during a period when data on Soviet perceptions were unavailable. Studies conducted when such data was available either lacked depth, partially omitted key moments perceived by the Soviets, or directed their analysis toward different ends.

short, the Cuban Missile Crisis is a case of grave stakes with an abundance of high quality evidence from both the U.S. and Soviet sides.

In the study, I develop a basic chronology of public and private signals sent by Kennedy and Khrushchev. Where able, I correlate these signals to verbal or physical reactions by the recipient. Instances where either leader expressed perception are included in the chronology. I then compare perceptions and reactions to predictions of both the rationalist and behavioral credibility literatures.

4. Case Study – The Cuban Missile Crisis

4.1 Background

The Cuban Missile Crisis unfolded over 13 days in October 1962. Marked by the high stakes of open nuclear exchange, the Cuban Missile Crisis is a rare historical incident shaped by multiple precipitating events. These events are not included in my analysis but are essential for framing the crisis.

In June 1961, the Vienna Summit brought Kennedy and Khrushchev together for the first time. The topics of discussions ranged and included events such as nuclear test banning and the Berlin problem.[102] Critically, Khrushchev used the summit to upbraid Kennedy over the United States Bay of Pigs misadventure.[103] However, between Khrushchev's stubbornness and Kennedy's "shock" at such treatment, the summit failed to resolve tensions, and both leaders left with a mutual mistrust of the other.[104]

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[102] Fursenko, Aleksandr Aleksandrovič, and Timothy J. Naftali. *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958 - 1964*. 1. publ. as a Norton paperback, Norton, 1998, p. 129.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Fursenko and Naftali quoting Robert Kennedy's recollection of how John F. Kennedy viewed the event, see Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble*, p. 131.

Khrushchev perceived Kennedy as inexperienced and excessively dovish, while Kennedy viewed Khrushchev as obstinate.[105]

Two months later, the U.S. conducted one of its most extensive amphibious exercises ever in the Caribbean. Kennedy intended the exercise to be a prominent display of U.S. resolve after the failings of Vienna, a "clear statement of vital U.S. interests" in the region.[106] However, this had the effect of heightening Soviet concerns about American military capabilities. Seeing too many parallels to the Bay of Pigs, Khrushchev sought a "bold move to remind Washington of Soviet power" that would also strengthen the Soviet Union's strategic position.[107] Thus, operation Anadyr – the Soviet codename for the operation that placed missiles in Cuba – was born.

4.2 The Crisis

On Tuesday, October 16th, U.S. President John F. Kennedy (JFK) was informed by his advisors that Soviet missiles were being installed in several locations across Cuba. As Kennedy convened what would become the ExComm, a secret group of his most senior and trusted advisors, a general sense of confusion permeated the early talks, and Kennedy himself can be heard saying, "it seems to me…my press statement was so

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[105] Zubok, Vladislav Martinovich, and Constantine Pleshakov. *Inside the Kremlin´s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*. Fourth pr, Harvard Univ. Pr, 1999, p. 248.
[106] Ibid, p. 203.
[107] Ibid, p. 183.

clear" about what his administration refused to tolerate in the Western Hemisphere.[108] Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, said it more bluntly: " I don't see the rationality of the Soviets."[109] Given this confusion, the committee agreed to reconvene later that evening once more information was available. But little else occurred. The ExComm was divided on the extent to which they could trust early intelligence assessments of Khrushchev and the degree to which Soviet placement of the missiles in Cuba directly altered the strategic balance of power.[110]

Furthermore, the group was at a loss for what Khrushchev's ultimate goal was – whether he was protecting a communist revolution from western intervention or jockeying for a better bargaining chip to be used in Berlin, the committee was unsure.[111] An exchange between McGeorge Bundy and Alexis Johnson, Bundy states the only point about which the ExComm was confident - "what we say for political purposes and what we think are not identical;" the men found it better to speak frankly during deliberations and window dress what was said publicly, as needed.[112] Unfortunately, no recordings are available for Wednesday, October 17th, and though no hard decisions were made the following day, the discussion held among the ExComm members is illuminating.

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[108] Ibid, p. 70.
[109] May, Ernest R., and Philip Zelikow, editors. *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Concise ed, Norton, 2002, p. 61.
[110] Ibid, p. 89.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid, p. 100.

During the morning meeting, several committee members said the Cuban missile problem was a "political" rather than "military" matter and should be dealt with accordingly.[113] Two broad plans began to take shape. The first was diplomatic, directly communicating with Khrushchev about his aims in Cuba.[114] The other was a quick-strike option that eliminated the missiles before they became operational, an option that President Kennedy initially found more favorable than diplomacy.[115] As the talks progressed, several members expressed fear that any overtly escalatory action might cause Khrushchev to respond in Berlin. Still, the consensus was that conflict in Berlin might be a foregone conclusion.[116] Furthermore, the group was hesitant to hastily issue the order for a strike since the operability of the missiles was unknown.[117] While debating the likelihood of an escalation in Berlin, President Kennedy asked the United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Llewellyn Thompson, how best to communicate with Khrushchev if such talks were needed. Thompson replied that a "written message" was preferable, so Khrushchev "has to reply in writing."[118] This written chain of documentation would prevent a "fuzzy conversation."[119] No further recording exists for

[113] Ibid, p. 133.
[114] Ibid, p. 130.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid, p. 154.
[119] Ibid.

that day, and no substantive decision on how best to proceed was made until October 22nd.

As the ExComm met during the morning of October 22nd, little had changed. Conversations still swirled around how best to maintain U.S. credibility, the credibility of its extended deterrence, and how any unilateral action might upset U.S. allies.[120] At one point during the meeting, President Kennedy received information that the Soviets would make a public announcement that afternoon. Upon hearing this, the tone in the room shifted drastically. Kennedy immediately became adamant that any public Soviet announcement be pre-empted by his own – none was needed; the public statement made by the Soviets was merely an announcement of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's departure.[121] While Kennedy's speech was drafted, deliberations on the best course of action continued.

That afternoon, the quick-strike option was abandoned as many within the ExComm felt it resembled "Pearl Harbor" and would result in the same overall failure and public denouncement.[122] Ideas about the next-best option began circulating when two key points were brought to President Kennedy's attention. The first, made by Thompson, was that in his assessment, Khrushchev was likely operating by "the flip [of

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[120] Ibid, p. 224.
[121] Ibid, p. 225-228.
[122] Ibid, p. 230.

a] coin."[123] The second point was made jointly by Maxwell Taylor and Dean Rusk, who pointed out that several highly visible and "overt" U.S. military moves were underway that were likely to be noticed by the American press.[124] Taylor goes so far as to say that the troop and equipment movements will look like a prelude to invasion. Kennedy became highly concerned with how those actions would escalate the crisis, and as a result, the least escalatory action was chosen – a naval blockade of Cuba.[125] President Kennedy also requested that any language in his speech suggesting an invasion be removed for something more "politically useful."[126]

Later that evening, before delivering his speech, Kennedy met with key Congress members, expressing his lack of faith in Khrushchev's rationality.[127] At the same time, a written copy of his speech was sent directly to Moscow. Attached to the address was a letter intended for Khrushchev's private consumption.[128] The letter makes several references to previous private discussions between the two leaders.[129] Though private conversations had borne little fruit in the past, Kennedy remained hopeful that future talks could de-escalate the current crisis. Furthermore, the document expresses Kennedy's hope that they find a peaceful resolution but also explicitly warns

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[123] Ibid, p. 236.
[124] Ibid, p. 239.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble,* p. 244.
[128] See Chang, Laurence, et al., editors. *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*. Rev. to include recently declassified documents, The New Press, 1998, p. 158.
[129] Ibid.

Khrushchev of U.S. resolve, stating that Khrushchev had "not correctly" understood "the will and determination of the United States."[130]

Kennedy's speech, which is widely known, will not be quoted in full. However, throughout, the President makes several references to the lessons of the 1930s while outlining in great detail the nature of the U.S. blockade and conditions for a peaceful settlement.[131] According to the historical research of authors Fursenko and Naftali, the Soviet Premier felt that Kennedy and his administration had "entirely misunderstood" his reasons for installing missiles in Cuba and did not see why he was expected to be so comfortable with U.S. Jupiter missiles so close to his territory.[132] Despite Kennedy's public pronouncement of resolve, and a way to end the crisis, the speech had a null effect on Premier Khrushchev, and he remained "determined to proceed with Anadyr."[133]

Premier Khrushchev responded to Kennedy's speech with his own, but the address garnered little attention during the October 23rd ExComm meeting. Its contents mirrored those predicted by U.S. intelligence assessments, so the conversation shifted in short order.[134] Much of the ExComm discussion that day revolved around the specifics

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid, p. 160-164.
[132] Ibid, p. 249.
[133] Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble,* p. 247.
[134] May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, p. 327.

of the blockade, specifically which ship should be stopped first. U.S. intelligence had an accurate map of the vessels en route to Cuba, their likely cargo, and their port of origin.[135] Many within ExComm saw the boarding of a Soviet ship as the potential point of escalation and, as a result, were careful of the type of ship to target first.[136] As the debate continued, an unidentifiable committee member queried about the Soviet perception of events so far. Llewellyn Thompson replies that a high-level debate is likely occurring within the Kremlin.[137] Robert Kennedy was dispatched to meet privately with Soviet Anatoly Dobrynin so he could better ascertain the Soviet side of the crisis.[138] During the discussion, Robert Kennedy was given little information except that, as far as Dobrynin knew, Soviet ships were under orders to challenge the U.S. blockade.[139] If there was a debate occurring in the Kremlin, Dobrynin was unaware.

The audio that exists for Wednesday, October 24th, is relatively poor. However, the intelligible fragments are essential. The ExComm was still under the impression that the Kremlin was debating alternatives and that perhaps the blockade had achieved the desired effect. As plans continued, McNamara argued that the U.S. should increase the number of low-level reconnaissance flights over Cuba because such flights would "establish a pattern of operation consistent with an attack" but not entirely discernable

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[135] Ibid, p. 329.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid, p. 327.
[138] Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble*, p. 253.
[139] Ibid.

from an attack.[140] Intelligence on the progression of Soviet missile construction began to trickle in but confused the ExComm members. Images from U2 spy planes showed that the Soviets had started covering up their installations. As to why this occurred so late in the crisis, President Kennedy and the other members of ExComm were at a loss.[141] The conversation happening in the Kremlin is more revealing.

In the Kremlin, Nikita Khrushchev still hoped that the "fear of war would force Kennedy to back down," but as meeting minutes show, the Premier was beginning to understand the depths of U.S. resolve. The operation, which Khrushchev was initially adamant about not becoming known to the U.S. until after the election, was beginning to unravel.[142] Early in the crisis, Khrushchev feared that the U.S. election would swing in Kennedy's favor and, as a result, cause the U.S. president to become emboldened. Indeed, Khrushchev had never truly forgotten the Bay of Pigs.[143] As the crisis continued, the Soviet Premier became less confident in his position. No data correlate the following decision to a specific stimulus, but before any further U.S. action was taken, Nikita Khrushchev ordered dismantling the missiles in Cuba.[144] Dobrynin was not informed of this decision, but neither was it debated in the Kremlin – as was often the case, Khrushchev's decision was unilateral.

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[140] May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, p. 400.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble*, p. 182.
[143] Zubok and Pleshakov. *Inside the Kremlin´s Cold War,* p. 265.
[144] Ibid, p. 259.

On October 26th, the U.S. Navy boarded and searched the ship Marucla.[145] Constant deliberation among the ExComm members resulted in the decision to board a clearly "non-bloc" ship to not wantonly escalate the crisis.[146] As the committee awaited the results of the search, Bundy mentioned to the group that he was receiving information that among the Soviets, there was an impression that "the U.S. military is taking over" the administration.[147] This comment receives no attention, and the meeting is adjourned until later that evening. Yet, it was a serious concern in Moscow.

As the Marucla was boarded, Nikita Khrushchev received intelligence that not only had the U.S. increased its military alert status to DEFCON 2 but that "U.S. hospitals" were being instructed to "prepare [for] mass casualties."[148] These alerts and instructions gave Khrushchev the impression that Kennedy had fallen under the sway of his more hawkish advisors and that the U.S. was preparing to invade Cuba.[149] This, in turn, prompted the Premier to write the famous "knot of war" letter, often cited as an emotional plea for a way out of the crisis.[150] Before receiving this intelligence, Soviet

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[145] May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, p. 445.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid, 470.
[148] Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble*, p. 262.
[149] See Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble*.
[150] Ibid, see also Zubok and Pleshakov. *Inside the Kremlin´s Cold War.*

diplomatic research shows that Khrushchev remained hopeful that he could extract concessions from the United States.[151]

During the evening meeting of the ExComm on Friday, October 26th, the committee pondered over the letter. Though the letter itself accused President Kennedy of misunderstanding the decision to place missiles in Cuba, along with a false assertion that they were installed at the "request of the Cuban government," it also contained an important proposition.[152] Khrushchev stated that if the United States pledged not to invade Cuba, then "the necessity for the presence of [Soviet] military specialists" – and missiles - on the island "would disappear."[153] However, before the committee could draft a response, Khrushchev sent another letter – this time delivered over public radio.

Though this letter contained some elements of the former, it also contained added requests, namely a request that the United States remove its Jupiter missiles in Turkey. From the start of the crisis, several analysts in the ExComm theorized that Khrushchev might have been playing at the Jupiter missiles all along. After the letter was read aloud, committee members began to offer their assessments. Bundy questioned the utility of swapping missiles when a deal that favored the U.S. had been offered not

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[151] Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble*, p. 263.
[152] May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, p. 486- 487.
[153] Ibid, p. 490.

24 hours prior.[154] Paul Nitze, the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, stated that the second letter might have been sent "to confuse the public scene with additional pressure."[155] Llewellyn Thompson thought that the private letter was an accurate representation of Khrushchev's sentiment.[156] He went on to say that in his view, Khrushchev had written the 'knot' letter "without clearance," and Soviet militarists had forced him to make a retraction.[157] President Kennedy summed up the group's feelings with the following:

"Why wouldn't they say it [the Turkish missiles] in private if they were serious? The fact that they gave it to me publicly, I think they know the kind of complexities…" – the rest of the sentence is lost to poor audio.[158]

The ExComm continued to deliberate about the second letter. Many wondered if Turkish missiles were what the letter referred to or if the Soviets were referencing a broader suite of capabilities dispersed throughout NATO.[159] Ultimately, the group decided to respond to Khrushchev's first letter but sent Robert Kennedy as an envoy to

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[154] Ibid, p. 499.
[155] Ibid, p. 500.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid, p. 509.
[158] Ibid, p. 513.
[159] Ibid, p. 518.

Dobrynin so the two could discuss a potential missile swap.[160] Upon deciding that responding to the first letter was preferable, the remainder of the discussion concerned the precise wording and delivery of Kennedy's response. This discussion was interrupted as several events beyond the control of either leader were beginning to unfold.

On October 27th, a U2 spy plane was shot down while conducting reconnaissance flights over Cuba. That same day, another U.S. spy plane accidentally flew into Russian airspace.[161] Khrushchev once again saw this as evidence of U.S. militarism. Diplomatic scholars Fursenko and Naftali cite that there was a mutual suspicion of militarism in both the U.S. and the USSR at this point in the crisis. As noted above, many within the U.S. administration feared that militarists had gained sway over Khrushchev.[162] However, the authors note these assessments were faulty; Khrushchev was "in complete control of the Soviet leadership."[163] Khrushchev, however, did not trust that Kennedy was in equal control of his own advisors. Rather, the Soviet Premier feared that the shootdown of the U.S. spy plane over Cuba might afford the hawks in Kennedy's administration greater leverage, pushing the President toward invasion. Once ExComm

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[160] Here it should be said that early in the crisis Kennedy favored a missile swap. The missiles themselves had caused him a great bit of trouble and, importantly, were aging. See Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble.*
[161] May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, p. 552.
[162] Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble,* p. 273.
[163] Ibid.

deliberated over the wording of Kennedy's response to the 'knot' letter, which contained clear statements about Cuba but only a vague reference to Turkish missiles, Khrushchev quickly responded, accepting Kennedy's terms.

At this point, the historical record differs in the chronology of final events, depending on the source. Some cite that Khrushchev accepted President Kennedy's terms before hearing that the President had accepted the missile swap in a private meeting between Robert Kennedy and Dobrynin. Others cite that Khrushchev agreed to Kennedy's terms after being assured that a missile swap would occur. Indeed, sources differ on the date of Khrushchev's acceptance – some citing it as occurring on October 28th, others as occurring on October 29th.[164] However, more important is that a private meeting between Robert Kennedy and Dobrynin did occur, during which Robert stated that if Turkish missiles were the only obstacle to resolving the crisis, the U.S. President did not see it as an "insurmountable difficulty."[165] And of equal importance is that along with a publicly broadcasted acceptance speech, Khrushchev sent two concurrent private messages.

The first message confirmed the public radio address made by Khrushchev. The second, "a more secret message" that was delivered by Dobrynin directly to Robert Kennedy, stated "that the Kremlin expected the White House to keep its promise" on the

[164] Differences in time zones may account for this, as Moscow is 7 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time.
[165] Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble,* p. 282.

matter of Turkish missiles but, in keeping with President Kennedy's wish, the Premier would say nothing on the matter publicly.[166]

[166] Ibid, 286.

5. Analysis and Theory

Any analysis of such a complex crisis is difficult. However, several points of interest arise using the original cross-cutting questions as a guide.

Over the course of the crisis, multiple public and private signals were sent concurrently. As a result, both President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev had to rely on corroborating evidence regardless of the signal. For example, at the start of the crisis, Kennedy's initial intelligence reports stated that the missiles in Cuba were either operational or likely to become so very soon. However, despite this lack of accuracy, there was little argument over whether installing the missiles was a credible signal. Instead, the ExComm members argued over what that credibility pointed to, i.e., capabilities, interests, or resolve. Furthermore, as my process tracing demonstrates, the ExComm members never agreed on why Khrushchev chose to install missiles in Cuba. Indeed, the other actor misperceived many of the public signals – including material actions – that the leaders sent. For instance, the ExComm members incorrectly deduced that the Soviets were covering up their missiles when it was merely part of the Soviet dismantling process. Khrushchev, for his part, seemed to take any material action as evidence for an imminent American invasion of Cuba. In the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, this calls into question rationalist theories of the credibility of material actions.

Credibility, as theorized, is a believable indication of one or more elements of the accepted credibility equation: capabilities, interests, or resolve. Though primary evidence from the crisis shows that both sides considered an open military conflict, neither desired it. Kennedy ultimately decided on a blockade because he feared the fallout of an invasion but was equally concerned with maintaining his reputation at home and abroad. So, he decided to make the necessary preparations for invasion but delay any decision on the matter until the blockade proved ineffective. Interests were not so clearly demonstrated through material actions as researchers would have us think. Moreover, at no point do I find evidence that accuracy was equated with credibility in the minds of Kennedy, Khrushchev, or their advisors.

In a turn of events that seemingly lends plausibility to Jervis's early theories of cognitive dissonance, both leaders struggled to reconcile new information with the old beliefs of their adversary. Initially, Kennedy was in disbelief that Khrushchev had ignored his prior, clear warnings about U.S. resolve in the Western Hemisphere. Similarly, Khrushchev couldn't fathom that Kennedy did not understand why he placed missiles in Cuba, to begin with. This was exacerbated by the delicate balance both leaders were forced to adopt during the crisis. On the one hand, both wanted to remain resolved publicly. On the other, as my process tracing shows, both sought a quick de-escalation of the crisis. This tension, likely intensified by the stakes of the crisis itself, induced behavior moderately well predicted by Jervis in *Perception and Misperception*.

However, at times this dissonance was overcome by the perceived plausibility of an action. Based on the primary data, plausibility was a greater concern than accuracy for Kennedy and Khrushchev.

To the second question of whether private negotiations are a by-product of their public counterparts, analysis is far more difficult. During the crisis, public and private signals conflicted and complemented each other. The public announcement of a blockade was a clear signal of U.S. interests but failed to sway Khrushchev. Yet, U.S. military preparations and the two U2 incidents both influenced Khrushchev's decision to negotiate privately and these backchannel talks ultimately led to the end of the crisis. As a result, no type of signal can be said to have been weighed more heavily than the other. Rather, each signal was assessed against all other signals and information equally. That the U2 events induced private negotiations are an intriguing consideration, as the latter incident was beyond the control of either leader. Here again, misperception seems to be a powerful mechanism in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Misperception indeed drove Khrushchev to seek private settlement of the crisis but also, but we should note that it was the public signals that were most often perceived incorrectly. As my case study shows, Kennedy intentionally added vague elements to his speech to not escalate the crisis. In private, however, both leaders were far more direct. While the flow of events in the crisis itself lends powerful evidence to

the theory that public costs induce and facilitate private concessions, it also evinces that clarity is an important consideration when a leader determines their response to a signal.

Throughout the crisis, both men turned to private negotiations despite prior setbacks. Confirming the rationalist theory, this is likely because both Kennedy and Khrushchev sought private signals to express otherwise unacceptable positions. However, contrary to rationalist theory, these signals had a level of clarity that neither public statements nor material actions could muster. Sharing private information outside the specter of public scrutiny allowed both men to be clear about their intentions and resolve. This also answers the fourth question of why leaders turn to private negotiations despite being without cost. And again, it seems that the rationalist literature has the correct answer, but for the wrong reasons.

In the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, private diplomacy allowed Khrushchev and Kennedy to express their credibility in a controlled manner. Several material actions occurred during the crisis, which was misperceived and misattributed. Therefore, the public scrutiny drove negotiations private, but these private signals were seen as revelatory because they were clear, not because they were efficient at cutting through the noise. Indeed, both men saw greater common language in the words they expressed than in the actions they took. Moreover, both men -and several of Kennedy's

advisors - expressed an awareness of how vague actions and words in the public arena can be and how at times, this vagueness is intentional.

In sum, the nature of private and public signals in the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis is complementary for counterintuitive reasons. In a way that blends both the theories of rationalist and behavioral credibility literatures, public signals induced private negotiations because Kennedy and Khrushchev both saw private channels as a clearer mode of expression. Furthermore, material actions led to de-escalation, but only because those material actions were misperceived. Cognitive dissonance hindered the ability of both leaders to rationally update their beliefs as the crisis progressed. Still, this same dissonance sparked a chain of events that resulted in a rollback from what is perhaps the closest the U.S. and the USSR came to open thermonuclear war. Though the seeds of this dissonance were planted before the start of the crisis as defined, its inputs are an interesting point of investigation for future research into credibility.

6. Conclusion

The two logics offered by credibility studies are often understood as dichotomous. As my literature review and case study analysis show, however, under the proper circumstances, they can be quite complimentary – much like public and private signals. Leaders turn to private signaling because it affords them an opportunity to clearly express their interests in a channel that they can more readily influence. It is not necessarily the case that the public specter of a crisis induces leaders to seek private negotiations, insofar as some credibility scholars understand it. Rather than simply a space where otherwise unpalatable concessions can be negotiated, private channels are turned to because misperception can permeate public signals. Certain types of information are conveyed beyond politically costly compromises. This, along with a consideration that is somewhat outside my scope conditions, has important implications for future research. However, before turning to this discussion I must address two criticisms which require more than a cursory explanation to counter.

The first criticism is that much of what I have uncovered is simply a function of the Cuban Missile Crisis itself. Put differently, the observations and ensuing analysis are based only Kennedy and Khrushchev's desire to signal that they both took the crisis seriously and were averse to thermonuclear war. This behavior induced both men to 'leave no stone unturned' and it is therefore not that private and public signals interplay,

but simply that grave enough stakes can motivate leaders to pursue all viable solutions. While I make no claim to generalizations beyond the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, it should also be said that the logic of this criticism parallels my own. My central argument is that private signals are not necessarily eclipsed by their public counterparts, and that they can at times be meaningful. Rationalist arguments preference public stones and many behavioral arguments claim that private stones should be turned only when their public equivalents have been fully exhausted. To say that stakes can put the potential credibility of both public and private signals on an equal playing field is to partly agree with my central theory.

Another criticism of my study is that certain evidence that is still classified may cast doubt on my findings. Though the Cuban Missile Crisis was chosen for its abundance of publicly available high-quality evidence, some of it remains classified. Documents collected via technologically advanced methods, for example how the NSA was able to geolocate the Soviet ships approaching the blockade, and through human intelligence are likely to remain classified for some time. Furthermore, private-to-private information may be of a nature that evinces a theory which contradicts my own. To this claim, less can be said save that some of this evidence has already been declassified. Indeed, much of what was said privately between Dobrynin and Robert Kennedy, along with the assessments Robert made from these meetings, is publicly available and supports my own theory. This evidence was only sparsely included in my own analysis

because much of it comes from the memoirs of Dobrynin and Robert Kennedy, and as a result is subject to a host of biases. Nevertheless, I do concede that some yet to be declassified evidence exists that works contrariwise to my own theory.

This study has several implications for future research. With the limitations of a single case study, generalization is extremely difficult. Furthermore, the depth of the study comes at the expense of elegance and parsimoniousness. This means that certain details could have been lost in the noise of the data analyzed. As such, future qualitative studies could test my own findings by utilizing multiple case studies in either a most-similar or most-dissimilar framework, as a basic starting point. Future quantitative studies can also benefit from this work. A study that utilizes a supervised learning algorithm could code declassified documents from historical archives, analyzing for content and context. This data could then be used to test the comparative effects of private and public signals statistically, and which, if any, lead to the de-escalation of a conflict. Perhaps most important, however, is that which lies beyond my scope conditions.

As I note in the case study, both Kennedy and Khrushchev mistrusted the others' ability to withstand pressure from their more hawkish advisors. Nikita Khrushchev was, at times, convinced that Kennedy had succumbed to this pressure and viewed U.S. material actions as a prelude to invasion. Though the U.S. was making initial

preparations for such an outcome, the President preferred a peaceful settlement. When rumors of a military takeover within the executive branch reached the ExComm, they were dismissed immediately. The same is also true for the U.S. side of the crisis – indeed, many theorized that Khrushchev's letter which demanded a missile swap was evidence that he had lost control over his own military. Yet, this was not the case. As such, reputation for resolve may not be just a matter of displaying grit in the face of an international adversary, but a domestic-internal one as well. Evidence for this claim lies beyond the scope of this work, but it should be noted that domestically displaying resolve in a manner that is perceived by an international audience has hitherto received little attention. Future studies could expand the scope conditions of the case I provide, incorporate current theories of civil-military relations, or incorporate lesser-known cases.

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