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WHO Recognizes Taiwan?
Credibility, Contested Sovereignty, and the Function of International Organizations

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Abstract

Contested claims of sovereignty are common occurrences for modern states. Whether over a section of uninhabited territory or an island home to millions, states often dispute the right of other governments to exercise control. Although many such disputes are managed through direct negotiations between states, some, such as Taiwan's status, require the involvement of international organizations. What role do those organizations play in those disputes and what does that role say about the function of international organizations more generally? I propose that international organizations are particularly valuable to states' credibility. Because international organizations represent a large community of states and provide a regulated platform for states to issue statements of policy, they allow states to bolster their credibility. Through an analysis of US government documents, I demonstrate the importance of credibility to US decision makers as they navigated the sovereignty dispute between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China in the early 1970s. I also conclude, however, that decisions made by UN represented a community decision that put pressure on the US officials to accept the PRC's sovereignty claim, thereby limiting the options available to the US. This dual role makes international organizations undeniably valuable to a state ability to maintain credibility but also a potential liability.

Introduction

As COVID-19 spread globally, many states turned to international organizations, especially the World Health Organizations (WHO), for guidance. In doing so, they highlighted the prominent role of those organizations to successful international cooperation. Yet, critics quickly noted that international organizations like the WHO excluded Taiwan from participation.[1] To many, that fact reinforced an enduring narrative on Taiwan's recognition in the international sphere: that it has little.[2] However, Taiwan's exclusion is hardly complete. For example, Taiwan participated in the World Health Assembly (WHA) as an observer between 2009 and 2016 and as a guest at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 2013.[3] These exceptions point to a puzzling reality. Namely, that while the People's Republic of China

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[1] "Taiwan Says Not Invited to WHO Meeting after China's 'obstruction' | Reuters," accessed February 22, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-who-taiwan/taiwan-says-not-invited-to-who-meeting-after-chinas-obstruction-idUSKBN27P03T.

[2] Sigrid Winkler, "Taiwan's UN Dilemma: To Be or Not To Be," *Brookings* (blog), June 20, 2012, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/taiwans-un-dilemma-to-be-or-not-to-be/.

[3] Ben Blanchard, "Taiwan Rejects China's Main Condition for WHO Participation," *Reuters*, May 14, 2020, sec. Emerging Markets, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-taiwan-idUSKBN22R0HM; Hsiu-chuan Shih, "Taiwan Only 'Guest' Due to China: ICAO - Taipei Times," *Taipei Times*, September 26, 2013, sec. Front Page, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2013/09/26/2003573020.

(PRC) has sufficient influence within the WHO and ICAO to prevent Taiwan's participation but sometimes allows that participation, nonetheless. While there are many plausible explanations for the PRC's willingness to accommodate some measure of Taiwanese participation, the more intriguing question regards the role of the international organizations themselves. In this example, what does the PRC gain by allowing Taiwan's participation through international organizations that it wouldn't gain otherwise?

Although contested sovereignty claims are key to some of the most vexing international disputes today, there have been few efforts to examine the role of international organizations in those disputes. Much of the literature on contested sovereignty centered the strategic calculations of either the participants in the dispute or other states. But the central question of this paper is not why other states choose to recognize a given claim, but how. How do states respond to contested sovereignty claims? More precisely, what role do international organizations play in contested sovereignty claims? And how do contested sovereignty claims shape or alter the function of international organizations?

These questions are not merely a matter of rhetoric, though they may appear so. For Taiwan, whether it chooses to refer to itself as sovereign—that is, whether it claims official independence from mainland China—is of great consequence to its survival.[4] Even for other states, how they choose to interact with the PRC and Taiwan is often determined by their ability to navigate the opaque nature of cross-strait relations. But contested sovereignty in international organizations is not limited to the outcome of China's civil war. In 1991, North Korea applied to become a member of the United Nations (UN) after decades of refusal to accept South Korea's

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[4] Scott L. Kastner, "Is the Taiwan Strait Still a Flash Point? Rethinking the Prospects for Armed Conflict between China and Taiwan," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (January 1, 2016): 54–92, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00227.

participation in the organization.[5] And, in 2011, attempts by the Palestinian Authority to become a full UN member state failed after it became clear the United States would reject the application.[6] The persistence of contested sovereignty claims in the UN makes efforts to understand them essential.

In this paper, I argue that international organizations are crucial to states' responses to contested sovereignty claims. Specifically, when choosing to recognize one claim in a dispute over others, states do not merely face a strategic calculation about the claim itself, as existing research has presumed; states must also consider their credibility. That is, reversing recognition of one party's claim or applying contradictory standards of recognition in disputes can be costly to a state's credibility. International organizations serve a crucial function in reducing those costs. By allowing a state to attribute decisions about recognition to an international organization and its internal processes, those organizations facilitate credibility buck-passing—shifting the credibility costs associated with recognition in contested sovereignty claims to the organization and its procedures. However, while international organizations can provide a valuable tool for states wishing to diffuse responsibility, they also prevent states from making independent decisions on recognition. Put differently, although international organizations provide a venue in which states can launder their credibility, they also bring about the conditions under which states feel compelled to adopt inconsistent positions on recognition.

This argument will consist of four parts. First, I will draw on existing scholarship on contested sovereignty, international organizations, and credibility to construct a theory of international organizations as vehicles for credibility maintenance. From this theoretical

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[5] David E. Sangers, "North Korea Reluctantly Seeks U.N. Seat," *New York Times*, 1991.
[6] Chris McGreal, "UN Vote on Palestinian State Put off amid Lack of Support," the Guardian, November 11, 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/11/united-nations-delays-palestinian-statehood-vote.

framework, I will examine the development of US policy toward Taiwan in the UN between 1969 and 1972. This second part will focus on the transition in the UN from the Republic of China (ROC) to the PRC. As this section will demonstrate, credibility was central to decisions of the United States (US) to recognize the PRC. The third section will explain how decision makers in the US viewed the UN and its internal rules as a viable tool to maintain credibility even as the US reversed its position on PRC-ROC sovereignty. The fourth section will elaborate on the extent to which the UN functioned as not merely a tool, but also a driver and limiter of US decision making. In that regard, the UN filled a role as a tool and limitation for US officials. I will then conclude by discussing the implications of these findings in both practical and scholarly terms, as well as additional questions raised by the results.

Literature Review

The argument I present in this paper centers on credibility. To what extent was credibility a component of US decision making during debates on ROC-PRC sovereignty? And what role did the UN play in that decision making? I argue that the UN played a dual role first as a tool for laundering US credibility in response to inconsistent policy making and second as a driver of inconsistent US policies. But before presenting evidence to that end, it is crucial to highlight existing work on credibility, sovereignty, and international organizations. This section will, consequently, explain how these three concepts have developed through existing literature and why that existing literature is insufficient to explain the importance of international organizations for states' credibility.

Credibility

Literature on credibility is difficult to separate from the wider study of signaling in international relations. Because the study of signaling has often required scholars to distinguish

between meaningful signals and cheap talk, it has often invoked the concept of credibility to differentiate between the two. In other words, meaningful signals are those that are credible. The tendency to couple signaling and credibility has led to a focus on the concept of credibility as it relates to the use of force and coercion. That is, scholars have generally invoked credibility to describe a state's threat of force. Such a threat is credible when the state initiating it is likely to follow through.

The tendency to treat credibility as one component of coercion is evident in early work which describes the concept as a product of capability and will.[7] For Schelling, one of the key factors in determining when a state has the will to follow through on a threat is whether that state possesses alternative options. That claim has, in turn, generate significant scholarly consideration with a particular focus on the conditions under which a state will have little choice but to uphold its commitments, generally because the costs of reneging are too great. Fearon and others have expanded on credibility as a function of costs by delineating between types of costliness, such as audience costs and sunk costs.[8] While these ideas have faced significant scrutiny, often on empirical grounds,[9] the concept of audience costs has proven particularly valuable for the study of connections between domestic politics and international relations.[10]

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[7] Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).

[8] James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (February 1, 1997): 68–90, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002797041001004; Kai Quek, "Four Costly Signaling Mechanisms," *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 2 (May 2021): 537–49, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420001094.

[9] Kenneth A. Schultz, "Looking for Audience Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 32–60, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045001002; Alexander B. Downes and Todd S. Sechser, "The Illusion of Democratic Credibility," *International Organization* 66, no. 3 (July 2012): 457–89, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818312000161.

[10] Jessica Chen Weiss, "Authoritarian Signaling, Mass Audiences, and Nationalist Protest in China," *International Organization* 67, no. 1 (January 2013): 1–35, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818312000380; Joshua A. Schwartz and Christopher W. Blair, "Do Women Make More Credible Threats? Gender Stereotypes, Audience Costs, and Crisis Bargaining," *International Organization* 74 (Fall 2020): 872–95.

Recent development in the study of credibility have diverged from those of earlier scholars by positing that credibility need not be publicly perceptible. Rather, private signals and communication may still be credible provided there are sufficient costs associated with failure to follow through.[11] However, this research remains focused on costs as key to evaluating the credibility of a signal. That is, existing literature continues to emphasize that credible signals are those for which the costs of engaging in contrary behavior is unbearably high.

There are two ways in which existing literature fails to adequately account for the complexity of credibility among states. First, existing literature overwhelmingly frames credibility as a modifier of threats and coercion. That is, in existing literature credibility matters because it affects the ability of states to successfully coerce one another and negotiate through the threat of force. There are some exceptions, of course. For instance, literature on international financial and monetary policy uses the concept of credibility to explain how states can successfully regulate those sectors.[12] But that scholarship is almost entirely detached from debates on credibility and signaling.

The second way in which existing literature is insufficient is that it neglects credibility over time and through iterative decisions of states. Specifically, existing literature avoids discussion of credibility as a function of consistency over time, as a matter of reputation. Again,

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[11] Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance," *Security Studies* 22, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 405–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2013.816126; Austin Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret," *Security Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 124–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1243921; Azusa Katagiri and Eric Min, "The Credibility of Public and Private Signals: A Document-Based Approach," *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 1 (2019): 156–72.

[12] Todd Allee and Clint Peinhardt, "Contingent Credibility: The Impact of Investment Treaty Violations on Foreign Direct Investment," *International Organization* 65, no. 3 (July 2011): 401–32, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818311000099; Philip Keefer and David Stasavage, "Checks and Balances, Private Information, and the Credibility of Monetary Commitments," *International Organization* 56, no. 4 (2002): 751–74, https://doi.org/10.1162/002081802760403766; Meredith Wilf, "Credibility and Distributional Effects of International Banking Regulations: Evidence from US Bank Stock Returns," *International Organization* 70, no. 4 (2016): 763–96, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818316000291.

there are notable exceptions. Some scholars have argued, for example, that hegemons are limited

by the effects of illegitimacy and hypocrisy,[13] while others have highlighted the vital role

precedent setting plays in state behavior.[14] But those studies rarely make the connection between

credibility and consistency explicit. Those that do, are even rarer.[15] Further examination of a

connection between credibility and consistency is certainly warranted.

Sovereignty

Unlike literature on credibility, which is largely cohesive, literature on sovereignty is

multifaceted and even lacks a consensus on the meaning of the term. In both theory and practice,

sovereignty has taken on several distinct but related meanings, which are often exploited by

states.[16] Rather than address the distinct meanings of sovereignty, however, it is more productive

to consider literature on the much narrower phenomenon of contested sovereignty.

Contested sovereignty appears in two notable places in the wider literature on

sovereignty. First, contested sovereignty is foundational to the existence of unrecognized states

and secessionist movements. Unrecognized states are entities that lack formal sovereignty

through recognition by other states but maintain some measure of sovereignty through their

control over people or territory.[17] Current scholarship on recognition regards as central the

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[13] Martha Finnemore, "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity: Why Being a Unipole Isn't All It's Cracked Up to Be," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 58–85, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887109000082.

[14] Elizabeth Kier and Jonathan Mercer, "Setting Precedents in Anarchy: Military Intervention and Weapons of Mass Destruction," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (April 1996): 77–106, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.20.4.77.

[15] Anne E. Sartori, "The Might of the Pen: A Reputational Theory of Communication in International Disputes," *International Organization* 56, no. 1 (2002): 121–49, https://doi.org/10.1162/002081802753485151.

[16] Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/11246345.

[17] Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012).

question of why some entities and movements obtain recognition while others do not, often attributing the results to the strategic calculations of great powers.[18]

Second, contested sovereignty is closely tied to territorial conflict and integrity. In fact, while scholars like Caspersen have argued that unrecognized statehood is quite common, contested sovereignty over territory is likely all the more frequent. The ubiquity of contested sovereignty over territory is reflected in the large body of literature on the subject. Although territorial integrity is conceptually distinct from sovereignty, it is a necessary component of what Krasner refers to as "interdependent sovereignty."[19] That is, territorial integrity is principally a matter of a state's control over its borders.

Given that territorial integrity is paramount to state sovereignty, a key theme in the analysis of contested sovereignty has been the extent to which violations of territorial integrity occur. Some have proposed, for example, that a norm of territorial integrity has proliferated globally so as to limit attempts to seize territory.[20] Yet, the existence of a norm of territorial integrity is not self-evident. Rather than being constrained by a norm of territorial integrity, states may simply have shifted the methods they use to take territory.[21] Clearly, however, practices surrounding territorial integrity have shifted and with them our understanding of sovereignty.

There is a significant gap in this literature on contested sovereignty, however. Notably, while literature has examined why individual states recognize other states, existing scholarship

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[18] Bridget Coggins, "Friends in High Places: International Politics and the Emergence of States from Secessionism," *International Organization* 65, no. 3 (July 2011): 433–67, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818311000105; Bridget. Coggins, *Power Politics and State Formation in the Twentieth Century: The Dynamics of Recognition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/12481607.

[19] Krasner, *Sovereignty*, 10.

[20] Mark W. Zacher, "The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001): 215–50, https://doi.org/10.1162/00208180151140568.

[21] Dan Altman, "The Evolution of Territorial Conquest After 1945 and the Limits of the Territorial Integrity Norm," *International Organization* 74 (Summer 2020): 490–522, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000119.

has not considered collective decisions on recognition among states. This is surprising, especially given the central role of international organizations in defining recognition in the international system. Initially, this gap may appear to be because literature on international organizations has already incorporated questions of recognition into discussion on membership. However, as the next section will demonstrate, that is not the case.

International Organizations

While the previous section demonstrated that sovereignty is reflected in a range of areas, especially territory, one in which it plays the most explicit role is international organizations. Scholarship on international organizations can be divided into two categories for the purpose of my analysis. First, the study of international organizations has strived to explain their existence; how and why would powerful states create them, for example. Second, such study has sought to examine connections between the structure and function of international organizations.

The initial puzzle that faced scholars with respect to international organizations has simply been why they exist at all. That is, why do states cooperate through the creation of international organizations? In the strictest sense, early work on international organizations focused less on the organizations themselves than on the concept of international regimes.[22] Accordingly, scholars did not limit their analyses to any single organization but rather looked to the larger system of rules and norms that enable cooperation. International regimes, scholars have argued, develop out of the interests of states, and reflect their intentions to facilitate cooperation.[23] However, the relative novelty and uniqueness of international organizations after the Second World War led others to conclude that international organizations and regimes reflect

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[22] John Gerard Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 379–415.

[23] Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

the machinations of hegemons.[24]Although Keohane and Ikenberry offer diverging explanations

for international regimes, with Keohane attributing them to rationalist pursuit of cooperation and

Ikenberry ascribing them to hegemony, both address the motivations and conditions under which

international organizations can arise.

In addition to explanations for why states, particularly powerful states, would want to

create international regimes, the study of international institutions has focused more recently on

the specific functions those institutions perform. Work on the function of international

institutions begins with the observation that they fill a wide range of roles and operate

accordingly. Building on Keohane's observation that international regimes can facilitate

cooperation, later theorists asserted that international institutions may vary greatly but do so with

the common rationalist aims.[25]

Similarly, uncertainty about the future shapes the design and function of international

organizations. In the case of international trade, states value mechanisms in international

agreements that allow for flexibility should future conditions make those agreements no longer

viable.[26] Building on those findings, recent works have examined the potential for international

organizations to resolve the key challenges facing states in an anarchic system. International

organizations, importantly, can mitigate the pervasive incentives to coerce to extract concessions,

thereby making cooperation more viable.[27] Likewise, states, which often face incentives to

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[24] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981); G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[25] Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal, "The Rational Design of International Institutions," *International Organization* 55, no. 4 (2001): 761–99.

[26] B. Peter Rosendorff and Helen V. Milner, "The Optimal Design of International Trade Institutions: Uncertainty and Escape," *International Organization* 55, no. 4 (2001): 829–57.

[27] Allison Carnegie, *Power Plays: How International Institutions Reshape Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

conceal information from one another, may find international organizations to be valuable tools in the sharing of sensitive information.[28]

Undoubtedly, international organizations and institutions play a crucial role for their constituent states. As early scholarship argues, international organizations can assist in the preservation of power for formerly hegemonic states. At the same time, scholars have demonstrated that international organizations can be tailored to fill specific roles. Relative to those discussions, consideration of state membership in organizations has been limited. While some studies have examined the process through which existing and widely recognized states gain membership in organizations like NATO,[29] existing studies have explored the process of state recognition through international organizations. That has left unexplained the way states choose to collectively recognize other entities as states and how those other entities react.

Credibility in Theory

My argument seeks to fill those gaps in existing literature by proposing a new function of international organizations: to maintain states' credibility. To make that argument, I will develop a theoretical framework that answers three core questions. One, what is credibility? Two, why is contested sovereignty potentially damaging to credibility? Three, how do international organizations mitigate that damage?

While it is not difficult to explain why credibility matters to states through existing literature, the concept itself is much more difficult to define. Schelling explains the value of credibility in terms of its value for coercion: "to be coercive, violence has to be anticipated. And

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[28] Allison Carnegie and Austin Carson, *Secrets in Global Governance: Disclosure Dilemmas and the Challenge of International Cooperation in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[29] Andrew H. Kydd, "Trust Building, Trust Breaking: The Dilemma of NATO Enlargement," *International Organization* 55, no. 4 (Autumn 2001): 801–28.

it has to be avoidable by accommodation."[30] But the implications of Schelling's argument are far greater than the focus on coercion suggests. To say violence must be anticipated means the receiving state must clearly identify and *trust* that the threatening state intends to harm it. Credibility is about convincing other states to trust that the signaling state intends to behave accordingly.

This need not only apply to making threats. I argue in this paper that it is far more important to the practice of reassuring partners and allies of continued support. But more than simply allowing for a reevaluation of credibility's uses, reimagining the concept as one of trust builds on the role of reputation as a determinant of credibility.[31] When states engage in the same behavior over time, they establish a reputation for consistency which, in turn, reassures other states that they will continue to behave in the same manner. However, when a state alters its behavior, it signals to other states that it may alter its behavior in other ways as well.

Although states regularly face challenges to their credibility, I argue that navigating contested sovereignty is particularly risky to credibility. As the literature on contested sovereignty demonstrates, states often attempt to exploit disputes to accomplish strategic objectives. But while states may find value in exploiting issues of contested sovereignty, doing so can require adopting inconsistent positions. That is, when faced with sovereignty claims by unrecognized entities or secessionist movements, states must decide either to accept that entity's claim or uphold the status quo. Ultimately, the side a given state chooses is likely to be inconsistent with prior positions on the dispute, positions on other similar disputes, or both. The state is then faced with a dilemma: are the benefits associated with an inconsistent policy greater

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[30] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 2.
[31] Sartori, "The Might of the Pen."

than the credibility costs of being inconsistent? In many cases, this may be a difficult dilemma to resolve, as the full costs of credibility are likely to occur later.

International organizations offer a solution to that problem in two ways. First, international organizations are a critical component of international regimes. While any given organization may lack the ability to bind states to a set of rules, the wider regime—including other norms and institutions—in which that organization exists has significant capability to shape the behavior of states.[32] Notably, the capacity of international organizations to represent the interests of a community of states and compel adherence to community norms either through the distribution of benefits or imposition of penalties.[33] That international regimes and their constituent organizations can, to some degree, compel or induce states to adhere to community values makes convenient actors on which to place responsibility for policy decisions. For a state to alter its policy alone would likely be unbearably costly, as other states would view it as a blatant disregard for past policy. But if that same state is responding to the demands of an international community when it shifts position, it can reasonably claim to no longer hold full responsibly for its change in behavior.

The second way international organizations can protect a state's credibility is by serving as vehicles for the dissemination of information. This function is entirely consistent with existing literature on international organizations originating with Keohane. Even without any significant ability to generate and enforce rule among states, international regimes and organizations serve to connect officials in one state to those in another.[34] In Keohane's original formulation, the connections afforded by international organizations constitute an informal network among state

[32] Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*.
[33] Kenneth W. Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "Why States Act through Formal International Organizations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 1 (February 1, 1998): 3–32, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002798042001001.
[34] Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*.

officials. But the extent of international organizations' utility for information sharing is much greater.

For example, regulatory and legal organizations are often, though not always, able to vet information provide by states, thereby reinforcing the information's credibility while allowing states to avoid disclosing sensitive information publicly.[35] Just as international organizations can vet information provided by states, they are also able to, in some sense, vet the coercive behavior of states. That is, international organizations that appear neutral provide support for states wishing to signal intentions to other states and the public.[36] This provides a clear basis for a connection between international organizations, information sharing, and credibility. Through the informal networks of officials afforded by international organizations, officials from one state are able to convey to officials from other states justifications for policy shifts and inconsistencies. Moreover, the rules and procedures that govern the function of international organizations can serve as valuable justifications for new policy positions. For example, a state may point to the rules on the induction of new members into an organization to explain its preferred policy.

This theoretical framework sets three expectations regarding the case I will analyze. First, we expect to see documents in which US officials express concerns about the credibility of the US government's alliances and partnerships. That is, documents should demonstrate that US officials perceived fears of abandonment among US allies and partners over ROC-PRC recognition debates. We should further expect to see these perceptions take two forms. One, US officials will express concern that their counterparts in the ROC fear abandonment (e.g. will the

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[35] Carnegie and Carson, *Secrets in Global Governance: Disclosure Dilemmas and the Challenge of International Cooperation in World Politics*.

[36] Alexander Thompson, "Coercion Through IOs: The Security Council and the Logic of Information Transmission," *International Organization* 60, no. 01 (January 2006), https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818306060012.

ROC still value US security and diplomatic commitments). Two, US officials will express a similar concern that other US allies and partners, specifically Japan, fear future US abandonment (e.g. will US allies still value US security and diplomatic commitments).

We should also see documents in which US officials discuss the strategic benefits of ROC versus PRC recognition. Put differently, we should see documents in which US officials acknowledge the benefits of PRC recognition in the UN, which would highlight the dilemma of contested sovereignty recognition.

Finally, we expect to see documents in which US officials express a belief that decisions on ROC recognition made by the UN, rather than the US alone, will be less damaging to the US and the credibility of its alliances and partnerships. These documents can also take two forms. First, they can express a belief that US statements made through the UN can reassure the ROC and other US partners of US intentions. Second, they can express a belief that UN recognition of the PRC or exclusion of the ROC would diffuse responsibility and allow the US to avoid blame for the decision. As my analysis will demonstrate, all three types of documents are prevalent in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* volume on the UN. However, before detailing the contents of the volume, it is worth considering several counterargument, limitations, and alternative explanations that are likely to arise.

A Credible Argument?

Before presenting my evidence in full, it is worth considering a few possible objections to my claims. The first and most significant objection to my argument is simply that it is not the best explanation for the behavior and comments we observe. Accordingly, a more plausible alternative argument is that US officials, rather than being concerned with their credibility, were merely interested in maintaining a productive relationship with the ROC. Although that

alternative argument bears significant resemblance to my argument, it is distinct insofar as credibility is not central. Following the logic of this alternative argument, international organizations would also play a diminished role.

Evaluating the alternative argument is difficult in this case. Although critical, the distinction between a fear of breakdown in bilateral ties and a fear of credibility loss is subtle. Indeed, they need not be mutually exclusive as one key component of credibility of bilateral agreements and relationships. However, the alternative argument that is most challenging to my position is that credibility is of little relevance to US behavior. If that alternative argument is valid, there are a few indicators that should be absent. Most obviously, if US officials were primarily interested in promoting a bilateral relationship with the ROC, we should not expect much discussion of the wider implications of US policy, especially regarding the attitudes of third-party states. Other key indicators we should not observe are explicit statements about US credibility. If US policy is a story on bilateral relations, it is unlikely we would see US officials talking about credibility.

There is also a crucial but less evident indicator we should find. Notably, we should see US officials evaluating the consequences of a deteriorating relationship with the ROC. It is important to distinguish here between the consequences of a deteriorating relationship and those of ROC abandonment. In the former case, we would see fears that the ROC would no longer provide the US the benefits of a partnership. For example, US officials could express fear that the ROC would side with US adversaries or refuse to host US troops, which remained in Taiwan through much of the 1970s.[37] In the latter case, we should see the opposite reaction. Rather than

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[37] Jay Mathews, "U.S. Trims Military Forces on Taiwan by Half in a Year," *Washington Post*, November 7, 1978, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/11/07/us-trims-military-forces-on-taiwan-by-half-in-a-year/48fe4a2e-abc5-4d23-9d25-3c6d167dd668/.

fearing that the ROC would drift away from the US, officials would fear that, if the ROC felt abandoned, it would take drastic and reckless actions to maintain US support.[38] As the evidence presented in the following sections will demonstrate, US officials were deeply concerned about how the ROC would react if it felt abandoned.

A second objection to my argument is that US officials may have had little choice in whether the UN expelled the ROC. According to this assertion, the US would have simply been presented with a *fait accompli*—a non-decision. Far from being a useful tool to preserve credibility, in such a case the UN would simply be an impediment to US interests. As my analysis shows, however, such a scenario was not likely. First, documents from 1969—two years before Resolution 2758—indicate that US officials were fully aware of efforts to expel the ROC and replace it with the PRC. And, while US officials acknowledge that they hope to delay the transition, documents show that those officials accurately assessed the precarious position of the ROC in the UN. Instead, of a *fait accompli* scenario, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests, as expected, that US officials sought to use the mechanisms of the UN to maintain its interests *and* credibility while transitioning recognition from the ROC to the PRC.

A third objection, as with any study of historical documents, is that officials may misrepresent their views and objectives if they anticipate a critical audience. While it is impossible to determine the extent to which these documents reflect the true beliefs of their authors, it is unlikely that the documents reflect efforts to mislead the public. First, the documents I used in this section were not published until 2004—more than twenty years after the transition took place. It is unlikely that the original authors of the documents would have anticipated that their commentary would eventually be made public nor would US officials

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[38] Victor D Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security* 34, no. 3 (Winter 2009/2010): 158–96.

responsible for publishing the documents have sufficient incentive to conceal the motivations of the documents' authors.

Alliance Credibility and US Decision Making at the UN

In October of 1971, the UN's long-standing recognition of the ROC collapsed and was replaced by a new status quo in which the China was solely represented by the PRC at the UN.[39] That change has been of incalculable significance to the emergence of a globally influential PRC. But to focus on that moment alone would only give a brief window into the complexity of contest sovereignty in the UN. Which is to say that the shift in recognition from the ROC to the PRC was merely the culmination of years of negotiation and strategizing. By evaluating the role of the UN in the transition from ROC to PRC recognition, we will be better able to understand how states rely on international organizations to protect credibility. The purpose is not to examine why the United States chose to recognize the PRC but how they did so. To accomplish this, I will analyze documents released to the public through the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series on the United Nations between 1969 and 1972.

Foundational to my argument is the claim that US officials viewed the question of ROC recognition as a risk to US government credibility. As the parameters of the Cold War evolved, US officials faced an increasingly tenuous status quo regarding China's status: the ROC, a small but relatively important strategic partner, represented China at the UN, while the much larger PRC was excluded. Moreover, better relations with the PRC offered an opportunity to the US, which remained concerned with the Soviet Union. This presented a dilemma for US officials who had long been supportive of the ROC but also recognized the value of improved relations

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[39] The General Assembly, "Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations" (United Nations, October 25, 1971).

with the PRC. How could the US alter its policy on ROC-PRC recognition without incurring prohibitive costs to its credibility? I argue that the answer to this question lies with the UN itself.

In 1969, the earliest year for which sufficient documents were available, US officials debated the best approach to the dilemma of ROC-PRC recognition. At that point, US officials, while still aiming to protect the position of the ROC at the UN, started to consider the long-term viability of US policies. In January of 1969, for instance, the US Mission to the United Nations reported to the Department of State that the composition of the Security Council was likely to be detrimental to US efforts to keep the ROC in the UN. By late 1969, it became clear that earlier speculation was well founded and that the US position was increasingly untenable. As the documents make clear, the failure of the US to stave off challenges to the ROC's status generated concern among the ROC and its supporters. In a telegram to the State Department, the Secretary of State relayed those fears: "Liu [the ROC permanent representative to the UN] said there was concern US might shift policy toward Peking" and that "articles such as one in New York Times of October 9 regarding US moves to meet moderates in Peking are interpreted broadly by certain delegations."[40] The Secretary of State further explained that he responded with reassurances: "Secretary said we would not change our position and, if necessary, he would make another statement."[41]

Evidently, US officials were deeply concerned with the way their statements and actions were perceived by others, especially the ROC. At the beginning of 1970, the ROC's position in the UN remained uncertain while the US continued its efforts to balance its commitments to the ROC against its interests in improved relations with the PRC. This only further exacerbated the

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[40] Evan M. Duncan and Edward C. Keefer, eds., "United Nations, 1969-1972," in *1969-1976*, vol. V, Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2004), 489.
[41] Duncan and Keefer, 489.

question of credibility: "He [Liu] felt that recent statements by Secy Rogers on US desire for renewed contact with PRC…wld have great influence on attitudes of other countries. When US took one step, others want to take three."[42] Again, it is clear that US credibility was critical to debates over ROC recognition. That US officials immediately clarified that they had no intention of alerting their position demonstrates that they were aware of the credibility risks of negotiating with the PRC at the expense of the ROC. But more than a question of US-ROC relations, these statements imply that US credibility was of great import for other states in the UN, which followed the lead of the US on sovereignty recognition.

Although these statements reveal some value of credibility in ROC recognition debates, they are not explicit about the costs to the United States. That changed, however, in July of 1970. In a memorandum from the then-Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger explained to President Nixon the options available to the US as well as their implications:

> He [Secretary of State Rogers] argues that any change in our UN tactics would require that we consider the effects on the ROC and the PRC, the Japanese and the Soviets, the implications for other divided states, and the consequences of the presence of PRC representatives in the UN and in the U.S. Since most of these points would argue on balance against any change in U.S. position, the strong implication is that we should continue as we are.[43]

In another memorandum from 1970, a group of diplomatic officials from the US discussed the implications of the ROC recognition:

> Taipei is a real problem…We see a change in the position at the UN as a developing and evolving process. We do not now know what precise shape such change will take but as moves are made it is highly important to maintain the confidence of the GRC and we must do our best to support it. Moreover we want to be able to avoid any dangerous reaction from Taipei.[44]

[42] Duncan and Keefer, 495.
[43] Duncan and Keefer, 507.
[44] Duncan and Keefer, 519.

The above excerpt indicates that US officials were concerned about how the ROC would react in the event that US support waned, which implies a practical consequence of US credibility: if the ROC no longer viewed US support as credible, it might have been incentivized to act recklessly. The same memorandum also supported Kissinger's earlier assessment that other states would likely react to a change in the US position as well: "It is not only a question of Taipei's attitude. The attitude and position of the Japanese must be taken into account; a sudden move could create problems for Tokyo. And there is also the problem of Taipei's other Asian neighbors."[45]

At that point in 1970, US officials were well aware of the precarity of their position but continued to push for a favorable outcome. Specially, high level US officials hoped to obtain support for a system of dual representation in which the ROC and PRC would both be seated at the UN. However, the tone of discussion among US officials shifted during the early months of 1971. In a memorandum from January of that year, the acting Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs expressed noted "that if we [US officials] believe that in a comparatively short time we will in any event have the PRC in the UN and the GRC out, one could argue that we might well let the Albanian Resolution pass and get the agony over with."[46] Statements such as those reveal the extent to which officials in the US recognized that their position would likely collapse soon thereafter.

Despite the ever-growing possibility that the PRC would enter the UN and the likelihood that such a change would also entail an expulsion of the ROC, officials in the US continued to emphasize their support for the ROC. Evidently believing the US to be their best hope for continued participation in the UN, officials from the ROC continued to impress upon US officials the importance of their support:

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[45] Duncan and Keefer, 519.
[46] Duncan and Keefer, 562.

> Ambassador Liu said that "our people" do not underestimate the possibility that other countries may change their position, but they also do not underestimate the influence of the US and Japan on other countries… It follows from this, Ambassador Liu continued, that whatever alternatives others may propose, the IQ must not be abandoned, having been reaffirmed by the General Assembly on so many sessions. Further, if an alternative is proposed, his government feels that for "political, psychological and other reasons, the US should not be a party to it."[47]

The documents are not explicit about what the political and psychological reasons are. Whatever further explanation took place was likely not recorded. However, we can infer from other statements and the general tenor of existing documents that ROC officials saw the potential for a cascade effect in the event of a US defection. That the State Department quoted Ambassador Liu directly on the matter indicates that US officials believed such concerns to be vital to their decision making. The document's record of Liu's comments on the US and Japan's influence corroborates this point. Moreover, it is apparent from the following language that US officials took steps to assuage Liu's concerns and that Liu seemed satisfied, at least to some extent:

> In conclusion, Ambassador Liu expressed his appreciation for the assurance that the US has not said anything to other governments which would give the impression that we consider the GRC's case hopeless. He said that he would report to his government that… the US is continuing its examination of how best to assure the GRC's place in the United Nations.[48]

Undoubtedly, officials in the ROC and other US partners remained uncertain despite US assurances. As with earlier statements, however, what is most notable is not that Liu made these comments, but that US officials responded to and recorded them. This particularly telling given that many of these statements are drawn from memoranda of conversation, the contents of which likely reflect the priorities of the US officials writing them. That is, such memoranda likely do not include every comment or topic. Rather, they are curated records of topics and comments their authors believed important.

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[47] Duncan and Keefer, 576.
[48] Duncan and Keefer, 580.

Record of similar conversations appear throughout State Department documents on ROC-PRC recognition. These interactions provide compelling evidence that US officials were heavily influenced in their decisions by how they expected those decisions to be perceived by the ROC and other states. As anticipated, credibility in the eyes of the ROC and other states was crucial. But that alone is not sufficient to demonstrate the role of international organizations in upholding credibility. How did US officials view the role of the UN and its procedures in mitigating the risks and damage to US credibility?

The Role of the UN

Although the evidence from the previous section reveals alliance credibility as a central tenet of US decision making, it does not fully articulate the role of the UN in mitigating threats to that credibility. Among high-level officials in the State Department and White House, falling support for the ROC at the UN represented a threat to US interests and ability to credibly support its partners. At some point, they concluded, the US would be forced to accept the PRC into the UN and even reject ROC membership. As the previous section shows, US officials believed such an eventuality to be potentially costly to the US, as it would appear to the ROC and other states that the US may not uphold its alliances and partnerships. The solution to this problem, in the eyes of US officials, lay with the UN itself and the procedural mechanisms for recognizing sovereignty. Importantly, at issue in the UN were twofold questions: should the PRC be admitted as a UN members state? And should the ROC remain a UN member state? To US officials, this presented an opportunity to navigate the difficult question of China's sovereignty through the UN. In other words, the US could shape its policy on sovereignty recognition according to the direction of debates in the UN. The following section will demonstrate the extent to which US officials viewed the UN as a useful tool to promote US alliance credibility while remaining

flexible on ROC-PRC recognition. As with the previous section, this one will rely on documents contained in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series on the United Nations between 1969 and 1972.

To fully understand the role of the UN in US decision making on ROC-PRC recognition, it is essential to consider the options facing US policy makers. In 1969, the first year my analysis covers, US officials faced increasing support in the UN for PRC membership. At the point where my analysis begins, the US had been able to prevent PRC membership through a resolution called the Important Question (IQ). This resolution, when passed with a simple majority, designated China's representation an important question that required two-thirds majority to alter. Specifically, this prevented PRC acceptance and ROC expulsion via the Albanian Resolution, which had recently garnered a simple majority.[49]

Like discussions of alliance credibility, conversation about the role of the UN began in earnest in 1970. In a memorandum from July of that year, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger articulated his concerns about US credibility but concluded that, using the UN, the US could appear to support the ROC while preparing for an eventual transition to PRC recognition: "If we anticipate an eventual defeat, and [I] do not see how we can avoid it, we should minimize that defeat by preparing now to diminish its apparent significance, in so far as we can do so without hastening the event."[50] He further explained that "If the ROC should voluntarily leave, faced with a hostile or 'two-Chinas' vote, we would have demonstrated our loyalty to a friend, and we could convincingly argue that the subsequent entry of the PRC was not a defeat at all."[51] Of course, these statements, read generously, could appear a simply

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[49] See document 278, "Editorial Note," Duncan and Keefer, 487.
[50] Duncan and Keefer, 507.
[51] Duncan and Keefer, 507.

continuation of unrelenting support for the ROC. However, in the same memorandum, Kissinger

indicates the contrary. Instead, Kissinger proposes that the US should minimize language of

confrontation outside the UN and push for cooperation with the PRC on critical issues:

> in non-UN contexts, to avoid emphasizing the confrontation aspects of US/PRC relations, and to make clear that we wish to promote greater communication with the Chinese Communists and to see eventual PRC participation in worldwide cooperation on issues such as disarmament, narcotics control, exchange of weather information, outer space, seabeds, etc.[52]

Although later documents reveal similar themes, this one is crucial because of its timing and

explicit commentary. There is little doubt from the combined statements above that as early as

1970, top US officials aimed to expand opportunities for engagement with the PRC while

minimizing the credibility costs of abandoning the ROC. For Kissinger, the UN could assist in

this effort by diminishing the role of the US in recognition debates. Put differently, if the UN

pursued its own decision in which the PRC was recognized or the ROC excluded, the US could

avoid any appearance of abandonment.

Through the course of these debates, however, the role of the UN grew more

complicated. Rather than simply relying on the IQ, US officials sought new opportunities to

advance their interests. This took the form of two additional proposals. First, US officials

considered a dual representation scenario in which both the ROC and PRC would have

membership at the UN. According a memorandum to President Nixon written by Kissinger, they

key benefit of dual representation is that it would likely have majority support. Kissinger

cautioned, however, that dual representation would likely be unsatisfactory to both the ROC and

PRC. Second, US officials considered dual representation as a function of universal

representation. Like dual representation, the key advantage to Kissinger of universal

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[52] Duncan and Keefer, 508.

representation is the widespread support it would command. In his memorandum to President Nixon, Kissinger provides initial evidence of the UN's role, if only implicitly. In explaining the advantages of dual representation, he explains that "if Peking refused to enter on this basis, the onus for its non-participation would be squarely on Peking."[53] Although subtle, the implication of Kissinger's comment for the UN is striking. That is, a key advantage of a dual representation formula is that the US could continue to support the ROC in the UN and advocate for PRC representation, all while achieving its desired outcome of excluding the PRC in practice. This was, crucially, made possible by the collective decision making of the UN.

Similarly, in discussing the advantages of universal representation Kissinger elaborated on the benefits to US credibility of supporting such a policy. Referring to universal representation, he commented:

> It would also provide a popular, credible and easily defended explanation for the change in our longstanding opposition to Peking's entry and it would give a strong additional argument in principle for maintaining Taipei's seat. Finally, it might make a dual representation policy somewhat more palatable to Taipei.[54]

There appear to be three key claims underpinning the advantages of universal representation, two of which are relevant to my argument. First, Kissinger refers to the policy as "popular, credible and easily defended."[55] It is ambiguous to whom the policy would appear this way but given that this claim is placed alongside but separate from a comment about Taipei's (the ROC) reaction, the most plausible audience is that of the wider international community. Such a community almost certainly included US allies and partners who were looking for the US to demonstrate that its commitments were credible.

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[53] Duncan and Keefer, 639.
[54] Duncan and Keefer, 641.
[55] Duncan and Keefer, 641.

Second, Kissinger says that a call for universal representation "might make a dual representation policy somewhat more palatable to Taipei." This is vital in two respects. One, it is additional evidence of my claim from the first section that US officials were concerned about how a change in policy would appear to the ROC. Two, it is evidence of my claim in this section that US officials viewed their approach to representation in the UN as a remedy to that concern.

As was the case with documents in the previous section, US officials regularly demonstrated their recognition of the inevitable: that the PRC would gain acceptance to the UN. Yet, as Kissinger explained in the memorandum quoted above, the US need not recognize that acceptance as a defeat. Even in 1971, that remained a consensus among US officials and support for a dual solution with ROC and PRC representation was the norm. In a memorandum to Kissinger, National Security Council member Marshall Wright outlined his support for a universal solution that would, in effect, permit membership of the ROC and PRC. The aim of such a solution would be to defend the ROC in the UN while admitting the PRC by advancing a right "that all peoples should be represented in the United Nations."[56] First on the list of reasons Wright gives for a universal policy is that "It gives us the high moral ground, and a simple rationale for our change of policy."[57] Wright's statement is unequivocal in its message: supporting a universal right to representation in the UN would allow the US to accept PRC membership without giving the appearance of inconsistency.

In a March National Security Council meeting, the issue of dual representation and universality took on even greater urgency, with President Nixon weighing in. Specifically, while some, especially Kissinger, expressed skepticism of universality and dual representation as useful directions to take US policy, Nixon appeared receptive. However, Nixon also saw value in

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[56] Duncan and Keefer, 610.
[57] Duncan and Keefer, 610.

maintaining a staunch position even in the face of eventual defeat: "We need to get the old man to help us. And secondly we need to position this thing domestically so it will sell. One thing we could do would be to let the UN take the rap."[58] Expanding on his position, Nixon explained "If it is done in such a way that a polyglot bunch of countries in the UN push us into Communist China membership when we didn't want it, that will hurt the UN. We don't want to hurt the UN any more. But it will be hurt if it pushes us into something we don't want."[59] Although these statements appear to be references to domestic political concerns, they hint at an underlying strategy: if it appears that the UN is forcing the US to accept PRC membership, it will be damaging to the UN, not the US.

Evidently, whether the US pursued a new policy of dual representation or continued its singular support for the ROC, the UN served a central role. If the US were to move toward support for dual representation, the principle of universal representation in the UN would allow the US to alter its longstanding position while maintaining most of its credibility. If the US chose instead to maintain support for the ROC even in the face of defeat, the UN could allow the US to deflect blame for ROC expulsion onto the wider international community. Crucially, the internal discussions referenced above meet our expectations insofar as they portray the UN and US approaches to recognition in the UN as vehicles through which to curate perceptions of US credibility. Taken together with evidence from the first section, there can be little doubt that US policy makers, from State Department officials to the President, viewed debates over ROC-PRC recognition as potentially damaging to US credibility. They then turned to the UN's procedures for addressing contested sovereignty and the collective decision-making power of the UN to mitigate those risks.

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[58] Duncan and Keefer, 652.
[59] Duncan and Keefer, 652.

The UN: Help or Hinderance?

Despite significant evidence that US officials viewed UN policies as useful tools to protect their credibility, there is also considerable evidence that US officials viewed the UN as a constraint on their decisions. Repeated statements expressing frustration with the UN and its other members states, as well as frequent regard for the opinions of the General Assembly (GA) and Security Council (SC) betray a great respect for the UN's influence. Indeed, throughout discussions, US officials treated the UN and the opinions expressed within it as tantamount to the ultimate arbiters of China's sovereignty. This often meant that US officials considered the options available to them according to trends within the UN. That is, as other members of the UN shifted their policies to be more favorable to the PRC, US officials took note and began to shift their positions as well. As the following section will reveal, US officials, though they employed the UN to burnish their credibility, often felt constrained by the collective decision-making power of the organization.

In 1969 and early 1970, discussion of China's UN representation was generally confined to the State Department, particularly among various US diplomatic posts. The primary concern of these discussions was the ability of the US to maintain support for the IQ and hold off successful passage of the Albanian Resolution. Given that the participants in these discussions, especially the US Permanent Representative to the UN, were responsible for maintaining diplomatic ties with other states and negotiating in the UN, it is hardly surprising that they attached significant weight to the opinions of the international community. Still, that US officials were clearly preoccupied with the representation question indicates that the views of the international community were key components of US decision making.

More important than those early discussions, however, is the way that debates in the UN pushed US officials to search for alternative policies that would be more acceptable to other UN member states. In a late 1970 memorandum to President Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers explained that "the adverse voting trend in the UN General Assembly on the Chinese representation issue and the likelihood that in the months ahead several more countries will follow the lead of Canada and Italy in recognizing Peking require that we take a thorough look at our China policy to see where we go from here."[60] He then elaborated his intent to consider the issue in greater detail: "I have asked my staff to initiate a thorough study and review of the situation and possibilities open to us and will make recommendations to you as soon as possible."[61] The text of this memorandums indicates an emerging desire among US officials to revisit US policy on ROC-PRC recognition in light of the wider shifts in UN membership and opinion.

The following day, Kissinger sent a memorandum to the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence relaying an order from President Nixon to study US policy on China. The document referenced many dimensions of US policy to be included in the study but the first three mentioned explicitly concerned the prospect of adopting a new approach in the UN:

> 1. The implications of new approaches, e.g. "universality," on the membership question for the United Nations itself and on our ability to pursue U.S. interests within the U.N. organization.
> 2. In addition to dealing with Korea, Vietnam, Germany, and China, the study should treat with any other aspects of U.N. membership likely to be affected by the adoption of a new approach to the membership question.
> 3. The effect on our bilateral relations with other countries which would be caused by adoption of a new approach to U.N. membership.

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[60] Duncan and Keefer, 544.
[61] Duncan and Keefer, 544.

Whether Kissinger's memorandum was in direct response to Secretary of State Roger's earlier message about the need to revisit US policy on China is unclear. However, it is obvious that there was growing concern at the highest levels about the sustainability of US policy on representation in the UN. That concern evidently led President Nixon and Kissinger to push for a comprehensive study outlining the options available to the US. In turn, that indicates, as expected, that US officials felt constrained by the decisions of other UN member states and the prospect that the UN would grant the PRC representation at the expense of the ROC.

Just as concerns about US credibility intensified as the threat to ROC representation grew, the constraints on US policy loomed ever larger. By March of 1971, US officials including Kissinger and other members of the National Security Council began to seriously consider alternatives to existing US policy. Minutes from a National Security Council meeting demonstrate that through President Nixon's stark assessment:

> We have a sticky problem over the Chinese Communists in the UN. We all know what our position has been, and we all know that each year we have a harder time getting the votes necessary to keep this position viable. Therefore we must consider the question not only of what we ought to do, but what our options would be in case George Bush gets up and finds that he doesn't have the votes. I don't think that this year we will have a problem, but my judgment is that we will next year.[62]

That these discussions occurred in the National Security Council to any extent is telling. The president and his advisors clearly viewed the status of the ROC and PRC in the UN as vital national security interests—national security interests that were increasingly in jeopardy. The tone of the president's assessment is also meaningful. Specifically, there was apparently little need for Nixon to explain the issue, probably because it was of great enough importance that the participants were already familiar with it. But the true value of the president's commentary is implied: the US cannot hold the votes it needs and, consequently, it must reevaluate its position.

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[62] Duncan and Keefer, 645.

The fact that the Albanian Resolution was close to success meant that the US would be forced to make a difficult decision about the sovereignty of other states.

The constraints on US policy toward Taiwan extended further than simple representation. As the final vote approached in October of 1971, it became apparent that the SC seat would prove the most difficult issue to navigate. Unsurprisingly, US officials preferred that the seat remain with the ROC. However, the PRC was adamant that it receive representation on SC. To add to this challenge, US officials recognized as early as 1969 that changes to the SC could be difficult to prevent as they would be un-vetoable matters of credentials.[63] This point remerged at various points between 1969 and 1971 but each time the US attitude was similar: the matter of who represented China at the SC would likely be relegated to a procedural matter over which the US had no veto power. According to a memorandum of conversation from July of 1971, Kissinger made this point to officials from the ROC:

> In a brief exchange with Ambassador Shen on the possible U.S. use of a veto to prevent Communist China from entering the Security Council, Dr. Kissinger explained that it might not be technically possible for the U.S. to exercise its veto power on this issue. If the question were put in terms of which entity represented China, Communist China or the GRC, this might be considered a procedural matter not subject to the veto.[64]

As with other memoranda, this reflects a paraphrasing of the conversation between Kissinger and Ambassador Shen. Consequently, we can conclude that the exchange constituted an important point for US officials. For our purposes, this evidence is a valuable indicator that, while US officials sought to use the UN to avoid responsibility for the ROC's fate, they were also heavily constrained by the organization's procedures.

Taken together, evidence from US officials during these debates suggests that they viewed the UN and the attitudes of its member states as significant constraints on their policies.

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[63] Duncan and Keefer, 479.
[64] Duncan and Keefer, 717.

But more than simple constraints, debates in the UN about ROC-PRC representation confronted the US with a challenge. Because of those debates, it became difficult for the US to stand by. Although US officials clearly hoped the collective decision making of the UN would offer the US cover, that decision making process often compelled them to take polarizing positions. For example, a telegram for the US Consulate in Hong Kong to the Department of State cautions against language that would be alienating to the PRC. The telegram, clearly anticipating the possibility that debates on representation will place the US in a difficult position, declares "As more and more public attention focuses on Chirep and Chirec, the number of pitfalls will multiply"[65] before listing a series of ostensibly inflammatory comments to avoid and an overview on how to answer questions like: "Does the U.S. oppose seating PRC in the UN?"[66] The telegram sends a clear message to US officials that debates on ROC-PRC recognition are likely to force uncomfortable questions.

This section as sought to explain how, in spite of their best efforts, many US officials found the UN's debate over representation frustrating and counterproductive. While the previous section detailed the ways US officials took advantage of the UN to navigate the difficult matter of China's sovereignty, this section has provided a more complex narrative. Ultimately, the fact that US officials attempted to manipulate the UN to protect their credibility was only made necessary by the UN itself, which forced the US to clearly and publicly comment on the sovereignty of China at the precise moment when it wished not to.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to examine the role of international organizations in contested sovereignty claims. From Palestine, to Korea, to China, the UN has been a

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[65] Duncan and Keefer, 630.
[66] Duncan and Keefer, 630.

battleground for competing claims over territory and legacy. It is often the final arbiter of who can claim statehood and sovereignty. Yet, little has been written about contested claims in the UN. While contested sovereignty and international organizations have both been the subject of extensive analysis, the interaction between the two concepts has been rarely studied. To fill that gap, I have argued that international organizations serve a dual role in the arbitration of contested sovereignty claims. To a great extent, international organizations provide mechanisms for collective decision making which allow states to deflect responsibility. This is essential for states looking to navigate the issues of contested sovereignty, as the inherent complexity of such issues heightens the risks to credibility. To be more precise, when states are called to take positions on issues of contested sovereignty, they must often do so inconsistently to promote their interests.

Despite the benefits conferred by international organizations, I argue that they also make avoiding dilemmas of contested sovereignty difficult. This is particularly true in the UN where membership is tantamount to statehood. At any point when a state's membership is questioned so too is its sovereignty. The effect of this is simply that positions on membership in the UN appear, at least to other members of the international community, as positions on sovereignty. In that sense, international organizations can serve as drivers of state behavior regarding recognition in contested sovereignty cases, while also being facilitators of credibility maintenance.

Using US government documents from the late 1960s and early 1970s, I demonstrated that US officials were deeply concerned about their credibility during debates about the ROC and PRC's UN membership. Because the US had long maintained support for the ROC, its UN membership, and sovereignty, growing support for replacing the ROC with the PRC threatened the position of the US. Faced with the option to either continue its support for the ROC or adopt an alternative policy, the US found its credibility at risk. To manage that credibility, US officials

turned to the UN itself. Through the collective decision-making procedures of the UN, US officials reasoned that they could maintain public support for the ROC while avoiding damage to their credibility that would result from the ROC's eventual and inevitable exclusion.

The UN was not merely a tool of US policy makers, however. Indeed, the UN itself was a key factor that compelled US officials to reconsider their policy. The public nature of debates over UN membership forced into the spotlight the question of ROC sovereignty, along with the controversies surrounding it. This fact was clearly felt by US officials who were often called upon by domestic and international audiences alike to adopt a leadership role in debates over ROC sovereignty.

There are three key implications of this finding. First, that states may attempt to implicate international organizations hope of protecting their credibility indicates that international organizations may be far more dynamic than scholars had initially realized. Although there is considerable research on the way states design international organizations to suit their needs, there is relatively little research on the possibility that states may seek to manipulate existing international organizations for alternative purposes. Second, that manipulation of existing international organizations could significantly undermine the function of the organizations. As the initial instance of Taiwan's exclusion from the WHO demonstrates, attempts by states to settle matters of contested sovereignty through international organizations can be a significant barrier to the function of those international organizations.

The third implication is that international organization may be more influential in matters of contested sovereignty than commonly recognized. As the internal documents cited in this paper show, concerns about PRC and ROC recognition in the UN reached the highest levels of the US government. In spite of US influence globally, officials often felt constrained by

decisions made in the UN often because of that very influence. That is, the demands for the US to take a leadership role in recognition debates imposed their own limitations on US policy. Evidently, how and when the US approached the question of China's representation was heavily determined by the UN and its member states.

These implications raise several questions for future study. Notably, what role do other international organizations, other than the UN, play in the recognition of contested sovereignty? Additionally, how did other states perceive US efforts to maintain credibility through the UN? It remains unclear from US government documents how other states responded to US efforts in the UN; however, access to archives outside the US could shed light on the effectiveness of the US strategy. Moreover, examining documents outside the US could point to addition instances of this phenomenon, raising another question: how prevalent is the practice of harnessing an existing international organization for a purpose other than the one for which it was intended? And, to what extent can the practice be used for ends beyond protecting a state's credibility?

Answering these questions requires far greater resources and access to historical documents than were available for this study. However, they are critical to how we understand the role of international organizations. Regardless of the full extent of these phenomenon, the case of China's representation in the UN remains a fascinating and complicated example of contested sovereignty that will likely only grow in importance over time.

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