

Honor and American Security Strategy



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Abstract

Honor is an elusive concept, yet its affects have influenced the course of human history. Although the explicit usage of honor within international politics has waned, many argue its mechanisms still drive foreign policy decision-making. In this paper I will attempt to present a coherent conceptualization of how honor still impacts U.S. foreign policy, making a distinction between a moral imperative and a credibility imperative. Subsequently, I will create a framework for testing the hypothesized imperatives. Finally, I will apply this framework to answer the research question: In what way does honor influence the national security strategy of the United States?

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1. Introduction

Honor is often regarded as an archaic concept within international relations. However, though few politicians nowadays cite national honor as a motivation, many authors argue that honor has not disappeared but merely changed appearance.

In this paper I will review the influence honor might have on contemporary US foreign policy. I will do this by focusing on the following question: “In what way does honor influence the national security strategy of the United States?”

I will start this paper with a historical overview of the usage of honor. Subsequently I will review some of the main elements of honor before describing the two main ways honor is conceptualized in modern IR theory. After this I will describe the role honor plays in the ideologies under review today and present hypotheses. Following this, I will present the framework and methodology used in the paper. Then I will present the results of my primary research. Finally, I will present a comparative discussion, a conclusion and some implications.

2. The evolution of honor

Historically honor was a central moral code until the time of the *ancien régime*. It remained primarily reserved to the nobility. Like them, honor was strongly connected to the monarchical system of government. Though reflections of the honor-dominated *modus vivendi* of the nobility existed among other segments of the population, to the aristocratic elites it was a central code of behavior. One of which they were convinced only they themselves were capable of abiding by it (Best, 1982, pp. 13-14). I will return to this idea of the exclusive element of honor below. Traditionally, honor has been divided in a set of masculine and a set of feminine characteristics, typical for a traditional worldview. In this paper I will limit myself to the masculine aspect of honor, as this is the one thought of importance in international relations (O’Neill, 2001, p. 87).

Through the aristocracy’s traditional role of military officers as well as the violent nature of upholding honor, the concept received a central role within military context:

“The concept turns up in all sorts of contexts and with infinite varieties of meaning; but its core in our culture, from which its spores have been, as it were, diffused through the rest of society, has always lain among the military.” (Best, 1982, p. 9)

During the French revolution, honor was to the nobility’s vice and immorality and was therefore rejected. Bourgeois virtue replaced aristocratic honor as a measure of quality central to their socio-political system (Best, 1982, pp. 18-20). However, as revolutionary armies clashed on the battlefields of Europe, their armies retained their military traditions and honor did not disappear. As Best puts it: “What was functionally valuable in the old tradition would be absorbed by the new men, and what was not could be jettisoned” (1982, p. 32). Thus, an eclectic approach to the use of honor was taken. In addition, through its revolutionary military use the nobility lost its exclusive hold on honor, which was now shared by all citizen-soldiers (Best, 1982, pp. 31-32).

Smith (2018, p. 246) describes America’s focus on virtue and honor during the Revolution and how even in this unlikely nation through the military the notions of aristocratic-inspired ideas of honor remained of importance side-by-side with the new idea of collective honor.

This collectivization and transformation of honor would give birth to a new phenomenon, national honor. Honor was mostly framed in personal terms, extended at most to an exclusive group of peers. However, by the late nineteenth century the idea of honor had, through the democratisation of the concept, been “thoroughly collectivized” and as nationalism soared their fusion created an idea of the nation as *“personified as a huge collective self”* (Best, 1982, pp. 43-44). The high watermark of the explicit national honor was in many ways the First world war. Offer (2016, pp. 214, 235) describes how honor drove many of the warring states to and during the war. In fact, Wilson explicitly cited America’s national honor as a reason to declare war on Germany (Dafoe and Caughey, 2016, p. 344; O’Neill, 2001, p. 86).

After the Great War, the idea had lost most of its popularity, being associated with the ultranationalism that caused the war. Instead of honor nations now instead use words like credibility, reputation, prestige, the national will, to denote the still present motives of honor (O’Neill, 2001, p. 85; Fettweis, 2013, p. 99-100).

3. Honor: A general conceptualisation

As noted above, honor is a behavioral code, determining the way an actor is supposed to act. In times of the aristocratic quasi-monopoly of honor concerned a *'complicated code of behavior'* determining *'peculiar rules of what was right and proper to do'* (Best, 1982, p. 14). Offer colours this in, stating that the code of honor required "strict adherence to norms of professional and personal conduct, like loyalty to the state, professional integrity, courage, and virility." (Offer, 2016, p. 215).

Here we need to make a distinction between honor as virtue and honor as precedence. Robinson (1999, p. 124) describes this split as follows:

"The former is based on religion, and equates honour with virtuous and moral behaviour. In the second concept of "honour as precedence," virtue is irrelevant. Instead "Honour is the aspiration to status and the validation of status.""

O'Neill, writing about honor as status, also reasons that this kind of honor is separate from virtue, which should be upheld when no one watches, while honor depends *"only on behavior commonly known to be publicly observed"* since it is about the validation of status (2001, p. 89). However, though this separation is important, I would argue that 'honor as virtue' is not entirely irrelevant to 'honor as precedence' as it contributes to the status of an actor. As Offer puts it: "To cast doubt on a person's virtue in any of these domains constituted a serious insult." (Offer, 2016, p. 215). O'Neill also implicitly recognizes this by naming "social grace" as part of the content of honor (2001, p. 87) as well as when he describes how the different "traits, virtues and values" of honor are treated as present or absent as a whole (2001, p. 91).

In fact, Robinson himself seems somewhat contradicting, as he states that some White officers connected 'honor as virtue' and 'honor as precedence' (1999, p. 134). In addition, he does stress the important role of the code of honor maintained by the Whites (Robinson, 1999, pp. 126, 133, 137) and explicitly stating how the code "emphasises the means over the end" (1999, p. 140). Moreover, he even relates it to morality (Robinson, 1999, pp. 131, 132, 137, 138).

It seems like Robinson's separation of 'honor as virtue' and 'honor as precedence' is based rather on the idea articulated by O'Neill that virtue should be upheld when no one watches, whereas honor needs to be publicly observed:

"In this system, "might is right." As long as one is not caught out, any means are allowed. Dishonor comes only from being caught using unfair means, not from actually using them." (Robinson, 1999, p. 124)

This is echoed by O'Neill, who also states that misbehaving that was not recorded by the public did not affect honor (2001, p. 89). Another argument for Robinson's strict separation seems the savagery displayed by the Whites during the civil war, yet he himself shows that this fits within the White code of honor due to the opposing Reds being not being outside of their group of honor, leaving them no obligation to treat them with honor (Robinson, 1999, p. 133).

Therefore, it seems like virtuous behavior, in the optics of the behavioral code of honor, only matters when 'publicly observed'. Furthermore, the virtuosity in question can differ a lot from virtues in the traditional moral sense and adhere to rather 'peculiar' norms. Best (1982, p. 19) also links honor to peer judgement as well as "*society's highest esteem*" (1982, p. 20), just as Offer (2016, p. 217) considers reputation as the "*motivational source*" of honor. This reflective characteristic, central to the concept of 'honor as precedence', is what O'Neill coins the reputational component of honor, which O'Neill relates to the social function of reciprocity:

"honor-conscious people worry about others' beliefs about their own attitudes." (O'Neill, 2001, p. 89)

"It is the duty of the honorable person to generate common knowledge that he is honorable, to assure everyone that he would be willing to defend the group. If each member knows that others are confident in the given member, they too will be steady." (O'Neill, 2001, p. 89)

'The group' mentioned here by O'Neill is described shortly afterwards as "*those others that hold honor*" or the "*honor group*" (2001, p. 89). This idea of exclusivity is also noted above in Robinson's description of the Whites not regarding the Reds as being in the honor group,

implying they also shouldn't be treated with honor (1999, 133), something noted above and returning in Offer's article (2016, p. 215).

These commitments could in fact be such that men were willing to give their lives for them. In such cases honor no longer served self-interest, but was transformed into self-sacrifice (Robinson, 1999, p. 125). This was what Robinson describes as collective honor, the fact that to members of a specific honor group, the group itself possesses honor to which one's personal honor is tied. This traditionally this could be a regiment (1999, p. 125). However, since the 'democratization of honor' and the rise of nationalism this could extend to a nation which would be "*personified as a huge collective self*" (Best, 1982, pp. 43-44). This links the idea of honor with identity, as one is united with the group due to membership to a society by what Steele sees as "*a sense of what will be deemed 'honorable' by our community based upon common principles, what I term the relationship between external honor and collective or social identity.*" (Steele, 2007, p. 97). In other words, the nation would become the 'honor group'. This collective honor is contrasted with personal honor, which is primarily self-serving (Robinson, 1999, p. 125; O'Neill, 2001, p. 89; Steele, 2007, p. 97).

Both collective and personal honor are a status, therefore an insult on one's honor or the honor of the group needs to be defended (Robinson, 1999, pp. 124-125; O'Neill, 2001, pp. 139-140). The archetype of reaction to an insult by a person, whether against his individual or honor group, would be to challenge the insulter to a duel (Offer, 2016, p. 215; O'Neill, 2001, p. 245). When a perceived insult is made upon the national honor, the state's reaction would be war (Offer, 2016, p. 216; O'Neill, 2001, pp. 91-92). Thus, due to the violent nature of upholding one's honor, it results in a constant readiness to defend it. This leaves honor-conscious people, or states, more belligerent (Fettweis, 2013, pp. 105-108).

4. To a modern concept of honor in American politics

American honor had its roots in the general gentile concept of honor as practiced in Europe. This is a logical result of British colonization (Smith, 2018, p. 34). However, the high levels of religious communities of outcasts from the Old World led to a heightened sense of 'honor as precedence' with its focus on morality and virtue as described above (Smith, 2018, p. 30). While this 'religious' honor developed more in the north, the more traditionally European

idea of 'honor as status' remained dominant among the landowning gentry in the south (Smith, 2018, p. 34).

Smith describes how the American revolutionary war caused an increase in the more traditional and personal ideas of honor associated with the European variant through the military (2018, pp. 139-140, 149). However, under influence of Congress and Washington a strong sense of collective honor developed, which was relatively more focused on honor as virtue (2018, pp. 165, 219). The focus on honor as status became once more prominent during the war of 1812 and the rise of President Andrew Jackson (Smith, 2018, p. 233). Moreover, Jackson himself could be seen as a paragon of a militarized honor as status, being described as knightly personage (Smith, 2018, pp. 242-243) whose conduct against his enemies is more than a little reminiscent of the double standard conduct of the Russian Whites described by Robinson (Smith, 2018, p. 244; Robinson, 1999, p. 133). However, Jackson's low-class origins showed that though much of the traditional values of European honor had been adopted by the Americans, it had also truly democratized (Smith, 2018, p. 245).

Cohen and Nisbett (2016, pp. 551-553) connect the higher levels of violence of Southern whites to the culture of honor they discern there, which they see as rooted in three historical factors: The origins of Irish herdsman, the herding lifestyle of these immigrants in the region and the historical lack of law enforcement. They argue that this has created a regional culture of honor which has remained as these socioeconomic conditions changed. This specific culture of honor they relate to 'honor as status' as described above. Characteristics are a high value on reputation and therefore insult, with a focus on violent reaction mirroring the duels prevalent in traditional societies (2016, p. p. 566). Uskul recognizes the same culture of honor and contrasts this with Northern attitudes which in turn focus more on values much like Smith's description of honor as virtue (Uskul, 2012, p. 1133; Wyatt-Brown, 2005, p. 435).

Although Cohen and Nisbett as well Uskul relate this honor culture more to personal honor, others relate it to national honor. They argue that actions against the state are considered insults and therefore elicit a militant reaction from members of the honor culture like a personal insult would as well (Barnes, Brown and Ostermann, 2012, pp. 1019-1020). This reminds of Best's conceptualization of the state as a huge collectivized self, described above. Thus, the culture of honor gets an ideological dimension which is also noted by different

research (Imura, Burkley and Brown, 2014, p. 30). Mead in fact considers the existence of a code of honor as a central part of the foreign policy instinct of Jacksonianism (1999, p. 21).

Having established a clear conceptualization of honor in general and its role in America, I will now formulate two hypotheses of honor's contemporary influence on the US national security strategy. Though these are two separate concepts, they represent the interconnected mechanisms present in traditional honor and therefore 'honor' remains the best concept to describe their joint influence.

5. Modern honor in IR: The credibility imperative

As noted above, national honor has not been directly cited as a foreign policy issue since the First World war. However, many argue that honor, though disguised, has had a continued influence on American foreign policy since (O'Neill, 2001, pp. 85-86; Fettweis, 2013, pp. 94-95). Instead of honor, policymakers now use terms like reputation or credibility when they would have used honor before. Redefined as credibility imperative, Fettweis (2013, pp. 99-100) notes how honor still maintains a major influence on the American grand strategy. The idea is based on the idea of audience costs, the idea that not acting upon one's word, causes the audience to react negatively, yet the evidence is shaky, both at the national or domestic level (Nomikos and Sambanis, 2019, pp. 575, 586-587) as well as the international level (Fettweis, 2013, pp. 99-100). Still, concerns regarding the maintenance of credibility have been explicitly cited as influencing actions by the US government on the international stage. For example, Fettweis (2013, p. 112) cites one official in the Reagan administration stating credibility as the sole reason to intervene in El Salvador. Another case is Vietnam, where pulling back was seen as doubly hurting US reputation both by abandoning an ally and succumbing to a hostile state (O'Neill, 2001, p. 104). Concerning the Iraq war, credibility is also often cited as one of the reasons for intervention (Dafoe and Caughey, 2016, p. 344). Thus, my first hypothesis is that honor influences American security strategy through the credibility imperative. I will now discuss some characteristics associated with honor as credibility imperative.

The first characteristic is a focus on sticking to commitments to allies. Failing to aid one's allies in times of need, will cause other allies to perceive a state as incapable or unwilling to

support its allies, rendering an alliance with the state useless, which could cause them to distance themselves from this untrustworthy and dishonorable state, isolating it in the international system (O'Neill, 2001, p. 128). An example of this characteristic at play is the US defense of South Korea (Fettweis, 2013, p. 103). Another example is the aforementioned Vietnam case (O'Neill, 2001, p. 104). By stressing an adherence to alliance commitments, policymakers do sometimes commit to actions that serve no tangible interest, acting only in the interest of credibility (Weinstein, 1969, pp. 44-46). This corresponds to the idea of collective honor as well as the idea of oath-taking (O'Neill, 2001, p. 127).

Besides the positive credibility towards allies, states also seek to create a credibility related to threats. The argument runs similar to idea of committing to alliances. If one makes a threat yet does not enforce it when the threat is ignored, a state loses credibility, diminishing the impact of future threats (Fettweis, 2013, p. 105). This would have a significant impact on policies of deterrence or coercion (Dafoe, Renshon and Huth, 2014, p. 374). An example is the unwillingness of the US to back down in crises created by soviet threats (Fettweis, 2013, pp. 113-114). The attack of 9/11 has oft been cited as being elicited by a lack of US reputation for resolve (Barnes, Brown and Ostermann, 2012, pp. 1026-1027). Again, this could cause states to crises to get involved just because a threat was made, even though actually acting upon the specific threat might be against the state's interest (Fettweis, 2013, p. 114).

The credibility imperative also makes states more belligerent. If one does not react to a hostile action, other actors might perceive it is weak or otherwise unable or unwilling to respond, even when no threat is made. This is because any unanswered slight causes damage to their reputation so states will be constantly ready to show resolve by acting assertively to protect their reputation, often in a violent way (Fettweis, 2013, pp. 105-107). A link can be made to the violent reaction to insults within cultures of honor and with states of Victorian Europe going to war over insults to national honor. Seeking to prevent slights, states also seek to pre-empt insults, further contributing to a belligerent attitude that Fettweis describes as being 'hyperbolic' (2013, p. 108).

The ultimate application of the credibility imperative concerns nuclear deterrence. After all, the usage of these weapons of mass destruction poses the most severe threat to the state and a

bad reputation could cause others to stop believe in a state's willingness to use them (Powell, 1990, p. 32).

6. Modern honor in IR: The moral imperative

In his writings on the Jacksonian instinct in American foreign policy, Mead (1999, p. 21) describes how this section of the American population has a strong sense of national honor which he translates to honor as reputation as noted above. However, with Mead we arrive at the juxtaposition of honor as credibility and a different kind of honor, ne more based on concepts like dignity and identity. The reason for this is that Mead connects the reputation imperative to an emotional state than the more common (pseudo-)rational credibility imperative:

“Honor in the Jacksonian imagination is not simply what one feels oneself to be on the inside; it is also a question of the respect and dignity one commands in the world at large.”
(Mead, 1999, p. 21)

As can be seen this focus on the inside seems to align with the internal component of honor. The role this concept of honor, referring more to identity, is described by Steele (2007, pp. 2, 40). He develops a concept of ontological security, the idea that nations do not just seek material security but also a kind of moral security which is connected to whether a nation acts according to its self-image and values (Steele, 2007, pp. 2-5). Upon this I base my second hypothesis regarding honor's role in modern IR theory, as moral imperative.

Within this framework of ontological security, Steele makes a link with honor, stating how 'self-identity' is served by 'honor-driven action' (Steele, 2007, p. 149). Of course, we have seen above how there is an interplay between internal and external honor. This way honor as identity shares the commitment to alliances with honor as credibility, as it would be immoral to renege on commitments (Steele, 2007, p. 148). In addition, this would lead to a strong desire to react to humiliation, which corresponds to a more emotional variant of honor as reaction to threats and attacks found with the credibility imperative, yet in this context motivated by concerns for dignity as national identity (Tsygankov, 2014, p. 353).

Another characteristic of honor as moral imperative is the rejection of immoral practices that do not fit the state's self-identity. This is further articulated by Steele in another article about the usage of torture by the US and its relation to US self-identity and honor. Here Steele defines how performing honorable actions in virtuous sense relate to self-identity:

“If its self-identity shapes what it honors, the converse is also true – performing ‘honorable’ actions helps reinforce (or adjust) an agent’s sense of who they are and what they stand for” (Steele, 2008, p. 245)

Thus, Steele argues, honor prevents social agents from acting inappropriate by feelings of ‘shame’, ‘guilt’ and ‘blame’ (2008, p. 246). Giving honor the role of an internal sanction from immoral actions. Kreps and Maxey also link moral behavior no national identity, and specifically to American exceptionalism:

“The in-group/loyalty foundation is consistent with a commitment to protecting a country’s values and identity by responding to attacks on civilians. This moral commitment is often used to establish a country’s distinctiveness and, in the case of the United States, American exceptionalism.” (Kreps and Maxey, 2018, p. 1823)

Another characteristic of honor as moral imperative is the existence of an honor group within the international system. This relates to idea of an honor group presented above, with ‘good nations’ deserving honorable treatment whereas ‘bad’ states do not. It focuses on the idea that some states are ‘good’ whereas others are ‘bad’ or even ‘evil’. Choosing in which category a group or state belongs often depends on whether they behave ‘honorably’. This effect is related to the American fusion between honor and evangelicalism:

“The Manichean style separating the world into the polarities of good and evil applies in both the domains of honor and evangelicalism.” (Wyatt-Brown, 2005, p. 448)

This can lead to moral exclusion of the out-group:

“Those subjected to moral exclusion are seen as ‘non-entities, expendable, or undeserving; consequently, harming them appears acceptable, appropriate, or just.’” (Schori-eyal, Halperin and Saguy, 2019, pp. 426-427)

The combination of this Manichean divide and the moral imperative to act on values also causes states to wish to export their values to other states (Wyatt-Brown, 2005, p. 453).

7. A multilevel framework

Neoclassical realism is focused on integrating domestic factors of influence within the systemic framework of neorealism. Basing themselves on the thought and ideas of the more classical realists like Carr and Morgenthau, neoclassical realists argue that domestic-level factors contribute as secondary influences side by side with the more primary systemic pressures of the international system (Kitchen, 2010, p. 118). This ultimate area where the levels meet is at the Janus-faced foreign policy executive or FPE which exists at the intersection between the domestic and international levels (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, 2009, p. 43).

Focusing on both domestic as well as systemic variables allows neoclassical realism in theory to reach a greater level of explanatory power than its neorealist cousin. However, the complexity of neoclassical realism in turn does suffer in parsimony and coherence. This, in fact, is the main critique of Neoclassical realism. Its opponents describe how it is a degenerative theory, indistinctive, theoretically regressive and suffering from an identity dilemma due to being located at the intersection of the structural and the domestic (Meibauer, 2019, p. 22). It is important that any domestic or ideational influences are intervening variables that constrain policymakers in pursuing otherwise rational policies conform the neorealist structural model (Meibauer, 2019, pp. 22-23). However, in order to successfully integrate ideational factors within such a materialist framework, careful conceptualization in a positivist manner is key. As Meibauer puts it:

“The successful integration of ideational factors in positivist frameworks of inquiry into foreign policy and state behaviour hinges on a careful conceptualisation and operationalisation of ideas as distinct from, yet conceptually linked with, interests, beliefs, culture, and language.” (Meibauer, 2019, p. 34)

Integration of both levels centers around the concept of grand strategy. Grand strategy is the central object of study for neoclassical realists (Kitchen, 2010, p. 119), it focuses on the priorities of the state and the way it pursues its, mainly structurally determined, goals within the international system. A clear conceptualization is given by Kitchen:

“When we speak of grand strategy as an analytical concept, we are speaking of that considered set of national policies in peace and war that both set out the goals of the state in international politics and prescribe how a broad range of national resources should be utilised in pursuit of those goals. The study of grand strategy is therefore the study of states’ attitudes to the international environment – of how they mobilise which elements of their power in pursuit of which causes in global politics.” (Kitchen, 2010, p. 121)

Based on my conceptualization and hypotheses I will now describe a model integrating honor into the grand strategy framework of the US, specifically security strategy. As mentioned above, grand strategy is often determined by a multitude of domestic factors, for example actors, processes or institutions. In this paper I will, however, focus on one of those domestic sources of Grand strategy, namely ideas. Therefore, the model presented in this paper is not meant to be a grand theory of US foreign policy, rather it seeks to examine how one of those ideas can explain some of the peculiarities of US foreign policy that traditional structural realism fails to explain, other than calling them outliers, without leaving the materialist and systemic framework.

I separate honor in two components, which are both connected and interact reciprocally. One is focused on honor as moral imperative, the other as credibility imperative. To clearly show the way honor impacts grand strategy, I will first establish a basic framework. Following the assumptions prevalent within neoclassical realism that ideas function as intervening variables influencing state grand strategy, the role of honor is limited to influencing state behavior merely as deviating the grand strategy from following solely systemic impulses.

This way, both imperatives could be an explanation for behavior otherwise unexpected if only systemic influences are taken into account. For example, the moral imperative could cause the US to spend on humanitarian goals, while this could not be explained by systemic factors.

Drawing from the characterizations of honor's role in modern IR there are several expected diversions from systemic models. The moral imperative creates concerns with fairness, dignity, values, a black-and-white worldview and moral commitments. The credibility imperative creates concerns with deterrence, assurance, trustworthiness, resolve and belligerence.

Though imperatives of honor could thus change state policy, it is important that it does not always deviate from 'rational' policies. First it is necessary to find indications of honor to verify its influence. Only then is it possible to explain irregularities a model based solely on systemic factors would fail to explain. I will focus on finding these indications, not explaining the irregularities.

8. Methodology

In this paper I will analyze the National Security Strategies of the United States (henceforth: NSS) of the Bush and Trump administrations. If honor still plays a role in American security strategy, these documents should reflect that. The reason can be found in the link between national security and grand strategy. Neoclassical realists in general describe how national security functions as the central component of grand strategy (Clarke and Ricketts, 2017, pp. 481-483). Thus, an easy link can be made with the NSS, which is a document published by each administration, describing the core and direction of their national security policy, or at least how they wish it to be perceived.

As I wish to explore the role of honor on US grand strategy in general and its security strategy in particular, I have employed the diverse and most likely method of case selection. The diverse method focuses on exploring the value of a variable and "*has as its primary objective the achievement of maximum variance along relevant dimensions*" (Seawright and Gerring, 2008, p. 300). By analyzing different NSS's, I will be able to test if indicators of honor are present over a longer period of time, lowering the chance that this is accidental. Seawright and Gerring describe that when a variable is categorical, as is the case in this research, identification of diversity will be "readily apparent" (2010, p. 300).

However, not only do I want to measure if honor still impacts US security strategy, but also in what way. I therefore focus on two presidents most likely to use honor to explain their actions. Bush is often seen as influenced by the southern culture of honor, often literally citing the credibility imperative: "*For diplomacy to be effective, words must be credible. And no one can now doubt*

the word of America." (Dafoe and Caughey, 2016, p. 344). Trump, because he is often classified as a Jacksonian and is therefore expected to adhere to the Jacksonian code of honor (Mead, 2017, pp. 2-3; Clarke and Ricketts, 2017a, pp. 375-376).

The method of analysis used will be qualitative content analysis. I will use directed qualitative content analysis which uses existing theory to focus the research, provides predictions and helps to determine the initial coding scheme in order to "*validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework*" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2016, p. 1281). I have chosen this method because though the framework presented in this paper is new, it is composed of elements from preexisting frameworks and theories.

I will conduct my analysis in accordance with the model formulated by Hsieh and Shannon:

"first highlighting the exact words from the text that appear to capture key thoughts or concepts. Next, the researcher approaches the text by making notes of his or her first impressions, thoughts, and initial analysis. As this process continues, labels for codes emerge that are reflective of more than one key thought. These often come directly from the text and are then become the initial coding scheme. Codes then are sorted into categories based on how different codes are related and linked. These emergent categories are used to organize and group codes into meaningful clusters" (Hsieh and Shanon, 2016, p. 1279)

In order to operationalize the different conceptualizations of honor, I decided to highlight in-text words, sentences or paragraphs which indicate the influence of honor, either as moral imperative, credibility imperative or both. These highlighted versions of the documents are added as appendices A-C.

Next, I categorized the indications based on their content, resulting in several groups or 'clusters', which can be found in the appendices.

9. The 2002 National Security Strategy

9.1. Credibility imperative

“Our military’s highest priority is to defend the United States. To do so effectively, our military must:

- *assure our allies and friends;*
- *dissuade future military competition;*
- *deter threats against U.S. interests, allies, and friends; and*
- *decisively defeat any adversary if deterrence fails.”* (2002 NSS, p. 29)

The 2002 NSS represents a concern for honor as status. A focus on deterring threats, assuring allies and dissuading possible enemies can be discerned throughout the text. However, this does not just concern reactive deterrence. The 2002 NSS also shows a desire to act preemptively to show a zero tolerance to threats which reminds of the typical example of the credibility imperative of Reagan’s administration intervening in Central America simply for the sake of maintaining reputation and preventing a future threat in the hemisphere (Fettweis, 2013, p. 108)

“And, as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed.” (2002 NSS, p. vi)

Furthermore, the NSS focuses on showing a resolve against the enemy, the entire language is belligerent, enhanced by the aforementioned divide between good and evil, and this results in a hard-line policy, all about looking tough:

“The United States will make no concessions to terrorist demands and strike no deals with them. We make no distinction between terrorists and those who knowingly harbor or provide aid to them.” (2002 NSS, p. 5)

Such a show of resolve is found to serve a double function, also showing US allies the US commitment to them:

“The presence of American forces overseas is one of the most profound symbols of the U.S. commitments to allies and friends. Through our willingness to use force in our own defense and in defense of others, the United States demonstrates its resolve to maintain a balance of power that favors freedom.” (2002 NSS, p. 29)

This excessive showing of force in combination with a hard-line course and the notion of preemptive action leads to an overall belligerent image which seems to align with the more southern concept of external honor as deterrent to outside aggression:

“Finally, while maintaining near-term readiness and the ability to fight the war on terrorism, the goal must be to provide the President with a wider range of military options to discourage aggression or any form of coercion against the United States, our allies, and our friends.” (2002 NSS, p. 30)

9.2. Moral imperative

“These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society—and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages.” (2002 NSS, p. iv)

The above quote from the 2002 NSS reflects the role of honor as virtue. The sentence fits the theme surrounding honor as moral imperative and connects to Steele’s idea of ontological security. The fact that the actors behind the state consider these values ‘right and true for every person’ makes it a duty for the state to pursue the protection of these values at all times in order to feel ontologically secure and thus remain true to their code of honor.

“In pursuit of our goals, our first imperative is to clarify what we stand for: the United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere.” (2002 NSS, p. 3)

This theme is prevalent throughout the 2002 NSS. The idea of America as a virtuous force bringing good into the world is central. A focus is put on the need for America to be representing its core values.

“In the war against global terrorism, we will never forget that we are ultimately fighting for our democratic values and way of life.” (2002 NSS, p. 7)

Central to Bush’s vision on the world is his focus on the US acting in accordance with its ‘good values’ and the terrorists who represent evil. In this comparison the terrorists are portrayed as acting dishonorably, for example attacking innocents:

“The enemy is terrorism—premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.” (2002 NSS, p. 5)

The same goes for rogue states, which *“brutalize their own people and squander their national resources for the personal gain of the rulers;”* and *“reject basic human values”* (2002 NSS, p. 14).

Instead, this is contrasted with the American behavior, which is linked to honorable and virtuous behavior like helping the poor:

“Including all of the world’s poor in an expanding circle of development—and opportunity—is a moral imperative and one of the top priorities of U.S. international policy.” (NSS 2002, p. 21)

10. The 2006 National Security Strategy

10.1. Credibility imperative

“Our deterrence strategy no longer rests primarily on the grim premise of inflicting devastating consequences on potential foes. Both offenses and defenses are necessary to deter state and non-state actors, through denial of the objectives of their attacks and, if necessary, responding with overwhelming force.” (2006 NSS, p. 22)

The above is an example that represents a care for reputation in the sense of the credibility imperative that is present throughout the text. The imperative is represented by an explicit and repeated concern for showing an image of power and determination:

“Indeed, the terrorists are emboldened more by perceptions of weakness than by demonstrations of resolve. Terrorists lure recruits by telling them that we are decadent and easily intimidated and will retreat if attacked.” (2006 NSS, p. 10)

This image is also related to rivals not even considering opposing the US militarily, or even acquiring the capabilities needed to threaten it:

“We aim to convince our adversaries that they cannot achieve their goals with WMD, and thus deter and dissuade them from attempting to use or even acquire these weapons in the first place.” (2006 NSS, p. 18)

The acquiescence of force to support the credibility of deterrence is also mentioned and related to concerns of showing credibility to both allies and rivals:

“We are pursuing a future force that will provide tailored deterrence of both state and non-state threats (...) assuring allies and dissuading potential competitors.” (2006 NSS, p. 43)

10.2. Moral imperative

“It is a moral imperative that states take action to prevent and punish genocide. History teaches that sometimes other states will not act unless America does its part.” (2006 NSS, p. 17)

The concern iterated here is a concern which has no specific strategic value for the US in the traditional sense. There are no material gains to be made by preventing and punishing genocide. However, this does concern the self-image of the US as it goes against US values and not acting against it would harm the American self-perception. This is amplified by the realization that ‘history’ apparently requires a leading US role in preventing and punishing genocide, leaving the state no excuse to stay on the sidelines.

Like the 2002 NSS, the 2006 NSS also stresses the role of values in the war on terror, even connecting victory to them:

“In the long run, winning the war on terror means winning the battle of ideas, for it is ideas that can turn the disenchanted into murderers willing to kill innocent victims.” (2006 NSS, p. 9)

In the 2006 NSS, there is also an increased focus on bad faith on the part of rogue regimes, which here not only relates to the theme of the credibility imperative but also gets a moral component relating to the dishonorability of not keeping promises.

“The Iranian regime’s true intentions are clearly revealed by the regime’s refusal to negotiate in good faith.” (2006 NSS, p. 20)

A recurrent theme is the moral imperative of spreading American values because they are supposed to be universally good:

“Economic freedom is a moral imperative. The liberty to create and build or to buy, sell, and own property is fundamental to human nature and foundational to a free society.” (2006 NSS, p. 27)

Another topic of the 2006 NSS is the relation between friendly relations and shared values. This reflects the idea of the honor group. Positive relations can only be established with other honorable actors and in turn honor in moral sense remains connected to shared identities and values, represented by political systems and the treatment of citizens.

“We will encourage all our partners to expand liberty, and to respect the rule of law and the dignity of the individual, as the surest way to advance the welfare of their people and to cement close relations with the United States.” (2006 NSS, p. 36)

“We must also solidify strategic relationships with regional leaders in Central and South America and the Caribbean who are deepening their commitment to democratic values.” (2006 NSS, p. 37)

“Europe is home to some of our oldest and closest allies. Our cooperative relations are built on a sure foundation of shared values and interests.” (2006 NSS, p. 38)

The 2006 NSS even argues a link between institutions based off ‘good’ values to effective governance, connecting the moral imperative to good governance:

“Effective democracies are better able to deal with these challenges than are repressive or poorly governed states.” (2006 NSS, p. 48)

11. The 2017 National Security Strategy

11.1. Credibility imperative

“We must convince adversaries that we can and will defeat them—not just punish them if they attack the United States. We must ensure the ability to deter potential enemies by denial, convincing them that they cannot accomplish objectives through the use of force or other forms of aggression.” (2017 NSS, p. 28)

The 2017 NSS puts an explicit emphasis on convincing rivals of US strength, showing them how strong the US is so that they wouldn’t even dare attack the US. This is further linked not only to the material capabilities of America, but also to the maintenance of its alliances:

“Experience suggests that the willingness of rivals to abandon or forgo aggression depends on their perception of U.S. strength and the vitality of our alliances.” (2017 NSS, p. 26)

In turn, maintaining credibility is also necessary to assure allies:

“The United States must maintain the credible deterrence and assurance capabilities” (2017 NSS, p. 30)

Besides allies and material capabilities, the 2017 NSS also stresses the role of showing determination, connecting this to the moral imperative, exemplified here by restating the commitment to keeping the peace:

“Just as American weakness invites challenge, American strength and confidence deters war and promotes peace.” (2017 NSS, p. 3)

Finally, the 2017 NSS also sees its enemies as purposefully searching for perceived weaknesses, which of course makes the credibility imperative more urgent:

“Adversaries studied the American way of war and began investing in capabilities that targeted our strengths and sought to exploit perceived weaknesses.” (2017 NSS, p. 27)

11.2. Moral imperative

“We will continue to champion American values and offer encouragement to those struggling for human dignity in their societies. There can be no moral equivalency between nations that uphold the rule of law, empower women, and respect individual rights and those that brutalize and suppress their people.” (2017 NSS, p. 38)

In the 2017 NSS a lot of the rhetoric of Bush’s earlier NSS’s returns. This is reflected by the quote above, which shows the need to champion American values abroad and which creates a divide between those nations that adhere to these values and those that do not. In this way, the US is once again portrayed as being a force of good in the world, upholding universal values, which creates an image securing the nations ontological security based on its virtuous code of honor.

“Our adversaries will not fight us on our terms. We will raise our competitive game to meet that challenge, to protect American interests, and to advance our values.” (2017 NSS, p. 28)

“This Administration has the confidence to compete to protect our values and interests and the fundamental principles that underpin them.” (2017 NSS, p. 37)

This is also connected to themes of the credibility imperative like showing resolve, enforcing deals and maintaining commitments.

“When America does lead, however, from a position of strength and confidence and in accordance with our interests and values, all benefit.” (2017 NSS, p. 3)

“The United States will pursue enforcement actions when countries violate the rules to gain unfair advantage.” (2017 NSS, p. 19)

Finally, this NSS has a focus on ‘fairness’ (2017 NSS, pp. 19-20), which is stressed again and again. This relates to the idea of dignity as part of both the moral imperative, because it relates to as what is a moral way of dealing, yet also concerns the credibility imperative because it relates to respect and status.

12. Discussion

Across the 2002, 2006 and 2017 NSS’s, I found significant support for the idea that honor still impacts the US national security strategy. This it does in both ways hypothesized.

All three NSS’s show a concern for the moral imperative of honor. A concern for behaving according to a moral code. This shows itself in rhetoric centered on acting in accordance with values, a refusal to deal with dishonorable countries (with a clear divide between the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ states) as well as a connection between morality and giving one’s word in the sense of commitments and obligations. Furthermore, the 2017 NSS shows a concern with self-image in the sense of dignity. Specific policies connected to the moral imperative mentioned are humanitarian aid and punishment for genocide.

The credibility imperative of honor also features explicitly in the three documents. Each is filled with references to maintaining the US reputation to friend and foe. This is not just related to material capabilities but also strength of will and resolve. All three also show a commitment to belligerence and offensive deterrence, naming cases in which deterrence should go beyond defensive deployment and interventions become warranted. However, the

credibility imperative also appears the other way around in all NSS's, stressing a need to maintain reputation by assuring allies and acting upon commitments.

The patterns of rhetoric also confirmed the relation between both imperatives. Indicators like staying true to commitments have both a moral and a credibility motive. In addition, the themes are often put closely together. For example, managing deterrence in a way that does not conflict with ideas of virtuous behavior. Thus, the interconnectedness of both imperatives shows the relevance of the traditional mechanisms of a holistic concept of honor, rather than independent notions credibility or morality.

13. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to make sense of the many different interpretations of honor in international relations theory. This I have done in order to look whether honor still has an impact in modern American politics, which changed much since Wilson cited honor as *casus belli* for the great war.

I have used a neoclassical realist approach, focusing on security strategy. The object of study has been the National Security Strategies of 2002, 2006 and 2017. I will now turn to answering the research question: How does honor influence modern American security strategy?

In conclusion, the influence of honor on modern American security strategy is twofold and conform the more traditional divide of honor into honor as virtue and honor as precedence. First, there seems to be a moral imperative related to virtue, values and the self-image or ontological security America wishes to maintain. This is primarily related to internal honor. Second, there exists a concern with the credibility imperative, aiming to dissuade rivals and assure allies to enhance the material security of the United States, representing mechanisms primarily relating to the concept of external honor.

Honor influences American foreign policy in the typical way intervening variables exert influence in neoclassical realist frameworks. Rather than being the primary driver of foreign policy it diverts policy from a completely rational course in neorealist terms, moving policy

in pursuit of different imperatives like non-strategic humanitarian aid in the sense of the moral imperative.

Of course, this study is very limited in scope and leaves many paths open for further research. Relations to other intervening variables in the neoclassical sense like ideology remain obscure. Furthermore, the impact of honor on other fields of grand strategy than security strategy still needs to be measured. In addition, the studied sources in this paper are limited and the framework could benefit a lot from being empirically tested using other sources. An obvious example remains applying it to the 2010 and 2015 NSS's of the Obama administration. Finally, the framework could be used to explain irregularities present neorealist theory.

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Appendix A:

Attachment Nss2002_coded.pdf

Appendix B:

Attachment Nss2006_coded.pdf

Appendix C:

Attachment Nss2017_coded.pdf