**The Effectiveness of Public and Private Threats: A Document-Based Approach**

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**Motivation**

How effective are public and private diplomacy in crisis bargaining? Most scholarship on public and private threats utilizes formal models and historical case studies. While many agree on the relative efficacy of public signals (Fearon 1994, Schultz 2001), academics diverge on whether private signals are "cheap" (Kurzak 2007, Ramsay 2011).

We attempt the first systematic study to address this question by photographing, digitizing, and coding over 30,000 de-classified pages of documents on a critical period: the Berlin Crisis of 1958-1963.

**General Approach**

Elite policymakers' perceptions of threat during crises may be influenced by publicly hostile statements or privately channeled messages. We collect de-classified White House (internal) documents of elite perceptions at the Eisenhower and Kennedy Presidential Libraries, and State Department telegrams of private messages from de-classified files at the National Archives. The Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) provides public statements made by the Soviet Union. These documents are broken down to 300-word segments. A sample of each collection is coded for expressing threats and hostility to enable automated coding of the remaining data.

**Predicted Data**

All segments are predicted for threats and re-aggregated to the document level. Results with 95% confidence intervals are below. Some key moments from the Berlin Crisis and Cold War more generally are also indicated for reference.

**Time-Series Model Selection**

To directly identify instantaneous relations between the variables while also estimating coefficients of the innovation terms, we use structural vector autoregression (SVAR) A and AB models with lag $p = 7$ (that is, one week).

$$\begin{align*}
A \mathbf{y}_{t-1} = A_1 \mathbf{y}_{t-2} + \ldots + A_7 \mathbf{y}_{t-7} + \mathbf{u}_{t},
\end{align*}$$

$u_t \equiv A^{-1} \mathbf{e}_t$ in an A model, and $u_t = A^{-1} \mathbf{e}_t$ in an AB model.

$y_C$, the number of memos expressing threat in collection $C \in \{\text{FBIS, DOS, WH}\}$ on day $t$.

This identification assumption is justified by the data's construction and results of VAR models.

**SVAR Results**

Recall that the key dependent variable is the number of White House memos that express threat, as influenced by private messages (DOS), public Soviet statements (FBIS), and past White House perceptions (WH).

**Conclusions**

While largely statistically significant, neither public nor private diplomacy has a substantively important effect on elite policymakers' perceptions of threat.

With original data and techniques, our findings suggest that the debate about the differing nature of public and private diplomacy in crises may be rather immaterial. During one of the tensest sustained periods of US history, neither form of communication had consequential effects on Americans' views on its primary adversary. This conclusion challenges pivotal but essentially untested assumptions of a large IR literature.

Future work could investigate this dynamic in other periods and with other countries. Scholars could also use this data and document-driven method to study the strategic calculations, if any, of using public or private diplomacy.