Core interests, Crisis Behavior and Reputation: A survey experiment with national security elites

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Abstract

Does crisis behavior signal information about resolve or, aggressive long-term intentions, or is there too much uncertainty to signal anything at all? Studies of iterated crisis bargaining have found this question difficult to answer because they assume states draw their values for each issue independently. We argue that pre-crisis foreign policy context — whether an issue under dispute is consistent or inconsistent with the challenger's declared core interests — determines what defenders infer. When challengers fight for a declared core interest defenders draw inferences about resolve to fight for core interest. When challengers fight over a peripheral interest, defenders draw inferences about the challenger's aggressive strategic intentions. We test this argument with an elite survey experiment that extends a realistic war game exercises that the National Security Council participated in decades ago. The subjects — intelligence, defense and foreign policy experts in Washington DC — are randomly assign information about the challenger's declared foreign policy and military intervention behavior, then asked to assess the challenger's intentions and resolve. Using random assignment on an elite sample and exactly simulating an assessment task they regularly participate in, we validate our theory of foreign policy context and differential crisis signaling. We import elite survey methods from judicial, medical and business studies.

Introduction

What inferences do states draw when they observe their rivals use force to take territory? There are two research agendas on this question that emphasize different kinds of private information. In one, fighting signals high resolve to fight in future disputes (Slantchev, 2011; Sartori, 2005; Dafoe, 2017). In the other, fighting signals aggressive strategic intentions (Kydd, 2005; Glaser, 2010).

For many researchers a state's strategic intentions are defined relative to its resolve to fight. But throughout history, whether policy-makers drew inferences about a rival's resolve to fight, or strategic intentions had dramatically different implications for the patterns of war and peace that followed. For example, in 1945, Stalin orchestrated a coup in Romania. Although alarmed by the lengths Stalin would go to (Kitchen, 1986, p261), the Western Allies assessed that "Russia policy, however distasteful it may be to us... has the air of remaining a policy of limited objectives."[1] For a year longer, they made concessions in the hopes that Stalin would peacefully integrate into world order. If anything, events in Romania only increased the sie of concessions that the British were willing to make (Kitchen, 1986, p261). By contrast, when Stalin instigated the Iran crisis in 1946, the Western Allies concluded that Russia "will adopt a policy of opportunism to extend her influence wherever possible."[2] This revised assessment about Stalin's intentions led to the origins of containment.

It is not obvious what crisis behavior reveals in realistic settings where a rival has private information about both its resolve and strategic intentions simultaneously. Some argue that multiple types of uncertainty can make it impossible for states to draw inferences from their rival's crisis behavior (Press, 2007; Rosato, 2015). Evidence is mixed. Some report crisis behavior signals resolve, others report report it signals strategic intentions and others still find no consistent pattern (Danilovic, 2001; Huth and Russett, 1990; Huth, 1997;

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[1]Clark Kerr's assessment: FO371/47941 Mar. 27, 1945
[2]Report of the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee of Great Britain: Russia's Strategic Interests and Intentions,' Mar. 1, 1946.

Schultz, 2001b; Levy, 2012; Wood, 2012; Fearon, 1994b). A reputation for one kind of private information may be activated for the duration of leadership tenure or given certain country (Dafoe, 2017; Renshon, 2016; Tomz, 2007; Levy, McKoy, Poast, and Wallace, 2015; Uzonyi, Souva, and Golder, 2012; Weeks, 2008; Kertzer, 2017). But researchers do not understand why states sometimes draw one type of inference and not the other, if these inferences are rational (Mercer, 1996; Yarhi-Milo, 2014), or systematic (Hopf, 2010).

The key piece of evidence to answer this question — how decision-makers process information and form beliefs following rare, highly classified national security crises — is difficult to observe. To properly identify an effect, researchers must measure how national security decision-makers assess a rival's intentions and resolve pre-crisis, then randomly assign a crisis event and observe how these decision-makers updated their beliefs. I do just that through a novel experiment with national security decision-makers. My vignette replicates a "war game" exercise that the National Security Council participated in decades ago. In it, subjects — real-world intelligence and foreign policy professionals in Washington DC — assessed the intentions and resolve of an emerging threat to US national security interests. I randomly assigned information about military crises and observed variation in subjects' responses to these differences.

Prior experiments demonstrate that the public opinion can change based on crisis behavior (Renshon, 2015; Kertzer and Mcgraw, 2012; Levendusky and Horowitz, 2012; Gottfried and Trager, 2016) and that citizens update beliefs in stylized games (Tingley and Walter, 2011; Tingley, 2011). But scholars expect a lot from decision-makers who assess complex events with uncertainty across multiple dimensions. Many question if elites are subject to specific biases that may confound their assessments (Yarhi-Milo, 2014). Advancing a handful of political experiments that analyze elites samples (Renshon, 2015; Mintz, 2004; Hafner-Burton, LeVeck, and Victor, 2016; Friedman, Lerner, and Zeckhauser, Friedman et al.), my experiment follows recent trends in behavioral economics to place expert decision-makers in settings that realistically reflect their work (see Fudenberg, 2006; Camerer, Loewenstein,

and Rabin, 2004, for review). I import these design choices to shed light on national security decision-making.

With this evidence, I argue that what a state can learn from crisis behavior depends on whether a crisis emerges over an issue that is consistent with its rival's declared core interests. Through history, leaders identified what issues and territories were most important to them through declared foreign policies. For example, in 1823 the United States used the Monroe Doctrine to declare that Western hegemony was in its core interests. In 1841, Tsar Nicholas declared that Russia would protect Orthodox Christians worldwide. In 1932, Hitler declared that sovereign control of German speaking territories was in Germany's core interests.

States that observe their rivals make claims such as these understand there is an incentive to misrepresent. These states are uncertain if the claimant is sufficiently resolved to fight for the core interests it claims, or if it is extremely aggressive and will fight for much more. Yet they do know which issues are consistent with their rival's declared core interests and which are not. In most crises they know if the issue under dispute is consistent with their rival's declared core interest.

Armed with information about declared core interests, states draws different inferences about their rival's resolve and strategic intentions depending on their rival's crisis behavior. When a rival fights for a declared core interest, states increase their confidence that their rival is resolved to fight for declared core interests in the future. When a rival fights for a peripheral interest, states increase their confidence that their rival has greedy intentions and will fight opportunistically in the future.

For example, in 1903 the United States threatened British interests in Alaska. The British did not know if the United States would actually fight for concessions in Alaska if Britain refused to give in, or if the United States would make future demands even if Britain made concessions. But Britain did know that American interests in Alaska were consistent with the Monroe Doctrine. When the Americans deployed forces to Alaska, the British inferred that the United States was sufficiently resolved to fight to enforce the Monroe Doctrine. But the

Alaska Boundary Dispute did not cause the British to question American ambition beyond the Western Hemisphere.[3] My conjecture is that British inferences would have been different if the United States invaded British colonies in Africa rather than Alaska. In this case, the British would have inferred that the United States had aggressive strategic intentions.

The argument unites studies of uncertainty about resolve (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth, 2014; Kertzer, Renshon, and Yarhi-Milo, 2015) and strategic intentions (Kydd, 2005) within the one framework. It shows that both are possible under different conditions and explains how ineffective reputations are a special case driven by undefined core interests (Press, 2007). It compliments studies on the conditions under which reputation adheres by moving beyond the properties of actors and instead looking at the content of a crisis (Dafoe, 2017; Renshon, 2016; Tomz, 2007; Levy et al., 2015; Uzonyi et al., 2012; Weeks, 2008). Finally, it takes preferences seriously (Moravcsik, 1998), by theorizing about the link between a state's underlying foreign policy priorities and the specific values of issues and territories that may arise (Jackson and Morelli, 2011; Trager, 2011).

1 Inferences from the decision to fight

Studies of crisis bargaining and reputation for resolve analyze an interaction between two states: a defender (he) who controls all issues under the status quo; and a challenger (she) who can choose to instigate crises to revise the status quo in her favor. In the basic set-up, the challenger can deliver an ultimatum: give me this concession or I'll fight. If she makes this threat, the defender can concede that issue or not. If the defender does not concede, the challenger can start a war or back down (Slantchev, 2011). The interaction is assumed to repeat (Sartori, 2005).

The challenger has private information about her resolve to fight. If she can convince the defender she is highly resolved, then the defender will always concede without a fight

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[3]Britain did not infer that the US was benign. Rather the Alaska dispute did not effect British assessments about American intentions.

(Fearon, 1994b). Knowing this, the defender is skeptical when the challenger claims to be highly resolved. The literature emphasizes how certain messaging strategies (usually threats) and crisis behavior (usually following through on those threats) reveal information that effects strategic bargaining in the future. Through slight adjustments to this set-up, formal research shows that challengers can credibly signal their resolve using costly militarization (Slantchev, 2011), domestic institutions (Schultz, 2001a), diplomacy (Sartori, 2002), and audience costs (Fearon, 1994a).

In these theories, conditions exist where a challenger's threat is called by the defender. In this case, the challenger's decision to fight or not effects the defender's beliefs about the challenger's underlying resolve. If the challenger stands firm, the defender increases his confidence that the challenger is resolved to fight in future crises. However, if the challenger backs down, the defender decreases his confidence that the challenger will fight in future disputes.

> **Existing Expectation 1** *When a challenger uses military force, the defender increases his confidence that the challenger is resolved to use force in future crises*

A separate literature emphasizes commitment problems that arise in repeated crises (Glaser, 2010; Powell, 2006). Defenders that face repeated threats from one challenger are tempted by preventative war (Powell, 2006). When preventative war is sufficiently cheap, defenders prefer to fight one large war in the present to prevent a barrage of iterated threats and concessions (Streich and Levy, 2007; Powell, 1999). When preventative war is credible, challengers face different incentives to misrepresent (Jervis, 1978). To avoid these large wars challengers understate their resolve to fight.

When challengers militarize rapidly, or use their military for revision, defenders increase their confidence that the challenger has aggressive long-term intentions because only greedy types are willing to risk major war. By contrast, challengers can signal their benign intentions by failing to capitalize on an opportunity to take territory (Glaser, 2010). As a result, the

choice not to use force can parse out limited aims challengers from greedy challengers (Kydd, 2005).

Existing Expectation 2 *When a challenger uses military force, the defender increases his confidence that the challenger has aggressive strategic intentions and will fight opportunistically whenever the opportunity presents itself*

Combining these frameworks, challengers face competing incentives to misrepresent. They want to *overstate* their resolve to receive a concession without having to fight for them (Fearon, 1994b). They want to *understate* their interest in fighting for many issues to avoid preventative war (Jervis, 1978). These competing incentives make it difficult to understand what past actions mean. The challenger may choose to fight because she is resolved to fight for this specific issue or because she holds an expansive foreign policy agenda (Press, 2007).

Compounding the problem, real world crises are rife with multiple sources of uncertainty (Rosato, 2015). Many argue that defenders cannot draw inferences from past crises because it is impossible to compare the challenger's relative value and costs across cases.

Existing Expectation 3 *When a challenger uses military force, the defender cannot be certain what the challenger will do in future crises. The defender should expect the worst.*

2 Uncertainty, Intentions and Declared Core Interests

I argue that a challenger's value for different issues is not drawn independently. Rather, how much a challenger values a specific issues depends on what motivates her foreign policy (Jackson and Morelli, 2011; Moravcsik, 1998). Some states are motivated by restoring their historical borders (Carter and Goemans, 2011), international security (Waltz, 1979), status (Gilpin, 1983; Renshon, 2016), ethnic-nationalism or for one of many other principles that may motivate her foreign policy. In some cases, a challenger's underlying principles provide

a natural limit for the objectives she wants to achieve because taking and holding territory is expensive (Brooks, 1999). However, other principles, such as the spread of a state's ideology can drive challengers to seek expansive revision. As a result, some challengers have unlimited interests and fight opportunistically whenever the opportunity presents itself.

I define a challenger's core interests as the tangible objectives that the challenger is willing to use military force to take, control and maintain based on their underlying interests. I sometimes refer to other issues as peripheral interests. I distinguish between a challenger's *declared* core interests and their *actual* core interests. Actual core interests are those that follow from what truly motivates a challenger's foreign policy. Declared core interests are those that follow from what the challenger claims motivates her foreign policy.

Recent game-theoretic analyses shows that declared core interests play an important coordinating role between rivals locked in strategic bargaining. Challengers have incentives to coordinate with defenders on their priorities to ensure that they receive valuable concessions first (Battaglini, 2002; Ramsay, 2011). In the context of crisis bargaining, Trager (2011) shows that challengers can explain their favorite concessions. Defender's believe that challengers prioritize the issues they identify as core interests. However, defenders remain unsure if challengers have overstated their claims. In the context of power transitions, Joseph (2017) shows that defenders use the challenger's declared core interests as a benchmark to evaluate future behavior against. In the face of commitment problems, defenders assume that challengers want *at least* what they say they want. Others argue that states can declare their core interests through a history of public claims or declaratory policies (Fearon, 1994a). Following this research, I assume that defenders are especially interested in knowing whether or not the challenger wants what she has claimed all along.

Based on this variation in preferences, I make three amendments to the repeated crisis model. First, I assume that challengers may have limited aims or greedy aims (Kydd, 1997; Glaser, 2010). However, I make the additional assumption that the limited aims type values issues and territories that are consistent with her declared core interests much more than

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Table 1: The challenger type-space

	Limited Aims	Greedy
High cost of war	Unwilling to Fight	Unwilling to fight
	Fight only for Core interests	Fight for any issue
Low Cost of war	Fight for any issue	

her peripheral interests. The greedy type values her declared core and peripheral interests roughly equally.

Second, I assume that when an opportunity for a crisis emerges, the defender knows whether or not that issue is consistent with the challenger's declared core interests or not. Applied to the real world this assumption means that the United States knows that control over Taiwan is consistent with China's declared core interests but control over Australia is not. Past theories assumed that the United States has no information to claim one issue is more important than the other given China's declared core interests. Finally, I allow for uncertainty about resolve and intentions to vary independently. In addition to uncertainty about values for core and peripheral interests, I assume that states have different underlying costs for fighting.

The implications of these additions are depicted schematically in Table 1. The two columns depict variation in strategic intentions as two types. A greedy type that values all issues and territories equally and a limited aims type that only values her declared core interests. The continuous y-axis reflects variation in each type's underlying cost for war. As you can see, no matter what a challenger's intentions are, sometimes they will never fight and sometimes they will always fight. The main distinction between the two is at middle values for the cost of war: limited aims challengers will fight only for declared core interests but greedy challengers will fight for all issues.

3   Inferences From the Decision to Fight

I assume that the challenger is given opportunities to fight for issues that are either (1) consistent or (2) inconsistent with her declared core interests. There are two possible outcomes. Faced with an opportunity to fight, the challenger (1) fights; or (2) does not fight. This leads to four possible scenarios against which the defender can draw inferences.

I argue that the existing theories about reputation and crisis behavior are special cases of this paradigm. When challengers fight over their core interests, it prompts defenders to make inferences about the challenger's resolve to fight for core interests in the future (Existing Expectation 1). When challengers fight (or not) for peripheral interests, it prompts defenders to make inferences about the extent of the challenger's strategic intentions (Existing Expectation 2). When core interests are undefined, I expect the inferences that follow from Existing Expectation 3.[4]

3.1   Inferences about strategic intentions

First, consider the case where the challenger is given an opportunity to fight for her core interest. If the challenger chooses to fight, the defender cannot distinguish between the challenger that will fight for any issue, or the challenger that will only fight for core interests. The observed crisis therefore cannot distinguish limited aims and high resolve.

By contrast, the defender can learn much more when a crisis erupts over a challenger's peripheral interest. The defender knows that either the challenger cares about these issues less than (or equal to) her core interests. If the challenger does not care much about her peripheral interests she will simply forgo this opportunity to fight. Challengers that fight for peripheral interest signal that they care enough about similar issues to fight for them in the future. As a result, defenders can be confident that when a challenger fights for a peripheral

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[4]I omit complex strategic options that prior studies have analyzed and situational uncertainty. Future analysis should include these elements.

interest, that she will fight opportunistically, for whatever issue arises.

Hypothesis 1 *When a challenger fights for an issue that is inconsistent with her declared core interest, defenders are more confident that the challenger will fight for any issue than they would have been if they observed the challenger fight for her core interests.*

One might wonder if a greedy challenger will ever use force against a peripheral interest. After all, they can still select issues that are consistent with their declared core interests and avoid commitment problems. There are two reasons that challengers may fight for their peripheral interests even if it invites commitment problems. First, they may value expansionist aims so much that they prefer the present value from fighting given the cost of containment. Second, there are a finite number of issues and territories that are consistent with their declared core interests. The challenger may exhaust all of these consistent issues. In these cases, greedy challengers may prefer to continue their revisionist strategies than wait for an opportunity to fight for a core interest.

Prior studies that ignore a state's declared interests conclude that defenders must assume the worst (Press, 2007; Mearsheimer, 2001).

Hypothesis 2 *When a challenger has no declared core interests, and chooses to fight, the defender increases its confidence that the challenger will fight opportunistically whenever the opportunity presents itself more than they would have if the challenger fought for well-defined core interests.*

3.2   Inferences about resolve to fight for core interests

Consider the case where a challenger faces an opportunity to fight for a core interest. If the challenger fights, she signals that her gains from fighting outweighed the costs. When new opportunities arise for challengers to fight for her core interests, defenders can refer to these past events. They know that the challengers fought when faced with a similar situations in the past.

I accept that a challenger may values some core interests more than others. There may be some conditions where a limited aims challenger would not fight for core interests. This may temper how much defenders update. However, if a challenger is truly motivated by her declared core interests, then she will value all of these issues much more than any of her peripheral interests. The difference between how much the challenger values any two core interests will always be much less than the difference between how much she values her core interests relative to her peripheral interests. For example, if China is truly motivated by restoring its historical legacy, then the Chinese leadership will value control sovereign control over Taiwan and Tibet. Which one it values more may change over time. However, both will always be much more valuable to China that control over New Zealand. It is these small differences between core interests that diplomacy (Sartori, 2005), militarization (Slantchev, 2011) and other mechanisms can help communicate once a challenger has made explicit their underlying interests and costs for war.

> **Hypothesis 3** *When a challenger fights for an issue that is consistent with her declared core interest, defenders are more confident that the challenger is resolved to fight for her core interests than they would have been if the challenger fought for her peripheral interests.*

As time wares on, the distribution of power may shift making it more difficult to draw inferences (Mearsheimer, 2001; Press, 2007). I accept that shifting power may put an expiration date on the inferences that can be drawn. Yet I do not want to overstate these concerns because the direction of shifting power is often observable. For example, American policy-makers believe that China is now in a better position to prevail in a crisis over Taiwan than it was in 1995. American policy-makers disagree about how much better, but there is broad consensus that China is stronger relative to the United State today compared to two decades ago. When power shifts in favor of the challenger, these inferences may grow stronger. Suppose a challenger fought for a core interest a decade ago and is now stronger than she was then. The challenger is now in a better position to capitalize on another opportunity to fight for her core interest. If power had shifted in the opposite direction, the

defender's capacity to make an inference would have weakened.

Shifting power and other dynamics have a a larger effect if the challenger has no way to compare the relative value of issues. Thus, when the challenger has not defined her core interests the defender is less likely to make inferences about future behavior.

> **Hypothesis 4** *When a challenger fights for an issue that is consistent with her declared core interest, defenders are more confident that the challenger is resolved to fight for her core interests than they would have been if the challenger fought but did not have clearly defined core interests.*

We summarize our predictions in Table 2. The columns represent the three types of issue that the challenger can fight over. The rows represent counter-factual cases. In the boxes we write what we predict the defender's beliefs to be if it observes the challenger fight over the issue in the column, relative to what it would believe given the counter-factual condition in the row. Table 2 makes clear how context about how crisis events and crisis behavior can prompt nuanced inferences when the defender has some information about what the challenger has said that she wants. The defender can answer different questions (either about the challenger's resolve or intentions) under different conditions. By considering the case where core interests are absent, I also make explicit how well defined core interests are necessary to make crisis behavior meaningful.

3.3 Existing Evidence

Past studies have reported evidence about how defenders draw inferences from, and respond to, a challenger's crisis behavior. In this section I re-interpret this evidence in the context of my theory. First I analyze archival studies about Anglo-German relations in the 1930s. Second I analyze quantitative studies. I do this for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that I can clarify seemingly contradictory findings about crisis and reputation as conditional effects, rather than evidence that crisis behavior has no systematic effect.

Table 2: Predicted beliefs across different treatment groups

	What type of issue did challenger fight for?		
	Core	**Peripheral**	**Undefined**
Core		↑ aggressive intentions ↓ resolved core interests	↑ aggressive intentions ↓ resolved core interests
Peripheral	↓ aggressive intentions ↑ resolved core interests		− −
Undefined	↓ aggressive intentions ↑ resolved core interests	− −	

The Counterfactual Case (row label)

Each box reports my predictions for differences in what the defender infers from a crisis observed in the column, relative to the row condition. Each box contains two rows that summarize inferences about (1) the challenger's relative value for core and peripheral interests; and (2) the challenger's resolve to fight for her core interests. − marks represent no theorized effect.

Table 3: P-values required to reject the null for each two-way comparison.

	What type of issue did challenger fight for?		
	Core	**Peripheral**	**Undefined**
Core		0.00146 ✓ 0.00304 ✓	0.01379 ✓ 0.00357 ✓
Peripheral	0.00146 ✓ 0.00304 ✓		0.80647 ✓ 0.99167 ✓
Undefined	0.01379 ✓ 0.00357 ✓	0.80647 ✓ 0.99167 ✓	

The Counterfactual Case (row label)

Boxes follow the prsentation in Table 2. Numbers are p-values that are required to reject the null. ✓ implies my prediction is confirmed.

Second, it demonstrates that my predictions generalize to observed patterns across different types of data.

Archival researchers have asked why British elites chose to appease Hitler despite Hitler's repeated use of force to take territory. Although the details vary, scholars identify crises — for example, the re-militarization of the Rhineland and the Anschluss — as key events that should have led the British to conclude that Hitler had vast aims. Since the British did not update their beliefs, these studies conclude that either British elites were irrational, naive, or that defenders should not update based on crisis behavior (cf Yarhi-Milo, 2014; Gilbert, 1972; Barnett, 1986).[5]

Yet British assessments are well explained by mapping these crises onto Hitler's declared core interests. The British believed that Hitler may have been motivated by uniting ethnic-Germans under one government. Each of these crises is consistent with that basic principle. For example, when Hitler re-militarized the Rhineland, the British War Secretary told the German Ambassador, "through the British people were prepared to fight for France in the event of a German incursion into French territory, they would not resort to arms on account of the recent occupation of the Rhineland. The people did not know much about the demilitarization provisions and most of them probably took the view that they did not care 'two hoots' about the Germans reoccupying their own territory."[6]

The shift in British assessments following the failure of the Munich Agreement Agreement are also consistent with my theory. In 1934, Hitler mobilized forces to take Czechoslovakia. Alarmed by these events, the British attempted to mediate a settlement. Ultimately, Hitler accepted territorial concessions over only the German speaking parts of Czechoslovakia. based on this compromise, th British were optimistic about peace in Europe. It was only after Hitler took the non-German speaking parts of Czechoslovakia that the British prime

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[5]One exception is Ripsman and Levy (2008). There account is consistent with mine. As they point out, the most senior British elites were, at best, uncertain about Hitler's strategic intentions up until Hitler violated Munich.

[6]Quoted in Weinberg (1980) p259.

minister became convinced that Hitler's aims were expansive.[7] The failure of the Munich Agreement was not the first time that Hitler had taken territory, threatened force, or even violated an international agreement. It was, however, the first time that Hitler took territory that was inconsistent with his declared core interests.

Other researchers furnish quantitative evidence. McManus (2014) finds that American presidents who make forceful threats are more likely to receive favorable conflict outcomes because they can generate a reputation for high resolve.[8] In contrast, Gottfried and Trager (2016) find that "aggressive foreign rhetoric makes it harder for a leader to offer a dramatic settlement involving substantial concessions to preserve the peace," and also "dramatically increases the approval of presidents who prosecute successful wars." Different still, Wood (2012) finds no relationship between threats and conflict outcomes across crises.

At first sight, the evidence seems contradictory. My theory clarifies why these scholars observe different effects. McManus codes the severity of all American presidential demands since 1950 using a machine-coded dictionary. The dictionary relies on pre-coded phrases as high or low resolved. As a result of this procedure, she codes both statements to retaliate against those that kill American soldiers, and the Cuban Missile Crisis as high-resolved threats. In contrast, she codes both statements about the 1991 Gulf War and the Soviet withdrawal of Afghanistan as low-resolved demands. At least these archetypal examples demonstrate a correlation between strong threats and core interests. Consistent with my theory, she finds that Americans can rely on threats to demonstrate resolve to fight when they make threats over their core interests.

Gottfried and Trager (2016) report a survey experiment based on an ongoing Russo-American dispute over oil-rich arctic territories. Participants are told that Russian interests in the arctic are not related to Russia's core interests. Therefore, subjects that observe Russia threaten force to take this territory, observe Russia threaten a peripheral interest.

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[7]This account is consistent with (Ripsman and Levy, 2008; Bullock, 1971; Hillgruber, 1974)

[8]This debate centers on threats, but as McManus (2014, p728) notes, "the logic should apply to both conflicts that are decided without the use of force and conflicts in which force is used."

Consistent with my theory, when Russia fights for a peripheral interest subjects are more likely to support the use of force against Russia at the first available chance and are less likely to support short-term concessions.

These findings demonstrate that my theory is consistent with a wide variety of evidence. When a conflict arose over a challenger's core interest, archival research showed that the defender inferred that the challenger was resolved to fight for core interests. The statistics showed that defenders were willing to make more concessions in future disputes. By contrast, when a conflict arose over a peripheral interests, archival research found that the defender inferred that the challenger was greedy. The statistics showed that challengers were willing to fight at the first available opportunity. I now analyze experimental evidence to demonstrate these patterns are causal.

4   Evidence

I present evidence from an elite survey experiment on 93 foreign policy, intelligence and defense professionals. The survey presented information about a fictional challenger named Bandaria. Subjects were randomly assigned information about Bandaria and then asked to assess Bandaria's intentions and resolve to fight over core or peripheral issues. The hypotheses and research design were pre-registered at [removed-for-review].

4.1   A Scenario-Based, Elite Survey Experiment

This survey departs from most other survey experiments in international relations in two ways. First, subjects were foreign policy elites. Second, the vignette was a detailed hypothetical scenario that closely reflected a real-life war game exercise that national security professionals participated in, rather than a stylized game or a short vignette. Below I explain the advantages of this approach, and the design choices that help me overcome its shortcomings.

To understand how elites evaluate crisis behavior I focused my attention on a convenience sample of elites. Subjects were eligible if they had briefed a Deputy Assistant Secretary, Congressperson or similarly ranked official on foreign policy issues. Subjects were asked sample inclusion questions at the end of the survey to ensure they met the elite sample frame.[9] 139 subjects answered at least one question, 131 completed the survey, and 93 passed attention checks. I analyze these 93 responses below. My sample is a good proxy for high-level elites for two reasons. First, all participants are successful, political officials focused in foreign affairs. It is precisely this group of people that cabinet members are drawn from. Second, subjects were selected because they provide information to senior decision-makers. High-level elites rely on facts and analysis that they receive from people in this sample. Thus, the sample has considerable influence in shaping the information that their superiors see.

In international relations research, scholars claim that personal experiences distinguish foreign policy elites' decision-making from the general population's (cf Saunders, 2011). If foreign policy elites think differently, it is difficult to draw strong inferences about their behavior from experiments administered to educated population. In other contexts, it has been shown that professionals with specialized expertise approach their work differently than an average educated adult would the same task. For this reason, behavioral researchers increasingly turn to convenience samples to identify effects for medical doctors (Arber, McKinlay, Adams, Marceau, Link, and O'Donnell, 2006; Feldman, McKinlay, Potter, Freund, Burns, Moskowitz, and Kasten, 1997), CEOs (Rashad Abdel-Khalik, 2014; Cen and Doukas, 2017; Lieb and Schwarz, 2001), or lawyers and judges (Redding, Floyd, and Hawk, 2001), rather than a representative sample of educated adults. These convenience samples often derive consistent result in repeated experiments on elite samples (Redding et al., 2001).

Drawing from this research, I took four steps to increase my confidence that the results are not an artifact of my sampling method. First, I solicited elites using two distinct sam-

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[9]See Appendix B.1.2 for solicitation information and B.5 for balance tests.

pling techniques that I describe in Appendix B.1. Each sampling method had its own link to an identical survey. I demonstrate that the treatment effects hold controlling for the different sampling methods in Table ??. Thus, I can say with confidence that one method of sampling did not determine the results because I get the same results using different sampling techniques on different sub-populations of elites. Second, I collected biographical information on president Trump's current NSC and president Obama's final NSC. Figure 6 reports the summary statistics for my sample (panel a) broken out by sampling procedures and the real NSC staff (panel b) broken out by president. The variation across my sampling frames is consistent with variation in real-world NSC selection. Third, I report metadata on response attributes and attrition rates recommended by Eysenbach (2004) in Appendix B.2. Fourth, I conducted pilot surveys on Mechanical Turk to test features of the vignette recommended by Steiner, Atzmüller, and Su (2017). The results are supportive.

The scenario based vignette also draws from recent innovations in behavioral economics, medicine and law. Increasingly, researchers that survey elites use scenario based exercises rather than stylized games with precise numerical payoffs (cf Collett and Childs, 2011; Arber, McKinlay, Adams, Marceau, Link, and O'Donnell, 2004). The reason is that elites make judgments in highly complex strategic environments that cannot be captured in stylistic games. In the national security setting, challengers are not simply profit maximizers that respond to well defined purchasing choices (like individuals in a market may do). There are several dimensions of preferences and outside options that may effect decision-making. As a result, stylistic choices do not well reflect the complex assessment process that leaders face when they assess their rival's military behavior.

National security experts are better suited to hypothetical scenarios than the average American or even other groups of experts because they participate in hypothetical war game exercises as part of their daily work. Real war plans[10] and National Security Estimates[11] are informed by war games. The vignette I developed took features from real war games

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[10]That is, the US military's specific plans to invade other countries
[11]That is, the intelligence community's assessments of foreign threats.

that national security experts had participated in. After I developed the vignette, I received review from five foreign policy experts including a former Deputy Director of an intelligence agency to make sure the information in the vignette was consistent with the scenarios that foreign policy experts use.

One concern with these hypothetical vignettes is that policy-makers choose policies not only based on their beliefs about their rivals, but on complex inter-agency dynamics and select incentives (Allison and Zelikow, 1971). These do not apply in my case because my dependent variable is beliefs, not policy choices. Beliefs form independent of interests. In the instrument, I am careful to ask subjects about their beliefs in this scenario, rather than actions they would take or policies that they would recommend. A second concern is that subjects do not take hypothetical scenarios seriously. In Appendix B.4 I describe design features, attention checks, and meta-data that demonstrate the subjects took the vignette seriously.

I chose a hypothetical scenario over a real example (e.g. a China scenario) because I did not want subjects to import outside information about a case into their answers. If subjects thought the scenario was about China, for example, they may have started the experiment with specific beliefs about the history of China's crisis behavior. I describe design features that ensured subjects did not systematically invoke a historical case and responses that demonstrate those measures were effective in Appendix B.6.

4.2 Vignette

The survey instrument, presented in Appendix **??**, has three phases. In each phase, subjects are presented with new information about Bandaria then asked standardized questions about Bandaria's intentions and resolve. Subjects also write text responses.

Phase 1 provides all subjects with the same prompt and baseline information. Subjects are told that Bandaria is an emerging world power, and the American president will soon meet the Bandarian prime minister. Subjects are asked to provide the president an assess-

Figure 1: Bandaria and its Neighbors
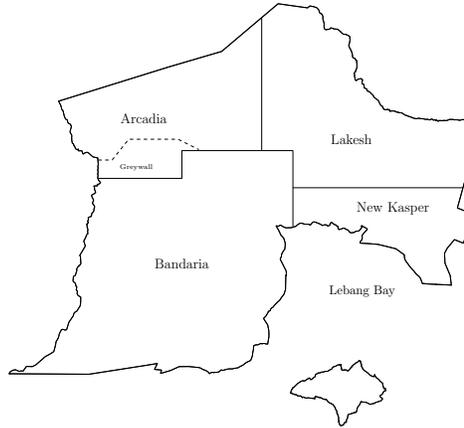
ment of Bandaria's long-run intentions and resolve in preparation for that meeting. The baseline includes information about the trajectory of Bandaria's military spending and economic growth, socio-political environment, trade and IGO networks and geopolitics, and a map of Bandaria and its surrounding countries depicted in Figure 1. Subjects are told that there are no significant natural resource deposits.

The baseline provides two plausible dispute areas in a discussion of Bandarian regional interests. First, Bandaria's international security is vulnerable to port closures in the Lebang Bay. These ports are controlled by New Kasper. Second, poorly treated ethnic Bandarians live in a neighboring country (Arcadia). Crucially, there is no information about which of these issues Bandaria cares about the most.

The detailed baseline addresses many confounding concerns raised by Dafoe, Zhang, and Caughey (2016). Further, interviews with senior intelligence officials in preparation for the survey suggests that the level of detail was necessary to make the scenario realistic.

In *phase two*, subjects are randomly assigned into a *core interest treatment* where Bandaria explains it is motivated by either: (1) security interests, or (2) ethnic interests. I also include (3) a control condition, that reflects the case where Bandaria does not provide any information about its core interests. In this condition, the Bandarian prime minister talks about confidence building measures and Bandaria's general interest in peace.

I include two core interest treatments to make sure the revelation of core interests generally and not the particular issue (security or ethnic based grievances), is doing the causal work. As an example, the ethnic treatment is:

> In a private meeting, the American president asked the prime minister of Bandaria to explain Bandaria's military spending. The Prime Minister replied: "Grave injustices have been done to ethnic Bandarians. We have a long history of supporting our Bandarian brothers in Arcadia. Ethnic-national concerns motivate our military policy." He then said, "Of course we want to resolve this issue peacefully. But Arcadia does not realize just how concerned we are about our ethnic kin. We will use any means necessary to ensure our ethnic kin are well governed." He continued, "Once our ethno-nationalist goals are assured, we have no reason to expand our military. All of our other foreign policy and regional concerns are less important and can be managed through UN participation, diplomacy and negotiation."
>
> Experts note that ethnic nationalism concerns have been central to Bandarian foreign policy over the past 10 years. Bandarian elites referred to ethnic-nationalism in private diplomatic conversations and public speeches consistently over the past 10 years.

The language modeled on de-classified minutes, letters and cables that described conversations between British elites, German Kaiser Wilhelm (1866), US president McKinnely (1898), Germen Chancellor Hitler (1934) and Soviet premier Stalin (1932). Although the language may strike the reader as direct, it is common through history.

In *phase three*, subjects are randomly assigned into a *military intervention* treatment where Bandaria annexes: (1) territory that surrounds the Lebang Bay in New Kasper, or (2) Greywall. One corresponds with ethnic interests the other with security interests.

This treatment takes the form of breaking news. For example, the ethnic treatment is:

> **Breaking News:** The Bandarian military occupied Greywall in Arcadia. Greywall is populated by ethnic Bandarians. The move comes after months of political unrest in Arcadia. The Bandarian prime minister announced plans to annex Greywall but promised fair treatment and reparations for aggrieved Arcadian citizens and busi-

nesses. The Bandarian Prime Minister insists that these events are entirely consistent with Bandaria's interests long known to the rest of the world and Bandaria remains committed to peace and stability generally.

The treatment groups that follow are depicted in Table 4. Letters represent (s)ecurity and (e)thnic treatments, and a (c)ontrol. Lowercase letters are the diplomatic treatments in phase 2. Uppercase letters are the military intervention treatments in phase 3. By the end of the experiment there are 6 distinct treatment groups. However, I am mainly interested in the difference between consistent and inconsistent core interests and military intervention. To that end, I pool consistent ($eE+sS$) and inconsistent ($eS+sE$) groups in the main analysis.[12] Further, in some specifications I test the difference within subjects across time. In these cases I am interested in subjects after they receive the core interest treatments in phase 2, and depict these groups s, e, c.[13] By using two different types of declared core interests, I make sure that subjects' prior beliefs about ethnic or security issues are not driving the result.

Table 4: Treatment Groups

	Ethnic Military Dispute	Security Military Dispute
Ethnic Core Interest	eE: Consistent Ethnic	eS: Inconsistent
Security Core Interest	sE: Inconsistent	sS: Consistent Security
Control	cS: Control	cE: Control

4.3 Response and Measurement

Subjects were asked standardized questions after each phase that reflect the hypotheses of my theory. Subjects were prompted by: "What is the percentage probability that the following statements are true?" Responses were recorded using a slide rule from 0% to 100% that moved in 5% increments. I chose this response method rather than a 7-point index

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[12]Table 11 demonstrates that the effects hold when I consider the nationalist message and security message separately

[13]After manipulation and selection checks, consistent = 29, inconsistent = 31, control = 33.

for reasons that are peculiar to the subject pool. Each Agency uses a different lexicon to describe probabilities. The CIA uses a confidence scale, Hill staffers and diplomats describe probabilities with no official standard. I did not want to favor one group over another. Second, there is much debate about what confidence levels mean. For some, the level of confidence refers to the primary source material. Thus, low confidence that an assertion is true, can refer to either the credibility of the source, or that the assertion is false. I chose 5% increments because some critical numbers move along that scale. But I wanted to avoid trivially small choices that would distract subjects.[14]

Since I randomized treatment on a non-random sample, I report the p-value derived from the permutation test of group means suggested by Strasser and Weber (1999). The test identifies how confident a researcher can be that the treatment had a causal effect on the responses of a non-random sample conditional on the responses observed and the independence of the in-sample randomization. Among the many advantages of permutation tests is that inferences are robust to small sample sizes.[15]

I test my hypotheses using two questions:

> **A**: Bandaria will use military force to expand its borders whenever the opportunity presents itself.

> **B**: Bandaria will use military force to achieve its core foreign policy objectives.

Hypothesis 1 and 2 focus on beliefs about strategic intentions. I therefore focus on responses to question **A**. To test hypothesis 1, I compare those who observed an inconsistent treatment (eS, sE) to those that observed a consistent treatment (eE, sS). I measure the mean differences between how these subjects responded to **A**. I expect that:

$$\mu(Inconsistent) > \mu(Consistent). \tag{1}$$

---

[14]See discussion between Broockman, Kalla, and Aronow (2015) and Lupton and Jacoby (2016) for problems and resolutions to feeling thermometers.

[15]For an explanation of why they are superior to t-tests see Ludbrook and Dudley (1998). The p-values are interpreted like those from t-tests. Using a t-test instead of the permutation test improves the result reported in the paper.

where μ reflects the group average and subscript refer to responses at different phases of the experiment.

To test hypothesis 2, I compare subjects that observed an consistent treatment (eE, sS) to those that were not told Bandaria had well-defined core interests (cS, cE). I expect that:

$$\mu(Control) > \mu(Consistent). \tag{2}$$

Hypothesis 3 and 4 focus on resolve to fight for core interests. I therefore focus on responses to question **B**. To test hypothesis 3, I compare those who received an inconsistent (eS, sE) to those that received a consistent treatment (eE, sS). I expect that:

$$\mu(Consistent) > \mu(Inconsistent). \tag{3}$$

To test hypothesis 4, I compare subjects that observed a consistent treatment (eS, sE) to those that were not told Bandaria had well-defined core interests (cS, cE). I expect that:

$$\mu(Consistent) > \mu(Control). \tag{4}$$

I also formed expectations about many null hypotheses that I represented in Table 2. Although I cannot test nulls formally, I report the p-values of these tests to demonstrate I do not get significant findings when I don't expect them.

Finally, I compute the difference between a subject's response following phase 2 of the experiment from that same subject's response following phase 3, then plot the individual differences by treatment group. I do this for two reason. First, since the samples are small, it is possible that a few individuals with large changes drive the results. Plotting the differences, I can demonstrate that no single individual drives the result. Second, plotting the information this way makes explicit that the effect of one treatment causes subjects to update differently to different questions.

5 Results

I visually represent the results in Figure 2. Panel A and Panel B correspond to question **A** and **B** respectively. The x-axis reflects a respondent's score to the question. I break-out responses into the three groups I make predictions about. The defender's assessment when the challenger: (1) fights for core interests; (2) fights for peripheral interests; or (3) fights when core/peripheral interests are undefined. Each panel plots the density of responses for these groups. Below the density plots are coefficient plots that summarize the mean and 95% confidence intervals of each treatment group.

Starting with Panel A, I confirm my expectations about how defenders update beliefs about the challenger's strategic intentions. Subjects that observed Bandaria fight for peripheral interests were more confident that Bandaria was resolved to fight opportunistically than those that observed Bandaria fight for a core interest. In contrast, there was no difference between subjects that observed Bandaria fight for peripheral interests and and those that had no information about Bandaria's core interests.

Turning to Panel B, I confirm my expectations about inferences relating to the challenger's resolve. Subjects that observed Bandaria fight for a core interest were more confident that Bandaria is resolved to fight for core interests than those that observed Bandaria fight for a peripheral interests, or those who had no information about Bandaria's core interests. In contrast, there is no difference between those that observed Bandaria fight for peripheral interests and those who had no information about Bandaria's core interests.

To increase my confidence that these results are not driven by a small sample size, or a confounding effect, I contrast my different predictions by reporting the p-values derived from permutation tests for each two-way comparison in Table 3. Each number reports the p-value that corresponds with the level of confidence I require to reject that the group means of the row and column are different. The top number in the box tests Question **A**, the bottom number tests **B**. I kept the same structure as Table 2 so readers can compare the

Figure 2: Beliefs about intentions and resolve given different histories of fighting

(a) Responses to question **A** about strategic intentions.
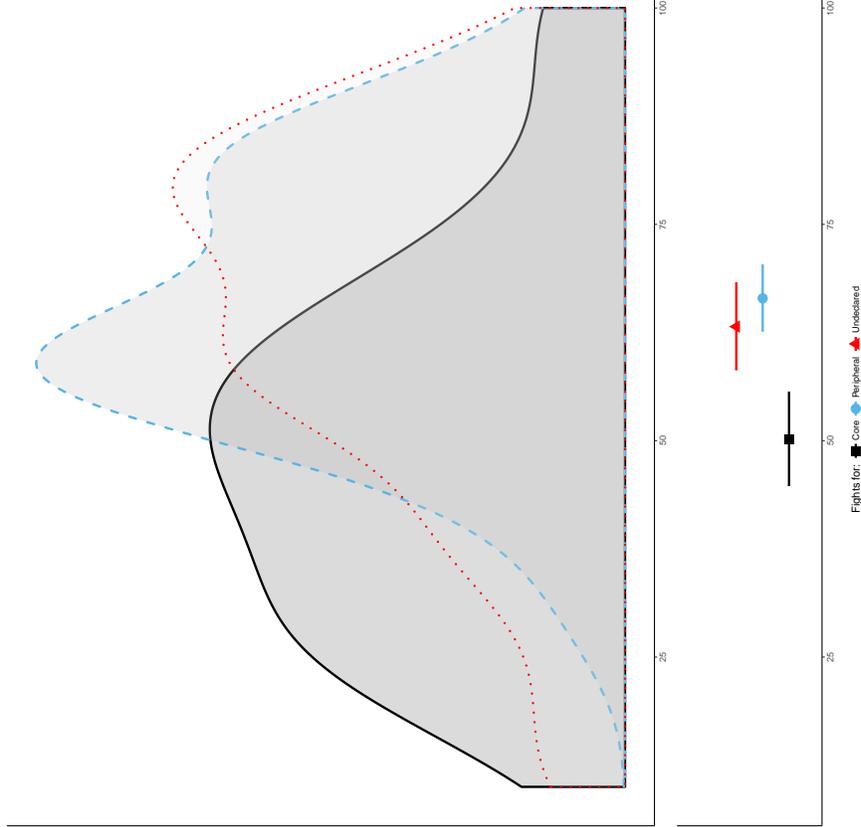
(b) Response to question **B** about resolve to fight.
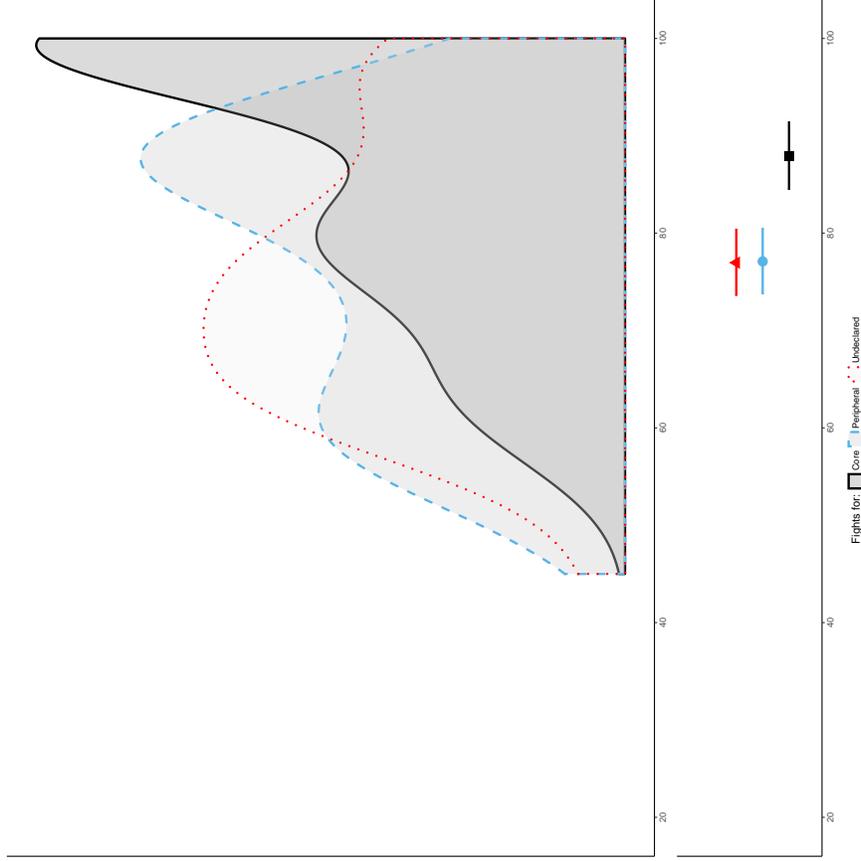
Responses are measured in % pr. True. They are broken down into 3 treatment groups and the pre-treatment condition. Distribution of responses plotted above. Mean with 95% confidence plotted below.

predictions and results easily. For all the cases that I expect a significant difference, I am able to reject the null hypothesis with 99% confidence. By contrast, when I expect to see no difference between treatment groups, I require 20% confidence to reject the null hypothesis — well bellow the conventional 95% threshold. These results suggest that when I expect to see differences between treatment groups, I see them with very high confidence, but when I expect to see similarities, I require implausibly low confidence levels to reject the null hypothesis.

Finally I report changes in responses across different phases of the experiment in Figure 3. Panel A plots the mean and 95% confidence intervals broken out by the three treatment groups. The top row reports responses to **B**, the bottom row reports responses to **A**. I stacked responses so it is easy to compare how the same treatment group responds differently to different questions. Subjects that observed Bandaria fight for a core interest (black square) increased their confidence that Bandaria was highly resolved to fight for core interests more than they increased their confidence that Bandaria was willing to fight opportunistically. The opposite is true for subjects that observed Bandaria fight for a peripheral interest (blue dot). When Bandaria's core interests are not defined (the red triangle) subjects update their responses to both questions the same way following a military intervention.

Panel B plots the distribution of responses. These plots increase our confidence for two reasons. First, they demonstrate that the group effects are not driven by a few outliers or polarized responses. Rather, when I expect that subjects will not update their beliefs, responses are amassed around 0, demonstrating that most subjects did not alter their beliefs. By contrast, when I expect subjects to update their beliefs, responses are distributed across positive numbers.

When I expect subjects to update their beliefs, there is wide variance in how much they update. This result may clarify how my theory relates to research on the effects of personal characteristics on leadership decision-making (cf Saunders, 2011; Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza, 2009). If subjects' priors are informed by individual experiences, then how much

Figure 3: Changing Responses Across Time

(a) 95% Confidence Intervals.
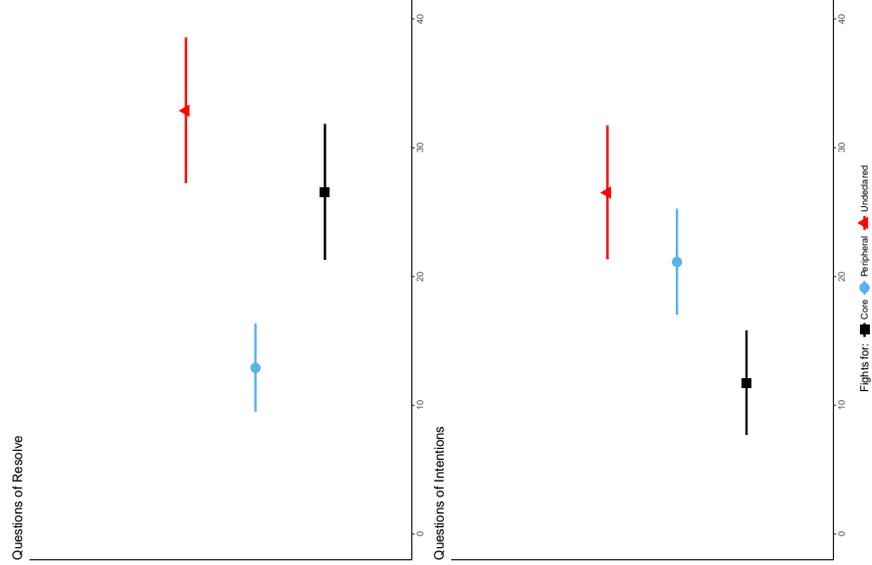
(b) Distribution of Responses.
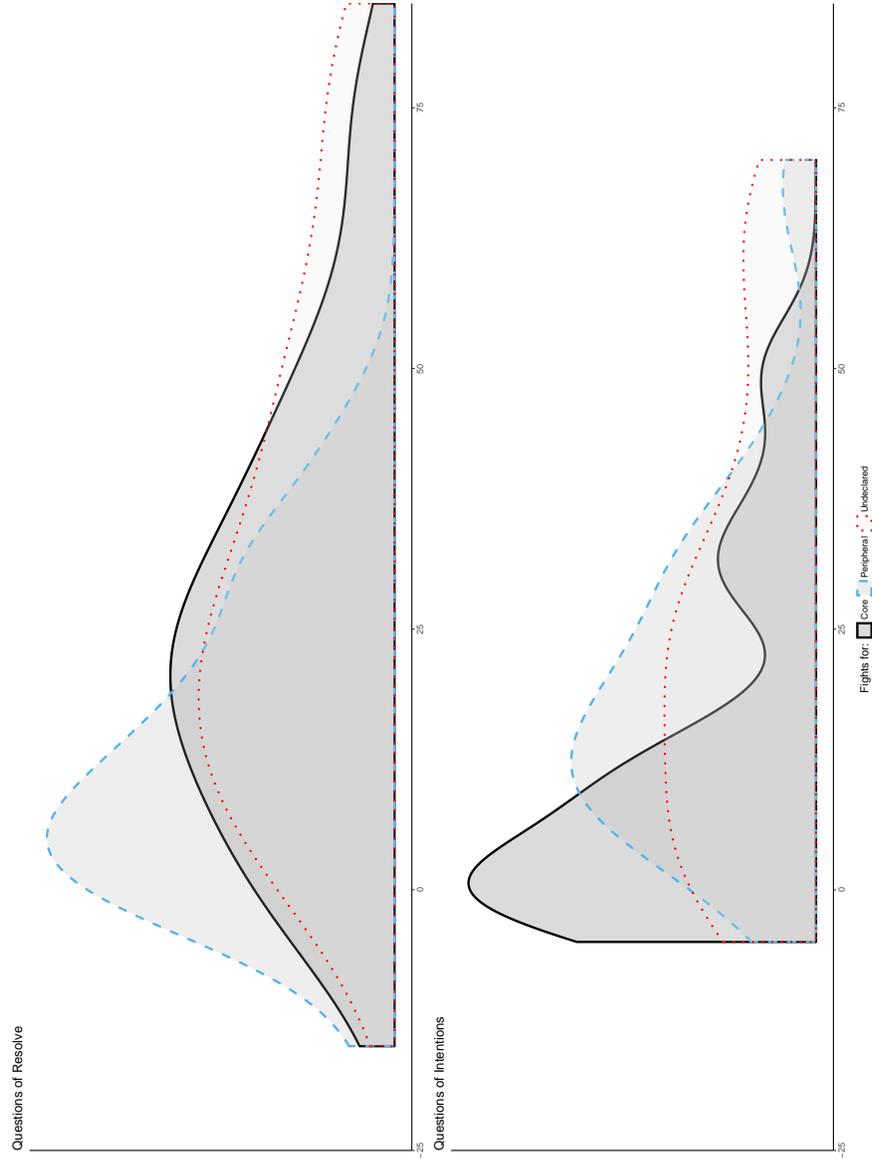
Responses are measured in changes in % pr. True from the second to third phase of the experiment. They are broken down into 3 treatment groups. Distribution of responses plotted above. Mean with 95% confidence plotted below.

they alter their beliefs given the same event will vary. However, whether or not they change their beliefs at all, depends on whether or not fighting erupts over a core or peripheral interest. One interpretation of my finding, is that my theory provides an average baseline around which personal experiences may cause responses to vary.[16]

5.1 Further Analysis

In Appendix B.7 I break down the results by the different diplomatic justifications. I show that if I constrain the analysis to either the ethnic or security justification that the result is robust. I use a variety of regression analyses to show that design features, including survey duration, sampling method, treatment assignment do not effect the result. I then used regression to explore if biographical features influenced the effect of treatment. I found that the treatment was robust when covariates were included and the results are consistent with my main findings.

6 Discussion

I developed a framework to understand the conditions under which states cultivate reputations for resolve and limited intentions. I argued that the context of what states are fighting over matters. In particular, states that fight over their core interests generate a reputation for resolve to fight for core interests in the future. States that fight for their peripheral interests cultivate a reputation as greedy. When core interests are undefined it is difficult to cultivate a reputation from crisis behavior.

I provided causal evidence to support my framework that directly observes how elites process information and form beliefs about national security crises. The empirics import recent advances in elite survey experiments from from medical, legal and business research. These techniques use in sample randomization on a realistic vignette to provide strong in-

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[16]The regression analysis in Appendix B.7 explores which inconsistent treatments have the largest effect.

ternal validity. However, they also leverage sampling and solicitation methods, biographical checks, and other features to increase my confidence that the results should generalize.

This line of research has vital implications for American policy-makers who care intensely about the signals they send from their crisis behavior, and the inferences they can draw from how their rivals make threats. Past scholars have suggested that inferences are impossible, or cannot differentiate between China's decision to fight for Taiwan and Russia's decision to fight in Syria. This project takes seriously the context in which crises emerge. It paves the way for academics and policy-makers to integrate strategic dynamics and situational factors such as long-standings claims and the nature of the crisis.

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A Appendix A: Survey Text

Below is the text that subject see in the experiment. Each section corresponds with a screen in the experiment.

Screen 1: Introduction

This exercise simulates an intelligence assessment. The scenario is fictitious and not designed to resemble any particular country. However, all the information draws from war game scenarios that senior decision-makers participate in.

By taking this exercise seriously you will improve how we, as policy-makers and intelligence professionals, estimate the intentions of other countries.

Screen 2: Prompt

The Task

The country of Bandaria is experiencing unprecedented economic growth. We know very little about Bandaria's long-term foreign policy goals.

Later this year, the U.S. President will meet the Bandarian Prime Minister. Before that meeting, the president needs information about Bandaria's foreign policy interests and their willingness to use force.

Evaluate the following information and provide an assessment of Bandaria's long-term intentions.

Slide 3: Baseline Vignette

Economic Trends

In the next 50 years, Bandaria will become one of the largest economies in the world. Bandaria's projected growth is compared to the United States' in the figure below.

Figure 4: Comparing the United States to Bandaria on GDP Growth and Military Expenditure.
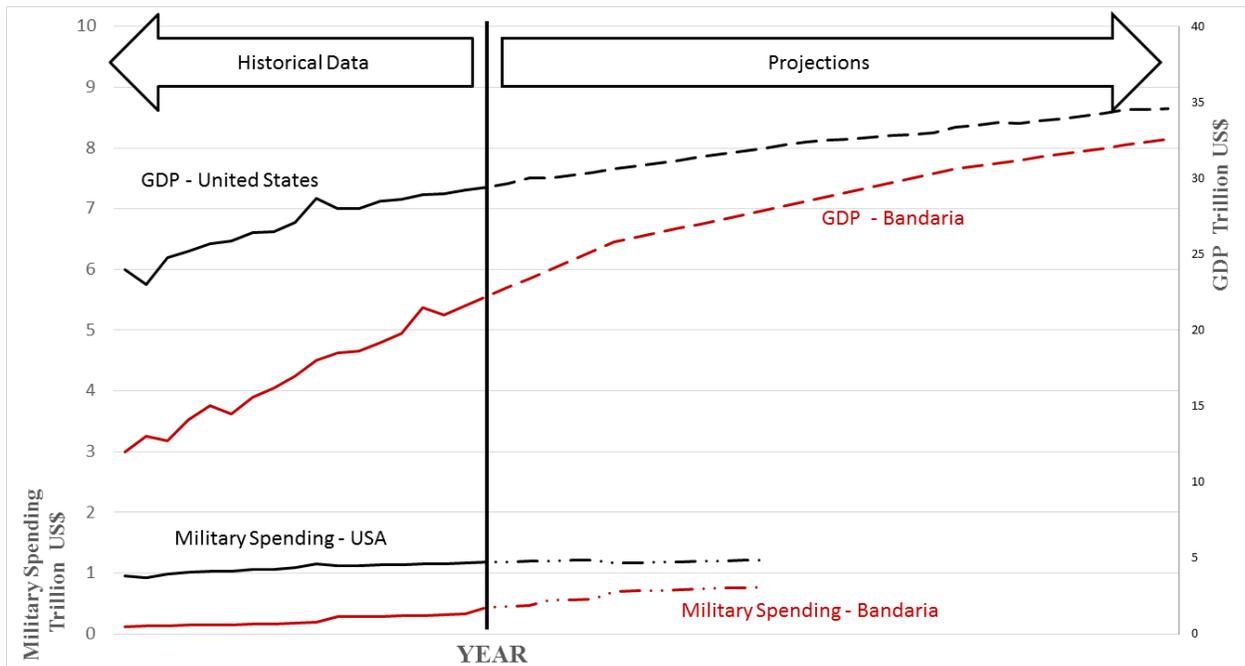
Military Trends

Last year, Bandaria announced it will spend 2.6% of GDP on military modernization over the next decade. If Bandaria increases military spending as they project, they will be the largest military power on their continent in 10 years, although still much weaker than the United States.

Experts disagree about the trajectory of Bandaria's military growth beyond 10 years. Some think Bandaria has aggressive long-term intentions. They note that Bandaria has the resources to increase military spending long into the future. Some think Bandaria has benign long-term intentions. They note Bandaria would prefer to spend their surplus on domestic programs after an initial military modernization effort.

Political Trends

Experts do not regard Bandaria as democratic. Bandarians elect a Prime Minister through competitive single-party elections. However, the Prime Minister shares power with the Bandarian King.

The government is popular. The Prime Minister has stamped out local corruption and put in place welfare reforms to lift the poorest citizens out of poverty. 90% of Bandarians belong to the same ethnic and religious group. The minorities are well integrated into society. Regional experts agree that the system of government will remain stable over the next thirty years.

Figure 5: Regional Map

Surrounding Countries

Bandaria is situated on a continent with three other countries: Arcadia, Lakesh and New Kasper.

There are no significant natural resource deposits on the continent.

Trade and Diplomacy

Bandaria exchanges diplomats with all its regional neighbors as well as many other countries. It is a member of the United Nations and other international organizations.

Bandaria benefits from strong trade ties with its regional neighbors, the United States and many other countries.

Possible Strategic Tensions

- One province of Arcadia, called Greywall, is populated mainly by ethnic Bandarians. Ethnic Bandarians complain that they are treated as second class citizens in Arcadia. Ethnic Bandarians in Greywall are, on average, of lower socio-economic status than native Arcadians. There is no concentration of ethnic Bandarians elsewhere in the region.

- The Lebang Bay contains the only deep water ports on the continent. It is the major trade thoroughfare and strategic choke point in the region. New Kasper controls the Lebang Bay and governs the territory that surrounds it. 50 years ago, New Kasper and Bandaria disputed fishing rights off their coast. During that dispute, New Kasper blocked Bandarian trade through the Lebang Bay for one week. The effect on the Bandarian economy was enormous. Bandaria and New Kasper have resolved their disputes and now have normal trade and diplomatic relations. Bandaria faces no other key security vulnerabilities elsewhere in the region.

Screen 4: Baseline Response

A.0.1 Assessment Based On Available Information

Military analysts warn that Bandaria will soon be powerful enough to revise the international status-quo if it wants to. The question is: does it want to?

Based on the information you've seen, provide an assessment of Bandaria's intentions.

You will be asked to write your assessment in your own words and answer some standardized questions.

Note: A summary of what you've read so far is below, but you can review all the information by clicking here.

[**Question**] What is your assessment of Bandaria's long-term intentions?

[Text Box]

[**Prompt**] What is the percentage probability that the following statements are true?

Move the slider towards certainly true (100%) or certainly false (0%) based on how confident you are that the statement is true.

- No matter what territorial concessions are made Bandaria will demand more if it is given the opportunity to do so.

- Bandaria will use military force to achieve its core foreign policy objectives.

- Bandaria will use military force to expand its borders whenever the opportunity presents itself.

- Although there are many military objectives that Bandaria might pursue, a single target stands out as the most likely.

[slide rules 0-100 that move in 5 point increments. Labeled Certainly False, Certainly True at endpoints]

[Question]In the last question you were asked to think about a most likely target. Click on the map where that most likely target is.

[Click-Map of Bandaria]

[Question] Once Bandaria achieves this objective, it will stop making demands.

Screen 5: Treatment 1 + Response 2

A.0.2 Notes

Subjects are randomly assigned into 1 of 3 treatments. They are then all subject to the same standardized questions that appear below. The treatments read as follows.

A.0.3 Minutes of Diplomatic Meeting

A.0.4 Security Treatment

In a private meeting, the American president asked the Prime Minister of Bandaria to explain Bandaria's military spending. The Prime Minister replied:

> We worry about our security. We have key vulnerabilities in the Lebang Bay. Although our relations with New Kasper are good today, anything can happen tomorrow. Concerns for our security motivate our military policy.

He then said,

> Of course we want to resolve this issue peacefully. But New Kasper does not realize just how concerned we are about our international security. We will use any means necessary to assure that our security is protected from potential foreign influence.

He continued,

Once our international security is assured, we have no reason to expand our military. All of our other foreign policy and regional concerns are less important and can be managed through UN participation, diplomacy and negotiation.

Experts note that security concerns in the Lebang Bay have been central to Bandarian foreign policy over the past 10 years. Bandarian elites referred to security issues in private diplomatic conversations and public speeches consistently over the past 10 years.

A.0.5 Ethnic Treatment

In a private meeting, the American president asked the Prime Minister of Bandaria to explain Bandaria's military spending. The Prime Minister replied:

Grave injustices have been done to ethnic Bandarians. We have a long history of supporting our Bandarian brothers in Arcadia. Ethnic-national concerns motivate our military policy.

He then said,

Of course we want to resolve this issue peacefully. But Arcadia does not realize just how concerned we are about our ethnic kin. We will use any means necessary to ensure our ethnic kin are well governed.

He continued,

Once our ethno-nationalist goals are assured, we have no reason to expand our military. All of our other foreign policy and regional concerns are less important and can be managed through UN participation, diplomacy and negotiation.

Experts note that ethnic nationalism concerns in Greywall have been central to Bandarian foreign policy over the past 10 years. Bandarian elites referred to ethnic-nationalism in private diplomatic conversations and public speeches consistently over the past 10 years.

A.0.6 Control

In a private meeting, the American president and the Prime Minister of Bandaria exchanged sentiments of mutual respect. Both called for increased confidence building measures.

A.0.7 Task

Given what you now know, we will ask you some more questions about Bandaria's long-term intentions. Some questions are the same, others are new.

Note: A summary is below, but you can review all the information you've seen before by clicking here.

[**Prompt**] What is the percentage probability that the following statements are true?

Move the slider towards certainly true (100%) or certainly false (0%) based on how confident you are that the statement is true.

- No matter what territorial concessions are made Bandaria will demand more if it is given the opportunity to do so.

- Bandaria will use military force to achieve its core foreign policy objectives.

- Bandaria will use military force to expand its borders whenever the opportunity presents itself.

- We can trust what the Bandarian Prime Minister said about Bandaria

- Although there are many military objectives that Bandaria might pursue, a single target stands out as the most likely.

[slide rules 0-100 that move in 5 point increments. Labeled Certainly False, Certainly True at endpoints]

[**Question**]In the last question you were asked to think about a most likely target. Click on the map where that most likely target is.

[Click-Map of Bandaria]

[**Question**] Once Bandaria achieves this objective, it will stop making demands.

[**Question**] What is your assessment of Bandaria's long-term intentions now? [text]

Screen 6: Treatment 2 + Response 3

A.0.8   Notes

Subjects are randomly assigned into 1 of 2 treatments. They are then all subject to the same standardized questions that appear below. The treatments read as follows.

A.0.9   Breaking news

A.0.10   Security Treatment

The Bandarian military occupied territory surrounding the Lebang Bay in New Kasper. The Bay is the primary security issue in the region. The Bandarian Prime Minister announced plans to annex the Bay but promised fair treatment and reparations for aggrieved New Kasper citizens and businesses.

The Bandarian Prime Minister insists that these events are entirely consistent with Bandaria's interests long known to the rest of the world and Bandaria remains committed to peace and stability generally. He pledged to respect the sovereignty of all other countries in the region.

A.0.11 Ethnic Treatment

The Bandarian military occupied Greywall in Arcadia. Greywall is populated by ethnic Bandarians. The Bandarian Prime Minister announced plans to annex Greywall but promised fair treatment and reparations for aggrieved Arcadian citizens and businesses.

The Bandarian Prime Minister insists that these events are entirely consistent with Bandaria's interests long known to the rest of the world and Bandaria remains committed to peace and stability generally. He pledged to respect the sovereignty of all other countries in the region.

A.0.12 Task

Given what you now know, we will ask you some more questions about Bandaria's long-term intentions. Some questions are the same, others are new.

Note: A summary is below, but you can review all the information you've seen before by clicking here.

[**Prompt**] What is the percentage probability that the following statements are true?

Move the slider towards certainly true (100%) or certainly false (0%) based on how confident you are that the statement is true.

- No matter what territorial concessions are made Bandaria will demand more if it is given the opportunity to do so.

- Bandaria will use military force to achieve its core foreign policy objectives.

- Bandaria will use military force to expand its borders whenever the opportunity presents itself.

- We can trust what the Bandarian Prime Minister said about Bandaria

- Although there are many military objectives that Bandaria might pursue, a single target stands out as the most likely.

[slide rules 0-100 that move in 5 point increments. Labeled Certainly False, Certainly True at endpoints]

[**Question**]In the last question you were asked to think about a most likely target. Click on the map where that most likely target is.

[Click-Map of Bandaria]

[**Question**] Once Bandaria achieves this objective, it will stop making demands.

[**Question**] Does this information change your assessment of Bandaria's long-term intentions? If so, why? If not, why not? [text]

Screen 7-9: Manipulation Checks, Biographic Questions, Post-Treatment Questionnaire

Subjects are given a battery of questions that determine (1) Their eligibility in the sample; and (2) if they paid attention to the questions.

Subjects are asked a series of questions about their work function.

Subjects are randomly assigned into 4 groups and asked follow up questions about how they use information in their work.

B Appendix B: Supplementary Analysis

Below I provide additional information about the survey experiment. Appendix B presented the text of the survey. This appendix presents summary statistics, additional analyses and also information about sampling procedures.

B.1 Sampling Procedure

In this section I explain the sampling procedure. I describe my method of solicitation, then two types of checks I used to rule out inappropriate subjects: sample inclusion questions (that ensure subjects are elites); and attention checks (that ensure subjects properly read the questions).

B.1.1 Two distinct samples:

The sampling method relied on a convenience sample of policy elites. I used two distinct sampling methods that targeted different groups of elites. I provided these groups with different links to two identical surveys. First, I sent solicitation emails through institutions that interact with mid-level foreign professionals. Three Master's Degree Programs that accept only mid-Career American Foreign Policy and Intelligence Professionals sent solicitation emails to their alumni network. The Australian Embassy in the United States and the American Embassy in New Zealand solicited their policy, defense and analytical staff (approximately 800 solicitations).

Second, I used an elite "snowball" sampling technique. During field research, I developed contacts within 31 foreign policy professionals. I asked them to distribute solicitations through their professional networks within my sample frame.[17] Employers include the State Department, Office of the Secretary of Defense, various military and civilian intelligence

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[17]To be clear, I did not ask the people I knew directly to take the survey, only to distribute it through their network.

agencies and staff for the Armed Services Congressional Committees. In the snowball sample, I asked my professional network to extend a solicitation email to subjects that they believed fit my sampling frame.

Table 5 reports the results of two linear regression analysis. The dependent variables in columns (a) and (b) are the responses to questions **A** and **B** respectively. In the analysis include the treatment — whether or not the subject observed Bandaria fight for a core or peripheral interest (the control is omitted). We also included a control for sampling method. The table cofirms that the treatment significantly predicts how subjects respond, but the method of treatment does not.

Table 5: Sampling Method

	Response to Strategic Intentions (1)	Response to Resolve (2)
Fought for Core Interests	10.426^{**} (3.759)	-16.880^{**} (5.100)
Institutional Sample (Y/N)	-2.354 (3.834)	-3.465 (5.202)
Constant	78.236^{**} (3.171)	68.128^{**} (4.303)
Observations	60	60

Note: $^{*}p<0.05$; $^{**}p<0.01$

Figure 6(a) summarizes the biographical information from the two sub-samples. The snowball sample had considerably less military experience then the institutional sample, and worked in civilian government agencies more frequently. Figure 6(b), reports biographical information from the NSC principle members selected by president Obama, and president Trump. The comparisons demonstrate that the variation across my sampling methods corresponds with actual variation in NSC selection.

Figure 6: Biographical information:

(a) Survey participants by sampling method.
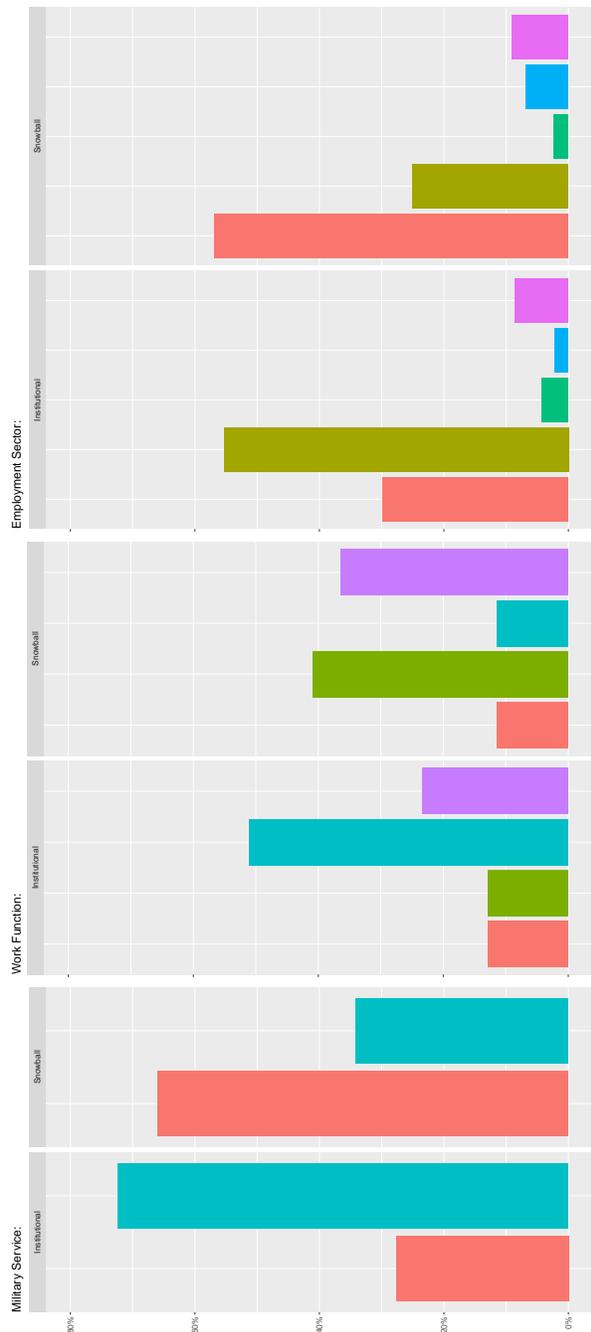
(b) NSC principals by president.
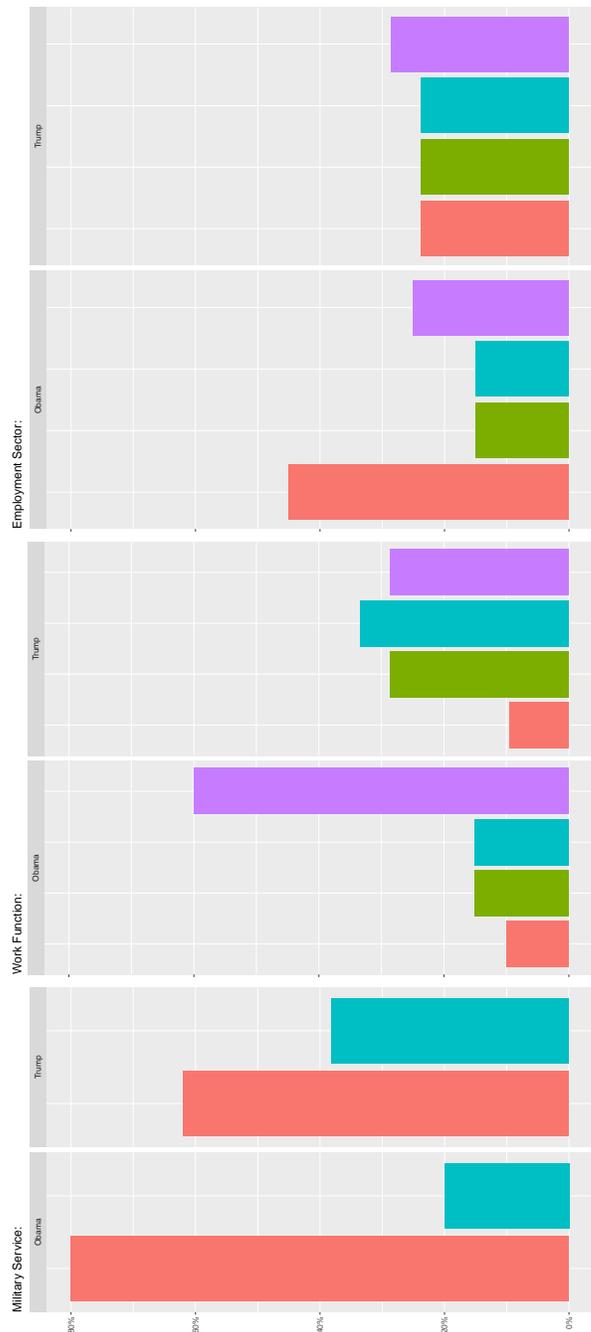
Each plot represents the percentage of responses to a single biographical question.
Within each plot, there are two panels that correspond to sub-groups.

49

B.1.2 Solicitation Email

The following text is the solicitation email sent to subjects from the snowball sample:[18]

Please take part in a study that simulates a foreign policy assessment. We need foreign policy, and defense professionals, broadly defined, to participate. We are contacting you through a friend or colleague that knows about the project and recommended you as an ideal participant.

To let you know about the survey:

1. The research simulates a foreign policy assessment. The information is fictitious, but drawn from simulations that very senior leaders have participated in.

2. It is totally anonymous. We collect no meta-data or identifying information. We are surveying several organizations and all answers are pooled. Thus, we do not know who responds or even which organization they work for. An external survey firm (Qualtrics) guarantees the anonymity of the results.

3. It takes about 20 minutes. Pilot subjects took between 15-25 minutes to complete. But all noted it took their full attention for that time.

4. The survey will end on June 29th.

5. Take it at your convenience on any desktop computer (Smartphones are disabled): Just click the link below and the survey will begin. We disable the survey on mobile devices to make sure we can protect your identity.

6. Its fun. Pilot subjects really enjoyed taking it.

Please start the survey when you have 20 minutes to focus on it. To begin, click the link below:

[LINK]

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[18]The Solicitation for the institutions is similar, and therefore omitted.

As you can see, the link directs you to [Institution Name]'s Qualtrics research account. [Institution Name] is a research university in [City]. Qualtrics is the leading survey research firm worldwide. Qualtrics makes sure the information is anonymous.

Your participation will make a meaningful difference. We really appreciate your help!

For more information please contact: [My Email]. We'd be happy to tell you more about the research.

Cordially,

Michael Joseph George Washington University

B.2   Response Rates

217 subjects clicked on the link and read the prompt. 198 subjects clicked past the prompt page to read the baseline vignette. 138 subjects clicked to the next page and answered at least one question. 131 subjects read the two treatments and answered all the questions. Since my analyses focuses on answers in the last phase of the experiment I could only analyze subjects that made it to the end of the experiment.

There is a noticeable drop-off between those that observed the baseline vignette and those that clicked to the next screen and answered one question. The probable reason is that the baseline vignette is approximately three pages long and contains a great deal of information. Many subjects probably observed this information and chose to end participation.

Fortunately, I can be certain that differential treatment effects did not cause this large drop-off in participation because all subjects receive the same baseline information. Thus, the drop-off occurred before subjects received different information.

The attrition rate between those that answered one question (before differential treatment effects) and those that completed the survey (after treatments) is just 7 subjects. As Table 6 shows, these subjects are dispersed across treatment groups.

51

	Ethnic Int.	Security Int.
Control Message	0	2
Ethic Message	2	0
Security Message	1	2

Table 6: Dropout Rates Between Answering First Question and All Questions.

B.3   Sample Inclusion Questions

Subjects were asked 2 questions to determine if they fit the sample frame:

1. What is the position of the highest ranking government official you have briefed during your career? [Text]

2. Do you work on foreign policy issues? [Y/N]

Subjects were ruled out if they answers to these answers to these questions indicated they were outside the sampling frame. Additionally, 7 subjects completed the survey and passed all attention checks but did not answer any of the biographical questions including these sample inclusion questions. It is possible, that these subjects did not want to provide personal information on an online survey platform because of their work affiliation. Thus, these subjects may be appropriate for inclusion. Nevertheless, I chose to omit these subjects from the sample for two reasons: (1) I wanted to be as sure as posible that the sample was elite; (2) smoe property of these subjects that led them to be reluctant to complete biographical questions may have also interacted with the treatment group. By eliminating them, I can omit factors that may have effected sample heterogeneity.

B.4   Did the subjects pay attention

The experiment contains three checks to ensure that subjects paid attention and that attention did not vary with treatment. First, I included attention checks. Second, I recorded long-form text responses and timed the survey to see if subjects spent a reasonable amount of time on the survey. Third, I then re-ran the survey with Mechanical Turk workers to

compare the attention statistics of elites to mechanical turk workers: 73% of elite respondents correctly answered these attention checks (twice as many as M-Turk workers). The elites took on average 29 minutes (50% longer than the M-Turk Workers) and had an average open text response of 509 characters (3 times longer than the average M-Turk worker).

B.4.1 Attention Checks

Subjects were asked two post-treatment questions to test if they read the information in the vignette. Of those that passed sample inclusion questions,[19] and completed the survey, 32 failed at least one of the attention checks. Table 7 shows that they are well dispersed across treatment groups.

	Passed	Failed
Core interest crisis	29	11
Peripheral interest crisis	31	13
Interests Undefined	33	8

Table 7: Elites Who Passed Attention Checks?

B.4.2 Meta-data

Table 8 reports the time it took subjects to respond and the length of their text responses.

Table 8: Attention Data By Treatment

Treatment Group	Median Minutes
Core interest crisis	25
Peripheral interest crisis	36
Interests Undefined	29
Full Sample	33

Treatment Group	Median Character Length
Core interest crisis	457
Peripheral interest crisis	623
Interests Undefined	498
Full Sample	509

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[19]i.e subjects I am confident are elites.

Interestingly, the subjects that observed a peripheral crisis took longer to respond than the other groups. In other settings, subjects who observe unusual or out of place information feel anxious and spend more time evaluating information before they reach their assessment. It is consistent with my theory that observing the peripheral interest treatment would behave this way.

B.5   Balance tests in Summary Statistics

The following tables breaks out treatment groups by various covariates.[20] I broke out the tables to show that there is a good dispersion of covariates across the sample and most subjects responded to biographical information if they completed the survey.

Subjects also cover a broad range of work functions and organizational affiliations. Notably, the NSC includes advisors from defense, treasury, commerce, the intelligence community, state department and so on. It includes analysts as well as operations staff who deal with more practical matters. Thus, the broad scope of subjects' experiences captures a certain amount of diversity that one might find on the NSC.[21] Further, two subjects briefed a Head of State on a foreign policy issue. 30% had briefed a member of the NSC. An additional 52% had briefed an Ambassador, Member of Congress or the Senate, or a General.

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[20]Note all subjects answered all of the biographical questions. Thus, the numbers do not correspond. I restrict my attention to the sample I analyze in the paper.

[21]Not all subjects answered all biographical information. The numbers therefore do not always add up to 93.

Table 9: Biographical Data By Treatment

	Core	Undefined	Peripheral	Total
Yes	24	21	22	67
No	5	12	9	26
Total	29	33	31	93

	Core	Undefined	Peripheral	Total
Yes	14	20	15	49
No	15	12	15	42
Total	29	32	30	91

	Core	Undefined	Peripheral	Total
Civil Government Agency	15	12	12	39
Military Agency	9	15	13	37
Political Party	2	1	1	4
Private Sector	3	2	3	8
Other	0	2	1	3
Total	29	32	30	91

	Core	Undefined	Peripheral	Total
Research/Analysis	9	6	12	27
Policy-Making	13	7	4	24
Programmatic Work/Operations	2	14	13	29
Diplomacy/Political Communication	5	5	1	11
Total	29	32	30	91

	Core	Undefined	Peripheral	Total
Head of State	1	1	0	2
Cabinet Official/Chairman of Joint Chiefs	9	8	7	24
Amb./General/Senator/Congress	14	17	15	46
Other Elites	3	5	8	16
Total	27	31	30	88

Table 10: Sector By Military Service:

	Military Service	No Service
Civil Government Agency	10	29
Military Agency	33	4
Political Party	1	3
Private Sector	4	4
Other	1	2

B.6 Dissociating Bandaria from real cases

I took several steps to make sure subjects did not associated Bandaria with a real case. I administered the survey towards the end of the American presidential primary when all eyes were on domestic politics. The major interstate incident during this period was Brexit—an event unrelated to military intervention. I chose a fictitious scenario with fake names and a map based on merging and manipulating American congressional districts. Finally, I told subjects that the scenario was designed not to resemble a particular case, but rather that the information was derived from war games that senior policymakers had participated in. In a mechanical turk pilot I provided test subjects parts of the vignette and asked them what pieces of information reminded them of particular cases. I then developed a fact base that was not similar to any single case.

To make sure these steps were effective, I asked subjects two questions after they completed the survey.

- Did you have a particular event, either current or historical, in mind at the beginning of this survey? If yes which one?

- Did you have a particular event, either current or historical, in mind at the end of this survey? If yes which one?

70% of subjects reported no event in their mind at the beginning and at the end. Of the 30% that had an event in mind at the beginning of the experiment, 3/4 reported that

they had a different case in mind at the end of the experiment. Further, there was enormous variation in what subjects identified. Subjects identified Vietnam, China, Afghanistan, Iraq, Russia, Iran and Sudan as cases. The case most frequently identified was Russia/USSR, and only 8% of participants identified it (it is unclear if they were describing Russia today or the Soviet Union).

B.7 Regression Analysis

To further demonstrate the proper application of randomization, I report regression results that include covariates above. The sample only includes those that saw Bandaria fight for either core or peripheral interests. I omit the control group. Since my sample size is already small, I consider potential confounding effects separately.

The procedure is as follows. First, I subset the data to omit those that received a control. Next, I estimate regressions of the following form:

$$High\ resolve_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Core\ interest + \beta_k Control_j + \epsilon \tag{5}$$

$$Opportunistic_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Core\ interest + \beta_k Control_j + \epsilon \tag{6}$$

Where the outcome variable is the subject's response at the third stage of the experiment. The main independent variable is a binary indicator, equal to one if subject received consistent treatment, and 0 if they received an inconsistent treatment. The equation then includes some controls (indexed by j to make explicit I estimate different models for each set of controls). I consider the following controls:

1. Message Type: (1) Security Message, (2) Ethnic Message

2. Military Service

3. Citizenship: (1) American, (0) Australian/New Zealand

4. Highest Ranking Official: Ordinal variable

5. Employment Sector

6. Work Function

7. Survey Duration: continuous variable

Each table presents the results to both Dependent Variables with the same suite of controls.

The results clearly show that the treatment is reliably consistent with high confidence in 15 out of 16 models. The one model where treatment is no longer significant includes a categorical variable with 5 categories. Even that model is significant with 89% confidence.

Table 11: Type of Core Interests

	High Resolve	Strategic Intentions
	(1)	(2)
Fought for core interest	10.940**	−16.674**
	(3.726)	(5.033)
Security Core Interests (Y/N)	1.110	−4.122
	(3.757)	(5.076)
Observations	60	60
Note:		* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Table 12: Military Service

	High Resolve	Strategic Intentions
	(1)	(2)
Fought for core interest	10.082**	−16.690**
	(3.691)	(5.104)
Military Service (Y/N)	0.918	1.690
	(3.691)	(5.104)
Observations	59	59
Note:		* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Table 13: Citizenship

	High Resolve	Strategic Intentions
	(1)	(2)
Fought for core interest	11.691**	−16.267**
	(3.658)	(5.088)
American Citizen (Y/N)	−7.266	−0.102
	(4.322)	(6.012)
Observations	60	60
Note:		* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Table 14: Seniority

	High Resolve	Strategic Intentions
	(1)	(2)
Fought for core interest	10.083*	−16.046**
	(3.805)	(5.418)
Briefed NSC principle (Y/N)	−1.265	1.263
	(2.612)	(3.720)
Observations	57	57
Note:		* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Table 15: Employment Sector

	High Resolve	Strategic Intentions
	(1)	(2)
Fought for core interest	9.102**	−17.186**
	(3.346)	(5.262)
Military	0.138	−2.130
	(3.648)	(5.738)
Other	−30.684*	−18.251
	(12.951)	(20.370)
Political Party	1.581	−10.127
	(7.669)	(12.061)
Private Sector	−19.402**	4.508
	(5.684)	(8.939)
Observations	59	59

Note: Diplomat is baseline category
Note: * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$

Table 16: Work Function

	High Resolve	Strategic Intentions
	(1)	(2)
Fought for core interest	6.780	−19.171**
	(4.262)	(5.867)
Policy-making	6.909	−6.791
	(4.782)	(6.584)
Programs/operations	0.954	−12.660
	(4.892)	(6.735)
Diplomatic	10.708	0.260
	(6.699)	(9.223)
Observations	59	59

Note: Baseline category is research
Note: Core interest treatment is significant at 11%
Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Table 17: Duration

	High Resolve	Strategic Intentions
	(1)	(2)
Fought for core interest	10.512**	−16.765**
	(3.646)	(4.928)
Duration	−3.383	−5.097
	(2.251)	(3.042)
Observations	60	60

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01