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REPUTATION, CULT OF REPUTATION, AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

SHIPING TANG

Building on recent scholarship on reputation in international politics, this article argues that, because reputation for resolve cannot form in international conflicts due to anarchy, politicians' persistent belief in the value of reputation for resolve is merely a cult of reputation. After outlining the logic of the cult and an operational code derived from it, this article examines the pattern of influence that the cult has exerted on state behavior in conflicts. It then explores the possible cause of the cult. Finally, it proposes that integrating structural and psychological factors may be a productive enterprise for understanding state behavior, and that further work along this line may lead to interesting findings.

REPUTATION FOR RESOLVE (which will be referred to in this article simply as “reputation”) has long occupied a prominent place in the practice and study of international politics.¹ On the one hand, politicians often justify interventions in places with little intrinsic value by contending that, while tangible interest may or may not be at stake, reputation, which for politicians often looms much larger than interest, is indeed at stake.² On the other hand,

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1. This article deals exclusively with the role of reputation for resolve in international conflicts. For the important distinction between “reputation for resolve” and “reputation for power,” see Paul Huth, “Reputation and Deterrence: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment,” *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (fall 1997): 75–78. For the role of reputation (for commitment or compliance) in international cooperation, see Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 125–126; Robert Keohane, *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 95–96, 125–126; and Beth Simmons, “International Law and State Behavior: Commitment and Compliance in International Monetary Affairs,” *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 4 (December 2000): 819–35.

2. When politicians (and sometimes theorists, too) talk about “reputation” and “credibility,” they frequently use the two terms interchangeably—with each other and with “honor,” “resolve,” and “prestige.” In reality, reputation (for resolve) is only one of the three components

many early deterrence theorists have spent most of their careers articulating how to build and defend reputation.³

The general validity of reputation, however, has come under assault. Whereas in 1961 Glenn Snyder touted the virtue of drawing the line in places such as Quemoy and Matsu,⁴ he later all but acknowledged the flaw of his logic.⁵ Likewise, a decade after claiming that “a state can usually convince others of its willingness to defend its vital interests by frequently fighting for interests others believe it feels are less than vital,”⁶ Jervis was no longer so sure in 1982: “We cannot predict with great assurance how a given behavior will influence others’ expectations of how the state will act in the future.”⁷

This assault on reputation remains anathema for most politicians (and many political scientists). As statesman Henry Kissinger warned his colleagues, “No serious policymaker could allow himself to succumb to the fashionable debunking of ‘prestige,’ or ‘honor’ or ‘credibility.’”⁸ Judging from politicians’ rhetoric and behavior, Kissinger’s advice has been well taken. There seems to be a gap, therefore, between politicians’ persistent obsession with reputation and scholars’ increasing doubt about reputation’s importance, and that gap is widening.

Several more recent studies have taken the case against reputation (and credibility) even further.⁹ Compared to previous studies, these tend to be

of credibility (more on this point later). Throughout this article, I use the terms “reputation” and “credibility” distinctively unless they are embedded in original quotations.

3. Schelling’s two classics laid down much of the foundation: Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960); and Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). Also see Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Westport: Greenwood, 1961). The literature of deterrence theory is enormous; for excellent reviews, see Paul Huth, “Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 25–48; Robert Jervis, “Rational Deterrence Theory: Theory and Evidence,” *World Politics* 41, no. 2 (January 1989): 183–207; and Robert Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (January 1979): 289–324.

4. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, 36.

5. Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 186–187.

6. Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 10.

7. Robert Jervis, “Deterrence and Perception,” in *Strategy and Nuclear Deterrence*, ed. Steven Miller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 63.

8. Henry A. Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 228.

9. Major works include Robert McMahon, “Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 4 (fall 1991): 455–71; James Fearon, “Signaling versus the Balance of Power and Interest,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38, no. 2 (June 1994): 236–69; Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence and American Foreign Policy in the Third World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Daryl G. Press, “Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility during the Cuban Missile Crisis,”

more systematic and better grounded empirically. They can be divided into two categories. The first group of work focuses on the impact of politicians' concern for reputation on state behavior and concludes that the concern for reputation has had a profound influence on state behavior in conflicts.¹⁰ The second group of work, taking politicians' belief in reputation as a fact, argues that this belief is unjustified because reputation in international conflicts is difficult, if not impossible, to develop. To put it differently, this line of work contends that reputation actually does not matter as much as politicians usually believe, if it matters at all.¹¹

Intuitively, because these two lines of research focus on the same concept, they should converge at some point. Yet they seem to go their separate ways for now, and because of this, several important issues remain unresolved. How do we explain politicians' strong belief in the value of reputation? What are the implications for international politics of this belief in reputation? Where does the belief come from? Partially because the belief in the value of reputation appears to be so widespread and persistent, these issues must be properly understood.

This article brings together these two lines of recent scholarship on reputation. Reviewing and building on them, it advances two principal arguments. First, there is a cult of reputation among politicians. Second, reputation for resolve cannot form in international conflicts because of anarchy. This article begins by defining credibility more rigorously and distinguishing between two types of reputation and credibility: bargaining and behavioral. Next, to explain politicians' persistent obsession with reputation, the article postulates that a "cult of reputation" exists among them, similar to the "cult of the offensive" that Stephen Van Evera coined for explaining the First World War.¹² The article outlines the logic of the cult of reputation and an operational code derived from it, drawing for support from existing empirical studies, and highlights the pattern of influence that the cult has exerted on state behavior in conflicts. Although the nature of international politics (anarchy) is the ultimate reason

paper presented at the 2001 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, available at <http://www.international.ucla.edu/cms/files/PressDaryl.pdf>; and Daryl G. Press, "Does Backing Down Hurt Credibility? Evidence from the 'Appeasement Crises, 1938–39,'" manuscript. Huth also tested whether a state's past behavior has any effect on crisis bargaining, but his result was a bit ambiguous. Paul Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), chap. 6.

10. Works in this category include those of MacMahon and Hopf cited above.

11. Works in this category include those of Fearon, Mercer, and Press cited above.

12. Stephen Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origin of the First World War," *International Security* 9, no. 1 (summer 1984): 58–107. See also Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

for politicians' thirst for reputation, anarchy also means that it is impossible for a state to develop a reputation. Because of its parsimonious simplicity and explanatory power, this structural explanation is superior to Jonathan Mercer's elaborate hypothesis that reputation is based on "desirability."¹³ The final section of this article argues that we can reach more determinate predictions for great powers' behavior under different international structures by combining structure with the cult of reputation, that integrating structural and psychological factors may be a productive enterprise, and that further work along this line may lead to interesting findings.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN REPUTATION AND CREDIBILITY

PERHAPS SURPRISINGLY, although statements about reputation and credibility keep piling up, the relationship between these two concepts has never been rigorously addressed. Credibility remains "an elusive concept that defies precise definition,"¹⁴ and many still tend to use the two terms interchangeably.

Mercer defined "credibility" as consisting "of capability, interest, and resolve. . . . Credibility is a relational concept. Whether a threat or promise is credible depends entirely on the perception of others."¹⁵ This was a major attempt in the right direction, but even this definition is wanting. If "resolve" is properly defined as "the extent to which a state will risk war to keep its promises and uphold its threats,"¹⁶ then resolve is a state's private information about its own will to risk war. Thus resolve is privately held and nonrelational. A state knows its own resolve, but others can only speculate about its resolve. Unlike capability and interest, which can be both private information and common knowledge, and thus encompass both nonrelational and relational dimensions, resolve cannot be relational. If so, resolve should not be used for defining credibility, a relational concept, since to do so would be logically inconsistent.¹⁷

To define "credibility," a relational concept, a relational replacement for "resolve" is needed, and we find it in "reputation for resolve." "Reputation," as commonly defined, is "the general opinion of a person or a thing held by

13. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*.

14. McMahon, "Credibility and World Power," 455.

15. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 15, 27.

16. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 15. See also Robert Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 42.

17. Snyder and Diesing made a similar point: "resolve" and "credibility" are close to being the opposites of the same coin." Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 50n11. See also George Kent, *The Effects of Threats*, Merston Center Pamphlet Series (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967), 84–86.

others and the general public.”¹⁸ Translated into strategic language, a state’s reputation (for resolve) is others’ perception of that state’s resolve to risk war in a given situation, and it does not exist without others: reputation is by definition a relational concept.

Using “reputation” as a relational replacement for “resolve,” “credibility” can then be defined properly. “Credibility” consists of a reputation for or perception of capability, the perception of interest, and a reputation for resolve. In any given situation, an actor’s credibility is other actors’ combined assessment of these three factors.

This new definition of credibility will eliminate a seed for potential confusion because credibility is now truly relational.¹⁹ When credibility was defined as consisting of capability, interest, and resolve, and because capability and interest can be based on both private and common knowledge, many may have simply ignored the private nature of information inherent in the concept of resolve and viewed the overall concept of credibility as nonrelational. The new definition, in contrast, makes it explicit that credibility can only be relational, even if capability and interest are common knowledge, because reputation for resolve can only be relational. Accordingly, a state’s credibility is not its own possession but that of other states.

Each of the three factors multiplies (rather than adds to) the effects of the others to form credibility. When the value of one factor (say, capability) is low, it would be extremely difficult for the other two factors to compensate.²⁰ Thus, the likely equation should be [credibility = capability × interest × reputation], rather than [credibility = capability × (interest + reputation)] or [credibility = capability + interest + reputation].

It is possible to distinguish between two types of reputation (and, therefore, credibility): bargaining and behavioral.²¹ Bargaining reputation derives solely

18. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (New York: Dell, 1983), 586. For a similar definition, see *New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language* (Danbury: Lexicon, 1992), 846.

19. Making credibility a truly relational concept essentially means that whether a state can gain a certain kind of credibility depends mostly, if not entirely, on whether observers confer that kind of credibility on it. A state can desire a certain kind of credibility and try to influence the formation of that credibility, but ultimately it cannot control the outcome of that process. Put differently, cultivating certain kinds of credibility through certain behaviors may or may not work.

20. For instance, China’s threat to intervene in the Korean War was deemed incredible by General Douglas MacArthur because he did not believe that China had the capability to fight a meaningful war against his troops. On the other hand, the U.S. threat that it would fight to the end was largely dismissed by North Vietnam because the Vietnamese did not believe the U.S. had much interest in Vietnam. For a similar but less developed argument, see Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 15.

21. Mercer’s distinction between “specific” and “general” reputation has a similar logic but is closer to Morgan’s distinction between “immediate” and “general” deterrence and to Snyder

from a state's demonstrated will to run the risk of war during crisis bargaining,²² whereas behavioral reputation supposedly derives from a state's past behavior. To put it differently, bargaining reputation is something that counts now, whereas behavioral reputation is something that may count in the future. The demand for bargaining reputation comes from the need to signal resolve in an ongoing standoff. In contrast, the need for behavioral reputation comes from the structural imperative of international politics. Under anarchy, adversaries in a conflict do have incentives to deceive and mislead (that is, to bluff), thus creating uncertainty about each other's resolve. "[This] uncertainty about the resolve of an adversary creates an incentive for developing and maintaining a reputation for being resolute. . . . Having a reputation for being resolute is beneficial."²³

Distinguishing between these two types of reputation (and credibility) is important. Together with the new definition of credibility, this distinction between bargaining and behavioral reputation not only makes the distinction between "reputation for resolve" and "reputation for power (capability)" more significant, but also clarifies our understanding of credibility.

For instance, fighting a skirmish effectively adds value to both one's bargaining reputation for power and one's bargaining reputation for resolve for the crisis at hand, and it adds value to one's behavioral reputation for power, but it does not add value to one's behavioral reputation for resolve in a future crisis. Thus, fighting a skirmish effectively may indeed make a state's future threat more credible; it achieves this feat not by making the state appear more resolute, but by making it appear more capable. In contrast, while staking one's reputation in a standoff may or may not add value to one's bargaining reputation for resolve, it surely adds nothing to one's bargaining reputation for power. Such a move will have no impact on one's credibility for a future crisis, because it adds no value to either one's behavioral reputation for power or one's behavioral reputation for resolve. Therefore, fighting to enhance one's behavioral reputation for power may be possible (and even desirable under certain circumstances); fighting to enhance one's behavioral reputation for resolve may not be possible, for behavioral reputation for resolve is an elusive commodity.

and Diesing's distinction between "background or long-term" and "immediate" images. See Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 37–39; Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977), chap. 2; and Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 291. I also distinguish between bargaining and behavioral reputation for power.

22. Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory*, 16, 42, 59–60.

23. Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory*, 48–49. For similar views, see Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 116–25; Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 185; James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations of War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (summer 1995): 400; and Barry Nalebuff, "Rational Deterrence in an Imperfect World," *World Politics* 43, no. 3 (April 1991): 313–35.

The problem, of course, is that politicians usually do not have such nuanced understandings of credibility, reputation, resolve, and capability.²⁴ Too often, they fight for behavioral reputation for resolve and hope to improve their bargaining reputation (thus credibility) in the future. By doing so, they confuse themselves, mislead their domestic audiences, and squander their countries' blood and treasure for the wrong commodity.

In fact, most strategists and politicians have either lumped the two kinds of reputation together or believed that behavioral reputation can easily be converted into bargaining reputation (that is, they have believed that commitments are interdependent or that reputation is fungible). Because developing and maintaining a behavioral reputation for being resolute is desirable, many politicians and strategists undertake certain tasks *ex ante* to develop such a reputation, without ever questioning whether having a behavioral reputation is possible at all. This practice, as discussed below, informs one central belief behind the cult of reputation.

Perhaps because behavioral reputation is something that may count in the future, moreover, it is the type of reputation about which decisionmakers are most concerned.²⁵ In fact, decisionmakers actually may bargain hard largely because they care more about their future behavioral reputation. This article thus focuses on behavioral reputation for resolve (which hereafter will be referred to as "reputation" unless specified otherwise).

CULT OF REPUTATION: ITS OPERATIONAL CODE AND ILLOGIC

TO EXPLAIN the phenomenon whereby politicians often fear the potential loss of reputation and frequently justify their actions by claiming to defend reputation, this article advances the hypothesis that a "cult of reputation" exists among them. The cult of reputation is defined as a belief system holding as its central premise a conviction (or fear) that backing down in a crisis will lead one's adversaries or allies to underestimate one's resolve in the next crisis.²⁶

24. The author thanks Thomas Christensen for this point. Needless to say, politicians' resolve often depends on their assessment of relative capability, and assessing is not easy under most circumstances. For a general discussion of the problem of assessment, see Shipping Tang, "A Systemic Theory of Security Environment," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27, no. 1 (March 2004): 1–34.

25. As Jervis noted, "states have often cared about specific issues less for their intrinsic value than for the conclusion they felt others would draw from the way they dealt with them." Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 7. For a similar argument, see Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 39.

26. This article focuses on reputation among opponents only. Although fear of losing reputation among allies also weighs heavily among decisionmakers, reputation between two adversaries matters far more than between two allies. For a similar argument, see Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility," 4.

Two implicitly related notions underpin this belief system. The first notion is that one's reputation is one's own possession, hence "something worth fighting for."²⁷ In reality, and as explained above, one's reputation is not one's own possession but that of somebody else. The cult thus "puts the problem the wrong way around."²⁸ The second notion is that reputation is fungible, that reputation gained in one round or place can be transplanted to other rounds or places.²⁹ That is, a cult believer hopes (having previously stood firm) or fears (having previously backed down) that others will perceive his current resolve based on his previous actions. This belief arises from a confusion of behavioral reputation with bargaining reputation, or a belief that behavioral reputation can be easily converted into bargaining reputation. By believing in the fungibility of reputation, the cult puts far too much value on an illusory entity.

Furthermore, as a belief system, the cult dictates an "operational code" for state behavior. Consequently, state behavior and rhetoric exhibit a predictable pattern based on the code.³⁰ Two types of behavior and rhetoric follow from the cult's logic. Type I behaviors and rhetoric justify and take action in the name of defending reputation; type II behaviors and rhetoric justify backing down and limiting the presumed damage to reputation, and to a lesser extent, try to regain reputation after an episode of backing down. (Table 1 details the specific expressions of these two types of behavior and rhetoric.) As demonstrated by recent scholarship, both types of behavior and rhetoric have been rampant, indicating the cult's prevalence.³¹

27. This is consistent with "prospect theory"—that one is willing to pay a heavier price to defend what one already possesses. For a review, see Jack S. Levy, "Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1997): 87–112. For a classic statement that reputation is something worth fighting for, see Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 124.

28. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 208.

29. Others may prefer to label this belief in the fungibility of reputation as a belief that commitments are interdependent or as "past action theory." See Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 55–59; Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 36–42; Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict," 32–34; and Press, "Does Backing Down Hurt Credibility?" Mercer, Huth, and Press all point out that there is a broader and a narrower version of this belief.

30. Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (June 1969): 190–222.

31. Most existing literatures focus on type I behavior and rhetoric. See Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*; Hopf, *Peripheral Visions*; Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility"; and McMahon, "Credibility and World Power." Some of the most illustrative examples of type II rhetoric came from Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev after the Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis. For instance, after backing down from his ultimatum on Berlin, Khrushchev nonetheless declared that he won: "It was a great victory for us, and it was without firing a single shot" (type II-a, discussed below). See Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, trans. and ed. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 510. After the

There is, however, a fatal flaw in the cult's logic, for states rarely act according to the cult's logic even when the logic should most clearly apply: a state rarely underestimates its adversary's reputation even if the adversary has backed down in previous standoffs. In other words, although a state constantly fears that others may assign reputation to it based on its past behavior, the state never assigns reputation to other states based on their past behavior.

Rivalry has long been recognized as the most intensive type of international conflict and the most likely scenario for reputation to matter.³² The U.S.-Soviet rivalry was the first and perhaps the last true global rivalry in history, and both sides had global commitments. If reputation matters at all, one would expect it to have been paramount in the crisis-bargaining process between these two rivals.³³

Both Ted Hopf and Daryl Press have examined the role of reputation in the Soviet-U.S. rivalry in great detail, and what they find contradicts the cult's beliefs.³⁴ In this regard, Press's examination of the Cuban missile crisis is especially illuminating. As Press noted, if one accepts the logic of the cult of reputation (or the "past action theory"), then by the time of the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviet Union should have lost a great deal of its reputation because Nikita Khrushchev had backed down from three previous ultimatums on Berlin.³⁵ Moreover, the Cuban crisis involved the same two leaders

Cuban missile debacle, Khrushchev again contended, "We feel that the aggressor came out the loser. He made preparations to attack Cuba but we stopped him and forced him to recognize before world public opinion that he won't do it at the current stage. We view this as a great victory" (type II-a). See letter from Khrushchev to Castro, 30 October 1962, in *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, ed. Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh (New York: New Press, 1992), 243. Khrushchev also put his retreat from Cuba on the high ground: "In order to save the world, we must retreat" (type II-b, discussed below). Quoted in Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: Norton, 1997), 282.

32. For the relationship between repeated games and the concern for reputation and credibility, see Harrison Wagner, "Rationality and Misperception in Deterrence Theory," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4, no. 2 (1992): 128-35. On rivalry, see Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, "Enduring Rivalries: Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Patterns," *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (June 1993): 147-71; Paul F. Diehl, ed., *Enduring Rivalries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); and John A. Vasquez, "Distinguishing Rivals That Go to War from Those That Do Not: A Quantitative Comparative Case Study of the Two Paths to War," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (December 1996): 531-58.

33. That is, this rivalry should be an easy test for the cult. For detailed elaboration, see Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility," 15-18.

34. Hopf, *Peripheral Visions*; and Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility." Most important, Press also largely discredited the quintessential case supporting the logic of the cult: Hitler's famous quote before the invasion of Poland ("Our enemies are little worms, I saw them in Munich"). Press, "Does Backing Down Hurt Credibility?" For an earlier discussion of the Munich case, see Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 217-19.

35. Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility," 18-22. One may also add that the Soviet Union had previously backed down from the 1946 Iran-Turkey crisis, the 1946-47 Turkey-Greece crisis, and the 1948-49 Berlin blockade.

Table 1
TWO TYPES OF CULT RHETORIC AND BEHAVIOR

Rhetoric	TYPE I *	Behavior	Rhetoric	TYPE II **	Behavior
(1-a) "In order to defend our reputation (honor, prestige, credibility), we must do this."	Intervene in areas with little or no intrinsic interest.	(II-a) "We did not retreat, we actually won."	Take drastic action to resuscitate credibility		
(1-b) "This is a test of our resolve; backing down will lead to loss of our reputation and credibility, and no one will believe in our commitments anymore. Therefore, we must stand firm and demonstrate our resolve."	Escalate and prolong conflicts because reputation or credibility is at stake.	(II-b) "We retreated not because of a lack of resolve (or under pressure), we retreated for a noble cause (peace, humanity) or even for the other side's prestige, thus we did not lose any credibility."	Take an extremely hard-line position in the next crisis.		
(1-c) "Backing down will lead to the domino effect (because the adversary will underestimate our resolve and push harder)."	Expand previous trivial commitments, or be dragged into conflicts by allies.***	(II-c) "Do not expect us to retreat next time."			
(1-d) "If we stand firm this time, there will be no next time."		(II-d) "We stood firm, therefore we gained reputation (credibility)."			

* Although the possibility that politicians may simply "use" the cult to sell their policies and justify their actions cannot be completely ruled out, their rhetoric in private (and to a lesser degree, their rhetoric in closed meetings), when they do not have much need to sell and justify, suggests otherwise. Moreover, they often took costly actions (such as the actual use of force) following their cult rhetoric, and they continued to defend the logic of the cult even after backing down in crisis (see below). For a discussion of the believability of rhetoric in private and in closed meetings, see Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility," 13n16. The author thanks an anonymous reviewer for bringing up this issue.

** Theoretically, after backing down, politicians can also deny that there will be any loss of credibility by denouncing the cult and its logic. This act, however, is rarely observed. Politicians' refusal to denounce the cult after retreat has two possible explanations. First, politicians may actually believe in the cult. Second, they may have no intention of repudiating the cult because doing so would undercut their ability to justify future actions; thus it is better to deny that anything was lost. Although this second explanation cannot be completely ruled out, the first explanation seems far more plausible in light of politicians' often vehement denial that they backed down even when their denial is plainly untenable: politicians' refusal to denounce the cult actually underscores their firm belief in the cult.

*** This is the "entrapment" phenomenon in alliance politics. See Snyder, "Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics." The notion of "abandonment" and "entrapment" first appeared in Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Revolution: International Politics before and after Hiroshima* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

(Khrushchev and John F. Kennedy) and thus should have been an ideal case in which to prove the narrower version of the cult.³⁶ The United States should have acted according to the logic of the cult—that is, it should have underestimated the Soviets' resolve and acted accordingly (for example, by taking an extremely hard-line approach).

The evidence that Press uncovered deals a devastating blow to the logic of the cult: "the Executive Committee (Ex Comm) was *virtually unanimous* on a key point: Soviet credibility to resist any of these U.S. approaches was very high." Perhaps even more extraordinary, there was not *even one* statement during the entire crisis indicating that U.S. decisionmakers were using Soviet past behavior to predict Soviet actions.³⁷ During the entire cold war, in fact, the Soviets consistently backed down when confronted by the United States. The best it managed was a rough draw at the Berlin Wall. Yet the United States consistently acted as if it did not expect the Soviets to continue to back down. As Robert Jervis put it, "Contrary to American expectations about the inferences others would draw from the American defeat in Vietnam, they themselves did not see further retreats as likely to follow the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan."³⁸

36. For a detailed discussion, see Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility," 7–10.

37. *Ibid.*, 46, 57 (emphasis in original).

38. Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexities in Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 170–71. Press made a similar point in "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility," 58. Indeed, during the entire cold war, there might have been two cases about which one may reasonably argue that the United States might have underestimated the Soviets' resolve: (1) during the Berlin crisis in 1958, when Eisenhower told congressional leaders that he could take a tough stand because the Soviets had bluffed before (cited in Jervis, *Systemic Effects*, 170); and (2) during the 1973 Middle East crisis, when Secretary of State Henry Kissinger assured China that Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev's ultimatum to intervene was a bluff (see William Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* [New York: New Press, 1998], 157). These two cases, however, were not clear-cut, because in both cases U.S. decisionmakers' rhetoric could be explained by the powerful need to assure allies—domestic allies and China, respectively. Indeed, Kissinger's assurance was contradicted by his own actions. He was unimpressed by White House chief of staff Alexander Haig's conviction that the Soviets were bluffing, stating, "I did not see it as a bluff (but it made no difference)," and he acted according to the worst-case scenario anyway by ordering a worldwide military alert (Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1982], 585). This article's argument is also supported by the fact that Kissinger presented two contradictory versions of the story. In his memoir, he wrote that the worst scenario was more likely (that is, that the Soviets meant business), yet while talking to the Chinese ambassador, Zhen Huang, he assured China that the Soviets were bluffing (thus Burr's interpretation of Kissinger's comments was too simplistic). Truman, in a different setting, put the need to assure more explicitly: "If, however, the threat to South Korea was met firmly and successfully, it would add to our success in Iran, Berlin, and Greece (Turkey) a fourth success in opposition to the aggressive moves of the Communists. And each success, we suggested to our allies, was likely to add to the caution of the Soviets in undertaking new efforts of this kind." Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, Vol 2: *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), 339 (emphasis added). Of course, Truman was perhaps also trying to seize the opportunity for mobilizing the nation. On this point, see Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Domestic Mobilization and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Likewise, the Soviet Union was reluctant to underestimate U.S. resolve even after repeated U.S. retreats from the Third World.³⁹

In a different setting, Jonathan Mercer also uncovered convincing evidence against the logic of the cult. For instance, while Germany backed down in the first Morocco crisis, neither France nor the United Kingdom nor Russia assigned a reputation of irresoluteness to Germany in the next crisis that arose (that in Bosnia-Herzegovina). Likewise, despite the fact that Russia backed down in the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis, neither Germany nor Austria believed Russia to be irresolute.⁴⁰

Therefore, the only plausible conclusion that we can draw is that although the cult of reputation is prevalent among decisionmakers,⁴¹ the cult is just a cult. Although decisionmakers fear that backing down will damage their reputation, they rarely underestimate their adversary's resolve even if an adversary has (sometimes repeatedly) backed down before. To put it differently, these cult believers rarely act according to the cult's logic even when the logic should clearly apply; their own actions negate the logic of their belief.

39. Hopf, *Peripheral Visions*, 37–40, 45–46, 62–69, 118–23, 129–30. Khrushchev might have been the only leader that did from time to time underestimate his opponents' resolve when initiating a crisis (as in Berlin and Cuba). Khrushchev's belief that the Soviet Union's nuclear threat played a crucial role in forcing the United Kingdom and France to back down during the Suez crisis might have led him to bluff again in Berlin. See Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 190–94. Kennedy's Bay of Pigs and Vienna debates might have caused Khrushchev to underestimate the former's resolve in Berlin. See “Khrushchev's Secret Speech on the Berlin Crisis, August 1961,” *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) Bulletin*, no. 3 (fall 1993): 58–60. Even Khrushchev, however, consistently acted cautiously during crisis bargaining and rarely underestimated U.S. credibility when it truly mattered.

40. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*.

41. A Google search using the phrase “doubt our resolve,” performed on 11 April 2000, found more than eighty hits, mostly for warning opponents and assuring allies. By 15 June 2004, the number of hits on this phrase had reached 444 (perhaps largely because of September 11). Snyder and Diesing found that politicians resorted to making threats that engaged prestige, honor, and future bargaining reputation in all the cases they examined. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 199. The cult is not restricted to Western decisionmakers. For instance, during the 1999 Kargil crisis between India and Pakistan, both Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Indian army chief General V. P. Malik labeled the conflict as “a challenge to our nation's resolve” and a test for India's “political and military will” Vajpayee quoted in *Financial Express* (New Delhi), 29 June 1999, available at <http://www.expressindia.com/fe/daily/19990629/fec29033.html>; Malik quoted in *India Today*, 7 June 1999, 24. Not surprisingly, after Pakistan was forced to back down again, many Indians still feared that Pakistan might be more resolute than India if there were another round. Swapan Dasgupta, “India Can't Endure Pain,” *India Today* (New Delhi), 14 August 2000, available at <http://www.india-today.com/itoday/20000813/swapan.shtml>.

PERILS OF THE CULT

DECISIONMAKERS' PERSISTENT CONCERN for losing reputation has brought unnecessary bloodiness to international politics: too many wars have been waged for the sake of defending honor, prestige, reputation, and credibility. During the cold war alone, the two superpowers fought at least three large-scale wars (Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan) and were involved in countless proxy conflicts for the sake of reputation (or prestige, honor, and credibility).⁴² On many occasions, politicians' only justification for plunging into conflicts was defending reputation and credibility. Consider Ronald Reagan's justification for U.S. involvement in Central America: "If we cannot defend ourselves (in Central America) . . . our credibility will collapse and our alliance will crumble. . . . If Central America were to fall, . . . which ally, which friend would trust us then?" (Type I-a).⁴³

This peril of overinvolvement is widely recognized. The cult of reputation, however, brings three additional perils to international politics. First and foremost, concern for reputation exposes states to manipulation by allies. Under the influence of the cult, while states fear appeasing adversaries the most, they are more likely to appease allies and thereby fall into entrapment. States have often ended up with commitments in places in which they were initially reluctant to commit, because their allies were extremely difficult to impress and often pretended to be unimpressed (which they found advantageous to do).⁴⁴ For example, during the second crisis over the islands of Quemoy and Matsu in 1958, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai was able to force Khrushchev into pledging full nuclear deterrence against the United States. When China indicated that it expected Soviet nuclear retaliation only when attacked by U.S. strategic but not tactical nuclear weapons, Khrushchev feared the possible loss of Soviet reputation among its adversaries and allies.⁴⁵

42. Hopf, *Peripheral Visions*. For a succinct treatment of the role of credibility in the conduct of postwar American diplomacy, see McMahon, "Credibility and World Power."

43. "President Reagan's Address to a Joint Session of Congress on Central America," *New York Times*, 28 April 1983.

44. Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 461–95. For a recent discussion of reputation in alliance politics, see Gregory D. Miller, "Hypothesis on Reputation: Alliance Choices and the Shadow of the Past," *Security Studies* 12, no. 3 (spring 2003): 45–85.

45. Vladislav M. Zubok, "Khrushchev's Nuclear Promise to Beijing during the 1958 Crisis," *CWHP Bulletin*, nos. 6–7 (winter 1995–96): 219, 226–27. For a Chinese perspective on this, see Dai Chaowu, "Dier ci taiwan haixia weiji he zhongsu guanxi," (The second Taiwan Strait crisis and Sino-Soviet relations), *Ershiyi Shiji* (*Twenty-first century*) (Hong Kong), no. 64 (April 2001): 29–41.

Across the Taiwan Strait, Chiang Kai-shek's exploitation of the U.S. commitment to Quemoy and Matsu was equally remarkable.⁴⁶ In fact, Alexander George and Richard Smoke were so impressed by Chiang's manipulation that their study of U.S. deterrence behavior soberly warned of "one of the major risks and limitations of deterrence policies: namely, the opportunities [such policies] may give a weak ally to manipulate the nature of the commitment made to it."⁴⁷

Similar tactics were effective in ancient Greece and China. Trying to drag Sparta into its vengeful war against Athens, Corinth argued, "If we managed to stand up to Athenian aggression, it was more because of Athenian mistakes than because of any help we got from you. *Indeed, we can think of instances already where those who have relied on you and remained unprepared have been ruined by the confidence they placed in you.*"⁴⁸ During China's warring period (475~221 B.C.), one of the most effective arguments used to persuade another state to come to one's help was "if you do not join us this time, you will be fighting alone next time."⁴⁹

Second, the cult adds still another ingredient for escalation: it exacerbates hostilities between two adversaries in a conflict and makes them less willing to compromise, thus prolonging the rivalry. Indeed, the fear of losing reputation has been a major factor behind states' reluctance to end conflicts.⁵⁰ Israel's unwillingness to stop its bleeding in southern Lebanon sooner, like the earlier U.S. reluctance to cut its losses in Vietnam, was in large part due to its fear of losing "the deterrent image," prestige, reputation, and credibility.⁵¹ The same holds true for the Soviet Union's reluctance to pull out of Afghanistan's mountains and Vietnam's reluctance to get out of Cambodia's jungle.⁵²

46. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 43.

47. Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 370. Also see Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 82-83.

48. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), 75 (emphasis added).

49. Zhang Guo Ce (*Compiled stories of the warring period*), trans. and ed. He Jiangzhan (Changsha: Yue-lu Publishing House, 1992), 112/551, 120/558.

50. Richard Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 23-26 and chap. 10. Another factor related to our discussion here is the personal prestige of high-level decisionmakers.

51. Abraham Rabinovich, "Despite Ragtag Pullout from Lebanon, Israel Is No Paper Tiger," *International Herald Tribune*, 30 May 2000; and McGeorge Bundy, quoted in Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vintage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 126.

52. Soviet leaders' concern for their prestige regarding Afghanistan was evident from archive materials. See "CPSU CC Politburo Decision, 28 January 1980, with Report by Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev," and "Record of Conversation, Soviet Ambassador A. M. Puzanov and Taraki, 18 June 1978," both available at <http://cwihip.si.edu/cwihiplib.nsf/>.

Furthermore, prolonging a crisis or rivalry can cause a state to believe that it has already invested too much reputation to back down. When a second crisis erupts between two previous foes, both sides will be even less willing to compromise, whatever the outcome of the previous conflict might have been. If the previous conflict ended in a draw, both sides now have even more reason to avoid losing. If the previous round ended in one side's defeat, the antagonism may become even more severe: the side that won is unwilling to lose its supposedly hard-won reputation, while the side that lost may stand firm in an attempt to regain its "lost" reputation. Each additional round makes both sides feel that they have more and more reputation at stake in the confrontation, so they are even more reluctant to compromise. Hence, the "lock-in effect" is far more serious in rivalries than in random conflicts.⁵³

The arrival of the second conflict also makes both sides believe that the conflict between them is unresolvable and will remain so for the foreseeable future. This will lead both sides to fear that the other side will deem any slight concession as a sign of weakness, and the fear induces states to believe that even the tiniest compromise at the least significant place might have far-reaching consequences.⁵⁴ The result is a "paradox of credibility": "in order to buttress its credibility, a nation should intervene in the least significant, the least compelling, and the least rewarding cases, and its reaction should be disproportionate to the immediate provocation or the particular interest at stake."⁵⁵

The third cult-derived peril is that the cult increases the probability of misperception during crisis bargaining. States in crisis bargaining often try to communicate their resolve by claiming that, although they may not be ready to defend a place for its intrinsic interest, they nonetheless are ready to defend it for the sake of their reputation.⁵⁶ The rationale behind such posturing is that staking one's reputation is an effective means of making one's

53. Fearon argued that politicians' concern for "domestic audience cost" is one important factor driving the escalation spiral. I contend here that the concern for reputation, which is a sort of "international audience cost" among potential opponents and allies, is at least equally critical. The two kinds of "audience cost" differ in that the international audience cost is illusory, whereas the domestic audience cost may be real. For the original discussion of "domestic audience cost" and "lock-in" effect, see James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994): 577–92, esp. 579–81.

54. As Goertz and Diehl put it, "the likelihood of future conflict conditions behavior." Goertz and Diehl, "Enduring Rivalries," 149.

55. Earl Ravenal, "Counterforce and Alliance: The Ultimate Connection," *International Security* 6, no. 4 (spring 1982): 28; and Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 186.

56. Snyder and Diesing noted that this tactic was employed in all of the cases they examined. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 188, 199.

commitment credible.⁵⁷ At the same time, however, states almost never judge an adversary's resolve based on their calculation of how much the adversary values its reputation or credibility. Instead, states judge an adversary's resolve based on their calculation of the adversary's interest and capability.⁵⁸

These dynamics lead to a scenario in which both sides in a conflict seek to convey resolve by staking their reputations, while both sides also heavily discount signals based on such rhetoric. Thus, cult-based signals tend to make the two sides in crisis bargaining talk past each other. For instance, the United Kingdom's cult-based signal that it had to stand firm because its reputation (and prestige) was at stake was largely ignored in Argentina during the crisis bargaining preceding the Falklands/Malvinas war,⁵⁹ just as U.S. leaders' repeated warnings to the North Vietnamese that the United States would fight to the end to defend its reputation and prevent the domino effect fell on deaf ears. As a result, the cult makes it more difficult for the two sides in a conflict to read how much the other side values the issue in dispute; signals intended to deter war cannot deter, and preventable war cannot be prevented.⁶⁰

WHY IS REPUTATION DIFFICULT UNDER ANARCHY?

IN HIS WELL-RECEIVED BOOK, Mercer offers an elaborate framework based on desirability in social psychology to explain why reputation is difficult to gain in international conflicts.⁶¹ His major argument, in sum, held that undesirable behavior elicits dispositional explanations (that is, reputation will form) and desirable behavior elicits situational explanations (that is, reputation may not form). According to Mercer, allies who stand firm (a desirable move from a state's point of view) will not get a reputation for being resolute, whereas allies who do not stand firm (an undesirable move) may get a reputation for being irresolute. By the same token, adversaries who stand firm (an undesirable

57. As Schelling put it, "A potent means of commitment, and sometimes the only means, is the pledge of one's reputation." Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflicts*, 29.

58. Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility." In the real world, one would be hard pressed to find a single case in which a state's opponent takes the state's "reputation of resolve itself as a vital interest." In this regard, Mercer's criticism of deterrence theory was not thorough enough. See Mercer, *Reputations and International Politics*, 15.

59. Richard Ned Lebow, "Miscalculation in the South Atlantic: The Origins of the Falklands War," in *Psychology and Deterrence*, ed. Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985): 114–15.

60. Of course, it is perfectly possible that states simply intend to misrepresent their resolve (that is, they pretend to be more resolute than they actually are) by issuing cult rhetoric-based signals. For a detailed discussion on how misinformation drives states to war, see Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations of War."

61. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, chap. 2.

move) may get a reputation for being resolute, whereas adversaries who do not stand firm (a desirable move) will not get a reputation for being irresolute. In essence, while disagreeing with the typical rational deterrence theory argument that reputation will always form, Mercer believes that reputation is nonetheless likely to form under certain circumstances (when adversaries stand firm and when allies back down).

This article goes further than Mercer and argues that reputation cannot form in conflicts because of the anarchical nature of international politics. Because of its simplicity, parsimony, explanatory power, and better fit with empirical findings, this explanation is superior to Mercer's. Anarchy remains the defining feature of international politics, so states operate within an environment of uncertainty. Anarchy produces "a strong sense of peril and doom"⁶² and "a conservative tendency to think of the future in the worst possible or worst plausible cause terms."⁶³ States have to consistently assume the worst possible scenario, especially when they are engaged in conflicts.⁶⁴ This "worst-case mentality" has major implications for reputation under anarchy on at least two fronts.⁶⁵

Foremost, because a state's security ultimately depends on self-help, the worst-case mentality means that a state has to assume its adversaries to be resolute and its allies to be irresolute. Essentially, this worst-case assumption sets a baseline image for both adversaries and allies, and reputation becomes impossible to develop under anarchy. A state cannot lose nor gain reputation among its adversaries by either backing down or standing firm in a conflict, because its adversaries will always assume the state to be resolute (the baseline image) in the next conflict. By the same token, a state cannot lose nor gain reputation among its allies by either backing down or standing firm in a conflict, for its allies will always assume the state to be irresolute in the next conflict. A state is assigned its baseline image by its adversaries and allies at the beginning of a crisis, and no past behavior can change that image *ex ante*.⁶⁶

62. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 109.

63. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 188.

64. Whether the "worst-case mentality" is a product of anarchy or only a neorealist (realist) assumption remains an issue of contention. For a brief discussion, see Stephen Brooks, "Dueling Realists," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (summer 1997): 445–50. I thank Bob Powell for bringing this point to my attention.

65. Mercer touched on worst-case mentality but did not develop fully its logical implication for reputation. See Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 10, 72–73. Moreover, Mercer himself sometimes fell back on worst-case thinking to explain empirical observations (as with his discussion of Alfred von Bethmann Hollweg's assessment of Russia and Austria's resolve, at 193).

66. This does not mean, however, that a state's bargaining credibility in a particular crisis will remain constant. Indeed, a state's bargaining credibility in its opponent's mind changes as the state takes various costly moves to signal its resolve.

Obviously, this argument is consistent with Mercer's empirical finding that adversaries rarely gain a reputation for being irresolute and allies rarely gain a reputation for being resolute. What about Mercer's hypothesis and supposedly strong empirical finding that adversaries can gain a reputation for being resolute while allies can gain reputation for being irresolute? The simple answer is that Mercer's evidence is unconvincing. Unless one can prove that a state's postcrisis reputation increases or decreases relative to its baseline image derived from the worst-case mentality, one cannot claim that a reputation has formed.⁶⁷

That is, unless one can prove that a state is perceived at the beginning of a new crisis to be more resolute than the baseline image of resoluteness (dictated by the worst-case mentality) held by its adversaries because it stood firm in a previous crisis, one cannot claim that a reputation formed. By the same logic, unless one can prove that a state is perceived to be less resolute than the baseline image of irresoluteness held by its allies at the beginning of a new crisis because the state backed down in a previous crisis, one cannot claim that a reputation formed either. On both accounts, Mercer cannot and does not provide convincing proof because it is difficult to do so.

Given that documenting the difference between a state's *ex ante* and *ex post* reputation for resolve will be difficult, one can try to reason from a psychological perspective and see why reputation cannot form under anarchy. Under anarchy, a state's worst nightmare is being deceived by its adversaries, and adversaries do have greater incentives to deceive and mislead in a conflict. Therefore, a state must constantly guard against the possibility that an adversary who stood firm in the last round may be enticed to bluff this time, or that an adversary who previously backed down may be especially eager to stand firm and trap the state this time. In other words, a state must fear that its belief about other states (because of their past behavior) may be exploited to its own detriment by those other states. Hence, a state must be extremely careful not to grant its adversary an image of resoluteness even if its adversary stood firm last time, for fear that the adversary may just be bluffing this time. Likewise, a state must be extremely careful not to grant its adversary an image of irresoluteness even if the adversary backed down last time, for fear that the adversary may stand firm this time. In sum, a state must be cautious in fixing its assessment of its adversaries' or allies' resolve.

67. Mercer adopts a more relaxed definition of "reputation formed." He argues that whenever an observer assigns a dispositional explanation for a state's past behavior, a reputation is formed. In contrast, the definition presented here contends that unless a state's image changes versus its baseline image (of being resolute for adversaries and irresolute for allies), there is no reputation formed. Personal communications with Mercer, April 2004.

If an adversary foresees the advantage a state will be able to gain from having a particular reputation—an image assigned to the state by the adversary—the adversary will refuse to assign the state that image. If a state desires an image of resoluteness that it can use to bully (or bluff) its adversaries, those adversaries will refuse to grant that image to the state. Likewise, if a state desires an image of resoluteness that it can use to contribute less to an alliance, its allies will withhold that image from the state, too.

Another point follows from this argument: trying to gain and maintain a reputation for being resolute by fighting in places with little intrinsic value cannot succeed, precisely because it is advantageous for a state to get such a reputation. In a new conflict, a state's bargaining credibility depends on its real-time demonstration of its willingness to risk war, not on its previous actions. A statement such as "because I stood firm last time even in a place like Quemoy and Matsu, you had better believe that I will stand firm again" does not carry any cost. It constitutes "projecting images on the cheap,"⁶⁸ and so cannot be credible.⁶⁹ By the same token, doing certain things in conventional crises to gain bargaining reputation in nuclear deterrence is a ludicrous idea.⁷⁰

During crisis bargaining, a state rarely takes seriously adversaries' or allies' rhetorical claims that they do not believe that the state has the nerve to fight (or fight long). Taking those claims seriously would be the worst thing to do, for whether adversaries or allies are truly underestimating one's resolve or not, it is always advantageous for them to claim to be doing so: such rhetoric helps to deter (if one is an adversary) or extract more support (if one is an ally).

Unfortunately, many policymakers and scholars fail to understand the utility of such rhetoric for deterrence and entrapment. Thus they tend to take such rhetoric as a genuine indication that adversaries and allies do underestimate one's resolve.⁷¹ In fact, such rhetoric functions exactly like claiming that one is more resolute. In other words, it is a form of signaling in crisis bargaining.⁷² As Jervis noted long ago, these "signals . . . are [intended] mainly to influence

68. Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 8.

69. This point lies at the heart of the "costly signaling" theory in crisis bargaining. See James D. Morrow, "Capability, Uncertainty, and Resolve: A Limited Information Model of Crisis Bargaining," *American Journal of Political Science* 33, no. 4 (November 1989): 941–72; James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interest: Typing Hands versus Sinking Cost," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (February 1997): 68–90; and Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 150.

70. For an incisive criticism of such arguments in U.S. deterrence policy during the cold war, see Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989): 174–225.

71. See, for instance, Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence and Compellence in the Gulf, 1990–1991," *International Security* 17, no. 2 (fall 1992): 175; and Thomas J. Christensen, "Correspondence: Power and Resolve in U.S. China Policy," *International Security* 26, no. 2 (fall 2000): 162–63.

72. For a similar point, see Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 219–21.

[the] receiver's perception of the sender. . . . They do not contain inherent credibility."⁷³ Therefore, in arguing that a state's adversaries may be really underestimating its resolve because they say they are, we fail to grasp the very basics of costly signaling in crisis bargaining.

In a poker game, will the opponent of a player who was caught bluffing in the last deal think that the bluffer is more likely to bluff in this deal?⁷⁴ Or will he think that, because the bluffer may understand this reasoning, the bluffer is more likely to play straight and trap his opponent this time? Going one step backward, how can the player be sure that the bluffer was not bluffing in order to secure a reputation for bluffing that could later be used to trap an opponent? This cycle of reasoning can go on forever without a firm conclusion. Hence, Thomas Schelling's conviction that "what one does today in a crisis affects what one can be expected to do tomorrow" may be true.⁷⁵ Because the expectation will be so uncertain, however, no reputation is possible.

Moreover, whereas a state that backed down in a previous conflict should be perceived to be less resolute, according to the logic of the cult, the bruised state actually may become more resolute (to exact revenge or regain reputation) in the next conflict exactly because it backed down in the previous one.⁷⁶ For instance, Russia's humiliation over the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 might have made it unlikely to back down again in 1914,⁷⁷ and the "peace with honor" in Vietnam might have given the United States more reason to take drastic action in the *Mayaguez* incident.⁷⁸

Therefore, because of the very nature of international politics (anarchy), the link between past behavior and reputation in conflicts is illusory or tenuous at best. To put the reputation question rhetorically, why would anyone believe in your supposedly "hard-earned" reputation when the incentive for you to lie looms so large in the background? After all, in a self-help world, lying is not a sin but a virtue. Unlike human society, in which there is a price to pay for lying, in the anarchic world no one is expected to tell the truth, and the price of lying is simply discounted by the need for survival.

73. Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 18, 20–21.

74. Poker is a game under anarchy because there is no central authority among the players. In contrast, the metaphors that Schelling uses—bank robbing and a father's demanding that his son improve his grades, or else—are not. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 37, 85.

75. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 93.

76. Indeed, states that backed down last time were more likely to be the ones that issued the initial threat of force in the next crisis. Russell J. Leng, "When Will They Ever Learn?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27, no. 3 (September 1983): 379–419.

77. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 189.

78. Henry Kissinger was quoted saying that "the United States must carry out some act somewhere in the world which shows its determination to continue to be a world power." See Tom Braden, "Why Are We Looking for Problems?" *Washington Post*, 14 April 1975.

In the end, while anarchy creates the need for reputation (and credibility), it also renders reputation impossible. As long as states operate under anarchy, the worst-case mentality will come to dominate decisionmakers' thinking in time of conflict, and reputation for resolve will remain a great illusion.

Ironically, though, while the logic of the worst-case mentality nullifies much of the cult's logic, the worst-case mentality often reinforces politicians' fear of losing reputation. In crises, politicians' fear does not stop at the fear of losing the tangible stakes of the present crisis. Politicians fear that their adversaries will underestimate their resolve in the future and so push harder for more gains in the next round and beyond. Indeed, because the worst-case mentality is a constant feature of anarchy, it is quite possible that the worst-case mentality's reinforcing effect on politicians' belief in the cult is what has made the cult so pervasive and persistent.⁷⁹

ROOTS OF THE CULT: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY UNDER HIERARCHY AND ANARCHY

JUDGING FROM THE historical evidence, the cult or general belief in reputation for resolve has a long history. Indeed, the rhetoric used by Pericles for justifying his refusal to revoke the Megarian decree was not much different from that of a modern statesman: "Let none of you think that we should be going to war for a trifle if we refused to revoke the Megarian decree. *For you this trifle is both the assurance and the proof of your determination.* If you give in, you will immediately be confronted with some greater demand, since they will think that you only give way on this point through fear."⁸⁰

Despite its long history, however, the origin of the cult remains poorly understood. Snyder and Paul Diesing offers two possible explanations for the origin of the belief in reputation: the personal bias of "hard-liners" and the anarchic nature of international politics. They noted that "the concern [for reputation] is always voiced by 'hard-liners.' The hard-liner tends to focus on the power consequences of the current disputes; the adversary's expectations about one's future firmness [are] an element of power. . . . [The] soft-liner is less concerned with the power considerations and more with the merits."⁸¹

On the surface, this reasoning seems to have some validity. In the U.S. debate on nuclear deterrence during the cold war era, the concern for reputation

79. In this sense, Snyder and Diesing do not miss the target entirely by attributing the origin of the cult to the anarchy-derived worst-case mentality. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 188.

80. Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 119 (emphasis added).

81. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 188, 297–310. The quotation is from 188.

was usually associated with “hard-liners.”⁸² Take, for instance, Kennedy, who among the post–Second World War U.S. presidents was not a hard-liner and may have been a soft-liner. He rejected the claim that the Bay of Pigs fiasco would do irreparable damage to U.S. prestige (and presumably to his own, too): “What is prestige? Is it the shadow of power or the substance of power? No doubt we will be kicked in the can for the next couple of weeks, but that won’t affect the main business.”⁸³

Yet one must not fail to notice that even Kennedy could not help falling into the cult’s trap, in Southeast Asia, Berlin, and Cuba. Bill Clinton, never known to be a hard-liner, still warned against abandoning Somalia using typical cult rhetoric: “Our credibility with friends and allies would be severely damaged. . . . And all round the world, aggressors, thugs and terrorists will conclude that the best way to get us to change our policies is to kill our people. It would be an open season on Americans.”⁸⁴

On the other hand, some hard-liners do not seem to put much weight on reputation. Josef Stalin was certainly not a soft-liner, yet he demonstrated little concern for his reputation in Turkey, Greece, and Berlin. Similarly, we have yet to come up with any evidence that Mao Zedong ever mentioned reputation during his decision-making process leading to China’s intervention in the Korean War.

Hence, differences in mindset cannot fully explain the belief in the cult. Moreover, distinguishing “hard-liners” from “soft-liners” is not explanation, for it still begs the question of why hard-liners come to believe in the cult.

Snyder and Diesing’s second explanation attributes the origin of the cult to the anarchy-derived worst-case mentality: a state’s worst nightmare is that its adversary may deem it to be irresolute if it backs down this time.⁸⁵ As Mercer touches on and as was elaborated in greater detail above, however, the logic of the worst-case mentality actually runs against the logic of the cult: Anarchy produces the need to build and maintain a reputation for resolve, but it cannot generate the logic of the cult.⁸⁶

Likewise, none of the explanations for the origin of the cult offered by Patrick Morgan (the presence of nuclear weapons, political culture, domestic

82. For a good historical account, see Gregg Herken, *Counsels of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

83. Quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, JR., *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 258.

84. “Clinton’s Words on Somalia: ‘The Responsibility of American Leadership,’” *New York Times*, 8 October 1993, A15. Of course, one can argue that Kennedy was trying to save his own face while Clinton was trying to justify his action.

85. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 188.

86. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 10, 72–73.

audience, et al.) can pass close scrutiny.⁸⁷ The cult existed long before the arrival of the ultimate weapon and has been believed by leaders from different political cultures facing different domestic audiences.

This section offers a different explanation for the origin of the cult. This explanation argues that the cult of reputation originates from statesmen's transfer of their belief in reputation under hierarchy to a drastically different environment of anarchy. All statesmen grow up in a domestic social environment, a more or less hierarchical setting dominated by interpersonal relationships. Under this setting, a father who does not carry out the threats to discipline a disobedient child has a real danger of losing the reputation embedded in parental authority, and someone who did not repay his debt last time is likely to face greater difficulty borrowing again. Likewise, a legal system that does not punish criminals consistently is unlikely to have much deterrent effect.

In a social environment, because most people with whom we interact now are likely to be around for some time, an individual's "reputation" does play a salient role. Thus, Jervis's conviction that "if an actor is caught [lying], he is less likely to be believed next time"⁸⁸ is largely true in society, and most individuals do need to establish and maintain a certain kind of reputation.

Moreover, for individuals with leadership ambition, the need to establish and maintain reputation may even be critical. Reputation (for keeping one's commitments and promises) is part of a leader's "moral capital," and leaders who do not defend their moral convictions vigorously and do not fulfill their promises will be judged as "irresolute" and "untrustworthy." Such individuals likely will lose their moral capital and even their positions.⁸⁹

It is plausible, therefore, that when leaders face international conflicts and the pressing demand for reputation under anarchy, they may find it convenient to transfer their belief about reputation in domestic life into the realm of international politics.⁹⁰ The problem is, of course, that domestic politics and international politics are fundamentally different: one is hierarchy while the other is anarchy.

We cannot readily prove that politicians do transfer their belief in reputation in interpersonal relations into international politics,⁹¹ but we do have plenty

87. Patrick Morgan, "Saving Face for the Sake of Deterrence," in Jervis, Lebow, and Gross Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence*, 219–20.

88. Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 78.

89. John Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39.

90. Whether this practice is due to the heuristic nature of the human mind is beyond the scope of this article. For a similar argument, see Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 24.

91. There is, however, plenty of evidence that personal experience influences decisionmakers' foreign-policy decision-making. See Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War* (Princeton: Princeton

of evidence that scholars do so, apparently believing that their insight on the role of reputation under domestic or interpersonal settings can readily apply to situations under anarchy.⁹² In fact, one can make the case that many misleading ideas about building and defending reputation promulgated by deterrence theorists and strategists are the result of the misguided transfer of beliefs.

For instance, when arguing the importance of face and nerve in international politics, Schelling often falls back on illustrations from domestic situations such as bank robbing or a father's demanding that his son improve his grades.⁹³ Even Jervis, one of the most sophisticated theorists on images, sometimes resorts to the use of interpersonal cases to illuminate international situations in his earlier work.⁹⁴ More recently, Gregory Miller's discussion of reputation in alliance politics also draws heavily from literature on reputation in business.⁹⁵ If these theorists transfer their understanding about reputation under hierarchy to situations of anarchy, we have good reason to believe that politicians do so even more frequently because they spend far less time dissecting the complexity of international politics.⁹⁶

By transferring their belief about reputation under hierarchy to anarchy, politicians and deterrence theorists have largely treated building and defending reputation as a problem to be solved, rather than as an assumption to be challenged.⁹⁷ By doing so, they have assumed away the structural imperative of international politics and forgotten that what they learned about reputation under hierarchy may not actually apply under anarchy.

This explanation of the origin of the cult has two readily testable hypotheses. First, leaders with a habit of lying in interpersonal relationships (for instance, Kennedy and Clinton, each of whom lied to his spouse) and placing little value on personal trust (for instance, Stalin and Mao) would be less concerned

University Press, 1992). A more recent case is the possibility that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's personal experience might have influenced her decision on Kosovo. See Michael Dobbs: *Madeleine Albright: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999). Also see Roger Cohen's review of that book, "Memory Goes to War," *The New Republic*, 12 July 1999, available at <http://www.thenewrepublic.com/current/coverstory071299.html>. For a similar argument, see Press, "Does Backing Down Hurt Credibility?" 5–6.

92. Morgan was perhaps the first to single out this malpractice, but he was largely ignored. See Morgan, *Deterrence*, 18–19.

93. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 37, 85.

94. Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 103, 107.

95. Miller, "Hypothesis on Reputation."

96. For a socially rooted explanation of U.S. leaders' belief in honor and reputation, see Walter Russell Mead's provocative essay, "The Jacksonian Tradition and American Foreign Policy," *National Interest*, no. 58 (winter 1999–2000): 5–29, esp. 21.

97. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 212.

with reputation in international relations.⁹⁸ Second, leaders who understood the difference between interpersonal relationships and international politics would be less likely to believe in the cult.⁹⁹

STRUCTURE, PSYCHOLOGY, AND STATE BEHAVIOR

SO FAR, this article has highlighted how the cult of reputation can help us understand some state behaviors in international conflicts. This section combines the cult with another structural dimension of international politics (the distribution of capabilities across units) to reach a more determinate prediction of state behavior under different structures. This approach underlines the possibility that integrating structural and psychological factors, just like combining structural and domestic factors, will be a productive enterprise for studying international politics.¹⁰⁰

Since the rise of neorealism within the discipline of international relations, many psychological factors (such as credibility, reputation, prestige, and honor) deemed important for understanding international politics were forced into exile, despite the psychological dimension in international politics (this is, fear) that E. H. Carr noticed long ago.¹⁰¹ Perhaps partly reflecting the same dissatisfaction with neorealism's inability to explain and predict state behavior as voiced by neoclassical realism,¹⁰² there has been a renewed interest in the role

98. Both John F. Kennedy's and Bill Clinton's international behavior may fit into this pattern, even though they both justified their decisions with cult rhetoric from time to time. For instance, Kennedy's reaction after the Bay of Pigs indicated that he had less concern for reputation (he used the term "prestige") than did most of his advisers. Likewise, from Haiti to China's most-favored-nation status, Somalia, and Bosnia, Clinton did not seem to care too much about reputation, either.

99. Research along the line of Khong, *Analogies at War*, can prove this.

100. For the argument that different research approaches and schools should enrich and strengthen (rather than weaken) each other, see Robert Jervis, "Realism in the Study of World Politics," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (fall 1998): 971–72.

101. E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (London: MacMillan, 1940): 135–36. Indeed, fear features almost as prominently as anarchy in Mearsheimer's offensive realism. See John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), chap. 2. For a social-psychology-based explanation of anarchy as a self-help system, see Jonathan Mercer, "Anarchy and Identity," *International Organization* 49, no. 2 (spring 1995): 229–52. For two classical treatises on the psychological dimensions of international politics, see Jervis, *Logic of Images*; and Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

102. For reviews, see Gideon Rose, "Neo-classical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 4 (October 1998): 144–72; and Ethan B. Kapstein, "Is Realism Dead?" *International Organization* 49, no. 4 (autumn 1995): 751–74. Important works include Michael Mastanduno, David A. Lake, and G. John Ikenberry, "Toward a Realist Theory of State Action," *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (December 1989): 457–74; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The*

of psychological factors such as reputation, reasoning by analogy, prestige, learning, motivation, and emotion in international politics.¹⁰³ Unlike neoclassical realism, which explicitly acknowledges the dynamic interaction between structural and domestic factors, however, this new psychological wave has so far followed an independent path and has not tried to link psychological factors with either structural or domestic factors.¹⁰⁴ It is high time for a change.

Predicting great powers' behavior under different international structures has been a major task for theories of international politics, yet few theories have come close. For instance, in his seminal book, Kenneth Waltz notes two contradictory codes of conduct for the two superpowers under bipolarity. At one point, he emphasizes that the two superpowers could have ignored allies' quarrels that could have dragged them into war. "The danger continues to be that we will do too much rather than too little," because "two conditions [bipolarity and independence] make it possible for the United States and the Soviet Union to be concerned less with scoring relative gains and more with making absolute gains."¹⁰⁵ In another place, however, Waltz notes that the two superpowers should have sought to block each other throughout the world because there were only two of them: "overreaction is the lesser evil because it costs only money and the fighting of limited wars."¹⁰⁶

Jervis rightly points out the contradiction in Waltz's arguments and noted the excessive interventions by the two superpowers during the cold war. Jervis, however, quickly dismisses the possibility of a structural explanation

Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*; and Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Putnam's "two-level game theory" is the neoliberal version of the neoclassical approach. See Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (summer 1988): 427–60.

103. For a discussion of reasoning by analogy, see Khong, *Analogies at War*. For prestige, see Daniel Markey, "Prestige and the Origins of War," *Security Studies* 8, no. 4 (summer 1999): 126–73. One may note that politicians usually take prestige equivalent to reputation and honor. Learning is discussed by George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock, eds., *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview, 1991); Jack S. Levy, "Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (spring 1994): 279–312; and Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs: Learning, Alliance, and World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). The label of "motivational realism" was coined by Kydd. See Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (autumn 1997): 114–54. Finally, emotion is examined in Jonathan Mercer, "Approaching Emotion in International Politics," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, 25 April 1996; and Neta C. Crawford, "The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationship," *International Security* 24, no. 4 (spring 2000): 116–56.

104. For exceptions, see Mercer, "Anarchy and Identity"; and Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*, chap. 8.

105. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 208, 195.

106. *Ibid.*, 170–72.

for the two superpowers' excessive intervention: "The structure of the system renders system imperatives irrelevant; any number of impulses can lead to intervention."¹⁰⁷

Yet the number of impulses can be limited to one, because if we take the cult of reputation among statesmen into account, we can come closer to a more definite answer on state behavior under bipolarity. Because worst-case mentality often reinforces the concern for reputation among statesmen, bipolarity exacerbates rather than alleviates the concern for reputation: "In a bipolar world there are no peripheries. . . . Competition becomes more comprehensive as well as more widely extended."¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the concern for reputation also reinforces the worst-case mentality; the fear of the domino effect is simply the fear that the worst may get worse. The net result was that the two superpowers had even more incentives to intervene under bipolarity: each superpower feared that losing reputation in one place might lead to losing it in other places, so no place was too small for intervention.

The logic laid out above suggests that concern for reputation will be most severe for the lone superpower under unipolarity. The strategic environment under unipolarity actually resembles that of a "chain-store paradox" game, in which the superpower is the monopolist, while all the rest of the world is the potential challenger.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, we would expect the lone superpower to defend its reputation even more ardently. Since the structural imperative to maintain the stability of the unipolar world points in the same direction,¹¹⁰ the lone superpower is likely to get involved more, not less, often.

So far, the sole superpower has indeed acted more, not less, often in the post cold war period, despite the call of "Come home, America,"¹¹¹ and the concern

107. Jervis, *System Effects*, 118–20, quote at 120.

108. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 171.

109. Although the monopolist may not be able to reason all the way to the next-to-last round of the game, his initial impulse is likely to be to stand firm against his challenger. For the original discussion of the "chain-store paradox" game and its application in the context of international political economy, see David M. Kreps and Robert Wilson, "Reputation and Incomplete Information," *Journal of Economic Theory*, no. 27 (August 1982): 253–79; and James E. Alt, Randall L. Calvert, and Brian D. Humes, "Reputation and Hegemonic Stability: A Game-Theoretic Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (June 1988): 445–66. For a brief discussion of the game's implication for international crises, see Wagner, "Rationality and Misperception in Deterrence Theory," 128–35.

110. William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (summer 1999): 39. For an illuminating assessment of U.S. behavior in the post-cold war era, see Andrew J. Bacevich, "Different Drummers, Same Drum," *National Interest*, no. 67 (summer 2001): 67–77. Also see Thomas E. Eicks, "U.S. Urged to Embrace an 'Imperialist' Role," *International Herald Tribune*, 22 August 2001.

111. Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security* 21, no. 4 (spring 1997): 5–48.

for reputation looms large behind the superpower's action each time. Secretary of State James Baker's testimony in the prelude to the Gulf war perfectly reflected the reasoning of the monopolist in a "chain-store paradox" game, with a concern for reputation and credibility clearly in his mind: "The current crisis is *the first opportunity to . . . reinforce the standards for civilized behavior* found in the United Nations Charter, to help shape a more peaceful international order. . . . So it is our view, Mr. Chairman, *that we must seize this opportunity to solidify the ground rule of the new order.*"¹¹² Similarly, Clinton's decision to make war on Kosovo was driven at least partly by the desire to preserve the United States's reputation as the sole superpower.¹¹³

Following the logic laid out above, we should predict that under multipolarity, great powers would be less concerned with reputation, and they would choose the option of "doing nothing" (including "buck-passing" and waiting) more frequently than they would under either a bipolar or a unipolar structure. Indeed, during the multipolarity that prevailed prior to the Second World War, when they perceived that defense was dominant, the United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union all tried to pass the buck. The possible loss of reputation was certainly not a major concern for these three countries.¹¹⁴

Hence, combining structural with psychological factors does generate more determinate predictions about state behavior under different structures, with only limited sacrifice of parsimony.

REPUTATION DEBUNKED: IMPLICATIONS

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP on reputation fundamentally challenges the notion that reputation for resolve is easy (or even possible) in conflicts under anarchy and argues that politicians' and scholars' faith in reputation is unfounded. Building on this scholarship, this article argued that the belief in reputation exerts a profound effect on states' behavior by functioning like a cult. Finally, this article underscored the utility of integrating structural and psychological factors into our understanding of international politics.

112. "Excerpts from Baker Testimony on U.S. and Gulf," *New York Times*, 5 September 1990 (emphasis added).

113. Jane Perlez, "The Steps, and Missteps, behind the Decision to War," *New York Times*, 26 March 1999; Jane Perlez, "The Road to War: A Special Report," *New York Times*, 18 April 1999; "Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright Remarks and Q&A Session at the U.S. Institute of Peace, February 4, 1999," available at <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1999/990204.html>; and "Secretary of State Albright Interview on the PBS Newshour with Jim Lehrer, 2-24-99," available at <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1999/990204a.html>.

114. See Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (spring 1990): 137–68.

The findings presented here have both theoretical and practical implications. Some theoretical issues with reputation and credibility at their core will have to be re-examined, and several new lines of research can be developed. For instance, in addition to the interaction between structural and psychological factors, it will be interesting to explore how domestic political factors and certain psychological factors work together to shape states' actions,¹¹⁵ and whether different psychological factors reinforce or cancel each other under certain conditions.¹¹⁶

On the practical side, to minimize the perils brought to international politics by the cult of reputation, the general public and the scholarly community must be vigilant when politicians justify their actions in the name of defending reputation. Facing such occasions, we must ask two questions: (1) Do we have real interests other than reputation, credibility, prestige, honor, or face to justify the use (or the threat of the use) of force? (2) Are politicians really fighting for reputation for resolve, or are they fighting for reputation for power so that they can bask in the glory of a victorious parade? If the answer to question (1) is that we do not have real interests at stake—whether preventing humanitarian disaster, enforcing peace, promoting regional stability, or defending vital interests—then the use of force is unwarranted and should be opposed.¹¹⁷ And if the answer to question (2) is that politicians are really fighting for reputation for power, then we must tell them boldly that to sacrifice blood (our own and that of others) for one's own glory is immoral. Alas, in case the politicians forget, remind them that they do not always win.¹¹⁸ Either way, by asking these two questions, we will fight fewer wars.

115. Fearon's "domestic audience theory" and Reiter's brief discussion of political structure and learning may be interesting starting points. See Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*, chap. 8; and Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences."

116. For instance, it may be interesting to ask whether groupthink reinforces the cult of reputation and reasoning by analogy. For groupthink, see Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

117. For similar arguments, see Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 1; and Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility," 2.

118. The U.S. invasion of Iraq may serve as another remainder for those believing in easy victory.