The Interpretation To End All Wars: U.S. Public Perceptions of International Organizations and the American Use Of Force

1. Study Design

When it comes to going to war, is the capacity of international organizations (IOs)[1] to influence public opinion (and by extension influence state behavior) constrained by how individuals in a particular state interpret IO endorsements[2] for wars? Such is the question that this experiment seeks to answer, namely by determining whether different interpretations of IO endorsements (in terms of their *direct implications*) lead to significantly different proportions of US public support for military interventions. To be sure, "direct implications" in this context can be defined in terms of two distinctions, namely: (1) whether the endorsement is understood as primarily theoretical (as is the case of UN authorization) or practical/material (as is the case of NATO support) in nature, and (2) if it is understood as primarily theoretical, whether the endorsement is considered first and foremost to be legal permission or a signal of prudence/likelihood of success. The hypotheses for this experiment, therefore, are as follows: (H1) US public support for a war, if there exists an IO endorsement for said war, will be significantly higher when the IO endorsement is UNSC theoretical authorization than when it is NATO practical support; (H2) US public support for a war, if there exists UNSC authorization for said war, will be significantly higher when the authorization is interpreted as a signal of prudence/likelihood of success, than when it is interpreted as legal permission.

The research approach devised to adequately answer this question is an original survey-based experiment that asks a simple random sample of 2000 subjects their opinion on a hypothetical US military

[1] For the purposes of this study, "international organizations," or "IOs," can be understood to mean inter-governmental organizations pertaining to American foreign military policy, specifically the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). They are referred to as "international organizations" in this proposal solely because this is the terminology used in major multilateral treaties (such as the 1969 and

[2] Throughout this proposal, the term "IO endorsements" should be taken as UN authorization for a military intervention (in the form of a formal Resolution issued by the Security Council) and/or NATO assistance for a military intervention.

intervention in a foreign country. There are four slightly different versions of the survey (A, B, C and D)[3], which will each be randomly administered to 500 respondents, thereby dividing them into one control group and three treatment groups (C1, T1, T2, and T3, respectively). However, respondents will not be aware that there are other versions of the survey aside from theirs, so that the study is blind and they do not know whether they are receiving the treatment or the control, nor do they know what treatment they are receiving.

The surveys all prompt the respondents with the same initial scenario, whereby the President of the United States (who is no longer Barack Obama) has decided to intervene militarily in a foreign country ("country X") of which the respondent has no prior knowledge. Similarly, the respondent only knows that the President deems it necessary to follow this path of action, (s) he does not know anything about the motive of the intervention. By not specifying any details about the President or the aggressor country in the scenario, the experimental design helps prevent any pre-conceived ideas that respondents might have (about Obama or other countries) from influencing their answer. Further, by instructing the respondent to assume that (s) he knows nothing about the President's motive for using force in this scenario, the survey controls for ethical considerations regarding the ends of the intervention. All three of these factors indeed do affect public opinion on wars in reality, but in the context of this experiment they are extraneous variables that are not of interest and influence the outcome of the study.

The subsequent section of each survey contains a manipulation of the IO endorsement involved: survey A (group C1) does not mention anything about authorization from any IOs, survey B (group T1) tells respondents that there is UNSC authorization for the intervention whereby the UNSC authorization strictly and exclusively implies that the intervention is *legal*, survey C (group T2) tells respondents that there is UNSC authorization for the intervention, whereby the UNSC authorization strictly and exclusively implies the that the intervention is *prudent* or *likely to succeed*, and survey D (group T3) tells respondents that there is NATO support for the intervention, whereby the NATO support strictly and exclusively implies that other

[3] See surveys A, B, C and D in Appendix 2.

member states of NATO will provide *material aid* (i.e. troops, weapons…etc.) for the war. Once these scenes have been set, each respondent is asked whether they would support the intervention or not, with five possible answer choices to select from (strongly support; support; indifferent/unsure; oppose; strongly oppose), and the number of respondents who select each answer will be recorded for every group[4], both as a raw number and as a proportion of the total respondents in that particular treatment group. The purpose of the three treatments is to allow for the statistical testing of both hypotheses: H1 can be tested by finding the average values of T1 and T2 for each answer choice, and subsequently comparing each value to that of T3 for the given answer choice. H2 can be tested by comparing the values of T1 and T2 across each answer choice. The specific statistical methods employed in this analysis will be determined upon completion of the data collection activities, so as to select the optimal statistical test for the particular characteristics of the data distribution(s).

A sample size of 2000 respondents is the requested for this study because it is the largest sample size permitted for surveys of this length. Large sample sizes are desirable because they decrease the margin of error, in this case, for example, to approximately 4.5% for the values of the proportions of each group, and to approximately 3.1% for the values of the aggregated proportions of two groups (while under simple random sampling and a 95% confidence level[5]). In other words, using the values of the sample proportions, this sample size allows for a relatively precise and nonetheless accurate estimate of the corresponding true population proportions.

2. Significance of Expected Outcomes

The findings of this study will be of value both in the field of international relations and across other disciplines. In terms of international relations theory, it will yield a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanism through which international organizations affect public opinion (and by extension affect state

[4] For a graphic representation of the experimental design, see Table 1 in Appendix 1 of this document.

[5] The margin of error for this sample size was obtained from Table 4.1 in Gideon (2005).

behavior), thereby contributing to the new and important line of research that explores the indirect channels by which IOs influence state actors. The contribution(s) that will be made by experiment are especially valuable to this branch of scholarship on the role of IOs in global politics, because the vast majority of literature on the influence of IOs on state leaders through indirect pathways of public opinion is based on observational study designs with macro-level data,[6] therefore limiting its conclusions to theoretical speculation, since only experiments can show causal connections between two variables.

While theoretical work of this kind began appearing as early as 2004, only in 2011 were these theories tested for the first time and was the mechanism by which IOs impose costs and benefits on state leaders first documented[7]. Since this investigation involves an experimental study design and original micro-level data, its outcomes will constitute an important advance for this branch of IR scholarship: it will significantly illuminate *how* IOs indirectly influence leaders through public opinion, not just by answering the causal research question proposed, but also by testing the validity of existing theories[8].

The results of this study will also be significant in a practical sense. On a larger scale, it will indicate whether the US public is more responsive to material or theoretical cues from international organizations when forming opinions foreign military action. As the world's largest military power, the United States has proven hard for IOs to restrict in the past: a particularly salient example of this is the Iraq war of 2003, when the US carried out a military intervention in Iraq without having UNSC authorization. Since the purpose of NATO is collective security, and as a regional IO it is subject to the authority of the UN (a global IO), the instances when the UN, whose purpose is peacekeeping, fails to prevent international conflicts in this way, are all the more harmful for its legitimacy and efficiency in its operations.

[6] Macro-level (or aggregate) data can be defined as survey or census data in which the unit of observation is compiled statistics (such as a mean or a proportion). Micro-level (or individual-level) data, in contrast, is census or survey data where the unit of observation is the individual, and information is recorded about each individual.

[7] This advance was made by Grieco et al. (2011), but has not been furthered in the research-based literature written thereafter. There is still a gap in the causal explanations of how IOs use the mechanism of domestic politics to influence state behavior.

[8] For example, Chapman (2004) argues that the public values theoretical UNSC authorization over actual burden-sharing advantages. This experiment will test Chapman's theory: if the results reflect a significantly higher level of public support for the intervention within group T2 than within group T3, Chapman's logic will be fortified.

Hence, understanding the respective effectiveness of theoretical and practical cues, and of legality vs. prudence cues, in their curbing of US public opinion illuminates a new potential pathway for the UN to be more successful in containing US use of military force, namely by fixing the ambiguity in its Charter regarding UNSC authorization for military interventions and instead providing a specific definition of these endorsements as being those that sway public opinion more. Because the UN contains so many agencies and programs (the list of issues on which the UN takes action is extremely extensive, encompassing everything from climate change to gender equality and health) the information provided by the findings of this study, in illustrating ways to improve the efficiency and therefore reduce the cost of UN peacekeeping efforts, will increase the amount of resources available to other agencies and programs that are central in other academic disciplines, such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Health Organization.

The experiment will also offer an indication of what individuals value most when making decisions of large scale and importance, such as going to war against another country or not. Said insights will be of particular benefit for individuals in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, since they will deepen existing understandings of the reasoning processes and institutional structures that govern individual decision-making and social behavior. Further research can expand the scope and value of this project by carrying out the same experiment on audiences of other countries that are UNSC permanent members and important NATO members, for example the UK, and then compare the results to the ones obtained by this study of American individuals. As indicated by the current immigration crisis in Europe, caused by refugees fleeing international wars, the detrimental effects of military conflicts extend far beyond the scope of any single scientific discipline or physical territory, and thus so will the findings of this study on how to prevent these better.

3. Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Research Design

	Control (CI)	Treatment 1 (T1) (UNSC approval; legality)	Treatment 2 (T2) (UNSC approval; prudence)	Treatment 3 (T3) (NATO support; material)
Strongly Support				
Support				
Indifferent/DK				
Oppose				
Strongly Oppose				
Total	**500**	**500**	**500**	**500**