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and

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*THE COST OF EMPTY THREATS:
A PENNY, NOT A POUND*

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Abstract

A large literature in political science takes for granted that democratic leaders would pay substantial domestic political costs for failing to carry out the public threats they make in international crises, and consequently that making threats substantially enhances their leverage in crisis bargaining. And yet proponents of this audience costs theory have presented very little evidence that this causal mechanism actually operates in real—as opposed to simulated—crises. We look for such evidence in post-1945 crises and find hardly any. Audience cost mechanisms are rare because (1) leaders see unambiguous committing threats as imprudent, (2) domestic audiences care more about policy substance than about consistency between the leader's words and deeds, (3) domestic audiences care about their country's reputation for resolve and national honor independently of whether the leader has issued an explicit threat, and (4) authoritarian targets of democratic threats do not perceive audience costs dynamics in the same way that audience costs theorists do. We found domestic audience costs only as secondary mechanisms in a few cases where the public already had hawkish preferences before any threats were made.

James Fearon's seminal (1994) article on the domestic political costs of making empty threats in foreign affairs has spurred over four hundred references to "audience costs" in scholarly journals. Though this concept has been applied broadly to a variety of problems involving the credibility of commitments, the central focus of this literature remains Fearon's original hypothesis: democracies whose leaders threaten force in international crises tend to get their way because the high domestic political costs of backing down make those threats credible in the eyes of their adversaries.

This claim might be viewed in a benign light as part of a broader argument that the peace among democracies rests on their ability to credibly signal their interests and commitments in international bargaining (Fearon 1994, 577, 587; Lipson 2003). However, a less benign implication is that democracies can successfully bully non-democracies by using belligerent foreign policy rhetoric to tie their hands. This expands on Thomas Schelling's (1960 and 1966) analyses of the tactical advantages of the reckless policy of throwing out the steering wheel in games of chicken, a tactic that Fearon says democracies are especially well suited to exploit.

Despite the widespread popularity and weighty implications of these conjectures, there is little empirical literature that directly tests audience costs theory in a real world international setting. Kenneth Schultz (2001b) shows that democracies tend to prevail in crisis bargaining, holding power constant, but he explains this mainly by signaling mechanisms other than audience costs, especially supportive policy preferences of the domestic opposition party. Michael Tomz (2007) manipulates survey scenarios to show that audiences judge harshly hypothetical leaders who fail to follow through on threats, across a range of fictional situations and policy preferences.¹ But beyond a few suggestive anecdotes, direct historical evidence that democratic audience costs shape international crisis behavior and outcomes is scarce. Schultz justifies this lack of evidence by arguing that audience costs are likely to be unobservable, because democratic leaders avoid making reckless public threats in situations in which their bluff might be called.

We argue that audience costs theorists may be correct in their narrow claims, but the qualifications that they introduce mask the fact that in the real world audience costs are not huge and decisive, but in fact are of marginal importance. Real audiences care far more about the overall substantive consequences of

¹ Tomz acknowledges that laboratory-type experiments of foreign policy attitudes raise serious questions of external validity. We thank Tanisha Fazal and Robert Shapiro for very useful discussions of conceptual and data issues at an early stage in our research, and Thomas Christensen, Sumit Ganguly, Robert Jervis, Andrew Nathan, Stéphanie Pézard, Tonya Putnam, and participants at the Jackson Institute/MacMillan Center International Relations Workshop, Yale University, for their suggestions.

the leader's policy, which we call policy costs, than they do about the leader's consistency between threats and subsequent actions.² On the relatively rare occasions when audience costs do come into play, they tend to emerge in situations in which public opinion is already inclined to favor a hard-line diplomatic stance.³ For that reason, audience costs are difficult to disentangle from the costs of defying a hawkish public. Schultz is right that leaders avoid reckless bluffs, but the reason is that empty threats make for substantively bad policy, not just that leaders fear being caught in an inconsistency. Domestic audience costs, as narrowly defined in Fearon's original article and in most subsequent uses, are a penny ante consideration.

To support this claim, we will offer our own view of the role of threats in crisis bargaining, contrast it with the audience costs account, note some subtle distinctions in the definition of key terms used in this debate, discuss how these hypotheses should be tested, and review some of the most important evidence bearing on the audience costs argument, based on case histories of post-1945 international crises.

The role of threats in crisis diplomacy

The image of crisis diplomacy presented in most audience costs research is that democratic leaders decide whether to make ultimatum-like threats: if you don't do what I want, I will use force to punish you or to seize what I want. At least implicitly, this rests on the assumptions that sufficient military power is available to carry out the threat and that the threat is unambiguous in the eyes of the target, the threat-making leader's own domestic audience, and third parties.⁴ Even when these conditions are met, the target needs to weigh the possibility that the threat is a bluff. Audience costs theory predicts that targets will generally consider threats issued by democracies to be credible, because a democratic leader will choose not to incur the severe domestic costs of getting caught bluffing. In contrast, politically unaccountable dictators can bluff without facing domestic costs, so their threats lack that source of credibility. Non-democratic leaders that are accountable to elite interest groups, however, might incur audience costs if caught bluffing (Weeks 2008).

² Slantchev (2006) raises this as a conjecture.

³ In contrast, Tomz (2007, 831) argues that audience costs should be larger when the public has substantive policy reasons to be dovish.

⁴ Fearon (1994, 578) argues that the military capability balance has already been taken into account in the decision to engage in the crisis showdown.

This image of crisis diplomacy is familiar to the many scholars of international security affairs who have studied the influential works of Thomas Schelling. Writing around the time of the second Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis, Schelling explained that nuclear mutual assured destruction was making relative capability irrelevant to deterrence, which consequently would depend only on the perceived willingness to compete in risking punishment. Schelling argued that the side that could move first to burn its bridges to retreat would gain a decisive advantage in the credibility of its threats. As part of this strategy of preemptive commitment, Schelling noted that public threats strengthen deterrence by adding the cost of failing to live up to one's word to the threatener's other motivations for standing firm. Schelling distinguished threats, which he defined as an actor's commitments to do "what he would manifestly prefer not to do if the contingency occurred," from warnings, which simply inform the opponent of a contingent action for which adequate incentives already exist (1960, 123). Whereas Schelling discussed only international audiences for threats, Fearon extended this logic to domestic audiences, arguing that democratic leaders risk greater domestic audience costs if they are caught bluffing. Fearon (1994, 586) claims, "in the model, democratic leaders have a structural incentive to pursue more escalatory, committing strategies when they face authoritarians than when they face fellow democrats, and this can generate a greater overall chance of war."

In fact, international crises, even at the peak of the cold war, have rarely hinged on bridge-burning ultimatums. When Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing (1977, 213-4) studied the use of threats in twentieth century crises, they found no instances of "committing threats," that is, a threat that "creates a commitment for the threatener that he did not have before, via the engagement of additional values (honor, resolve, reputation, etc.) that would be lost if the threat were not fulfilled." Rather than locking into a rigid stance, leaders typically issued threats that retained a degree of ambiguity regarding the time, place, and nature of the response, as well as the specific actions that would trigger it. When leaders issued unambiguous ultimatums, it was almost always because they were indeed resolved to fight and sometimes because they sought to use the crisis diplomacy to justify attacking (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 215; Lebow 1981). Leaders (even democratic ones) who were unsure of their intention to fight typically preferred to preserve some freedom of action, and thus forewent the credibility-enhancing advantages of bridge-burning threats (Jervis 1979, 303). Warnings of unspecified "grave consequences" were far more common than threats specifying explicit military sanctions, which risk engaging the honor not only of the threatener but also of the target (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 220). When leaders did make threats, they left loopholes that could later

be used to escape from the reputational costs of backing away from a commitment, as in the Eisenhower-Dulles doctrine of responding to aggression “at times and in places of our own choosing.” (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 214, 216-8, 221; Gaddis 1982) Pure bluffs, where the threatener knew in advance that he would not fight, were extremely rare and couched in ambiguity.⁵

This preference for ambiguity stems from the very nature of the role of threats in crisis bargaining, as explained by Snyder and Diesing. Crises involving the risk of war are interactions under uncertainty in which the parties test whether they can achieve their most valued goals at an affordable price. In this interaction, threats play the dual role of increasing the threatener’s bargaining leverage by incurring potential reputational costs for backing down and also gathering information about the other side’s willingness to run risks. The goal of enhancing credibility militates in favor of unambiguous threats, whereas the goals of prudent information gathering and avoiding unnecessary war militate in favor of ambiguity. Real leaders, unlike Schelling’s hypothetical teenagers, balance these contradictory incentives in using threats in a crisis. If leaders were to follow Schelling’s advice and lock into positions before learning more about the opponent’s preferences and resolve, unnecessary wars would be far more frequent.

This understanding of the role of threats in crisis has two implications that seriously diminish the significance of audience costs in shaping the outcome of coercive bargaining. First, since threats are usually ambiguous, leaders who fail to carry them out can usually escape the full ignominy of being caught in a bluff. Their domestic audience costs, as narrowly defined by Fearon, will be low and thus relatively unimportant compared to other, more substantive considerations. Second, leaders generally refrain from reckless bluffing or bridge-burning not so much because they fear domestic audience costs, but because crisis bargaining is more efficient in reaching optimal outcomes when the parties make threats that at least roughly reflect their true interests, their true assessment of their bargaining power, and their true reservation points for using force. Leaders that deviate from this approach suffer in the eyes of their domestic audience not so much because of inconsistency between word and deed, but because the audience is likely to conclude that the substantive costs and risks of the policy outweigh its benefits.

⁵ Snyder and Diesing (1977, 215) give the example of the German threat to France in the Moroccan crisis of 1905.

Differentiating audience costs and policy costs

As a step toward testing these competing claims, we distinguish among three different kinds of domestic political costs that may arise through decisions about threat-making in coercive diplomacy—audience costs, policy costs, and what we call reputational policy costs.

Most literature about domestic audience costs has defined the term narrowly: “domestic audience costs—the domestic price that a leader would pay for making foreign threats and then backing down.” (Tomz 2007, 821)⁶ Fearon distinguishes between “two sorts of costs that leaders face for backing down in a crisis.” “First, there is the domestic and international price for conceding the issues at stake, which is the same regardless of when concessions are made or after how much escalation.” This is part of what we mean by our term policy costs. “Second, there are whatever additional costs are generated in the course of the crisis itself.” These additional costs include the physical costs of the crisis and the risk that the crisis will escalate to accidental or preemptive war. We also include these costs under our term policy costs. Finally, Fearon’s additional costs also include “international and domestic audience costs.” This latter category consists of “signaling costs” in the eyes of these audiences that result when a leader backs down after making “a show of force” or “public declarations or threats.” (1994, 579, 581)

Domestic policy costs are the costs that a leader pays in adopting a foreign policy that is substantively unpopular with a significant domestic constituency, even if the leader carries out threats made in the course of implementing the policy. Such costs may arise because the domestic audience thinks the goals are undesirable or unattainable, the means repugnant, or the risks disproportionate to the expected benefits. Domestic policy costs will be high if the leader adopts a dovish policy in the face of hawkish public opinion, or a hawkish policy in the face of dovish opinion. The only type of cost that we exclude from domestic policy costs is the domestic political cost of failing to carry out a threat when the target fails to comply.

One subtype of domestic policy costs is reputational policy costs. These are reputational costs that are incurred even if the leader has not made an explicit threat. As Schelling (1966, 118) says, “unlike those

⁶ Similarly, Schultz (2001a, 33), says: “audience costs—costs that are imposed by domestic audiences if the leader makes a public threat and then fails to carry through on it.” In contrast, Weiss (2006) uses the term with a much broader meaning, including government policies that permit domestic publics to express hawkish opinions.

sociable games it takes two to play, with chicken it takes two *not* to play. If you are publicly invited to play chicken and say you would rather not, you have just played.” Leaders who fail to confront opponents that encroach on their state’s interests are likely to incur a cost to their personal reputation and that of their state whether or not they have made an explicit commitment to resist the encroachment. If they have not made such a commitment, we call this a reputational policy cost; if they have, and are punished for not living up to it, we call it an audience cost.⁷ It seems logical that the cost will be higher in a case where audience costs are added on top of reputational policy costs, but how much higher is an empirical question.

Empirical claims, mechanisms, and scope conditions

Audience costs theory makes a testable prediction about crisis outcomes: democracies that generate potential domestic audience costs through threat-making are likely to prevail in crises against non-democracies, holding constant relative capability and other factors affecting bargaining resolve.

The theory also makes testable predictions about causal mechanisms. Domestic audience costs theorists distinguish among at least three causal mechanisms, which are not mutually exclusive. First, Fearon (1994, 580) conjectured that the domestic audience would feel that the leader had compromised the honor of the nation by backing away from a threat, following a widespread social convention. Second, audience costs theorists have argued that the domestic public would feel that such a leader would have a severely compromised reputation for making credible commitments, and thus should be removed from power (Schultz 2001a, 34; Guisinger and Smith 2002). Third, Alastair Smith proposed that voters might assume that leaders who back down after making a threat are generally incompetent in foreign affairs (Smith 1998).

Audience costs theory has tended to make narrow scope claims with respect to the range of threats and commitments that it addresses. Some deterrent threats are standing warnings, such as public alliance commitments that are made well in advance of a crisis—perhaps before the current incumbent took office. Failing to live up to alliance commitments certainly risks incurring reputational costs. However, audience costs literature generally focuses on specific threats or displays of force undertaken during the crisis interaction. The existence of the crisis shows *prima facie* that previous commitments were insufficient

⁷ This parallels Jervis’s (2002, 305) distinction between reputation and signaling reputation.

to deter the challenge, so new, more credible threats are needed to prevail in crisis bargaining. Audience costs theory has generally followed Fearon in focusing on these additional threats, and so do we.⁸

Explicit verbal threats and implicit threats arising from shows of military force are both seen as creating potential audience costs. We will consider both. Some studies also portray a limited use of force as generating even larger potential audience costs if the leader later withdraws from the fight without going all out to win it (Tomz 2007, 828). While we see the logic in this, we also worry about stretching the concept of audience costs to apply to any conflict involving sunk costs. One problem with this extension is that any use of force beyond the merely symbolic is likely to yield information about the probable success of using military power to defeat the adversary. In this situation, it might be difficult to distinguish an empty threat from Bayesian updating leading to withdrawal from a disadvantageous fight. For that reason, we will examine cases that involve uses of force that are too limited to provide significant information about the likely outcome of more extensive fighting.

Causal inference in testing audience costs hypotheses

Problems of causal inference have hindered attempts to prove that domestic audience costs work as predicted. Some statistical results showing that democracies tend to prevail in crisis bargaining are consistent with the theory. However, these studies are unable to rule out as causes other putative properties of democracy, such as superior policy analysis because of democracies' open marketplace of ideas (Schultz 2001b). Other statistical studies find that democracies do not have a bargaining advantage over most autocracies, but it is unclear whether this means that domestic audience costs exert little effect or whether some authoritarian regimes also generate domestic audience costs through crisis threats (Weeks 2008).

Schultz has argued that efforts to observe audience costs are confounded by selection effects. Because prudent leaders should avoid making threats that they cannot carry out, we should rarely observe leaders getting caught in a bluff. Paying domestic audience costs is thus "off the equilibrium path." To surmount this problem, Tomz (2007, 830-1) studied domestic audience costs experimentally and found that domestic audience costs are large in a laboratory setting even when perceived policy costs are taken into

⁸ Fearon (1997, 85-86) explores the impact of audiences on the credibility of alliance commitments in a broader analysis of "tying hands" strategies. Audience costs theory generally treats threats differently from promises. Without taking a position on this, we will look only at threats here.

account. In the real world, however, Schultz's own book shows that democratic leaders are generally loath to issue irrevocably committing threats unless the opposition party agrees with the substance of the policy.⁹ On the equilibrium path, democratic leaders' threats are likely to succeed not because the target realizes that the democratic leader's signaling credibility is at stake, but because the target realizes that the democracy is unified behind a policy that makes sense in terms of the country's power and interests.

In addition to looking for correlational evidence, audience costs proponents have also suggested testing their theory by looking directly at causal mechanisms. Schultz (2001a, 41), for example, offers some marvelous quotations showing that observers thought that the British government had locked itself into an uncompromising negotiating position in its showdown with France over Fashoda in 1898 after publishing its hard-line diplomatic correspondence. Tomz (2007, 835) likewise offers evidence of these causal mechanisms when he quotes the reasons why respondents in his survey said they disapproved of hypothetical leaders who failed to follow through on threats. As predicted by the theory, respondents tended to remark on the leader's inconsistency, tainted credibility, and general incompetence. We look for similar evidence in historical cases.

We are guided by the following criteria in assessing whether audience costs mechanisms are present in a case of crisis bargaining, and in evaluating the domestic audience costs account against a policy costs interpretation.

CLARITY OF THREAT AND JUSTIFICATION FOR NOT CARRYING IT OUT

Audience costs arguments need to show that a clear threat was made, such that backing away from it would constitute an obvious inconsistency. Given that ultimatums are rare, and what Snyder and Diesing call committing threats are rarer still, the clarity of most threats is a matter of degree and interpretation. Threateners who want to escape from a commitment may be able to reduce the costs of backing down by arguing that the opponent's action was not of the type covered by the threat (e.g., they are not offensive missiles), that the opponent's concessions on other issues obviated the need to act, that the threat actually had been carried out through low cost actions (we boycotted their Olympics), or that counteraction would be taken in the future or through indirect means (we are increasing our defense

⁹ Schultz (2001b) explicitly differentiates his main argument from Fearon's audience costs argument, though he draws on audience costs in a secondary way in discussing the Fashoda crisis.

budget). (1977, 216) Especially if the opponent collaborates in helping the bluffer to save face, they can claim that the setback is minor or limited (Hitler: “this is my last demand”), that they are bowing to the opinion of neutral parties (Eden deferring to Eisenhower over Suez), that the change was rule-governed and not under duress (there was a plebiscite), that the crisis arose autonomously and was not planned by the opponent (famine caused anarchic violence), that the concession is not a precedent because the situation is *sui generis*, that the concession is part of an overall improvement in relations making the threat obsolete, or that the retreat was forced not by the threatened opponent but by some local actor (1977, 202-203). Thus, the combination of ambiguity in the original commitment and creativity in justifying an escape from the commitment may reduce audience costs substantially—and if this loophole is foreseen, may circumscribe the bargaining advantage of undertaking the ambiguous commitment.

One particular escape route, an appeal to changed circumstances, requires further discussion. A leader who wants to back away from a threat could explain to his public that the threat was appropriate when it was made, but changed circumstances had made carrying it out imprudent or unnecessary. Perhaps the opponent had become too strong to resist in the disputed location, or perhaps the opponent’s ruling coalition had switched from one with unlimited aims to one with limited aims, such that the concession would have no broader implications. Audience costs theory would presumably expect the public to reject such an appeal, focusing on the inconsistency between word and deed, and feeling that the leader should not have undertaken irrevocable commitments in such fluid circumstances. In contrast, a policy cost perspective would expect the public to breathe a sigh of relief to learn that the leader was not going to follow through with what had become an imprudent commitment (Slantchev 2006).

EMPIRICALLY SEPARATING AUDIENCE COSTS FROM POLICY COSTS

Proponents of audience costs theory understand in principle that they need to show that the risk of domestic punishment comes not from substantive policy disagreement between the public and the leader but from public dismay at the leader’s empty threat. Empirically, this turns out to be quite difficult to demonstrate, because audience costs situations rarely arise when the public favors a soft-line policy before the threat is made.

For this reason, Schultz’s interesting case study of the Fashoda crisis is unable to calibrate audience costs relative to policy costs. He presents lively quotations showing that observers believed that

British diplomats had issued threats that had tied their hands in the eyes of the British public. However, he also shows that the British public was immediately “incensed” upon learning of French encroachments on Britain’s position on the Nile and demanded strong action, whereas Prime Minister “Salisbury himself was inclined to be more flexible.” Cabinet hard liners, especially Joseph Chamberlain, added to the pressure on Salisbury to stand firm. Only then did Salisbury signal to the French that his hands were tied by publishing the diplomatic correspondence (Schultz 2001b, 182-188; Sanderson 1965, 320). Thus, hawkish public and cabinet policy preferences, anchored in Britain’s massive naval superiority and its perceived stake in protecting its colonial lifeline through the Suez Canal, were firmly established before Salisbury’s committing move. Hard-line domestic preferences explain the bridge-burning commitment, not vice-versa, so audience costs theory is largely redundant.

The strongest test in favor of audience costs would be one in which the public is opposed to military action before the threat is issued and then changes its mind after the opponent fails to comply with the threat. However, we could not find a clear-cut case of this kind, which in itself suggests that domestic policy costs fears trump audience costs incentives in shaping democratic leaders’ crisis bargaining tactics. Consequently, to distinguish the effects of domestic policy costs from domestic audience costs, we need to fall back on a more ambiguous test in which an already somewhat hawkish public considers whether to punish a leader who has not fully carried out a threat.

STATE OF MIND OF THE THREATENER, TARGET, AND AUDIENCE

Democratic leaders must in general be conscious of domestic audience cost incentives for the theory to work. In any individual case, a public threat might help a democratic leader prevail in a crisis for this reason even if the leader’s actual purpose was to influence only the international audience. However, to sustain an overall pattern of substantial democratic advantages in crisis bargaining, democratic leaders would have to be aware of this potential resource and use it knowingly, or else they would underestimate their bargaining power and make too many concessions.

Audience costs theory also requires the target of the threat to understand this mechanism. At a minimum, an audience costs account needs to show that the target looked for information about the attitude of the threatener’s audience, assessed the likelihood that the threatener would be punished for backing down, and assessed whether the threatener felt vulnerable to such pressures. Placing the bar higher, the

target should also conclude that the issuing of the threat affected these probabilities beyond their baseline level before the threat was issued.

It may not be easy to determine whether the target expects a called bluffer to suffer from audience costs as opposed to policy costs. Schultz (2001a, 41-2) offers colorful quotations from the Fashoda crisis that almost make this point, but not quite. The French ambassador in London opined: “with this haughty language, the English government will cut itself off from all retreat.” Schultz also quotes the French foreign minister: “Lord Salisbury has entrenched himself in English public opinion thereby preventing his government from negotiating as long as French forces occupied Fashoda.” These quotations establish that the French saw publication of the correspondence as making a British retreat prohibitively costly, but they remain ambiguous on the relative weight in this calculation of the British public’s hawkish policy preferences and its expected dismay at inconsistency.

For domestic audience costs to shape crisis outcomes decisively, the audience must be aware of the inconsistency between the threat and subsequent behavior, and care enough about that inconsistency to outweigh other considerations bearing on the wisdom of punishing the incumbent. While these states of mind may be hard to observe in cases where threats succeed, they should be observable when threats fail and are revealed to be hollow. The most dramatic punishment would be if a leader or the leader’s party were defeated for re-election or defeated in a vote of confidence as a result of an empty threat, but this threshold seems unnecessarily high. If a swing constituency that otherwise supports the incumbent and favors the incumbent’s foreign or domestic policies withdraws its support because of an empty threat, this would strongly support audience costs theory. Likewise, any substantial decline in approval ratings in public opinion polls traceable to an empty threat could undermine a leader’s political effectiveness and consequently should count in favor of audience costs theory. But if audience costs theory claims only that domestic audience costs add marginally to the substantial domestic policy costs that would arise from backing down in the face of an already hawkish public, which seems consistent with Schultz’s position, a much lower threshold of evidence would be needed.

PREDICTIONS AND TESTS ON AND OFF THE EQUILIBRIUM PATH

Process-tracing tests of audience costs arguments can be carried out on cases that are on or off the equilibrium path predicted by the theory. We discuss four trajectories, one on and three off the path.

On the equilibrium path, we should expect to see the democratic leader make a committing threat or show of force if the democracy's military capability and substantive stake in the crisis are above some necessary level. The authoritarian opponent should recognize the democracy's bargaining advantage stemming from the additional potential domestic audience costs that the threat incurs, and consequently the authoritarian should concede. No audience costs will be incurred. Process-tracing can check on these steps and the decision making associated with them. What audience costs theory needs to show is that the authoritarian is focused on the democrat's domestic risk and is decisively—or at least significantly—impressed by the *additional* costs incurred specifically as a result of the committing threat.

If the authoritarian opponent fails to concede, the trajectory is off the equilibrium path but still amenable to process-tracing tests. In this situation, there are three possibilities: 1. the target is not deterred, and the threatener fights, 2. the target is not deterred and the threatener does not fight, and is punished domestically, and 3. the target is not deterred and the threatener does not fight, and is not punished domestically. Why might these off-the-path trajectories occur?

In the first of these scenarios, the prospect of war might fail to deter authoritarians who think the threat to fight is credible, but believe that the democracy is too weak militarily or diplomatically to prevail in the fight, or who think that the democracy's stake in the struggle is small and so will quit after sustaining a few military setbacks. Another possibility is that the authoritarian thinks the democratic leader is bluffing and will not fight. The authoritarian might reach this conclusion for any of several reasons: the democracy's underlying power and interests seem insufficient to warrant carrying out the threat (a policy costs mechanism), public opinion in the democracy is too dovish to support carrying out the threat (a policy costs mechanism), the democratic leader has made a threat that is too imprecise or weak to generate sufficient audience costs (a malfunction of the audience costs mechanism), the democratic leader seems firmly in power and impervious to audience costs (inapplicability of the audience costs mechanism), or the authoritarian leader does not understand how audience costs work (a malfunction of the audience costs mechanism). If any or all of these reasons were found to be prevalent in a significant proportion of cases, they would cast doubt on audience costs theory's claim to be a powerful, general explanation for democratic successes in crisis bargaining.

A second step off the equilibrium path would be the democratic leader's failure to carry out the committing threat if the authoritarian failed to comply, and as predicted by the theory, the leader may then be punished. Why might this occur? One reason could be that a lame duck leader—or one that is domestically invulnerable—does not care if punishment follows being caught in a bluff. This does not undermine the core logic of audience costs theory, but if such situations are common, it would circumscribe its relevance. A second possibility is that the leader erroneously thinks he can escape severe punishment because the threat was vague, leaving loopholes that might permit the evasion of accountability. This undermines audience costs theory if it happens frequently enough. A third possibility is that the leader intended to carry out the threat, but then new information came to light that carrying out the threat would be much costlier than anticipated. This is a policy costs consideration that erodes the power of audience costs theory. Even if the public does punish the bluffer, an audience costs explanation needs to show that the cause was the bluffing per se rather than the policy preferences of the public. For example, a hawkish public that wanted to use force even before the threat was made might punish the leader for diverging from its preferred policy, whereas a dovish public might punish the leader for having made what it considered an unwise threat in the first place.

Finally, a failure to punish the democratic leader's called bluff would be a third step off the equilibrium path. This could happen because the audience considers the bluff a smart, low-cost tactic (a policy costs consideration) (Walt 1999), because substantive policy considerations outweighed the public's dismay at getting caught in an empty threat (also about policy costs), or because the leader's threat was vague (a failure to fully engage the audience costs mechanism). Any of these, if they were common enough, would raise doubts about the potency of audience costs theory.¹⁰

Case selection

To test these hypotheses about the effect of potential domestic audience costs on bargaining in international crises, we surveyed Brecher and Wilkenfeld (2000) and the Militarized Interstate Disputes

¹⁰ "When...backing down is best for a state, most leaders and domestic audiences should support it.

However, when war is best for the state, most members of both categories should favor it. In neither case do domestic audiences as a group have a reason to punish leaders," says Sartori (2005, 50).

dataset to identify cases of democratic states that issued threats to authoritarian states in the period since 1945, when public opinion data is often available.¹¹

One possible source of bias in these cases is the prominent role of the United States, an uncommonly powerful actor that tends to get its way when it makes threats and tends to carry out the threat when it does not. U.S. power advantages might make it harder to demonstrate the decisive effect of audience costs on crisis outcomes, since power considerations and audience costs would often point in the same direction. Moreover, the United States' overwhelming capability might make it unnecessary to use audience costs tactics, since its military threats automatically carry considerable credibility. But many cases remained untainted by these problems. The Soviet Union constituted an imposing foe to the U.S. in several crises. In addition, the domain of cases also includes numerous weaker democracies that did not always get their way. Moreover, these post-1945 cases should be assessed against the backdrop of our summary of the findings of Snyder and Diesing's study, which included many pre-1945 crises in which the democracies were not militarily dominant.

In surveying the post-1945 crises, we looked in particular for cases that should be easy for domestic audience costs theory to explain, according to two main criteria. First, we looked for cases that involved a clear ultimatum, especially in combination with a show of force. In these cases, there can be little doubt that the audience costs mechanism should have been engaged. The Suez Crisis of 1956 is the clearest case by this criterion.

Second, we looked for any and all cases that seemed even superficially to involve domestic audience cost effects on crisis bargaining. In particular, we looked for episodes in which leaders seemed to have tied their hands by making threats or in which leaders worried about being punished domestically for backing down. Then we conducted a more detailed process tracing to see whether audience costs mechanisms were in fact significant once we took policy costs into account. The Sino-Indian War of 1962 is the strongest case by this criterion. The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Iran Hostage Crisis are ambiguous and worthy of detailed discussion.

¹¹ The relevant democracies were mainly the US, UK, and France (for which we have fairly systematic public opinion data), and India and Israel (for which we generally do not).

In addition, we looked at all the major Cold War crises on the presumption that if audience costs theory could account for bargaining tactics and outcomes in any of them, it would be significant. While we do not claim to be offering an exhaustive account of audience costs in Cold War crises, the cases that we mention below include the most obviously relevant ones by these various criteria.

We discuss causal mechanisms in cases that are both on and off the equilibrium path that audience costs theory anticipates. We begin with cases that are three steps off the path predicted by audience costs theory. In these, the democracy's threats failed to deter or compel the autocracy, the democratic leader failed to carry out the threat, and he was not punished for his inconsistency between word and deed. The British and the French in the 1956 Suez crisis serve as our lead case.

We then look at a case that is two steps off the path, where the threat failed, was not carried out, and the leader was punished by the democratic public. The 1979-1980 Iran hostage crisis illustrates this category. Although President Carter was punished domestically for his handling of the crisis, we argue that he was punished not for inconsistency between word and deed but for being too weak in general. In fact, we found no cases in which the public imposed costs simply for failing to carry out a threat.

We then turn to cases that are one step off the path, in which the democracy's threat failed to deter the autocracy, and the democracy carried out the threat. There are numerous cases of this type, but we did not find one where audience costs theory seems decisive in explaining the decision to carry out the threat. Nonetheless, audience costs did play a noteworthy if not decisive role in Prime Minister Nehru's decision making leading up to the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

Finally, we discuss cases that are at least superficially on the path, in which the democracy issued a successful deterrent or compellent threat, in particular the Cuban Missile Crisis. U.S. decision makers discussed the potential audience costs of unfulfilled threats in the crisis, but in a way that was inseparable from their sensitivity to the public's hawkish policy preferences.

Weak follow-through on a threat; no audience cost paid: Suez

Audience costs theorists have not offered examples of called bluffs leading to domestic punishment of democratic leaders. Such cases, if they exist at all, are scarce not only because they are off

the equilibrium path, but because public evaluation of crisis behavior hinges more on the public's substantive policy preferences than on consistency between the leader's words and deeds. The Suez Crisis offers an example in which the public was cautious about the use of military force, so the bluffing leader was not punished.

The Suez Canal Crisis is three steps off of the equilibrium path: in the 1956 crisis, the leaders of Britain and France issued an ultimatum to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser to reverse his seizure of the canal, were defied by Egypt, undertook inconclusive military operations in the canal area, withdrew, and suffered no domestic punishment for failing to follow through on their threat. Policy costs outweighed audience costs in shaping public reactions to the crisis. British and French publics generally agreed with the policy of diplomatic resistance to Nasser's seizure of the canal while avoiding a costly military struggle. New information that arrived after the ultimatum, especially the U.S. reaction, reinforced these public attitudes and compelled the British and French governments to conform to the public policy preference for a non-military approach.

The crisis was triggered when the United States and Great Britain reneged on their commitment to financially assist Nasser in building the Aswan Dam following large Soviet arms deliveries to Egypt. In response, on July 26, 1956, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, which had been leased to the French- and British-owned Suez Canal Corporation (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 2000, 276). Conservative Prime Minister Anthony Eden and the British Cabinet, concerned about the security of oil supplies and trade, decided to restore Western control of the canal by force, if necessary, hoping to use the invasion as an opportunity to depose Nasser (Neustadt 1970, 12; Fursenko and Naftali 2006, chap. 4). In France, the Socialist government of Prime Minister Guy Mollet, fearing that Nasser's bold stroke would encourage the Algerian national liberation movement, likewise decided on a forceful response, secretly inviting Israel to invade the Egyptian Sinai to provide Britain and France with a pretext to seize the canal. When multilateral negotiations failed to resolve the issue, the British, French, and Israelis pressed ahead with their secret plan, despite warnings from President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles that the U.S. would not support the use of force against Nasser (Neustadt 1970, 12-13).

On October 29, 1956, the Israelis invaded the Sinai Peninsula, prompting an Anglo-French ultimatum calling on the Israelis and Egyptians to order their forces to withdraw ten miles from the Suez

Canal within twelve hours and demanding that Egypt allow British and French forces to temporarily occupy positions guarding the canal. In the case of a failure to comply, British and French forces would intervene in "whatever strength may be necessary to secure compliance." (*Times of London*, October 31, 1956) On October 31 the British and French forces bombed Egyptian airfields and after several days established only a small ground presence at the northern end of the canal (Neustadt, 1970, 24; Epstein, 1960, 201-224; Coles 2006, 100-118). Egypt appealed for help to the Soviets, who threatened missile attacks against London, Paris, and Tel Aviv. Eisenhower sent Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey to insist that the British immediately halt operations in Egypt, or else the U.S. would bar British access to U.S. dollars from the International Monetary Fund and deny British credit from the Export-Import Bank at a time when the pound sterling was already in jeopardy (Neustadt 1970, 24-26). Following the U.S. threat, the British and French immediately decided to declare a cease-fire and began withdrawing their forces on November 6, 1956 (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 2000, 276). A United Nations Peacekeeping Force was sent to Egypt to supervise the withdrawal. Neither Eden nor Mollet nor their parties suffered significant disapproval in public opinion polls for their failure to follow through on their threats. Eden resigned for compelling health reasons in January 1957, and Mollet remained in office (Kunz 1991, 142).

At the outset of the crisis the British public was largely dovish. Before the ultimatum to Nasser, British public opinion largely supported the British government's handling of the crisis, which at that point included various economic and political sanctions as well as participation in international conferences to resolve the crisis. In August 1956, 59% of British respondents indicated that they approved of the government's overall handling of the Suez Canal Crisis.¹² An overwhelming majority of respondents (ranging from 65 to 93%) approved various steps taken by the British government, including freezing Egyptian sterling credit, recalling reserve forces, strengthening forces in the Mediterranean, cutting off British arms shipments to Egypt, and calling an international conference. However, when asked what action the British government should take against Egypt if the conferences failed, only 33% of respondents favored military action, 47% favored economic and political action, and 20% did not know. Of the 33% that urged military action, an overwhelming majority (27%) supported military action even without American support.

¹² All British public opinion data comes from: Gallup (1976).

While Britain was engaged in a series of international conferences to rectify the Suez situation, a majority of Britons did not favor issuing an ultimatum to Egypt or using military force. In September 1956 the Gallup poll asked: "Some people say that France and Britain should have taken military action against Egypt immediately when Nasser seized the Suez Canal Company and not have wasted all this time talking. Do you think we should or should not have taken military action?" 65% of respondents disapproved of military action. Asked whether Britain should "give Egypt an ultimatum that unless she agrees to our proposals we will send in troops to occupy the Canal," 49% of respondents disapproved, while 34% approved.

A majority of the British public disapproved of carrying out the October 30 ultimatum with military force when Nasser failed to comply with its terms. When asked on November 1-2, "Do you think we were right or wrong to take military action in Egypt?" 44% of respondents indicated they thought Britain was wrong to take military action, while 37% thought the government was right.

Following the announcement of a cease-fire, British public opinion expressed approval of Eden and his policies. When asked on November 10-11 "do you agree or disagree with the way Eden has handled the Middle-East situation?" 53% of respondents agreed (Epstein 1964, 143).¹³ Nor did Suez have long term costs for the Conservatives. In the next general election in 1959, they increased the size of their majority despite ineffectual attempts by Labor and the Liberals to revive the Suez issue (Epstein 1964, 170-171; Beloff 1989).

The British public did not punish Eden's failure to follow through on his threat to seize the canal because they disagreed with issuing the threat in the first place, and because new information reinforced that view. Eden's decision to call a ceasefire was in line with the public's original policy preferences. In the public's eyes, considerations of substantive policy costs trumped audience costs (Epstein 1964, 170-171).

¹⁴ Although audience costs theorists might conceivably argue that the British and French were not

¹³ In December 1956, Gallup asked, "Having begun military action in Egypt, do you think that Britain and France should have continued until they had occupied the whole Suez Canal zone, or do you agree with their accepting the cease fire?" The answers were: should have continued, 34%; right to accept, 53%; don't know, 13%.

¹⁴ On elite factional divisions, see Adamthwaite 1988, 449-464. The only anomaly in the public opinion data is that in December 1956, after the cease-fire but before Eden's resignation, 49% of respondents

punished because they did *partially* carry out their ultimatum, Tomz (2007, 828) in fact argues that an inadequate, token use of force increases the leader's exposure to audience costs.

This does not mean that the British public did not care at all about Britain's reputation for resolve—reputational policy costs—during this time when the prestige of the British empire was waning (Kunz 1991, 77-78). An August 1956 survey found that 23% of respondents thought that past British weakness was to blame for the canal crisis. But insofar as reputation mattered, it took the form of a substantive concern over what we have called reputational policy costs, not a formalistic concern over consistency between words and deeds.

French public opinion on Suez policy ran parallel to that of the British, being largely dovish on the use of force at the outset of the crisis. The French government had even less exposure to the risk of audience costs, however, because Mollet would have been willing to continue military operations in Egypt had it not been for the unilateral decision of the British cabinet to withdraw (Neustadt 1970, 28).¹⁵

In July 1956, before Nasser nationalized the canal, 29% of French respondents reported that they were satisfied with Guy Mollet as President of the Council, while 18% were dissatisfied and 53% were indifferent. Following the onset of the crisis, French public opinion was on the whole more supportive of political and diplomatic action than the use of military force. When asked during the London Conference of September 1956 what would be the best solution to the crisis, a plurality of respondents (41%) preferred to "entrust to an international authority both the management of the Canal and control of the navigation," but only 28% believed the solution should be forcibly imposed. When asked "If Egypt does not accept the decisions taken by the majority of the powers participating in the London Conference, do you feel that France and Great Britain should engage in military action, political and economic action, or do nothing?" 49% of respondents expressed support for economic and political action, while 20% supported military

retrospectively indicated they thought Britain had been "right to take military action in Egypt," while 36% thought Britain had been "wrong."

¹⁵ On November 6 a majority of the British Cabinet resolved to accept the cease-fire, and Eden was pressured to acquiesce. When Eden called Mollet to inform him of Britain's decision, Mollet was upset at the decision and wanted to press forward with the offensive, but lacked the military capacity to carry on alone (Kunz 1991, 133).

action. Three-quarters of the latter group indicated that they would support military action even if the United States did not support France and Britain.

Mollet was not punished for insufficiently following through on the Franco-British ultimatum. His government easily prevailed in a vote of confidence (325 to 210) in the National Assembly. His previously tepid approval ratings improved somewhat after the crisis, rising to 39% in March 1957. Mollet remained in office. The public did not punish him for failing to carry out a threat to use force, because they did not want to use force in the first place. Policy costs trumped audience costs.

As in the British case, reputational policy costs also played a role in the public's reaction to the crisis. Nevertheless, the public's other policy costs concerns outweighed their reputational policy costs concerns. Explicitly drawing an analogy to "the Munich syndrome," the French press and politicians argued that weakness on the Suez issue would undermine France's credibility in dealing with rebellions in North Africa. Mollet himself made public comparisons between Nasser and Hitler (Vaisse 1989, 134-5). The public shared this view. In September 1956, 58% of respondents indicated that the Suez crisis had a "very important" impact on the situation in Algeria, while only 7% believed it had no effect. 50% of respondents believed the crisis also had an important effect on the relationship between France and Tunisia and Morocco. Thus, the public worried about the reputational consequences of retreats, but they also saw military intervention as unwise, and their overall assessment of policy costs trumped any possible motive to impose audience costs on Mollet.

The Suez Canal Crisis thus represents a particularly clear case questioning the efficacy of audience costs. The British and French publics did not punish Eden and Mollet despite their failure to fully follow through on their very clear ultimatum. Rather, because both publics were dovish at the outset of the crisis, they preferred their leaders' policies of backing away from the ultimatum.

Weak follow-through on a threat; domestic policy cost paid: Iran hostage crisis

The Iran hostage crisis lies two steps off the equilibrium path: President Jimmy Carter threatened to use military force unless Iranian students released U.S. diplomats in Teheran, Iran failed to comply, and Carter was punished by his domestic audience, though for the weakness of his policy in general, not because of a discrepancy between threats and actions. The U.S. initiated an aborted attempt to use

military force to rescue the hostages, but Carter made no subsequent attempts to make good on his threat. Although the U.S. public punished Carter in approval surveys and elected the more hawkish Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential election, we find no evidence that this punishment conforms to the logic of audience costs theory.

Following the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran by Iranian students on November 4, 1979, the Carter administration initially pursued only diplomatic channels to resolve the hostage situation, publicly rejecting the use of force. (Saunders 1985, 73). *The New York Times* quoted an administration official on November 5 as saying, "Since we don't have the Shadow or Superman in our employ, any force would be crazy." However, Carter himself warned that "Other actions which I might decide to take would come in the future after those peaceful means have been exhausted...This nation will never yield to blackmail." (*New York Times*, November 28, 1979).

Domestic public opinion was initially supportive of Carter's diplomatic approach, but turned hawkish well before he issued threats of military action in April 1980.¹⁶ In November, 71% of respondents agreed that Carter "is doing all he can to free the Americans being held hostage in the U.S. Embassy in Iran," (NBC News/Associated Press survey, November 27-28) and in December, 76% of respondents approved of the way Carter was handling the crisis (Gallup, December 7-10). At this stage, the public overwhelmingly disapproved of military solutions to the crisis: 70% of respondents opposed a U.S. policy of bombing the main Iranian oil terminal if Iran put the U.S. hostages on trial, and 65% disapproved of a rescue attempt (ABC News/Louis Harris, November 26-29). The public supported a military solution by 64% to 27% "if it is the only way to get the hostages out unharmed" (Time and Yankelovich, Skelly & White, December 10-12). However, 67% of respondents indicated it would not be possible to free the hostages through military action (Newsweek and Gallup, December 5-6, 1979). In January 1980, 34% of respondents believed the U.S. should pursue a diplomatic and economic solution to the crisis; 37% believed the U.S. should "hold off"; only 17% supported a military solution (CBS News/New York Times, January 9-13). In December 1979, 81% of respondents did not believe "the Carter administration is to blame for the situation in Iran today because we didn't give enough support to the Shah when he was in

¹⁶ The survey results reported here were obtained from searches of the iPOLL Databank and other resources provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

trouble" (*Los Angeles Times*, December 9-12), and as late as February 1980, 64% of respondents believed the U.S.'s problems with Iran would have occurred regardless of Carter's foreign policy decisions (*Newsweek* and Gallup, February 1-11).

Beginning in January 1980, however, public opinion became increasingly hawkish and began to shift against Carter: 58% of respondents indicated Carter should have taken stronger actions to end the crisis (CBS News/*New York Times*, January 9-13), and in a different poll, 52% said Carter was not being tough enough with Iran (NBC News/*Associated Press*, January 29-30). In March, 49% believed Carter's handling of the crisis had been a failure, while only 33% believed it had been a success (ABC News/*Louis Harris*, March 5-8); 65% of respondents rated Carter's handling of the crisis as "negative" (ABC News/*Louis Harris*, March 26-30); 50% disapproved of the way Carter was handling the crisis (Gallup, March 28-31); 41% believed the U.S. needed an "entirely different approach...a more hard-line approach" toward Iran, while 38% believed "Carter [is] taking [the] right approach" (Roper, March 29-April 5), and in another poll, 60% believed stronger action should have been taken to free the hostages (CBS News/*New York Times*, March 12-15). Support for military action became stronger: 45% agreed that "it is time to do whatever is necessary...even if it involves military action," compared to 44% who disagreed (NBC News/*Associated Press*, March 20-21). In April, before Carter issued the ultimatum, his approval ratings continued to drop: 65% of respondents believed U.S. policy was a failure (ABC News/*Louis Harris*, April 8); 53% disapproved of Carter's handling of the crisis (CBS News/*New York Times*, April 10-14).

This increased public support for a military solution helped to push Carter to adopt a more hawkish approach after a series of privately issued threats proved unsuccessful. By April 1980, says Harold Saunders (140), "a feeling pervaded the administration that the patience of the American people was running out and that firm and decisive steps had to be taken." On April 7, Carter cut off diplomatic relations with Iran, issued a full embargo, froze Iranian assets in the U.S., cancelled Iranian visas, and expelled Iranian diplomats. The public, however, did not believe those additional moves would be sufficient to end the crisis: 51% of respondents believed those actions were not tough enough (*Newsweek* and Gallup Organization, April 9-10), and 77% of respondents believed "it was a big mistake not to give Iran an ultimatum in the first 72 hours after the hostages were seized," and 51% approved of a military strike against Iran if the hostages were put on trial, "even if it might endanger the lives of the hostages" (ABC News/*Louis Harris and Associates*, April 8).

On April 17, Carter announced a new set of economic sanctions and issued a warning to the Iranians: "If this additional set of sanctions that I've described to you today, and the concerted action of our allies, is not successful, then the only next step available that I can see would be some sort of military action, which is the prerogative and the right of the United States under these circumstances." Carter added: "The Authorities in Iran should realize that the availability of peaceful measures—like the patience of the American people—is running out." Notwithstanding potential audience costs, these threats failed, and on April 24 the rescue mission was launched.

Although Carter's public threats failed to compel the Iranians to release the hostages, earlier public and private threats of "extremely grave" consequences if the hostages were harmed or put on trial do seem to have been effective. To back up those deterrent threats, Carter sent the *USS Kitty Hawk* to the Persian Gulf as part of the largest fleet convened in the Indian Ocean since World War II. In response, the Iranian regime toned down its rhetoric. Khomeini refrained from threatening to execute or try the hostages except in the event of a U.S. military attack (Sick 1985, 147-8). At this juncture, says Gary Sick, Carter's deterrent threat was taken seriously: "On balance, there is reason to believe that the U.S. threat of retaliation was received in Tehran, that it was considered credible, and that it was heeded by those in authority" (Sick 1985, 149). Furthermore, comments by Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and others in the regime illustrate that the Iranians were aware of the electoral cycle in the U.S. and the effect of the hostage crisis on Carter's bid for reelection (Sick 1985, 86, 164). Thus, threats deterring action against the hostages were credible, but threats designed to compel their release were unpersuasive, notwithstanding potential audience costs.

It is unclear whether the rescue attempt should be seen as fulfilling Carter's vague threat to take military action. In a nationally televised address on April 25, Carter said, "the mission on which they were embarked was a humanitarian mission. It was not directed against Iran" (*The New York Times*, April 26, 1980). This suggests Carter was distinguishing between the rescue attempt and a military response, which never occurred. Carter had previously said that mining Iranian ports seemed to be the most viable military option (Sick 1985, 144-146). Even if one asserts that the "humanitarian" mission was in fact a military response, the fact that Carter halted the mission before it could fulfill its stated goal put Carter in a potential audience costs situation of having failed to follow through on a threat.

In the immediate aftermath of the aborted rescue attempt, the hawkish public supported the policy but criticized Carter's incompetence in carrying it out: 70% of American believed the "U.S. was right to have tried the rescue attempt and should try again" (*Boston Globe*, April 27); 65% believed the U.S. should have attempted the rescue mission earlier (CBS News, April 26-27); 62% rated Carter negatively "on his handling of the hostages situation;" 56% rated Carter negatively "on his handling of the rescue attempt;" and 72% rated Carter negatively "on his ability to 'get things done.'"

Carter's approval ratings continued to fall. In June 1980, 74% of respondents rated Carter negatively on his handling of the crisis (ABC News/Louis Harris and Associates, June 5-9). In October, 38% of respondents believed Reagan would do more to get the hostages out of Iran, compared to the 29% that believed Carter would do more (Survey by Time and Yankelovich, Skelly & White, October 14-16). In the November Presidential election, 8% of voters said their choice had been affected primarily by the hostage issue (Roper, November 15-23). In December 1980, 56% of respondents agreed with the statement: "Looking back on it now, right after the hostages were seized, the U.S. should have given Iran an ultimatum to give back the hostages by a certain day, and then taken direct military action against Iran, even if this might have endangered the lives of the hostages" (ABC News/Louis Harris, December 3-6). In January 1981, 71% of respondents agreed with the statement: "Iran released United States hostages this week because they were afraid of dealing with Ronald Reagan as President" (NBC News/Associated Press, January 21-23).

There is no question that Carter's domestic audience punished him for his handling of the crisis, but there is no evidence that this had to do with any mismatch between Carter's words and deeds. Rather, the public disapproved of Carter because they had more hawkish policy preferences and because they were dismayed by the reputational policy costs of failing to redress the hostage-taking, irrespective of Carter's statements. During the course of the crisis, the public did become concerned with the consequences for U.S. national honor, but because of the inherently humiliating situation, not because of unfulfilled threats per se (Saunders 1985, 87). At the beginning of the crisis, the public was evenly divided about the impact of the crisis on national honor: 26% believed the crisis caused the world to have less respect for the U.S., 30% believed it caused the world to have more respect for the U.S., and 38% believed there was no change (Newsweek and Gallup, December 5-6, 1979). As the crisis progressed the answers became significantly more negative. In early April 1980, before Carter's ultimatum, 71% agreed that "Up to

now, the U.S. has been at the mercy of the Ayatollah, making us look weak and helpless" (ABC News/Louis Harris, April 8). In December 1980, 70% continued to agree with that statement (ABC News/Louis Harris, December 3-6). On October 29, 1980 the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Reagan's strongest question to Carter in the candidates' debate had been: "Is America respected throughout the world?" These were concerns about reputational policy costs, not audience costs. We found no complaints about discrepancies between Carter's threats and his actions. Polls did not ask that precise question, and our survey of newspaper editorials did not turn up complaints on this score.

When respondents were forced to choose between policy costs and reputational policy costs, they tended to care more about the former. Asked in December 1980, "If it comes down to it and we had to choose, which do you think is more important in settling the hostage situation in Iran—to preserve the lives of the 52 hostages or to preserve the honor of the United States?" 52% indicated support for preserving the lives of the hostages (Louis Harris, December 3-6). Yet national honor was still an important public concern. In January 1981, 46% believed the deal securing the release of the hostages had allowed the U.S. to keep its honor, while 47% believed the national honor had been compromised (Louis Harris, January 22-25). In the same month 56% of respondents rated Carter negatively on "standing up to the Ayatollah," while 42% rated him positively (Louis Harris, January 22-25).

Overall, it appears that the public cared first and foremost about policy costs—getting the hostages home safely—and then about reputational policy costs—preserving the honor of the U.S. and punishing Iran. This preference order was reversed only when questions were posed in a way that created a presumption that no policy had any hope of securing the hostages. There is no evidence that the public cared at all about—or was even aware of—audience costs.

The Threat Fails and Is Carried Out: The Sino-Indian War

A fairly common type of off-the-equilibrium-path case occurs when the target fails to comply with the democracy's threat and the democracy carries it out. A number of post-cold-war cases fit this pattern: the failure of Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait in 1991; his failure to fully comply with U.S. demands for maximally intrusive weapons inspections and later for his abdication in 2003; the failure of the Taliban to hand over Al Qaeda leaders responsible for the September 11, 2001, terror attack; and Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's refusal to accept highly intrusive U.S. peace terms for Kosovo in the

Rambouillet talks. All of these were ambitious attempts at compellence (warnings demanding a change in the status quo), not deterrence. The failure to comply arguably stemmed not from a lack of U.S. credibility but from the inability to comply in the Taliban case, the prohibitively high cost of compliance for Saddam in 2003 and Milosevic at Rambouillet, and the target's preference in each case to fight and lose rather than give up without a fight. In no case did U.S. leaders use committing threats to tie their hands to carry out policies that they would otherwise have been reluctant to implement. Audience costs are largely irrelevant to these cases.

Among cold war crises, the Sino-Indian War of 1962 comes closest to illustrating the causal mechanisms of audience costs theory in the one-step-off-the-path case of a democratic leader carrying out a threat when the target fails to comply. The threat consisted of Indian shows of force on the mountainous Sino-Indian border, combined with an unyielding negotiating position on defining the border. The most prominent account of this crisis in international relations scholarship, by Richard Ned Lebow, has an audience costs flavor. On its surface, the case appears to provide a straightforward example of the audience costs mechanism: during the crisis Indian Prime Minister Nehru went public with Sino-Indian diplomatic correspondence which aroused domestic antipathy toward China, tying Nehru's hands and locking him into a policy of confrontation and eventually war. In fact, the story diverges from a straightforward audience costs account in decisive respects.

India released the first of the diplomatic correspondence on September 7 and November 16, 1959. Subsequent White Papers were released in the lead-up to the war (Hoffmann 1990, 68). Nehru's release of the documents "was directly responsible for arousing the popular passions which ultimately compelled him to pursue his challenge of China to the point of war," Lebow argued, because Nehru "apparently found anti-Chinese sentiment useful in strengthening his hand against Peking and did his best to encourage it." (1981, 184, 188) But later in the crisis, says Lebow, Nehru could not moderate his policy because he "became the prisoner of the crude nationalist passions he had helped to arouse." (188) More recently, Steven Hoffman has likewise argued that public sentiment made it "imperative for the Nehru government to adopt only those policies that could conceivably meet with approval from an emotionally aroused parliament and press." (1990, 68, 70-4) Nehru "is alleged to have confided to a colleague: 'if I give them that I shall no longer be Prime Minister of India.'" (Lebow 1981, 187; Maxwell 1970, 164) In short, this sounds like a domestic audience lock-in by means of an implicit, but committing, threat.

However, the reason that Indian opinion came to oppose concessions was not a concern about Nehru's credibility but the substantive view that China was an aggressor that had to be stopped from encroaching on Indian territory (Maxwell 1970, 103). Although China's motive in seeking a more favorable delineation of the border was to protect a strategic road needed to suppress Tibetan rebels, Indian opinion agreed with Nehru that China was acting from aggressive, not defensive, motives. It is true that Indian public opinion was quiescent on the border issue until Nehru revealed Chinese demands for what he characterized as a revision of the status quo (102). However, this complacency was not a reflection of dovish preferences but simply a lack of awareness that China was challenging what India took to be the status quo. The Indian public's furor when it learned about Chinese moves, says Hoffman, reflected a longstanding, widespread view that "throughout its long history China had shown a tendency to be 'aggressive,'" interpreted through the mindset of India's "great power complex," which heightened sensitivity to affronts on its sovereignty (53, 48-9). In other words, the Indian public was hawkish because of its concern about substantive policy costs, not because Nehru had put his credibility on the line.

This calculation of policy costs by both Nehru and the Indian public was strongly influenced by their unwarranted optimism that India would prevail in a showdown with China. Because Nehru and his military had an inflated estimate of India's prospects if matters came to a fight, he discounted the likelihood of China taking confrontational military steps against India (Vertzberger 1984, 129; Guruswamy and Singh 2009, 74). "I have no fear of China, great, and powerful as that country is," Nehru said in October 1959 (Vertzberger 1984, 123). In a speech to Parliament in August 1961 Nehru declared that the balance of power was changing in India's favor (128). Failing to appreciate the unpreparedness of the Indian army and exaggerating Chinese internal weaknesses as a result of the Great Leap Forward, Nehru stuck with this assessment until events decisively refuted it on October 20, 1962 (123-5). Since public opinion heard no alternative strategic analysis, they assumed that India would win the war and thus saw no reason why Nehru should give in to an aggressor (Maxwell 1970, 132, 178, 240-2; Lebow 1981, 190-2). Because the Indian public got its strategic information from India's governing elites, Nehru and Indian opinion had the same substantive preferences and the same assessment of the bargaining power of the two sides. This is a case of misperception and manipulation of apparent policy costs, not a case of audience concerns about inconsistency between word and deed.

Finally, this case fails to manifest either of the two mechanisms that characterize an audience cost situation. First, Nehru's threats failed to deter the authoritarian Chinese opponent for several possible reasons, any of which would call into question an audience costs account. Some scholars argue that the Chinese leadership failed to appreciate how Indian public opinion might act as a constraint on government policy. For example, according to research based on transcripts of a 1959 Chinese Politburo meeting on the Tibetan rebellion, "because the Chinese leader did not appreciate India's democratic and pluralist political system, he regarded all the criticism from India (including from the Indian media) as indications of the Indian government's support for the rebels." (Guruswamy and Singh 2009, 78; Jian 2006, 54-101) One PRC military historian, however, says that Mao believed that Nehru was carrying out his bellicose strategy in part to divert the attention of the Indian public from its domestic problems.¹⁷ If so, this would indicate the salience of Indian domestic politics in Chinese thinking, but not an audience costs mechanism. Alternatively, it seems plausible that the Chinese did expect India to attack, but believed that Nehru had grossly overestimated India's diplomatic and military advantages, and thus did not fear a fight (Christensen 2006, 64).

Second, not only was there was no deterrence of the opponent, but there was no lock-in of the democratic leader to undertake actions that he would otherwise be reluctant to carry out. Nehru had hawkish preferences throughout the crisis, regardless of public opinion. His shift toward more moderate language at one stage of the crisis reflected not a desire to compromise but to seek a negotiated settlement almost entirely on Indian terms (Maxwell 1970, 118-9, 131). Nehru freely undertook the crucial decision at the end of 1960 for forward military deployments that threatened China's lifeline to Tibet. "The Government was not being spurred to implement the forward policy by popular pressure," says Neville Maxwell, a premier historian of the crisis and Lebow's main source. By that time, "public interest in the boundary dispute had simmered down." (205)

According to Maxwell, Nehru's decision to publish his uncompromising diplomatic correspondence with China "worked only to push him in directions he had chosen himself...so the controls were locked—but in the positions in which Nehru had set them." (133) Nehru was using publicity not to lock in what Snyder and Diesing would call a committing threat, but simply to underscore what they call a warning. Moreover, the lock-in mechanism depended on Nehru convincing the Indian public that an uncompromising policy was

¹⁷ Christensen 2006, 64, discussing the arguments of Chinese military historian Xu Yan.

correct, not mainly on putting his own credibility on the line. This is not an audience costs case in the narrow sense that Fearon and his successors have defined it.

The Threat Succeeds: The Cuban Missile Crisis

A number of post-1945 international crises have proceeded on the equilibrium path expected by audience costs theory in the sense that an authoritarian state complied with a democratic state's threat. But in fact these cases had little to do with the causal mechanism stipulated in the strictly stated version of audience costs theory. Often the military balance favored the democratic power, so the target backed down. Domestic politics frequently did not matter very much, and when it did, substantive policy views were more salient than concerns over the leader's consistency between talk and action.

Several on-the-path cases superficially fit Tomz's experimental finding that audience costs are greater in cases of shows of force than in cases of merely verbal threats. To mention some examples, verbal threats to the Communists to withdraw from Trieste in 1945 achieved nothing until military forces were deployed; President Kennedy's verbal warning about the Pathet Lao's encroachment on Thailand had little effect until troop deployments led to a negotiated settlement; complaints to the North Koreans following the deadly incident over the pruning of a poplar tree on the DMZ in 1976 accomplished nothing until the U.S. made a show of force. But domestic hands-tying had nothing to do with these incidents. Rather, the powerful U.S. military became directly engaged against a weaker adversary in circumstances that strongly implied that there was little room or time left to avoid an immediate clash that the opponent could hardly want (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 2000).

In some on-the-path cases, domestic political considerations cut against an audience costs account. For example, President Clinton threatened invasion to bring order to Haiti in 1994, deploying naval forces and readying a landing party to intimidate Haitians who were resisting international intervention. These Haitian foes, recalling Clinton's abandonment of the humanitarian intervention in Somalia in the face of light casualties, gathered on the dock and shouted "Mogadishu! Mogadishu!" Nonetheless, their leaders capitulated, but hardly because audience costs tied Clinton's hands. Only 31% of Americans supported the intervention, and even after it had succeeded, only 41% did (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 2000). This doubly undermines the audience costs argument, first because opinion was more inclined to punish carrying out

the threat than abandoning it, and second because opinion was driven more by views on substantive policy costs than by concerns about consistency between word and deed.

Though superficially on the equilibrium path, the Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1954-55, when Communist China shelled the Kuomintang-held coastal islands of Quemoy and Matsu, turns audience costs theory on its head. Instead of using threats to lock in deterrence by raising domestic costs of withdrawal, President Eisenhower publically hedged his threat in order to bring doves into a domestic consensus behind his policy. Only when he decided that mollifying domestic critics was less important than sending a stronger deterrent signal did he switch to a more threatening stance, saying that the U.S. would use tactical atomic weapons to defend the offshore islands "just as you would use a bullet or anything else." (Chang 1988, 108) When Eisenhower's nuclear threats provoked howls of domestic U.S. and international protest, the President once again changed his tack. Telling his national security team on March that war over Quemoy and Matsu would be "undesirable" because the allies would not support it and U.S. opinion would be divided, he dispatched Admiral Radford to Taipei to propose that Chiang pull his troops out of the offshore islands (Taylor 2009, 478-482). Contrary to the expectations of audience costs theory, the Chinese backed down despite U.S. public protests characterizing the Pentagon's war plans as reckless (George and Smoke 1974, 291).

The Cuban Missile Crisis looks superficially to be on the equilibrium path in that Kennedy made threats and Khrushchev backed down. In fact, grave uncertainties about the credibility of those threats belie such a simple characterization. Until September 1962, Kennedy made no clear threat to deter the Soviet decision to ship missiles, bombers, and nuclear warheads to Cuba because his intelligence service saw this contingency as highly improbable. Only after Republican Senator Kenneth Keating publicized rumors of significant Soviet missile deployments did Kennedy warn on September 4 that "the gravest issues would arise" if offensive ground-to-ground missiles were deployed in Cuba.¹⁸ This statement came far too late. Just 72 hours later Kennedy learned of photographs indicating that the Soviets had already done exactly that (Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 206, 227). After thirteen days of deliberation, Kennedy went public on October 22 with the compelling demand that the Soviet Union withdraw offense strategic forces from Cuba and the announcement that a naval "quarantine" would be a first step toward enforcing U.S. demands. In Snyder and Diesing's terms these were neither full-fledged committing threats nor warning threats, because

¹⁸ Department of State Bulletin, September 4, 1962, 450; Stern 2003, 27.

they were ambiguous about the actions the U.S. would take. Rather, they were “problematic threats,” because the threatener (not to mention the target) was unsure what he would do in the face of noncompliance. As it turned out, Khrushchev removed the missiles and warheads, and Kennedy gave him a public but not formal promise not to invade Cuba and a secret promise to remove obsolete U.S. missiles from Turkey.

During the crisis deliberations, U.S. officials expressed great concern over their reputation for resolve in the eyes of the Soviets, NATO allies, and the U.S. public. These were substantive worries about failing to resist aggression that we classify as reputational policy costs. In addition, these officials also expressed concern about their domestic political vulnerability in light of the hawkish attitudes of the U.S. public. Criticism from domestic hawks goaded President Kennedy to issue his September 4 threat, and top officials later discussed whether this threat had created potential audience costs if Kennedy failed to carry it out sufficiently. This case supports our conjecture that audience costs are most likely to arise as a second-order complication when public opinion already has hawkish preferences and pushes the democratic leader to make a committing threat.

U.S. public opinion was quite hawkish throughout the crisis, even before Kennedy made any public threats. In the wake of the failure to follow through with the Bay of Pigs invasion, Cuba was the only foreign policy issue for which Kennedy received negative public opinion ratings at the beginning of 1962. Even before the revelations about the Soviet missiles, 70 percent of the increasingly hawkish U.S. public wanted tougher action against Castro’s Cuba—not war, but measures to “starve them out.” Overall Kennedy’s approval rating was 60 percent before the crisis, rose to 76 percent immediately afterward, but by March 1963 fell back to 66 percent in part because of a continuing Soviet troop presence in Cuba. (Freedman 2000, 161, 225, 249; Weisbrod 2001) In this climate, Kennedy hardly needed to manufacture additional audience costs in order to convey the possibility that he might be punished for taking too weak a line on offensive missiles in Cuba.

Concerns about the potential domestic cost of taking too soft a line against the missile deployments pervade the ExComm discussions. Early in the crisis on October 16, Assistant Secretary of State Edward Martin opined that “you’ve got to move immediately, or...you’re going to have a lot of instability in this country,” to which President Kennedy responds, “oh, I understand *that*.” At the same

session, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara said, "I *don't* believe it's primarily a military problem. It's primarily a domestic *political* problem." (Stern 2003, 82, 93) At the October 18 meeting, Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon jotted to speechwriter Theodore Sorensen, "Have you considered the very real possibility that if we allow Cuba to complete installation & operational readiness of missile bases, the next House of Representatives is likely to have a Republican majority?" (George 2003, 115, 125, 204)

Kennedy's concern about his reputation for resolve in the wake of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and his harrowing meeting with the blustering Khrushchev in Vienna had both international and domestic dimensions. His televised statement announcing the blockade, like his early book *Why England Slept*, invoked the appeasement of Hitler: "the 1930s taught us a lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to grow unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war." (Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 246) This echoed the October 16 ExComm discussions in which Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy worried that "a year from now" the Cubans could blackmail other Latin American countries, and the President observed that a failure to act would make Cuba appear "coequal with us," or as Dillon put it, as if "we're scared of the Cubans." Martin stressed that "the psychological factor of our having taken it" meant that the U.S. could not appear to "have sat back and let 'em do it to us, that is more important than the *direct* threat." (Stern 2003, 81-82)

Kennedy's recorded *tete-à-tete* with his brother Robert on the day after his televised announcement revealed that this foreign policy danger interacted with his domestic concerns. The President told him, "It looks like it's gonna be real *mean*, doesn't it? But on the other hand, there's really *no choice*. If they get this mean on this one—Jesus Christ! What are they gonna fuck up next?" The Attorney General responded, "No, there wasn't any choice. I mean you woulda had a...you woulda been *impeached*." "Well, that's what I think," the President replied, "I woulda been impeached." (Stern 2003, 204)

Thus, the President and his advisers worried about the reputational foreign policy costs of seeming weak and about the risk of domestic punishment by a hawkish public, whether or not they had made explicit statements of commitment. In addition, they also worried about audience costs stemming from unfulfilled threats. Historian Sheldon Stern provides atmospheric commentary that helps shed light on the following smoking gun JFK quotation from the October 16 ExComm meeting, regretting his September 4 public threat:

"Last month," he began, in an almost jocular tone as several advisers chuckled in the background, "I said we weren't going to [accept offensive missiles in Cuba] and last month I should have said we're...well, that we don't care. But when we said we're not going to, and then they go ahead and do it, and then we do nothing," he suddenly became very somber, "then...I would think our...risks increase." (Stern 2003, 82)

But was Kennedy referring to domestic audience costs of his failed deterrent threat, or foreign ones? On the sole occasion that an ExComm participant used the word audience, it is in a strictly international context. On October 27, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy said "there are two different audiences here, Mr. President," not just the Soviets: "if we *sound* as if we wanted to make this trade to our NATO people and all those who are tied to us by *alliance*, we are in *real trouble*." (Stern 2003, 316)

McNamara, however, invoked audience costs in a clearly domestic context on October 16, but argued that audience costs could be escaped without having to attack Cuba: "This is a domestic *political* problem. In our announcement, we didn't say we'd go in and not that we'd kill them. We said we'd *act*. Well, how will we *act*?"¹⁹ Implying that Kennedy's September 4 statement had been ambiguous about means, McNamara suggested that the threat could be carried out by intensive surveillance, naval blockade, and a more explicit deterrent threat against the launch of the missiles that were already in place. (Stern 2003, 91-92)

Kennedy's critics, however, warned him that audience costs and other reputational costs could not be escaped so easily. Senator Richard Russell, meeting with the President just before his televised speech, reminded Kennedy that "you have warned these people [the Soviets] time and again...as to what would happen if there was an offensive capability created in Cuba. They can't say they're not on notice." We should "assemble...an adequate force and clean out that situation," or else "time's gonna come, Mr. President, when we're gonna have to take this gamble in Berlin, in Korea, in Washington, D.C. and Winder, Georgia,..for the nuclear war." "The more that we temporize, the more *surely* he *is* to convince *himself* that we *are* afraid to...really fight." (Stern 2003, 165)

¹⁹ Stern 2003, 91. The May and Zelikow transcript (1997, 113), has it as "We didn't say we'd go in or not, and kill them."

In all of these examples, the risk of audience costs was directly bound up with the substantive argument that failure to resist aggression would lead to more aggression in the future. Domestic audience costs from a possible failure to carry out a threat loomed large only because a sizeable, powerful domestic constituency was already worried about international reputational policy costs before the threat was issued. Bundy later claimed that Kennedy's September 4 warning was issued to defuse hawkish pressures at home: "We did it because of the requirements of domestic politics, not because we seriously believed the Soviets would do anything as crazy from our standpoint as placement of Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba." (Weisbrod 2001, 93) In short, hawkish domestic attitudes about reputational policy costs cannot in this case be "held constant" to test the separate impact of domestic audience costs because these underlying hawkish preferences set up the conditions giving rise to audience costs. No policy costs, no audience costs.

Though concerned about the consequences of looking weak, the Kennedys were far from locked in by reputational policy costs or by audience costs. In fact, they saw political dangers in behaving too belligerently as well as too passively. Robert Kennedy, wondering how it would look to reject the Soviet proposal to trade for the Turkish missiles, notes that the man in the street could easily think that the Soviet offer "is *very* reasonable...And we just turned it down, now suddenly we drop the bomb on Cuba." (Stern 2003, 320) In response to McNamara's harping on Kennedy's domestic political problem, Kennedy adopted a "lecturing" tone, says Stern, pointing out that an invasion of Cuba would strain the NATO alliance, because the allies see the U.S. as "slightly demented on this subject" and do not want to risk a major war over Cuba (100). Likewise, Kennedy later argued that the allies would accept a trade of the Turkish missiles once they realized that the alternative would be Soviet retaliation against them for a U.S. attack on Cuba (324).

The Kennedys frequently demonstrated an awareness of the importance of publicity as a factor constraining their own as well as Soviet options, but they sought to manage this problem tactically and not let it drive their overall strategy. Managing publicity problems emerges as a tactical issue repeatedly. The President argued that Khrushchev's proposal on the Turkish missiles could not be simply ignored because it was public (Stern 2003, 422). He was willing to trade away the Turkish missiles, and succeeded in keeping the deal private. He did not want to release a letter with a pledge not to invade Cuba until he was sure it would be accepted (334). Earlier in the crisis, Robert Kennedy worried that Soviet Foreign Minister

Gromyko would announce the missile deployment just before the President's television appearance in a way that would lock the Soviets into a commitment, and RFK suggested a quick preemptive statement (148). In all these ways, the Kennedys adjusted their tactics to considerations of publicity, trying to contain audience costs and reputational policy costs, but they did not use audience costs to try to lock into an irrevocable bargaining position.

Finally, although Khrushchev made numerous remarks about the effect of U.S. domestic politics on Kennedy's policy toward the missile issue, he does not seem to have had a coherent understanding of audience costs and was not deterred because of them. Insofar as Khrushchev took Kennedy's audience problems into account in designing his strategy, it seems that Khrushchev expected Kennedy to keep quiet about any missile intelligence until after the November 1962 Congressional elections, by which time the missiles would be operational and thus too risky to attack (Taubman 2003, 543, 555). More generally, Khrushchev held the somewhat self-contradictory view that, on the one hand, the Soviets needed to bargain from strength with Kennedy, who was captive to the "reactionaries" around him, but on the other hand that Kennedy lacked the resolve to prevent the Soviets from achieving such a position of strength in Cuba (552). Khrushchev failed to consult any experts on the U.S. (Stern 2003, 112). Foreign Minister Gromyko told him well before Kennedy's September 4 warning that the missile deployment would "cause a political explosion in the U.S. I am absolutely certain of that." But Khrushchev told him he had no intention of changing his policy (Taubman 2003, 544).

Khrushchev tried to banish audience costs and reputational policy costs through sheer obstinacy. At Vienna, Kennedy warned Khrushchev not to demand concessions that would weaken Kennedy domestically in light of his narrow margin of victory over Nixon and the strength of the hawkish Congressional opposition. Reassuringly, Khrushchev told him not to worry about a withdrawal from Berlin, because "US prestige will not be involved, and everybody will understand this." (Taubman 2003, 499)

Sometimes it seemed that Khrushchev simply paid no attention to the way his tactics heightened Kennedy's reputational and audience costs. According to Khrushchev's foreign policy assistant Oleg Troyanovsky, "It never occurred to anyone that publicizing the Turkish aspect of the deal would create additional difficulties for the White House." (Taubman 2003, 570) As the Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Dobrynin said later, "Frankly, I don't have the impression that everything was thought through." (552)

Superficially, it might appear that the Cuban missile crisis developed more or less on the equilibrium path, but it would be hard to argue that Khrushchev was compelled to withdraw the missiles from Cuba because he was sensitive to or impressed by Kennedy's audience costs.

Conclusion: Audience Costs in Perspective

Domestic audience costs, defined narrowly as "the domestic price that a leader would pay for making foreign threats and then backing down," seem to have at most a very small effect on crisis behavior. This is true for several reasons. First, unambiguous committing threats (ones that commit a previously uncommitted actor) are rare in crises at the brink of war, because leaders correctly see them as imprudent. The more ambiguous threats that such leaders actually make contain escape clauses that allow them to mitigate audience costs if they decide to back down. Second, domestic audiences understandably care more about policy substance than about consistency between the leader's words and deeds. Where these criteria are in conflict, punishment is more likely to be doled out for an unpopular policy than for a failure to carry out a threat. Third, domestic audiences do care about their country's reputation for resolve and national honor, but they care about meeting such challenges independently of whether the leader has issued an explicit threat. Fourth, authoritarian states probably do try to understand the domestic political context of democratic states' crisis threats, but narrowly defined audience costs are only a small part of that domestic context, and there is little evidence that authoritarian targets of democratic threats perceive audience costs dynamics in the same way that audience costs theorists do.

Our brief case studies are not sufficiently detailed, comprehensive, or systematic to be definitive, but they are more than merely illustrative. We have commented on some of the most prominent post-1945 international crises between a democracy and an authoritarian state, and we have built on studies of all twentieth century crises. We surveyed comprehensive databases and chose what we thought would be the easiest cases for audience costs theory, in which threats were fairly clear and the domestic political audience of the democratic threatener was actively engaged in the crisis. We looked at cases that were both on and off the equilibrium path predicted by the theory.

The fact that we found so little evidence of audience costs mechanisms in these cases suggests that the significance of the theory needs to be reassessed. We have no quarrel with the basic logic of the narrow audience costs argument, but a broader understanding of crisis bargaining is needed to put the

audience costs mechanism in perspective. This conclusion is important not only for theory but also for policy. Future leaders of democracies should not come away from their political science classes having gained the impression that democracies can safely get their way in a crisis by publically committing themselves to fight for otherwise unpersuasive objectives.

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