

It's the Principle at Stake: Rhetoric and Compromise in International Bargaining*

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Abstract

How does government rhetoric affect international bargaining? While governments often turn to principle-based arguments at the expense of material-based arguments, existing rationalist theories of International Relations dismiss such moral language as inconsequential rhetoric with no real impact on either state behavior or dispute outcomes. Contrary to the theoretical consensus, I show that moral rhetoric is not mere cheap talk but has measurable effects on international bargaining. In this paper, I provide evidence that when countries rely on moral over nonmoral rhetoric, they decrease the probability of peaceful compromise and increase the probability of a dispute escalating with military action. This language operates through two pathways. First, moral language prejudices domestic audiences against compromise, which makes it more difficult for politicians to de-escalate the disagreement. Second, principled rhetoric provokes the other side to use moral language as well. The ensuing moral debate deadlocks negotiations. Domestic opposition to compromise on both sides—a product of moral rhetoric—increases the probability that at least one side will resort to force to resolve the dispute. On the other hand, nonmoral language defuses the situation and avoids dispute escalation. The paper examines the effects of rhetoric on public opinion in a survey experiment and on negotiation breakdown and dispute escalation in a case study of the Falklands/Malvinas dispute.

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1 The Puzzle of Principled Rhetoric

When Soviet missiles were discovered in Cuba in October 1962, an outraged President Kennedy declared his disbelief at Premier Khrushchev’s deception. He also acknowledged the danger of the new nuclear (im)balance to U.S. security and his own regime. Khrushchev responded to Kennedy’s condemnation with his own disbelief:

“What morality, what law can justify such an approach by the American Government to international affairs? No such morality or law can be found, because the actions of the United States with regard to Cuba constitute outright banditry or, if you like, the folly of degenerate imperialism.”¹

In a moment of distress, the leader of the Communist world chose to appeal to international morality and law. According to rationalist theories of International Relations, Khrushchev’s principled appeal is ineffective as a bargaining tactic, while Kennedy’s focus on informational deception and material capabilities is both rational and effective. During the first days of the crisis, Khrushchev continually lambasted American policy along moral lines, while Kennedy generally avoided such normative appeals.

However, *principled*, *moral*, or *normative* language like Khrushchev’s is not uncommon in international interactions. President Saddam Hussein of Iraq frequently appealed to international law, the *shari’a*, Arabism, and culture leading up to and during his invasion of Kuwait.² Iranian media and political elites began to depict the United States as “Satan” and the “evil empire” after President George W. Bush included them in his “axis of evil.”³ President Obama condemned Russia’s “illegal” violation of Ukraine’s freedom, while President Putin defended self-determination in Crimea.⁴ Yet the language of states entails variation across space and time. On recapturing the SS *Mayaguez*, President Ford spoke of the operation’s military aspects and made no moral appeals.⁵ President Reagan emphasized material interests in the Middle East when addressing violence in Lebanon, arguing that the area is “vital to our national security and economic well-being.”⁶ Democratic and non-democratic governments often—but clearly not always—engage in moral rhetoric at the expense of or in combination with material-based arguments.

Although rationalist theories of International Relations tend to dismiss variation in language, especially in the bargaining context,⁷ governments spend a vast amount of resources on language in world politics. Speech writers and other staff devote considerable thought as

¹ *Letter From Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy* (1962)

² Long (2004: 228)

³ *The Economist* (February 1, 2012)

⁴ Zuesse (2012)

⁵ Ford (1975)

⁶ Reagan (1983)

⁷ See, for example, Fearon (1995); Goldsmith and Posner (2002); Morgenthau (1985)

to the exact language employed.⁸ Government officials, journalists, and foreign policy analysts study governmental communications for indications of policy, analyzing the meaning of the smallest nuances of official texts and changes in language.⁹ Our theoretical models often ignore the complexity of speech, but empirical reality and policy expertise indicates that framing and language influence policymakers, *especially* during bargaining.

This disconnect between theory and reality drives the question of this paper: What is the impact of moral versus non-moral arguments during bargaining, both on domestic opinion and relations with other states? Government elites sometimes utilize strategic or pragmatic frames, which emphasize material interests; at other times, they exploit normative or principled frames, which emphasize moral and legal principles. Why might rational political actors use moral arguments during bargaining when they could divert their attention to more strategic-based arguments regarding national interests and resolve? Despite the fact that language defines the centerpiece of state negotiations, we still are uncertain about the impact of this variation.

In this paper, I examine the *effects* of such rhetoric on international bargaining. Governments use moral and legal language for a host of reasons—to mobilize international opinion,¹⁰ legitimate policy to domestic audiences,¹¹ establish the interests at stake,¹² and self-justify positions.¹³ However, these efforts can be seen part of an overall effort to coerce the bargaining opponent to concede a disputed issue. Yet while governments often intend principled language to resolve a dispute in their favor, I find that it often provokes *bargaining intransigence*—a reciprocal refusal to alter bargaining positions—rather than bargaining concessions through two pathways. First, such language prejudices domestic audiences against compromise, which makes it more difficult for the moralizing government to de-escalate. Second, principled rhetoric provokes the other side to use moral language as well, deadlocking negotiations.¹⁴ While moral language elicits high levels of domestic and international “audience costs,”¹⁵ it decreases the probability of a peaceful outcome through mutual lock-in.

I test this argument in two ways. First, in a survey experiment, I find that principled language (compared to strategic language) decreases preferences for compromise and increases preference for the use of force among U.S. respondents during a hypothetical foreign policy dispute. However, principled rhetoric elicits strong domestic reactions only when the principles resonate with national ideals. Additionally, while such language has little impact on overall approval ratings for the government after the dispute has been resolved

⁸Ritter and Medhurst (2004)

⁹O’Loughlin and Grant (1990)

¹⁰Hurd (2005); Seymour (2013)

¹¹Goddard (2010); Shogan (2006)

¹²Freedman (2005)

¹³Morgenthau (1985); Stein (2000)

¹⁴Regarding moral rhetoric and domestic policy, see Clifford et al. (2015); Ryan (2014).

¹⁵e.g., Fearon (1994)

one way or another, it induces uncompromising preferences *during* the bargaining process. Such phenomena provide national leaders with incentives to fight rather than strike a deal. Second, I examine the role of principled versus strategic language during the case of the Falklands/Malvinas dispute, highlighting the time period between 1963 and the start of the Falklands War in 1982. I trace the decision to frame the issue as one of principle, public mobilization against compromise, the subsequent hardening of positions on both sides, and eventual escalation to war.

2 Language in the Literature

From the perspective of most disciplines, the *occurrence* of principled language in international relations is unsurprising. According to theories of human psychology, government elites are human beings; and humans have an inherent need to organize their lives through language and moral rules.¹⁶ According to theories of American politics, leaders are politicians; they must find ways to convince audiences of the “rightness” of their policies in and out of crisis.¹⁷ According to constructivist theories of international relations, elites function within a normative structure; normative appeals acknowledge that the international system is run by rules in addition to power and anarchy.¹⁸ Finally, rationalist theories of international relations generally view such language as either window-dressing or domestic pandering.¹⁹ However, none of these theories provide a satisfactory framework for understanding the *effects* of such language during international interactions.

The extant literature within international relations theory conceptualizes of language in three different ways. First, mainstream rationalist theories of International Relations dismiss the framing—specifically moral and legal framing—of arguments as inconsequential cheap talk.²⁰ What is especially puzzling, however, from the perspective of rationalism is that moral rhetoric often emerges during cases of interstate *bargaining*, a situation in which the ability of one nation to achieve its ends depends on the decisions that the other state participant makes.²¹ According to rationalist theories, the goal of bargaining is to alleviate uncertainty about intentions in order to achieve a favorable outcome.²² Bargaining is consequently about the strategic exchange of information regarding resolve, capabilities, and interests²³—

¹⁶Festinger (1957); Aronson and Mettee (1968); Tavris and Aronson (2007)

¹⁷Shogan (2006)

¹⁸Bicchieri (2017); Hurd (2007)

¹⁹Goddard (2008/09)

²⁰For an overview, see Goldsmith and Posner (2002).

²¹Schelling (1960)

²²Holmes (2013)

²³*Capabilities* refer to the ability to carry out a commitment. *Interests* refer to possessing an interest in carrying out a commitment. *Resolve* refers to the willingness to actually carry through on the commitment, regardless of capabilities or interests. See Kertzer (2016).

not the exchange of justifications or the framing of this information. Because framing is a costless strategy, the language has no impact on behavior or outcomes.²⁴ And such language is unlikely to influence the opponent's beliefs or actions, especially since bargaining nations generally have opposing preferences.²⁵ Thus, "legalistic-moralistic" talk is generally dismissed as window dressing in the bargaining context.²⁶

This is not to say that speech has no impact in bargaining within the rationalist framework. Under some conditions, language can inform; but the framing of that language is inconsequential. Krebs and Jackson (2007: 38) correctly note that signaling theory, a subset of rationalism, "flattens rhetoric into a purely informational tool [that] cannot shed light on the framing competitions that often lie at the heart of politics." Signaling models are empty of rhetoric, because "there is no inherent meaning to signals."²⁷ The traditional view in realism (often subsumed under rationalism) has in fact been somewhat contradictory: Moral language is a product of power so has no impact on behavior.²⁸ On the other hand, moral language is a frustrating inevitability, appealing to unsophisticated domestic audiences, but those audiences and the language have no impact on state behavior.²⁹ In sum, variation in principled versus strategic language is superfluous to the rationalist bargaining framework.

Second, according to some constructivist scholars, language (including reference to international norms and morality) is intended to *persuade*: "[I]t can change people's minds about what goals are valuable and about the roles they play (or should play) in social life. When speech has these effects, it is doing important social construction work, creating new understandings and new social facts that reconfigure politics."³⁰ Many of these theories implicitly draw on Jurgen Habermas' logic of 'communicative action' to explain the role of rhetoric. Habermas' framework allows for speech and argumentation to transform identities, beliefs, and structural norms in the international system. For example, Risse (2000) envisions a role for Habermasian communicative action to change minds.

However, this framework of persuasion suffers from three weaknesses when considered in light of bargaining processes. For one, those who advocate this persuasive process have not demonstrated whether state reactions are due to persuasion, which entails an actual change in preferences, or changing calculations of the cost/benefit ratio.³¹ Second, Habermasian models conceptualize discourse as part of a sincere deliberative process, assuming that both sides are open to reasoning and persuasion—rarely the case in situations of bargaining (especially crisis or dispute bargaining). Lastly, theories of persuasion generally

²⁴Stephen (2015)

²⁵Crawford and Sobel (1982); Farrell and Gibbons (1989)

²⁶Kennan (1951)

²⁷Trager (2016: 218)

²⁸Carr (1939); Thucydides (1972)

²⁹Kennan (1951); Mearsheimer (2001); Morgenthau (1985). See also Kertzer et al. (2014).

³⁰Finnemore and Sikkink (2001: 403)

³¹Krebs and Jackson (2007)

assume considerable alignment of preferences between actors, so persuasion rarely occurs between actors with opposing interests. However, the entire goal of bargaining is to resolve situations of opposing preferences.³²

In a subset of constructivism, actors use language to coerce others into acceding to their views. They argue that rhetorical framing closes off untenable arguments³³ or traps a nation into taking an action to avoid looking inconsistent or hypocritical.³⁴ Actors use rhetoric to talk their opponent into a corner, compelling them to endorse a stance that they would otherwise reject. Goddard (2006, 2010), as one example, looks at the unintended effects of principled rhetoric, in which legitimation strategies may effectively resonate with one audience but not the other, locking actors into untenable bargaining positions. Generally, these theories set out to explain one case or a small set of anomalous occurrences, but they do not provide a framework for understanding the aggregate and/or comparative impact of language on the bargaining context.³⁵

3 The Argument

In this paper, I conceptualize of moral language as a demonstration of resolve in the bargaining context, an attempt to coerce the bargaining opponent to concede the issue at hand. States use such language to mobilize audiences and establish the interests at stake, especially when the material interests are ambiguous, unclear, or simply low.³⁶ As ambiguity regarding their material interests increases, nations have more information to reveal but fewer strategies for revealing it. Governments use principled language to demonstrate that they are invested despite the visible lack of material interests at stake. The framing of the message signals national resolve.

What is the impact of this signaling attempt? First, I argue that principled language invokes uncompromising preferences among the domestic audience. When a dispute is framed as one of principle rather than material interests, the domestic audience becomes more likely to prefer force and less likely to prefer a negotiated compromise. This is because the language connects the policy with *moralized attitudes*, intuitions about right and wrong which reorient behavior from maximizing gains to adhering to rules.³⁷ Research on morality

³²Crawford (2009); Risse (2000); Seymour (2013)

³³Krebs and Jackson (2007)

³⁴Schimmelfennig (2001)

³⁵i.e, Hitler's legitimation strategies prompted both appeasement and confrontation during the interwar period (Goddard 2015), Bismarck staved off a balancing coalition with legitimation strategies (Goddard 2008/09), the Druze community compelled Jewish Israeli politicians to grant them something resembling first-class citizenship (Krebs and Jackson 2007), and legitimation strategies created indivisible territory in the cases of Ireland and Jerusalem(Goddard 2006, 2010).

³⁶Freedman (2005)

³⁷e.g., Bennis, Medin and Bartels (2010).

in politics has shown that such “moralized attitudes lead citizens to oppose compromise, punish compromising politicians, and forsake material gains.”³⁸ I argue that government rhetoric connects moralized attitudes with domestic policy preferences during foreign policy disputes, making audiences less likely to approve of compromise and more likely to prefer force.³⁹

Secondly, moral language from one state begets moral language from another, generating often unintended effects on bargaining. Moral language does not coerce the opponent to back down from a moral threat but rather provokes it to stand firm with its own moral argument. The field of conflict resolution, merged with findings from psychology, demonstrates that accusing someone of being “wrong” or insisting that one is “right” prompts the other side to dig in their heels and resist compromise.⁴⁰ The move to moral arguments in the face of accusation can be a defense mechanism to ward off discomfort.⁴¹ Thus, principled rhetoric introduces unintended dynamics into the signaling process.⁴² Just as the mode of communication—face-to-face,⁴³ written treaties,⁴⁴ or televised, public statements⁴⁵—can introduce psychological biases that overwhelm signaling efforts, the framing of the message also introduces “noise” that can confuse the interpretation of signals. Insults,⁴⁶ provocative threats,⁴⁷ humiliating demands,⁴⁸ symbols,⁴⁹ and apologies⁵⁰ have also been shown to provoke the opponent and frustrate attempts at compromise. Moral language provokes the opponent to respond with moral language, inducing both sides to eschew compromise, and decreases the probability of peaceful concessions.

The provocative effects of rhetoric in international relations remain undertheorized, with two notable exceptions: Goddard’s (2006; 2010) theory explores the impact of legitimation rhetoric on indivisible territory. Within her framework, public framings rouse public sentiment and may thereby convey bargaining leverage. It also constrains actors, in some

³⁸Ryan (2017: 409).

³⁹For examples of this occurring over domestic issue areas such as abortion, stem-cell research, and social security, see Marietta (2012); Ryan (2017). Marietta (2009) finds that sacred rhetoric—moral rhetoric crossing the threshold from the logic of consequences to the logic of appropriateness—does not influence overall opinion toward policy, but it solidifies these opinions and makes compromise more difficult.

⁴⁰Deutsch, Coleman and Marcus (2011). Philosopher Blaise Pascal made a similar observation in the seventeenth century.

⁴¹Barkan, Ayal and Ariely (e.g., 2015).

⁴²Jervis (1976); Trager (2016)

⁴³Holmes (2013); Yarhi-Milo (2014)

⁴⁴Morrow (2000); Leeds (1999)

⁴⁵Fearon (1994); Potter and Baum (2014)

⁴⁶O’Neill (1999, ch 9)

⁴⁷Jervis (1976, ch 3) Lebow and Stein (1989)

⁴⁸Jervis (1976); Kurizaki (2007); Gottfried and Trager (2016); McDermott, Cowden and Rosen (2008)

⁴⁹O’Neill (1999)

⁵⁰Lind (2011)

cases making compromise impossible, generating indivisible territory.⁵¹ Gottfried and Trager (2016: 243) recently found that “aggressive rhetoric by a foreign leader increases domestic leaders’ expected approval from war, decreases the value of compromise, and provides them with powerful incentives to fight harder.”⁵² There is therefore preliminary evidence that the framing of an argument has adverse implications for compromise in international bargaining. Yet while Gottfried and Trager examine the aggressive rhetoric of the dispute opponent’s domestic audience, I examine the impact of a government’s language on its own domestic audience. Goddard examines how legitimation rhetoric creates indivisible territory, but I examine the broader impacts of moral versus nonmoral language on negotiation breakdown and dispute escalation.

3.1 Hypotheses

Importantly, I propose that principled language will have different effects dependent on the values emphasized.⁵³ Some principled frames focus on national principles and are consistent with narrow parochial values, including racism and nationalism. Research in comparative politics has focused on such principled issues in the domestic arena,⁵⁴ and recent literature on compromise and rhetoric connects distinctly American values with foreign policy issues such as troops in Afghanistan and intervention in Iran.⁵⁵ This language often includes references to a state’s “moral authority,” the survival of liberty in the land, the superiority of a nation’s principles, etc. Such language can focus on spreading these principles, but the impetus is to protect cherished national principles rather than uphold internationally-recognized rules. It is very inward-focused. I label such language *the language of nationalist ideals*.

In contrast, some language necessarily emphasizes common normative values, acceptable to the international community. Constructivist theories of international relations focus on these legitimation strategies, “rhetoric that appeals to public, recognized norms and rules to justify a state’s foreign policy.”⁵⁶ This language emphasizes international principle. It often includes broad appeals to international law and morality, references to principles embodied in the United Nations charter, opposition to aggression, respect for international norms, etc. While any nation might value these principles, the language focuses more on the international aspect of the principle rather than parading it as some national ideal. I label this language *the language of legitimacy*.

⁵¹See also Atran and Axelrod (2008).

⁵²Interestingly, the aggressive language that Gottfried and Trager (2016: 247) use in their experimental treatments is actually principled: “This area is ours by right! If our rights are not respected at the negotiating table, we will see that they are respected on the battlefield!”

⁵³For a detailed example of each category of language, see Appendix A.

⁵⁴Tavits (2007)

⁵⁵Ryan (2014, 2016)

⁵⁶See, for example, Hurd (2005); Krebs (2006); Goddard (2010)

Finally, I compare these two principled categories of rhetoric to strategic frames, *the language of resolve*. This language focuses on material capabilities, national interests, international alliances, and other more material factors at stake. Nations demonstrate resolve and capabilities through costly military actions and public threats,⁵⁷ and this language emphasizes this information.

This discussion lends itself to several predictions concerning public opinion, negotiation dynamics, and dispute escalation. First, principled rhetoric connects moralized attitudes with policy preferences and elicits domestic opposition to compromise. However, I argue that the *language of nationalist ideals* is most likely to activate this process, because this language resonates with closely held national ideals rather than more abstract international principles. It is more likely to stir up national passions, especially if the language creates an “us-them” mentality by highlighting the differences between the in-group and out-groups. When such language is coupled with a threat, the language increases preference for military escalation and decreases approval of compromise.

This argument differs from existing theories of domestic audience costs: According to this substantial body of research in International Relations, domestic audiences disapprove of inconsistent leaders—those who say one thing and do another.⁵⁸ In my theory, political elites generate a different type of costs, “hypocrisy costs,” when they match their language to the moral preferences of their audience(s).⁵⁹ While a leader whose actions deviate from an expressed commitment acts *inconsistently*, a leader who compromises on a cherished moral principle acts *hypocritically*. The material commitment may remain the same, but the framing of that commitment as strategic or principled manipulates domestic preferences for compromise. This lends itself to a hypothesis regarding public opinion:

Hypothesis 1 (Hypocrisy Costs). *Other things being equal, domestic audiences will be less likely to prefer compromise and more likely to prefer military action when the dispute is framed according to national principle rather than international principle or national interests.*

Can leaders use purely nationalistic rhetoric to create additional bargaining leverage through increased audience costs? According to audience costs theory, the potential for sanctioning from domestic audiences should communicate resolve to the dispute opponent. However, recent work has convincingly demonstrated that international audiences pay little attention to domestic opinion when estimating state resolve.⁶⁰ This is not to say that language does not affect the costs leaders pay for compromise. Rather, the pure version of nationalistic rhetoric appears to be mainly for domestic consumption to international

⁵⁷Fearon (1997)

⁵⁸Fearon (1994); Levendusky and Horowitz (2012); Gelpi and Griesdorf (2001); Tomz (2007); Trager and Vavreck (2011); Weeks (2008); Snyder and Borghard (2011)

⁵⁹Greenhill (2010)

⁶⁰Downes and Sechser (2012); Snyder and Borghard (2011); Trachtenberg (2012)

audiences. Thus, while the language mobilizes domestic audiences and may be intended as a signal of resolve, it signals little more than domestic appeasement to the dispute opponent.

However, moral language does affect dispute dynamics through other pathways. I propose that the *language of legitimacy* provokes a moral rebuttal from the opponent.⁶¹ This language creates a legitimization contest, because it makes room to debate who is right/wrong according to international norms. Because moral language often explicitly targets another nation, international audiences construe such hostile language as a direct threat. This aggressive rhetoric prompts the targeted government to lash back with their own harsh rejoinder. The language of legitimacy thus opens up an opportunity for the opponent to “fight fire with fire” and advance its own normative justification.

For example, President George W. Bush marked North Korea as a member of the Axis of Evil during his second State of the Union address in 2002.⁶² The North Korean government interpreted the speech as an explicit threat, claiming that “It is again the United States which is threatening the Korean people with nuclear weapons.”⁶³ North Korea reciprocated this language through state-run news agencies, denouncing “U.S. imperialists” and threatening to “resolutely wipe out the aggressors and reduce them to a forlorn wandering spirit.”⁶⁴ In order to materially deflect this threat, North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and began to obtain more advanced materials for nuclear weapons development.⁶⁵

Because the content of nationalistic language signals that the message is intended for domestic audiences, such language is less likely to provoke this moral debate. It focuses inward rather than explicitly targeting the opponent. For example, many American presidents make passing reference to freedom and democracy during foreign policy speeches.⁶⁶ It is only when they tout those principles as internationally-recognized norms or condemn another nation for not following those principles that they will elicit moral debate. Also, strategic language rarely provokes moral language from the opponent because it focuses the discussion on the relative balance of interests. This lends itself to a hypothesis regarding negotiation dynamics:

Hypothesis 2 (Moral Debate). *Other things being equal, the language of legitimacy will be more likely to provoke the dispute opponent to use moral language than the language of nationalist ideals or the language of resolve.*

Often, the language of legitimacy overlaps with the language of nationalist ideals. Especially when moral language is coupled with threats and accusations, nationalistic language blurs with legitimacy-based arguments. This dual language activates moral debate *and*

⁶¹Haidt (2001).

⁶²Bush (2002)

⁶³CNN (January 30, 2002)

⁶⁴Lev (2003)

⁶⁵Kessler and Baker (2006)

⁶⁶Shogan (2006)

elicits hypocrisy costs for both governments, setting the stage for dispute intransigence—a reciprocal refusal to alter bargaining positions. Thus, when international and domestic principle combine during negotiations they eliminate opportunities for a negotiated compromise. Strategic language, on the other hand, shifts the discussion from a debate on right versus wrong to a discussion on material elements that can be divided and compromised. It allows the disputing parties to discuss the pragmatic issues at stake, decreases domestic opposition to compromise, and is consequently less likely to prompt negotiation breakdown.

Hypothesis 3 (Dispute Intransigence). *Other things being equal, principled language drawing on nationalist and international ideals will increase the probability of dispute intransigence compared with strategic language.*

As negotiations break down, this “moral begets moral” process spirals out of control, creating a feedback loop. The moral rhetoric fails to elicit concessions from the moralizing opponent, so governments may engage in low-level escalatory behavior, such as military moves and threats, to appease domestic audiences. Because moral language prompts this escalation process on both sides, both parties become increasingly likely to take military action. Mutual escalation increases the salience of the dispute for domestic audiences. Domestic opinion hardens, and governments have increasing incentives to drive a hard bargain.

Theories of audience costs predict that domestic mobilization and accountability increase bargaining leverage, decreasing the probability that the opponent will resist/escalate. Even if audience costs do signal resolve as indicated by these theories, I do not predict that increased hypocrisy costs necessarily improve a bargaining position—because moral language evokes high levels of hypocrisy costs on both sides. The audience costs emerging from moral rhetoric do not increase the probability that the opponent will back down because the opponent has also incurred high levels of audience costs from their moral language. This mutual lock-in increases the probability of dispute escalation. Strategic language, on the other hand, decreases the probability of moral debate and hypocrisy costs and, consequently, dispute escalation.

Hypothesis 4 (Dispute Escalation). *Other things being equal, principled language will decrease the probability of a peaceful settlement and increase the probability of dispute escalation compared with strategic language.*

All of these predictions are probabilistic. The language of nationalist ideals is more likely to evoke public prejudice against compromise, but the rhetoric may go unnoticed depending on how heavily the leader relies on it and how prevalent those appeals are in the media or government statements. State actors can take one of two approaches in response to the language of legitimacy from the dispute opponent: they can approach the situation with nonmoral language or they can reject the principled position with their own moral stance. The first defuses the situation, the second escalates it. In general, I predict that moral

language begets moral language, but the language of legitimacy in one state is not certain to provoke a response in kind by another.

For one, leaders who use strategic, material-based language are more likely to avoid escalation. For example, President Eisenhower used very little moral language when he chose to restrain Great Britain in the Suez Crisis. Both Egypt and Great Britain were engaged in moral debate as they escalated the crisis, but Eisenhower adamantly opposed such a policy. His language reflects this. Additionally, if the situation is clearly a high stakes issue, governments might not feel the need to engage in moral rhetoric to demonstrate resolve. President Kennedy did not engage in a moral debate with Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis, probably due to the clear national interests at stake *and* a fear of locking himself into unwanted nuclear escalation.⁶⁷ It is thus evident from the empirical record that the escalatory dynamics of moral rhetoric do not always emerge. In situations threatening national security, governments have incentives to restrain their language for fear of the escalatory effects of moral rhetoric.

Finally, language regarding material consequences does not always reduce moral language from the opponent. As the dispute progresses, the language of interests and resolve will have little impact on the position of the moralizing state who has convinced its domestic audience of the principle at stake. The same goes for one's own domestic audience. Once an issue has been rhetorically framed as one of principle, it is much more difficult to use material arguments to de-escalate. Once audiences view an issue as "moralized" or "sacred" they are more likely to reject arguments that emphasize the costs and benefits of particular policies, and they do not moderate their opinions in response to disconfirming information.⁶⁸

For example, a government may come to office hoping to defuse a long-standing dispute with strategic rhetoric. However, if former governments framed the issue as one of principle, the current government may have a difficult time convincing domestic audiences that the issue is *not* one of principle. Keeping a principled issue out of the public eye may be the only way to keep negotiations from exploding, because secrecy holds domestic audiences at bay while signaling to the dispute opponent that the state is serious about negotiations.⁶⁹ Principled language creates lock-in effects. Granted, some leaders may seek lock-in with principle rhetoric to communicate an unwillingness to compromise. However, because the language provokes moral debate from the opponent, that lock-in will not provide bargaining advantages. Instead, it will decrease the probability that the opponent will concede the issue short of war.

⁶⁷This raises the question of *why* Khrushchev appealed to moral language given the stakes involved. A rational leader trying to avoid escalation should make strategic appeals; a leader willing to escalate should engage in moral debate. Of course, some leaders may engage in moral rhetoric without realizing its provocative effects. Theories of psychology show how individuals caught in the wrong may use moral justifications to protect their self-esteem (Shalvi et al. 2015).

⁶⁸Atran and Axelrod (2008); Ginges et al. (2007); Ryan (2016); Tetlock (2003)

⁶⁹Yarhi-Milo (2013)

4 Rhetoric and Compromise in Domestic Politics

To test my theory of rhetoric and compromise in the domestic context, I designed a survey experiment that measures public preferences for compromise and military action in the presence of government rhetoric. Government statements are notoriously hard to analyze as they are surrounded by noise. Even if one detects a shift in public opinion in response to a U.S. presidential speech, one cannot be sure whether the shift arose from specific statements, the discussion surrounding the speech, or some other exogenous factor. Indeed, existing observational studies of moral language in the U.S. context are inconclusive, yielding mixed results.⁷⁰ Survey experiments are well suited to investigating the effect of rhetoric on public opinion, because they can isolate the language from all of the surrounding noise. Additionally, since public speeches can target a number of audiences, this method can pinpoint the domestic audience to provide a more precise estimate of its effect in this realm.

I fielded this survey experiment on 300 American adults recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in March 2017. I limited participation to MTurk workers located in the United States who had previously completed at least 1,000 jobs and whose approval rating for previous tasks was at least 95%.⁷¹

All survey respondents were first presented with the traditional *introduction* to vignette-type experiments, with a disclaimer regarding the fictional nature of the scenario. Subjects then read some *background* information regarding the dispute.⁷² Participants were provided with information about the fictional nations’ material capabilities and that the aggressor nation is led by a dictator. Also, respondents read that the disputing nations “are U.S. trade partners. These nations occupy regional positions at the crossroads of Central Asia.” Respondents also learn some background information regarding the U.S. president’s partisanship and approach to foreign policy.⁷³

⁷⁰Shogan (2006); O’Connell (2014)

⁷¹See Berinsky, Huber and Lenz (2012); Huff and Tingley (2014) for discussions of the use of Mechanical Turk for public opinion research. Berinsky, Huber and Lenz (2012) and others argue that MTURK samples are in fact more representative of the general U.S. population than other “convenience samples” (such as undergraduate students) that are often used in experimental studies. Perhaps more importantly, they show that the effects of experimental manipulations in MTURK samples are equivalent to those observed in nationally-representative samples.

⁷²I structured this section to reflect the basic information citizens might have regarding a recent American foreign policy dispute, such as Ronald Reagan’s intervention in Latin America, George H.W. Bush’s efforts to push out Iraq from Kuwait, Bill Clinton’s reaction to the Kosovo crisis, etc. In each, the interests and principles at stake are vague, giving the President leeway in the framing of the dispute.

⁷³Sigelman and Sigelman (1986). Similar to other survey experiments in IR, this design necessarily excludes a number of “real-life factors” due to both space constraints and theoretical reasons. Regarding the latter, I refrain from labeling either nation as an ally because this might tap into the Loyalty/In-group moral foundation, as outlined by Moral Foundations Theory. I do not describe international opinion regarding the dispute, as I regard this as something subject to the U.S. stance and transient throughout the crisis. Etc.

Following this description, subjects then read about the *U.S. verbal condemnation*. The president condemns the attack according to principles held dear to America, to those principles valued by the international community, or national (material) interests. Subjects are accordingly assigned to one of four conditions: International principle,⁷⁴ National principle,⁷⁵ a Combined condition (International and National Principle), or National interests.⁷⁶ The wording of all statements is reported in the Appendix. After learning about the president’s position regarding the dispute, subjects then indicated 1) their overall SUPPORT for a possible military intervention and 2) how LIKELY they felt that the U.S. President was to authorize the use of military force in the dispute.

Third, subjects read about the decision of the president to *threaten* force. Subjects indicated their APPROVAL or disapproval regarding this threat. Kertzer and Brutger (2016) recommend similar approaches to distinguish between *inconsistency costs* and *belligerence costs*. The subjects impose inconsistency costs when they approve of the threat but disapprove of the President’s handling of the crisis. The subjects impose belligerence costs when they disapprove of the threat and disapprove of the President’s handling of the crisis.

After this, subjects then read about the President’s secondary decision to propose a *compromise* in which the invading country would stop invading in exchange for 30 percent of the contested territory. Subjects indicate whether they PREFER military intervention to compromise, then read about the conclusion of the dispute: The concerned parties agree to the deal and the invading nation takes control of 30 percent of the contested territory. Following this outcome, I ask subjects whether they APPROVE of the President’s overall handling of the crisis. A final set of questions collected information regarding subject militant assertiveness⁷⁷ and basic demographic data, including gender, age, education, marital status, family income, race, ideology and party identification, religion and religiosity, voter registration, and interest/attention to politics.

4.1 Rhetoric and Morality in Survey Experiments

Recent developments in Moral Foundations Theory find that liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations.⁷⁸ In order to select the statements for this study that elicit similar moral ratings, I conducted a preliminary survey experiment in which 201 respondents rated a series of 15 real-life government statements.⁷⁹ Each respondent rated

⁷⁴The language of legitimacy.

⁷⁵The language of nationalist ideals.

⁷⁶The language of resolve.

⁷⁷Herrmann, Tetlock and Visser (1999)

⁷⁸Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009); Haidt, Graham and Joseph (2009)

⁷⁹To be sure, leaders usually frame policy through multiple speeches, developing a public relations campaign to reiterate the main points. Survey experiments, which isolate the effects of one speech, may thus underestimate the effects of leadership statements. Still, psychologists and

	<i>Dovish</i>	<i>Hawkish</i>	<i>Combined</i>
Barack Obama on national principle	0.61	0.71	0.67
George W. Bush on national principle	0.61	0.83	0.60
Margaret Thatcher on international law	0.48	0.70	0.55
Richard Nixon on international principle	0.57	0.73	0.62
Ronald Reagan on national interests	0.31	0.58	0.41
Jimmy Carter on national interests	0.35	0.60	0.43

Table 1. *Moral ratings for experimental rhetoric: 0 = nonmoral, 1 = moral*

the statements along four dimensions: “In your opinion, to what extent is this statement based on a moral principle?” “To what extent do you feel the speaker’s position is based on strong personal principles?” “To what extent is this statement deeply connected to your fundamental beliefs about right and wrong in foreign affairs?” and “To what extent does this statement reflect your core moral beliefs and convictions?” In order to assess heterogeneous differences in their evaluations, I collected information on individual moral foundations, partisanship, and foreign policy orientation.

Although there were differences among ranking by ideology, partisanship, and moral foundations, I was able to select statements that clearly differed on their aggregate moral ratings: two statements referring to American national interests and security, two statements referring to American national principle, and two statements referring to international principle and law.⁸⁰ All selected statements were ranked by respondents to be of similar quality. The biggest difference I found in the dispositional variables is that those who rate high on militant assertiveness or *hawkishness* were much more likely to rank *all* statements as moral (Kertzer et al. 2014). In Table 1, I break down moral ratings of the statements accordingly and include a measure of “militant assertiveness” (HAWKISH) in the survey experiment discussed below. In general, I expect hawkish individuals—who tend to equate strategic interest as a moral principle—will have similar preferences for compromise regardless of rhetoric, although moral rhetoric may exacerbate this preference. Dovish individuals should be more likely to eschew compromise in light of moral rhetoric.

political behavioralists have long examined the susceptibility of survey respondents to frames and cues (Druckman and Nelson 2003; Chong and Druckman 2007; Bullock 2011). However, these experimental treatments reflect the actual content of Presidential foreign policy speeches.

⁸⁰“Margaret Thatcher on international law” was ranked someone lower than expected, so I selected a slightly more aggressive statement from the same speech to replace it.

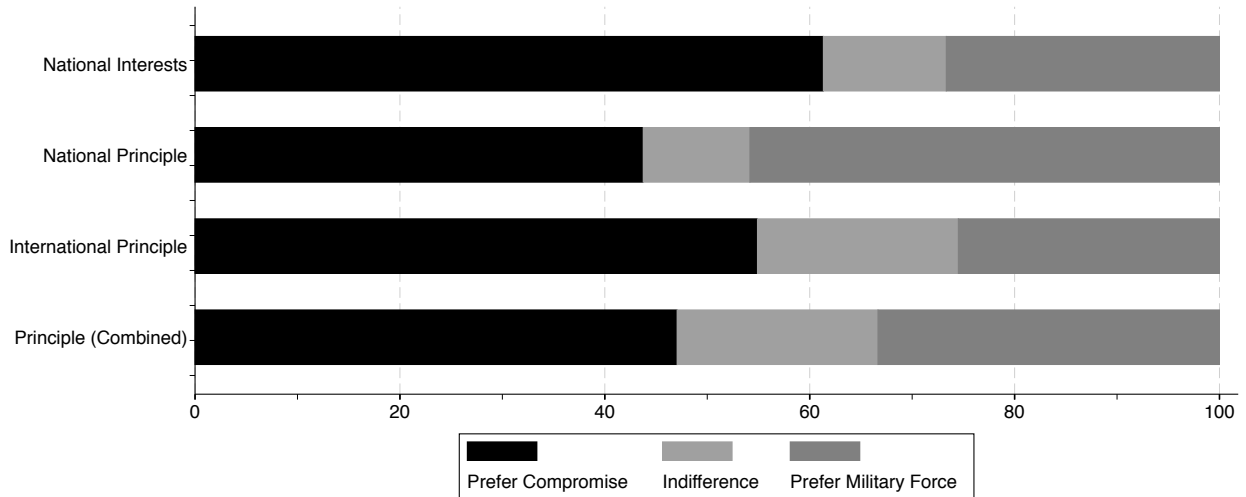


Figure 1. *Distribution of preferences by treatment*

4.2 Results

Regarding PREFERENCES toward military force versus compromise, I present the results in three stages in Figure 1, Figure 2, and Models 1-4 in Table 2 and 9-12 in Table 3. The results suggest varying levels of support for the hypothesis that principled rhetoric decreases preferences for compromise relative to strategic rhetoric. Respondents are much more likely to prefer the deal when the scenario is framed in a strategic manner; they are more likely to prefer military force when the scenario is framed in a principled manner.

First, Figure 1 summarizes the results. I examine the overall distribution of preferences for war versus compromise in the hypothetical military dispute, excluding all stage and demographic controls. The starkest difference emerges between the scenario framed in the national interest and the scenario framed according to national principle. A majority of respondents in the “National Interests” scenario prefer the compromise, while a larger proportion of individuals prefer military force in the “National Principle” scenario. In this figure, the results regarding “International Principle” and “Principle (Combined)” are somewhat less clear, although fewer respondents prefer compromise in either of these scenarios compared with the “National Interests” group.

In Figure 2, I analyze the marginal effect of moral rhetoric on preferences for compromise⁸¹ and preferences for military force.⁸² All types of moral rhetoric decrease preferences for compromise in comparison with rhetoric regarding the national interest. While the ef-

⁸¹I first run a logit model on a dichotomous measure of the dependent variable: 1 = prefer compromise, 0 = prefer military action or indifference.

⁸²I first run a logit model on a dichotomous measure of the dependent variable: 1 = prefer military force, 0 = prefer compromise or indifference.

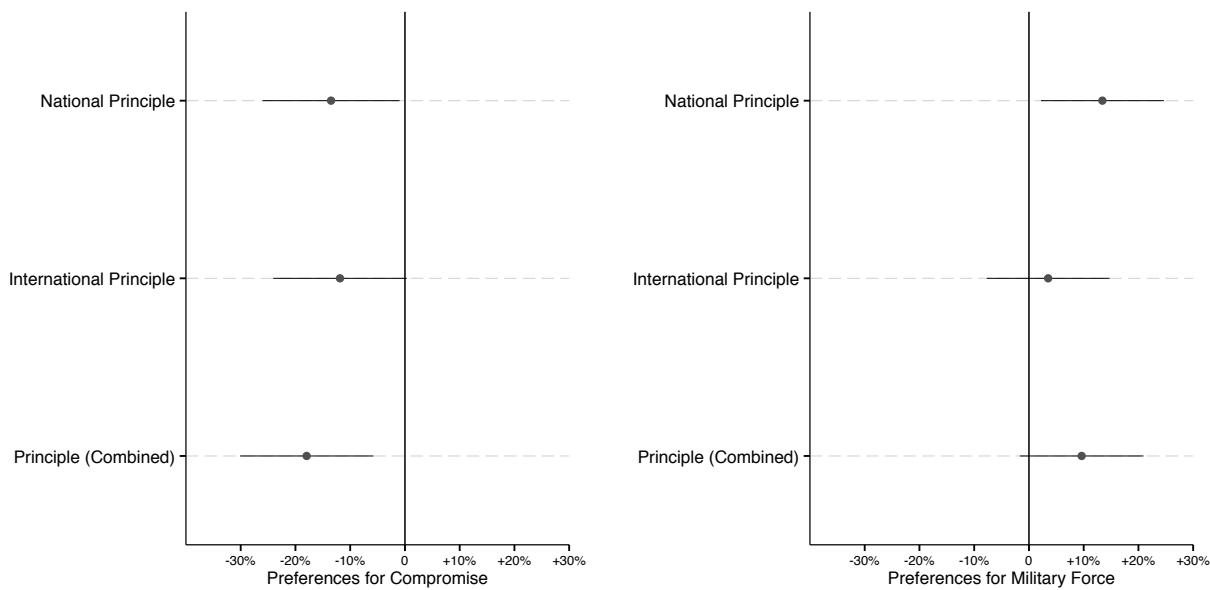


Figure 2. Marginal effect of principled rhetoric on preferences for compromise versus military force. Base category: strategic rhetoric.

fects range from a low of 12 percentage points (p -value=0.11) for international principle to 13.5 percentage points (p -value=0.076) for national principle to 17.95 percentage points (p -value=0.015) for the combined condition, the results suggest the same: moral rhetoric significantly decreases preferences for compromise, compared with rhetoric framing the issue in the national interest. Regarding preferences for military force, national principle increases such preferences by 13.42 percentage points (p -value=0.049), international principle by 3.51 (p -value=0.606), and combined by 9.63 (p -value=0.160).

Models 1–3 in Table 2 present the impact of moral rhetoric on preferences for war, using the trichotomous measure of PREFER (0 = prefer deal, 1 = indifferent, 2 = prefer military force) and OLS regression.⁸³ Model 1 examines the impact of rhetoric on preferences for war with no controls. Model 2 includes “stage controls,” controlling for subjects initial SUPPORT for military force, estimate of how LIKELY the president is to intervene, and APPROVAL for the president’s decision to threaten military force. As expected, initial approval for the threat is a strong predictor of preferences for war. Model 3 includes all demographic controls—besides the treatments, only HAWKISH (MA) is significant in this model. Model 4 presents a different measure of the dependent variable. Instead of specifying the dependent variable as a trichotomous measure, controlling for levels of initial support, BELLIGERENCE subtracts initial support for military action from final support for military action. A positive value indicates an increased preference for military action by the end of the dispute, compared with the base category of national interests. The results in this model are consistent with

⁸³The results do not change using an ordered logit model.

the others, as both national principle and the combined condition increase belligerence.

As predicted by Hypothesis 1, international principle does not have an effect distinguishable from the base category of strategic interests. It has a positive impact on preferences for force and a negative impact on preferences for compromise, but these effects do not reach statistical significance in any of the models. National principle strongly decreases preferences for compromise, as does the combined version of international and national principle. Indeed, the substantive effect for the combined version exceeds that of the national principle, implying that a government can further mobilize domestic opinion if it chooses to frame an international principle as one crucial to the heart of the nation.

These models and figures illustrate the logic of my theory regarding rhetoric and compromise. On average, moral rhetoric increases preferences for military force and decreases preferences for compromise compared with strategic rhetoric. However, the language of domestic principle more effectively stimulates these moralized attitudes among the public. Indeed, when a leader effectively appeals to international principle and frames it as a moral principle important to the nation, it is the most effective appeal in Model 3.

Regarding APPROVAL (0 = disapprove, 1 = indifferent, 2 = approve) of the president's handling of the situation, I find no initial evidence that the rhetoric used during a dispute affects overall approval for the president following the dispute (results reported in Models 5–8 of Table 2). In order to examine whether respondent hawkishness influences this null result, I collapse the principled treatment categories and interact this variable PRINCIPLE with the HAWKISH (MA) variable. Models 13–16 in Table 3 report these results. As expected, less hawkish individuals decrease their approval of a president who compromises after using moral rhetoric. More surprisingly and against my theoretical expectations, hawkish individuals *increase* their approval of a president who compromises after using moral rhetoric. This interaction is not significant with the PREFER variable (results reported in Models 9–12 of Table 3).

This experiment thus provides only tentative support for the idea that domestic audiences disapprove of a leader who compromises a cherished principle. The findings show that the audience prefers military force in light of principled rhetoric, but only subsets of the audience disapprove of a leader who acts against their preferences. Overall, these findings indicate that leaders paying careful attention to the opinion polls during international disputes may encounter uncompromising constituents if they frame their threat with principle. However, only certain subsets of the public are likely to actually punish a leader for compromising an espoused principle. Thus, domestic preferences during the dispute may not reflect approval ratings after the dispute has been resolved. In general, these findings warrant further exploration into how foreign policy preferences shape responses to moral rhetoric.

	<i>Dependent Variable: Prefer</i>				<i>Dependent Variable: Approval</i>			
	1 <i>No</i> <i>Controls</i>	2 <i>Dispute</i> <i>Stages</i>	3 <i>Demographic</i> <i>Controls</i>	4 <i>Belligerence</i>	5 <i>No</i> <i>Controls</i>	6 <i>Dispute</i> <i>Stages</i>	7 <i>Demographic</i> <i>Controls</i>	8 <i>Belligerence</i>
NATIONAL PRINCIPLE	0.367** (0.147)	0.278** (0.135)	0.240* (0.133)	0.515* (0.296)	-0.066 (0.150)	-0.084 (0.151)	-0.087 (0.152)	-0.005 (0.374)
INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE	0.053 (0.144)	0.157 (0.131)	0.187 (0.130)	0.327 (0.290)	-0.038 (0.146)	-0.052 (0.147)	-0.068 (0.149)	0.158 (0.366)
COMBINED	0.209 (0.144)	0.276** (0.131)	0.280** (0.131)	0.559* (0.290)	-0.077 (0.146)	-0.100 (0.147)	-0.110 (0.150)	0.201 (0.367)
SUPPORT		0.007 (0.050)	-0.015 (0.050)			-0.124** (0.056)	-0.126** (0.057)	
LIKELY		0.015 (0.063)	0.068 (0.063)			-0.064 (0.070)	-0.073 (0.073)	
APPROVAL		0.218*** (0.047)	0.155*** (0.050)			0.098* (0.053)	0.121** (0.057)	
HAWKISH (MA)			1.030*** (0.272)	-0.401 (0.496)			-0.204 (0.311)	-5.279*** (0.625)
MALE			0.018 (0.093)	0.174 (0.208)			-0.097 (0.107)	-0.294 (0.263)
CONSERVATIVE			-0.006 (0.162)	0.010 (0.361)			-0.132 (0.186)	0.293 (0.456)
PARTY ID			0.018 (0.091)	0.007 (0.201)			0.041 (0.104)	-0.141 (0.254)
OVER 40			-0.027 (0.102)	0.233 (0.226)			0.158 (0.116)	0.407 (0.285)
INCOME			-0.077 (0.099)	-0.696*** (0.220)			0.140 (0.114)	0.113 (0.277)
COLLEGE			0.119 (0.098)	0.338 (0.219)			-0.158 (0.112)	-0.190 (0.277)
CONSTANT	0.653*** (0.073)	-0.232 (0.203)	-0.603** (0.253)	-0.146 (0.416)	1.253*** (0.074)	1.517*** (0.227)	1.557*** (0.290)	3.229*** (0.525)
N	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300

NOTE: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2. *Effect of rhetoric on preferences for military force and approval of compromising president.*

	<i>Dependent Variable: Prefer</i>				<i>Dependent Variable: Approval</i>			
	9 <i>No Controls</i>	10 <i>Dispute Stages</i>	11 <i>Demographic Controls</i>	12 <i>Belligerence</i>	13 <i>No Controls</i>	14 <i>Dispute Stages</i>	15 <i>Demographic Controls</i>	16 <i>Belligerence</i>
PRINCIPLE	0.208 (0.206)	0.281 (0.203)	0.273 (0.209)	0.617 (0.457)	-0.477** (0.229)	-0.540** (0.232)	-0.515** (0.237)	-0.708 (0.574)
HAWISH (MA)	1.696*** (0.300)	1.132*** (0.333)	1.086*** (0.364)	-0.172 (0.714)	-0.713** (0.333)	-0.844** (0.380)	-0.764* (0.414)	-6.379*** (0.897)
PRINCIPLE* HAWKISH	-0.040 (0.410)	-0.114 (0.400)	-0.084 (0.412)	-0.338 (0.911)	0.938** (0.456)	1.024** (0.457)	0.943** (0.468)	1.848 (1.144)
SUPPORT		-0.020 (0.049)	-0.015 (0.050)			-0.115** (0.056)	-0.125** (0.057)	
LIKELY		0.073 (0.063)	0.069 (0.064)			-0.101 (0.072)	-0.095 (0.073)	
APPROVAL		0.155*** (0.048)	0.155*** (0.049)			0.116** (0.055)	0.124** (0.056)	
MALE			0.014 (0.094)	0.159 (0.210)			-0.066 (0.107)	-0.233 (0.264)
CONSERVATIVE			-0.015 (0.161)	-0.013 (0.360)			-0.106 (0.183)	0.327 (0.452)
PARTY ID			0.020 (0.091)	0.008 (0.200)			0.051 (0.103)	-0.114 (0.251)
OVER 40			-0.025 (0.102)	0.240 (0.226)			0.143 (0.115)	0.378 (0.284)
INCOME			-0.080 (0.099)	-0.705*** (0.219)			0.147 (0.112)	0.130 (0.275)
COLLEGE			0.121 (0.098)	0.340 (0.219)			-0.148 (0.111)	-0.162 (0.275)
CONSTANT	-0.098 (0.148)	-0.575** (0.240)	-0.631** (0.276)	-0.235 (0.456)	1.569*** (0.165)	1.901*** (0.275)	1.813*** (0.314)	3.614*** (0.573)
<i>N</i>	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300

NOTE: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3. *Effect of rhetoric on preferences for military force and approval of compromising president.*

5 The Case of the Falklands/Malvinas Dispute

In this section, I test my theory of rhetoric and compromise in a case study of the Falklands/Malvinas Dispute between Argentina and Great Britain from 1963–1982. I do this in four stages. First, I discuss my research strategy, which includes case selection, measurement, and standards of evidence. Second, I briefly outline the background conditions for the crisis, pointing out the interests and principles at stake. Third, I describe how Great Britain’s decision to frame the issue as one of principle rather than as a strategic issue prompted uncompromising attitudes among the British public. Fourth, I demonstrate that the Argentine sovereignty position clashed with the British position of self-determination to narrow the bargaining range and provoke negotiation breakdown. Finally, I show that principled positions on both sides of the Atlantic led to military escalation. Throughout my discussion, I focus primarily on British language, as the Argentine rhetorical stance was generally consistent: They touted the issue of sovereignty as a principled one to domestic audiences but followed the British line during negotiations in hopes of eventual concessions.

Principled rhetoric was present throughout the sovereignty negotiations before and after the Falklands War of 1982 occurred. Argentina insisted on the principle of territorial sovereignty over the Islands soon after it obtained independence from Spain. Great Britain in turn resorted to a number of moral and legal arguments to defend its title. Eventually, the principle of self-determination regarding the *wishes* of the Islanders prejudiced British domestic opinion against Argentine claims to sovereignty. Both sides refused to compromise on principle during negotiations. These intransigent bargaining positions—a product of principled language—prompted negotiation breakdown and provoked the Argentines to resort to force.

5.1 Research Design

The case of Falklands/Malvinas Dispute provides an excellent test of this theory for three reasons. First, the dispute demonstrates considerable in-case variation regarding principled versus strategic language. Argentina insisted on territorial sovereignty at the beginning of the case. This approach prompted the British to use principled language to defend its title. The British shifted to more material-based strategic arguments during the early 1970s, turning back to principled rhetoric later that decade. The British government had considerable leeway for how to frame the issue, so neither strategic nor principled language was predetermined. Lord Carrington, British Foreign Secretary from 1979–1982, clearly stated in his memoirs that “the Falklands represented no vital strategic or economic interest or principle.”⁸⁴ No arguments naturally fit, allowing for variation on the independent variable.

⁸⁴Gibran (1998: 110)

Second, while the distinction between nationalistic, legitimacy-based, and strategic-based language is often blurry in empirical reality, this case provides remarkably clear-cut distinctions. The principles of self-determination and sovereignty are pitted against strategic interests regarding economic development and the geographic location of the Islands. Also, the principle of self-determination, which was the primary principle used in British rhetoric, draws on both the language of nationalist ideals and the language of legitimacy. It is a democratic principle that appeals to liberal democratic audiences such as those in Great Britain, but it is also an internationally-recognized norm embodied in the United Nations Charter. Thus, we should see principled language in this case activating multiple theoretical pathways. The nationalistic aspects of the language mobilize domestic audiences against compromise. The international aspects provoke moral debate. Combined they produce negotiation breakdown, leading to dispute escalation. Strategic language should keep negotiations going without dispute escalation.

Finally, the internal documents for the Falklands War were recently released at The National Archives (London). This archive includes internal government minutes, conversations between British and Argentine negotiators, and government assessments of the situation, along with a host of other materials. These sources allow me to evaluate my argument with process tracing, which is “the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator.”⁸⁵ I conducted research at this archive in January 2015, and I also rely on a variety of secondary sources for background information and context to the documents.

Throughout this case, I engage in the following counterfactual: What would have happened had Great Britain chosen to engage in strategic-based rather than principled language?⁸⁶ I argue that strategic language would have prevented dispute escalation and opened up the bargaining space, but principled government rhetoric closed the bargaining range. During the back and forth negotiations before 1982, Great Britain expressed a willingness to negotiate through condominium, lease-back, and other options that ceded *de facto*, if not *de jure*, sovereignty of the Islands to Argentina. Yet the government publicly expressed commitment to the principle of self-determination. Since principle precludes any deal, British negotiations offered something outside of the bargaining range. Language regarding strategic economic interests would have provided material for a negotiated compromise.

5.2 Background: The Interests & Principles at Stake

The Falklands Islands (known as *Islas Malvinas* in Argentina), have been a point of disagreement between Great Britain and Argentina since the early nineteenth century. Regardless

⁸⁵Collier (2011: 923). See also Waldner (2015).

⁸⁶Levy (2015)

of public statements to the contrary, the possibly illegal and forceful aspect of the British occupation produced some unease in the British Foreign Office. British uncertainty over the claim began in 1910 and was strengthened by American Julius Goebel's analysis in 1927.⁸⁷ British government legal experts, leading up to the invasion, rested their confidence on the right of prescription—"the fact that, from 1833, British rule and occupation were continuous, and that the inhabitants were almost all of British stock and enthusiastically loyal to the Crown."⁸⁸ In this view, even if the Falklands Islands might belong to Argentina by right, the British keep them because the memory of Argentinian rule has been erased over time. Essentially, if a country can establish ownership long enough, that country becomes the rightful owner.⁸⁹ Still, residual uncertainty on the issue of prescription elicited another justification.

As predicted by Hypothesis 2, Argentine arguments for sovereignty prompted Great Britain to defend its possession with legitimacy-based arguments. Following WWII, Britain selected the principle of self-determination to defend its position whenever the Argentines pressed for sovereignty concessions. According to the principle of self-determination, the Falkland Islanders, who were loyal to Great Britain, determined their own allegiances. This principle usually established the independence, not the dependence, of a former colony; so many on both sides of the Atlantic viewed the principle of self-determination as non-applicable.⁹⁰

In addition to a questionable legal title, actual material interests in the Islands were sparse. Until 1982, trade consisted of primarily wool, which was heavily dependent on variable market prices.⁹¹ Starting after WWII, the island population declined. The official census showed a high of 2,392 settlers in 1931; by 1980 that number had decreased to 1,813.⁹² What little success the Islands met during times of economic surplus was siphoned away by absent investors. Because the Falklands Islands cost more than they were worth, Her Majesty's Government (hereafter HMG) showed considerable interest in conceding some measure of sovereignty to Argentina during negotiations from 1964-1975. However, as demonstrated in detail below, principled language prevented these concessions from occurring.

5.3 Stage 1: Principled Rhetoric & Domestic Opinion

Phase I of these negotiations (1964-1968) over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands got hung up on strategic versus principled language: Were the interests or the wishes of the Islanders

⁸⁷Goebel (1927)

⁸⁸Moore (2013: 657)

⁸⁹Freedman (2005: 11)

⁹⁰Cited in: Raphael Perl (1983). *The Falklands dispute in International Law and Politics: A Documentary Sourcebook* New York, page 368.

⁹¹Gibran (1998: 19-20)

⁹²Gibran (1998: 18), Donaghy (2014: 14)

paramount in the negotiation process? The islander's *interests* could be subjected to material considerations, such as economic well-being. However, the principle of self-determination emphasized their *wishes*, so the Islanders could choose their own destiny. By the end of this period, the British government agreed that the principle of self-determination—a liberal principle valued by democratic audiences and an internationally recognized norm embodied in the UN Charter—applied to the Falklands Islands. As predicted by Hypothesis 1, the language prejudiced domestic opinion against compromise. In later stages of the dispute, this principled position prompted the Argentines to hold fast to their own principled position and increased the probability of negotiation breakdown.

Argentine President Illia presented sovereignty claims over the Islands at the United Nations (UN) in 1963. In conjunction, June 10, 1963, “witnessed the creation of Malvinas Day in Argentina, a Malvinas museum, and organised demonstrations on the streets. School books were re-written, as a generation were imbued with a new sense of national pride.”⁹³ The United Nations passed UN Resolution 2065 on December 16, 1965, pressing the disputing parties to negotiate a peaceful solution, keeping the “interests” of the Islanders in mind.⁹⁴ Great Britain and Argentina accordingly held secret talks in 1966 to reach a political settlement that involved the transfer of the Islands. Although Great Britain had long professed itself as the lawful possessor of the Islands, it expressed a ready willingness to negotiate over these unprofitable islands.

The interests of the Islanders formed the focal point of these initial negotiations.⁹⁵ Argentina insisted on its sovereignty over the Islands, and this rhetorical stance remained consistent throughout the early negotiations. Although HMG had long touted principle in public, the British merely wanted Argentine guarantees that they would carefully safeguard Islander interests. The Islanders were not consulted at this initial stage.⁹⁶ In an interview after the crisis, Lord Chalfont⁹⁷ emphasized, “*The ‘interests’ of the Islanders’ was the key phrase. At that stage we all realized, or thought we realized, that we were the people who could decide upon the interests of the Islanders, not so much the Islanders themselves.*”⁹⁸ In the same interview, Lord Chalfont eschewed the principle of self-determination, insisting that the Labour Government at the time believed that sovereignty would have to be transferred to Argentina eventually. HMG took “into account the ‘interests’ of the population, not the ‘wishes,’ the crucial word.”⁹⁹

⁹³Donaghy 2014: 10

⁹⁴TNA PREM 13/2613, “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly, 1398th Plenary Meeting,” December 16, 1965. See also Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse (1990: 8)

⁹⁵Laver (2001)

⁹⁶Gamba-Stonehouse (1987: 91)

⁹⁷Alun Chalfont was a minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from 1964-1970. He conducted the first set of negotiations, with minimal input from the Prime Minister.

⁹⁸Quoted in Charlton (1989: 19), emphasis added.

⁹⁹Charlton (1989: 22)

The emphasis on islander “interests” meant that the British government could negotiate sovereignty without respect to islander opinion. Still, Lord Chalfont visited the Islands that year in an effort to persuade the Falklands to consider a transfer of sovereignty. The Islanders were skeptical. Shortly thereafter, the Falklands Lobby formed after domestic audiences caught wind of the substance of the negotiations in December 1968. This domestic interest group managed to cajole the British Government into stating that the Islanders’ *wishes* would be prioritized.¹⁰⁰ By December 1968, the British House of Commons had re-committed to the idea that “islander wishes are paramount,” giving the Island population right of veto over the sovereignty issue. According to Robin Edmunds, head of the Latin American Department of the Foreign Office:

December 1968 [was] an absolute watershed. From then on, in my view, in this country the Falkland Islands issue became primarily an issue of domestic politics. Previously, we have regarded it, rightly or wrongly, as largely a foreign policy issue, with, of course, like every *foreign policy* issue, some overtones of domestic politics. . . From then on it was exactly the other way around—a domestic policy with foreign policy overtones.¹⁰¹

Transitioning from the language of islander “interests” to that of islander “wishes” engaged the principle of self-determination, effectively prejudicing domestic audiences against a negotiated compromise. This move provoked initial bargaining intransigence, and these talks ended with no agreement. More pragmatic language from the start, focusing on the economic and strategic non-utility of the Islands, likely could have avoided the breakdown of these initial negotiations. Indeed, the strategic approach seemed to be working until the Falklands Lobby reminded domestic audiences (both the House of Commons and the domestic public) that, prior to 1965, Great Britain defended its claim to the Islands with the principle of self-determination.

5.4 Stage 2: Strategic Rhetoric & Private Diplomacy

Phase II of these negotiations (1969-1979) focused on “practical matters,” and the British government avoided a moral debate with Argentina. As indicated in the theoretical discussion, this shift from principled to strategic rhetoric prevented this second set of negotiations from completely breaking down, but it did not shift public opinion due to the lock-in effects of principled rhetoric. Indeed, the negotiations backfired once the domestic audiences get wind of the substance of the negotiations.

The Argentines did not drop their sovereignty claims during this period, but they followed British advice and enacted economic policies to win islander support. Argentina agreed to

¹⁰⁰Laver (2001: 133–4) and Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse (1990: 8).

¹⁰¹Gibran (1998: 162); Charlton (1989: 27–28)

focus on practical islander needs¹⁰² as part of a “hearts and minds” campaign that was ultimately counterproductive.¹⁰³ When the Communications Agreement between the Falklands and Argentina prejudiced islander opinion *against* a sovereignty transfer, Argentina reintroduced its sovereignty claims into talks with the British government in 1972.¹⁰⁴ Seemingly aware of the difficulties with the existing principled position, Foreign Secretary Callaghan¹⁰⁵ shifted discussions to more pragmatic, economic issues that could be more easily negotiated.¹⁰⁶

The Labour government under Harold Wilson continued the former administration’s preferences for condominium, that is, joint administration of the Islands. However, the Argentines agreed to consider condominium only to “facilitate the gradual integration of the population of the Islands into the political, social and institutional life of the Argentine Republic.”¹⁰⁷ Callaghan knew that a full transfer of sovereignty would not work, because British domestic audiences viewed the issue as one of principle: “If the foreign minister and president Péron insist on including recognition of Argentine sovereignty in the basis for initiating talks, the Islanders will refuse to take part; and we cannot move forward without them.”¹⁰⁸ Public and parliamentary opinion killed condominium by September 1974.¹⁰⁹ As negotiations deadlocked and tensions rose, the Wilson government fixated on the economic dimension of the Islands, which they believed could circumvent the sovereignty issue.¹¹⁰ Prime Minister Wilson encouraged the Foreign Office to “play the oil card” to divert attention from the sovereignty issue.¹¹¹

In a May 1975 memorandum, Foreign Secretary Callaghan stressed opportunities for economic cooperation between Argentina and Great Britain. The Labour government subsequently approved a scientific expedition, the Shackleton Mission, as an attempt to further establish the economic unfeasibility of the Islands. This maneuver backfired on several levels.¹¹² For one, the British approved the expedition in hopes of demonstrating to the Islanders their need for Argentine economic assistance.¹¹³ “When we launched the idea, this mission was intended to build a bridge between the Islands and Argentina,” Hugh Carless

¹⁰²Hastings and Jenkins (1983: 36–7); Charlton (1989: 33). This approach was begun under the Wilson government and continued under the Conservative Government led by Edward Heath.

¹⁰³Freedman (2005: 28)

¹⁰⁴TNA FCO 7/2700, The Falkland Islands Dispute: Developments from 1969-74.

¹⁰⁵James Callaghan became Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in March 1974. In this position, he became the primary player regarding the Falklands negotiations.

¹⁰⁶Charlton (1989)

¹⁰⁷TNA FCO 7/2699, Hopson to Callaghan and Lewis. June 20, 1974.

¹⁰⁸TNA FCO 7/2700, Callaghan to Hopson and Lewis. June 20, 1974.

¹⁰⁹Donaghy (2014: 42)

¹¹⁰TNA FCO 7/2949, Wright to Barrett: Meeting between Callaghan, Wilson and Ennals. April 16, 1975.

¹¹¹TNA PREM 16/743, Wright to Barrett. May 15, 1975.

¹¹²Donaghy (2014: 79), Freedman (2005: 9)

¹¹³Freedman (2005: 43)

explained.¹¹⁴ The Islanders resisted such a move at every step. Shortly before the expedition left, Callaghan pressed Shackleton “to influence the Islanders indirectly on the political side,” to which Shackleton agreed to “expose the economic truth whatever it might be.”¹¹⁵ Shackleton afterwards argued that on balance the British taxpayer made a profit from the Islands and recommended increased British investment.¹¹⁶

In addition, the Argentines misinterpreted the Shackleton Expedition as a piratic re-assertion of British sovereignty over the Islands and an insult to Argentina—rather than a step toward Anglo-Argentine economic cooperation. They were infuriated by the audacity of the British scientific research ship, RRS *Shackleton*. Thus, “[t]he materialist approach, which sought to circumvent the passions over sovereignty, the central issue, had been greeted by Argentina with unreserved hostility.”¹¹⁷ An Argentine destroyer (*Almirante Storni*) intercepted the *Shackleton* on February 4, 1976, some 87 miles south of Cape Bembroke and even shot three warning shots across the bow.¹¹⁸

Relations soured further when on December 29, 1976, a helicopter accompanying HMS *Endurance* discovered an Argentine station in Southern Thule. Still, the Labour government was able to defuse the situation. The government kept the discovery of Southern Thule secret for fear of activating domestic opinion. Low-key talks continued, although HMG was really just trying to string things along: “Look, we are willing to *incorporate*, in any discussion and negotiations, ideas about sovereignty issues which will arise, but not to put sovereignty on the table for debate, or for negotiation.”¹¹⁹ Over the protests of the MOD, they retained *Endurance* and engaged in a policy of quiet deterrence. Overall, the Labour government successfully achieved a “policy of deterrence and engagement” throughout 1977 and 1978 by 1) keeping exchanges private and out of the public eye and 2) focusing on the material aspects of the disagreement.¹²⁰ Public opinion was largely ignorant of the status of the Falklands through 1979, and the Labour government maintained the peace without making any real concessions.¹²¹

¹¹⁴Cited in Donaghy (2014: 80). Hugh Carless headed the Latin America department of the Foreign Office from 1973 to 1977, before his ministerial appointment as chargé d’affaires in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 1977 until 1980.

¹¹⁵TNA FCO 7/2963, Callaghan to Ashe and French. December 30, 1975.

¹¹⁶TNA FCO 7/3231, A Summary of Lord Shackleton’s report. December 21, 1976. See also Hastings and Jenkins (1983: 43) and Donaghy (2014: 105–9).

¹¹⁷Charlton (1989: 52)

¹¹⁸TNA FCO 58/989, French to Callaghan and Shakespeare: RRS *Shackleton* Incident. February 5, 1976.

¹¹⁹Ted Rowlands. Charlton (1989: 51–2)

¹²⁰TNA FCO7/3375, Report on Southern Thule (“Dispute over the Falklands—Argentine Presence on the South Sandwich Island Dependencies”). November 21, 1977. See also Donaghy (2014).

¹²¹For a full discussion of this period, see Donaghy (2014).

5.5 Stage 3: A Return to Principle & Negotiation Breakdown

During the third stage of the dispute (1979-1981), the Thatcher administration returned to principled language. The British government again used the principle of self-determination as its primary defense. From the Argentine side, “The transfer of sovereignty [was] consistently... the essential aim in negotiations” between 1970 and 1982.¹²² As predicted by Hypothesis 3, mutual focus on principle elicited negotiation breakdown during this period.

In September 1979, Lord Carrington¹²³ presented Prime Minister Thatcher with three policy options regarding the status of the Falkland Islands, favoring leaseback. Under leaseback, British administration would continue for a set period of time with eventual admission of Argentine sovereignty over the territory.¹²⁴ However, Thatcher commented on the leaseback scheme: “I could not possibly agree to the line the Foreign Secretary is proposing.”¹²⁵ According to Lord Carrington, “She takes the view that we cannot rush a decision of principle on our approach to the problem. . . .”¹²⁶ and proposed a postponement of the discussion until after the Rhodesian issue had been settled.¹²⁷ Thatcher’s government continued to delay discussing alternative options through January and February, despite “growing urgency to consider the issue. . . .”¹²⁸

Mr. Ridley¹²⁹ and Comodoro Cavandoli resumed talks in New York from April 28-29, 1980. However, the governments could reach no compromise because of British domestic opinion. They discussed oil, fishing rights, and other pragmatic issues related to future cooperation between the Islands and Argentina. The negotiators primarily skirted the issue of sovereignty during these discussions.¹³⁰ In November 1980, the OD Committee authorized

¹²²TNA FCO 58/2798 Memorandum by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with contributions from the Department of Trade and the Ministry of Defence. October 13, 1982

¹²³Peter Carrington became Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in 1979 under the Thatcher Government.

¹²⁴TNA PREM 19/656, “Carrington minute to MT (‘Falkland Islands’) in “Falkland Islands: Terms of Reference for Negotiations (Written Parliamentary Answer by the Secretary of State, 26 April 1977),” September 20, 1979. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122458>

¹²⁵TNA PREM 19/656 f118, Carrington minute to MT (“Falkland Islands”). September 20, 1979. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122458>. See also TNA PREM 19/656 f114 John Hunt minute to MT (“Falkland Islands”). September 21, 1979. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122459>.

¹²⁶TNA PREM 19/612 f55 FCO to UKMIS New York (“Argentina and the Falkland Islands”). September 25, 1979. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/121928>.

¹²⁷TNA PREM 19/656 f102 FCO letter to No.10 (“Falkland Islands”). October 12, 1979. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122461>.

¹²⁸TNA PREM 19/656 f93 Armstrong briefing for MT (“Falkland Islands (OD(79) 31)”). January 25, 1980. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122464>.

¹²⁹Nicholas Ridley became the Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during Thatcher’s government. He was a key negotiator during 1980 and 1981.

¹³⁰TNA PREM 19/612 f28 FCO record of Anglo-Argentine Ministerial talks on the Falkland Islands: New York, 28-29 April 1980 (Nick Ridley-Cavandoli). April 28, 1980. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/121932>.

Ridley to pursue talks regarding “the surrender of sovereignty and simultaneous leaseback.”¹³¹ However, when Nicholas Ridley proposed leaseback to the British House of Commons on December 2, 1980, the body shouted him down, effectively destroying all hope of leaseback.¹³² Ridley also failed to convince the Islanders that this was a feasible approach.¹³³ When Ridley wavered on “whether the principle of paramountcy of the Islanders’ wishes still applied,”¹³⁴ the Falklands Lobby struck back hard.

During private negotiations held in New York City during February 1981, Nicholas Ridley towed the “new” government line and insisted to the Argentine negotiators that “the British Government had no doubt at all of the legality and strength of their title to the Islands. He had always said to the Islanders that the legal position was not in doubt. It would indeed be possible to go on resting on that position for all time.” Comodoro Cavandoli, frustrated by this position noted: “But he could not understand or accept that Argentina’s one requirement, sovereignty, should be ignored permanently. The British side has said that Islander wishes had to be taken into account; why could not Argentine wishes be taken into account?”¹³⁵ The Argentines demanded full sovereignty as a matter of principle, the British demanded self-determination. This was a case in which a principle, which had both domestic and international implications, narrowed the bargaining range between two nations. During these discussions, the parties discussed a number of economic arrangements, but both asserted that principle could not be compromised. The British rejected a transfer of sovereignty and Argentina rejected a freeze proposal.

Even while verbally emphasizing the principle at stake, Great Britain showed decreased interest in the Islands and their inhabitants. For one, the new British National Bill came before Parliament in 1981, which denied citizenship to third- and fourth- generation settlers in colonies such as Gibraltar and the Falklands.¹³⁶ The Bill passed to include approximately 800 Falklanders. On a more strategic front, the Ministry of Defense decided to push through a plan (which had been on the table for almost a decade) to withdraw *Endurance* from the South Atlantic at the end of 1981-82 tour.¹³⁷

¹³¹TNA PREM 19/656 f76 Armstrong briefing for MT (“Falkland Islands (OD(80) 66”) November 6, 1980. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122467>.

¹³²TNA PREM 19/656 f56 Sanders minute to MT (“Falkland Islands: Mr Ridley’s statement”), December 2, 1980. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122469>.

¹³³TNA PREM 19/656 f43 Armstrong briefing for MT (“Falkland Islands (OD(81) 2)”), January 28, 1981. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122471>.

¹³⁴Freedman (2005: 15)

¹³⁵TNA PREM 19/0612 f8 FCO record of Anglo-Argentine Ministerial talks on the Falkland Islands: New York, 23/24 February 1980. February 23-24, 1981. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/121934>

¹³⁶TNA PREM 19/656 f51 Whitelaw minute to MT (“The Falkland Islands Under the Nationality Bill”). January 12, 1981. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122470>. See also Hastings and Jenkins (1983: 59).

¹³⁷TNA ALA 062/2. David Owen letter to Atkins (plans to phase out HMS *Endurance*). January 3, 1982. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/118416>.

Members of HMG recognized that principled language had locked them into an untenable position. Carrington expressed concern in a memo to the Prime Minister on September 14, 1981, that Britain “might ultimately become involved in a military confrontation with Argentina.” He could not reconcile Islander wishes with Argentine demands.¹³⁸ Carrington met with the Argentine Foreign Minister on September 23, 1981. “Islander opinion is even more strongly opposed to any ‘deal’ with the Argentines over sovereignty. We have reiterated that the wishes of the Islanders are paramount. We therefore have little room for maneuver, but it is in our interests to keep the dialogue going in order to avoid the economic consequences of breakdown.” He expressed hope that Britain could avoid stalemate by focusing on the “scope for economic cooperation.” While he expressed concern over the costs of providing services to the Islands should Argentina pressure them, he concluded, “We should not underestimate the strength of feeling of the Islanders and Parliament.”¹³⁹

As discussions dragged on, Falklands Governor Rex Hunt noted to Lord Carrington the next year: “As for a settlement of the main issue, as long as the Argentines continue to insist on sovereignty first and we continue to maintain that islander wishes are paramount, I see no way ahead in future talks.”¹⁴⁰ Although Great Britain had considered a transfer of sovereignty for decades, the country now could not fathom it. Argentina felt the same: “So long as this question is unresolved the dispute will continue. Consequently neither must it nor can it be ignored, because the Argentine Republic, however much time may pass, will never abandon its claim nor relax its determination until this has been satisfied.”¹⁴¹

5.6 Stage 4: Crisis Diplomacy & Dispute Escalation

Leopoldo Galtieri came to power through a coup that ousted General Roberto Viola in December 1981. In this final stage, principled language on both sides had reduced all chances for compromise and increased the probability of military escalation, as predicted by Hypothesis 4. By early 1982, Argentina had concluded that the British negotiators were stringing them along and decided to use force to establish its claims. While the sides prepared for war, HMG publicly denounced aggression and privately negotiated a peaceful compromise. Principled language eliminated the bargaining range for a negotiated solution. As predicted by Hypothesis 1, domestic audiences on both sides of the Atlantic pressed for war.

On January 27, 1982, the Argentines delivered a “*bout de papier*” to the British Ambassador in Buenos Aires, insisting that the purpose of future negotiations be to transfer

¹³⁸TNA PREM 19/656 f29 Carrington minute to MT (“Falkland Islands”). September 14, 1981. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122474>.

¹³⁹TNA PREM 19/656 f14. Carrington minute to MT (“Falkland Islands”). December 2, 1981. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/122478>.

¹⁴⁰TNA PREM 19/0613 Hunt to Carrington. January 19, 1982.

¹⁴¹ALW 014/1 UKE Buenos Aires to FCO (“Argentine Position”). January 28, 1982. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/118359>.

sovereignty to Argentina. HMG delivered a response on February 8: “Her Majesty’s Government wish to reaffirm that they are in no doubt about British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. . . they can not therefore accept the Argentine assumption that the purpose of the negotiations is the eventual recognition by HMG of Argentine sovereignty in the area.”¹⁴² While HMG did not take the threat of invasion seriously, the PM minuted “we must take contingency plans” upon seeing a Buenos Aires telegram of March 3.¹⁴³

Shortly thereafter, an invasion appeared imminent. On Saturday, March 27, 1982, Nott realized that the situation “was worse than. . . expected.”¹⁴⁴ When the Prime Minister was apprised of the situation on March 28, she contacted Foreign Secretary Carrington. She “not only saw few options but also that the crisis had turned into a dispute on sovereignty.”¹⁴⁵ Thatcher initially favored going to the International Court of Justice at the Hague. Carrington warned her that “We might get the wrong answer,”¹⁴⁶ implying that the United Kingdom might lose the sovereignty case. This new information alarmed the Prime Minister: “Because there is no earthly point in sweating blood over it if it’s not ours.”¹⁴⁷ Although Carrington assured Thatcher of British sovereignty, they chose to eschew a purely legal approach.

Thatcher quickly decided on a course of action. By March 31, the government had authorized Admiral Sir Henry Leach to ready a task force. Amid all these preparation in the early hours of the morning of Friday, April 2, Argentina’s fleet bloodlessly invaded Port Stanley. When the invasion occurred, Thatcher informed the Commons that a task force was being prepared as she addressed them. Even after approving the task force, the British government had approximately three weeks to negotiate a solution short of war with Argentina. Great Britain and Argentina discussed alternate solutions through three sets of the negotiations: The Haig Negotiations mediated by U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig; the Peruvian Initiative (The Belaunde Mediation) which ended with the sinking of the *Belgrano*; and the UN Mediation, which was a final attempt by Great Britain to save face and throw remaining blame on Argentina. According to recently de-classified documents, HMG—with Thatcher at the helm—seriously attempted to negotiate a peaceful settlement due to American pressures.¹⁴⁸

However, the disputing sides continued to take public, principled stances that closed the bargaining range during negotiations. The British took a three-pronged approach in an effort to legitimate their position, garner support from domestic and international audiences, and

¹⁴²TNA ALW 040/325/1 FCO record of Anglo-Argentine Ministerial talks on the Falkland Islands in New York (Annexes) <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/118369>

¹⁴³TNA ALW 040/325/1 B 51 - 100 No.10 letter to FCO ("Falkland Islands") <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/118531>

¹⁴⁴Freedman (2005: 189)

¹⁴⁵Freedman (2005: 189)

¹⁴⁶Freedman (2005: 190)

¹⁴⁷Freedman (2005: 190)

¹⁴⁸TNA PREM 19/617 f76 No.10 record of telephone conversation (MT-Haig) April 14, 1982 <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/121991>

demonstrate resolve to Argentina. They focused on the *sovereignty* of British territory, the need to defend British honor and territory against Argentine *aggression*, and the principle of *self-determination* regarding the Falkland Islanders. One scholar has noted that the War Cabinet carefully constructed the narrative of the operational plans to accord with international law and dispel both domestic and international criticism.¹⁴⁹

On April 14, the Prime Minister reported to the Parliament on the state of negotiations: “We made it clear to Mr. Haig that withdrawal of the invaders’ troops must come first; that the sovereignty of the Islands is not affected by the act of invasion; and that when it comes to future negotiations what matters most is what the Falkland Islanders themselves wish.”¹⁵⁰ Throughout the speech, as in her other public statements and letters to allies, Thatcher promoted the ideals of “democracy,” “liberty,” the “rule of law,” and other items of “principle” set up against “brute force” and “naked aggression.” As during the pre-crisis negotiations, British public statements contradicted the spirit of compromise during private negotiations. The junta (notably Costa Mendez) paid attention to this speech and others like it, concluding that Great Britain had no intention of making any concessions.¹⁵¹

Public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic firmly eschewed compromise and touted force as the only solution. In the first MORI poll of April 14, 83% of the British public favored the decision to send the Task Force, 52% to sink Argentine ships in Falklands waters. Public opinion was, at a minimum, opposed to any compromise that rewarded Argentine aggression. These numbers continued to rise as the British task force sailed to recapture the Islands, and approval of Thatcher’s government soared.¹⁵² Even today, polls suggest that public opinion in mainland Britain is firmly against any concession over the Islands.¹⁵³ The Argentines viewed the Malvinas as a source of national pride, and they initially supported the invasion enthusiastically. Their agitation against compromise went back decades; their preference for military force matched their opposition to negotiation.¹⁵⁴ It continues to this day.¹⁵⁵

Great Britain and Argentina considered many different compromises. However, as the British continued to press the issue of self-determination and the Argentines insisted on territorial sovereignty, Alexander Haig noted to the Thatcher administration: “The formulation on self-determination would be no less difficult for the Argentines to accept than it would be for you—or us—to accept a flat assurance of eventual sovereignty.”¹⁵⁶ The public, principled stance undermined the proposals for compromise in private negotiations. Dispute intran-

¹⁴⁹Gibran (1998: 79)

¹⁵⁰Thatcher, Margaret. “Excerpts from Mrs. Thatcher’s Talk.” April 15, 1982. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/15/world/excerpts-from-mrs-thatcher-s-talk.html>.

¹⁵¹Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse (1990: 192)

¹⁵²Dillon (1989: 116–118)

¹⁵³The Economist (2012)

¹⁵⁴Donaghy 2014: 10

¹⁵⁵Benwell and Dodds (2011)

¹⁵⁶TNA CAB 164/1620/1, Pym to Haig. May 5, 1982.

sigence continued, and all chance of compromise evaporated when Great Britain soundly defeated Argentina on the battlefield in June 1982.

5.7 Alternative explanations

In this section, I address key alternative explanations regarding the role of principled rhetoric during the Falklands dispute. The first argues that it was Margaret Thatcher—and her personality—that communicated intransigence during the dispute, rather than the language itself. The second views the language as nothing but cheap talk, a cloak to cover up self-interest and British power during the dispute. The third looks at the impact of audience costs and rhetorical coercion. Finally, constructivist theories of International Relations might argue that the British government actually *was* acting according to principle, rather than getting locked in by its rhetoric.

First, Margaret Thatcher emulated the American principles of liberty and freedom in her speeches: Even before she became prime minister, she espoused the need for “more emphasis on principle.”¹⁵⁷ In this view, Thatcher herself communicated intransigence rather than the language during the dispute. However, this explanation provides an incomplete interpretation of the Falklands dispute. Margaret Thatcher came to power only after HMG had long taken a principled stance regarding the issue of self-determination and British sovereignty over the Islands. It is true that Thatcher was resolute, uncompromising, and aggressive in her stances. Moral language was one of the many ways in which Thatcher demonstrated these qualities. However, it is plausible that another British PM in her place would have engaged in the line that HMG provided, provoking intransigence with principled language. By going back in time before the 1982 crisis and exploring the earlier periods, this case study guards against such leader-specific alternative explanations.

According to rationalist (and realist) theories of international relations, moral and legal rhetoric is mere cheap talk and window dressing for strategic behavior. According to these studies, principled language did not affect dispute dynamics but provided a cover for British intentions. According to these explanations, the Thatcher government was prepared to go to war with its superior military capability but needed a cloak of legitimacy to gain international and UN support. This argument does not hold water for two reasons. First, documents reveal that “UK government declarations and rhetoric at the time gave the impression that nothing short of the withdrawal of all Argentinian forces, the reaffirmation of British sovereignty and a return to the position as it was before the invasion would be acceptable. But the papers show Thatcher and her senior ministers were privately adopting a more flexible approach, including allowing a continuing Argentinian presence on the Islands.”¹⁵⁸ The public, principled stance

¹⁵⁷Moore (2013: 301)

¹⁵⁸The Guardian (2012)

undermined the private negotiations, but the Thatcher government did seek a deal.

However, even if the British government used the language only to cover up self-interested behavior, the language itself had clear, if possibly unintended, consequences throughout the dispute. After the war, the Research Department lamented the mixed language of international principle and nationalism:

The apparently unhesitating, blanket commitment on our part to the principle of self-determination for colonies, with its consequent emphasis on the wishes of the people was not only—as it turned out—ill advised (because of the resulting inflexibility of the British position), but also odd. . . careful wording could have provided a much more flexible framework for dealing with territories such as the Falklands, Gibraltar, and Hong Kong.¹⁵⁹

The government subsequently realized that the principled language throughout the dispute committed them to an uncompromising position that increased the likelihood of a costly war. At least in the view of the government, they really were bound from this apparent “cheap talk” strategy, even if it was intended as a costless cover-up.

Third, my argument does not necessarily contradict theories of audience costs or constructivist theories of rhetorical entrapment. Rather, it supplements and adds nuance to these theories. Theories of audience costs argue that words can commit a leader to a position. I argue that principled framings enhance that commitment, making it even more difficult for a leader to compromise. It challenges rationalist assumptions that the framing of an argument is inconsequential to the dynamics of bargaining. Relatedly, Goddard’s theory of indivisible territory looks at how leaders try to legitimate their position with existing international norms and in consequence get caught in untenable positions. I argue that this occurred during the Falklands dispute. I also show, however, that the government was able to mitigate escalation dynamics through strategic arguments under the 1974-79 Labour Government. My argument examines the role of language at a broader level here.

Finally, some constructivist theories of international relations argue that language is intended to persuade and has actual persuasive effects in the international realm. Did the British seek to persuade audiences of their legitimate position? Were they effective? On some levels, HMG was surprised at the remarkable efficacy of its arguments. They “were able for a surprisingly long time to make good use of the UN Security Council” and “[m]any of the non-aligned. . . showed a surprising respect for principle.” Overall, “Our success in mobilizing world opinion should also contribute a widespread tendency to accord us greater weight.”¹⁶⁰ However, this language did not persuade the Argentines of the British position—or vice versa. Additionally, HMG consisted of strategic actors who engaged in the language

¹⁵⁹TNA FCO 58/2798 Self-determination, Falklands/Gibraltar/Hong Kong. November 24, 1982.

¹⁶⁰TNA FCO 7/4506 International Implications of the Falklands Crisis: A First Review. June 25, 1983.

of principle for strategic ends. They became increasingly concerned that other nations would expect the British government to support similar wars of self-determination or act differently regarding other disputed territories such as Gibraltar and Hong Kong. While they found themselves trapped by such arguments, they did not necessarily believe them nor expect others to believe them. Thus, a normative account of the Falklands dispute and subsequent crisis and war is incomplete.

6 Conclusion

This paper presents a theory of government language during international bargaining. I find, in both the survey experiment and case study, that principled language reduces opportunities for compromise and increases the chances for military escalation in international bargaining. When the principles appeal to the values of the domestic audience, the public becomes prejudiced against compromise in favor of military force. Additionally, if the language resonates with international principle, this language can provoke the other side to engage in moral debate, generating dispute intransigence and negotiation breakdown. All of these processes combine to increase the probability of dispute escalation.

On the other hand, strategic material-based language can open the bargaining range and increase the possibilities for a negotiated settlement. The Labour Government from 1974–79 attempted this policy to prevent dispute escalation. Unfortunately, principled language had already created intransigence on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, while the Labour Government was able to maintain the status quo, the return to principle in 1980 set the stage for the Argentine Invasion of 1982. If HMG had engaged in more materialistic language early in the dispute, they likely could have found a compromise that would appeal to both sides, including their domestic audiences.

Overall, the ability to frame a disagreement as one of principle or material interests has measurable implications for international disputes. Leaders can carefully avoid escalation with material-based arguments, although it is difficult to actually resolve the issue if it has already been framed as one of principle. In this way, principled arguments are rather “sticky” arguments in international disputes. If a principled frame resonates with multiple audiences early on, governments may struggle to use material-based arguments later in the negotiations. Principled frames may thus increase domestic preferences for military force, create dispute intransigence, and increase the probability of dispute escalation.

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Appendix

Text of Rhetorical Treatments

National Principle

The U.S. president condemned the attack and outlined his foreign policy regarding the dispute in a televised speech last night: “The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. America’s influence is not unlimited, but fortunately for the oppressed, America’s influence is considerable, and we will use it confidently in freedom’s cause. We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right.

“Today, as always, we draw on the strength of our values — for the challenges that we face may have changed, but the things that we believe in must not. That is why we must make it clear to every man, woman and child around the world who lives under the dark cloud of tyranny that America will speak out on behalf of their rights. That is who we are. That is the source, yes, the moral source, of America’s authority.”

International Principle

The U.S. president condemned the attack and outlined his foreign policy regarding the dispute in a televised speech last night: “I am sure that everyone will join me in condemning totally this unprovoked aggression. It has not a shred of justification and not a scrap of legality. This invasion was an act of brutal and unprovoked aggression — a clear violation of international law and of the fundamental principles of settlement of disputes by peaceful means and of self-determination of peoples, both of which are enshrined in the UN Charter. This is a direct challenge to the efforts of the free nations to build the kind of world in which men can live in freedom and peace.

“Today, as always, we cherish freedom — yes. We cherish self-determination for all people — yes. We abhor the political murder of any state by another, and the bodily murder of any people by gangsters of whatever ideology. And we have sought to strengthen free people against domination by aggressive foreign powers.”

National Interests

The U.S. president condemned the attack and outlined his foreign policy regarding the dispute in a televised speech last night: “The area is key to the economic and political life of the West. Its strategic importance, its energy resources, waterways, and the well-being of the nearly 200 million people living there — all are vital to us and to world peace. If that key should fall into the hands of a power or powers hostile to the free world, there would be a direct threat to the United States and to our allies.

“Today, as always, the United States wants all nations in the region to be free and to be independent. If Kystrats is encouraged in this invasion by eventual success, and if they maintain their dominance and then extend their control to adjacent countries, the stable, strategic, and peaceful balance of the entire world will be changed. This would threaten the security of all nations including, of course, the United States, our allies, and our friends.”

Principle Combined

The U.S. president condemned the attack and outlined his foreign policy regarding the dispute in a televised speech last night: “I am sure that everyone will join me in condemning totally this unprovoked aggression. It has not a shred of justification and not a scrap of legality. This invasion was an act of brutal and unprovoked aggression — a clear violation of international law and of the fundamental principles of settlement of disputes by peaceful means and of self-determination of peoples, both of which are enshrined in the UN Charter. This is a direct challenge to the efforts of the free nations to build the kind of world in which men can live in freedom and peace.

“Today, as always, we draw on the strength of our values — for the challenges that we face may have changed, but the things that we believe in must not. That is why we must make it clear to every man, woman and child around the world who lives under the dark cloud of tyranny that America will speak out on behalf of their rights. That is who we are. That is the source, yes, the moral source, of America’s authority.”