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## **Assessing the importance of agency: Analyzing the Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on US Foreign Policy**

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**Assessing the importance of agency:  
Analyzing the Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on US Foreign Policy**



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### **Abstract**

Parsimonious system-based theories take center stage within the scholarly field of International Relations. Assuming the international system to be the key determinant of international politics, they aim to explain any geopolitical event. Utilizing 60 speeches from United States presidents Obama and Trump, and employing China's Belt and Road Initiative as an important divide, this thesis will examine the role of agency, through the individual leadership of both Obama and Trump, within the realm of international politics.

## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Literature review</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1. Structure-agency debate	7
2.2. System-based approaches	8
2.2.1. Neorealism	9
2.2.2. Liberalism	11
2.3. Power Transition Theory and Thucydides' Trap	13
2.4. Leadership matters	15
<b>3. Theoretical framework</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1. Beliefs	18
3.2. Operational Codes and the OCA	20
3.2.1. Critiques	24
3.3. Presidential role within foreign affairs	25
3.4. Expectations	26
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1. Case selection	28
4.2. Dependent and independent variable	29
4.3. Data collection	30
4.4. Data analysis	32
4.5. Limitations of the study	35
<b>5. Analysis and Discussion</b>	<b>36</b>
5.1. Analysis	36
5.2. Discussion on Obama's beliefs and effect of the BRI	40
5.2.1. Foreign policy outcomes	41
5.2.2. Meeting expectations?	41
5.2.3. Other explanatory factors	42
5.3. Discussion on Obama's post-BRI beliefs and Trump	44
5.3.1. Foreign policy outcomes	44
5.3.2. Meeting expectations?	45
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>47</b>
Bibliography	48
Appendix A: The White House archived speeches	67
Appendix B: Steps in the Verbs-In-Context-System	73
Appendix C: Table of data overview	74
Appendix D: Levene's test for homogeneity of variances	75
Appendix E: Shapiro-Wilk test for normality	77

## 1. Introduction

In 2013, whilst on a state visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the introduction of China's most ambitious program to date. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would follow China's ancient Silk Road over land and, using a complex network of ports and corridors, over sea. Through both monetary investments and utilizing its technological knowledge, China attempts to build a new economic order, one that is Sino-centric. Even though China has been on the rise for some time and its rise has not gone unnoticed by foreign leaders, a lot still remains unclear about both China and the BRI but also on how other nations respond to this geopolitical shift. An abundance of literature, especially within the scholarly field of International Relations, has been written on China's rise but this has been mostly done so using a specific theoretical lens. System-based theories, such as neorealism and liberalism, have analyzed the issue thoroughly. Neorealism argues that China, reminded by its history of being overrun by more advanced European powers, knows that the only path to survival is by reaching the status of hegemon (Flint & Xiaotong, 2019; Mearsheimer, 2010). In terms of examining the reaction of the nation which is currently in that hegemonic position, the United States of America, neorealists are divided on the progress of further China-US relations. On the other hand, those who follow the liberalist school of thought believe that the BRI is just another example of growing interdependence between nations, ultimately leading to increased cooperation and with it, peace. In terms of a US reaction towards China they are cautiously optimistic, stating that as long as the interests of the most influential Chinese and American sub-state groups align with one another, and China proceeds to integrate itself further into the economic world order, conflict can be avoided (Friedberg, 2006).

However, these theories, with the international system as their primary explanatory variable, are incapable of explaining the entire phenomenon of the One Belt One Road (OBOR). They prove to be especially impotent of explaining the American reaction to the Belt and Road Initiative. Neorealism struggles to explain why the US has only ushered a limited reaction to the adaptation of the BRI, a challenge to its own hegemonic position. Liberalism, with its emphasis on the importance of symmetric economic agreements and cooperation, is unable to explain why the United States from 2017, over four years after the BRI's inception, all of a sudden found the status quo unfavorable.

Working under the premise that leadership matters and therefore the role of agency should be accounted for, this thesis would like to offer an agency-centric approach as an alternative way of analyzing the case of the BRI. The thesis will therefore employ the following research question:

*“To what extent did leadership matter in US foreign policy vis-à-vis the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative?”*

In answering this research question, the following structure is maintained. First, the existing literature on system-based theories, as well as two middle-ranged theories, will be examined in order to expose their gaps. Then, the concepts of beliefs and Operational Codes are introduced, alongside the Operational Code construct and its limitations. Thirdly, all considerations in terms of case selection, data collection and analysis are discussed. Fourth, by examining 60 speeches by both presidents Obama and Trump through the analytical tool of the Operational Code Analysis (OCA), this thesis will argue that political leadership should be taken into account when examining geopolitical issues. Finally, the results of both analyses will be related onto US foreign policy outcomes towards China.

## **2. Literature review**

The following literature review will encompass an overview of all relevant themes, debates and gaps of the literature on foreign policy. It will first highlight the debate between structural versus agency approaches before moving on to how the structural approaches would analyze, and have analyzed, the Belt and Road Initiative and the United States' response. Lastly, this literature review will attempt to address the suggested gap using the role of human agency.

### **2.1. Structure-agency debate**

The debate between structural and agency approaches is not limited to merely the scholarly field of political science. The discussion on which methodological device prevails in driving human behavior is one that is present in just about any social science. At the core of the debate lies whether one's individual autonomy, acting as a free agent, or socialization by social structures, through offering opportunities and restrictions, primarily shapes individual human behavior (Young, 1980). As becomes clear, the concepts of agency and structure thus have a leading role in the debate and require further conceptualization. As is the case with most concepts having a predominant place within any field of study, thus being subject to scholarly contestation, the concepts of agency and structure can be perceived as being essentially contested in nature. Essentially contested concepts, first described by Walter Bryce Gallie in 1956, are concepts which cannot be defined in strict terms, due to their value-laden nature (Buzan, 1984, p. 125). Additionally, the act of attempting to define these terms in such strict terms misunderstands and defeats their function as being able to stand the test of time. Structure is described as "the recurrent patterned arrangements which influence or limit the choices and opportunities available" (Barker, 2012, p. 448). In contrast, agency is defined as "the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices" (Barker, 2012, p. 448).

Now that the structure-agency debate has been introduced and its boundaries have been outlined, the debate will be placed in a context relevant to this thesis. Perhaps one of the first authors arguing on the several levels present within the world of politics was Kenneth Waltz. In *Man, the State and War* (1959), he argued the existence of three images, or levels of analysis, over why and how conflict arose and would proceed. The first image examines war as a cause by the nature and behavior of man (p. 15). The first image does consider the role of the state, but to a considerable lesser degree than the second image. This second image considers the internal structure of the state to be the main explanatory factor when seeking to explain conflict or war (pp. 80-81). As almost everything is related to man, Waltz notes that conflict is not just



the product of human nature. Waltz's third image refers to war as a result of an international system absent of laws which are able to effectively govern it (p. 159). These images prove useful as a theoretical underpinning and pocket guide when examining the upcoming systems and reductionist approaches. However, applying the structure-agency debate onto the academic discipline International Relations (IR) offers a field-specific issue problematic in its own right. This level-of-analysis problem was first mentioned by Singer and describes the inability of IR theory and practices to be understood by examining them through one particular lens or image (Singer, 1961, pp. 77-78). Additionally, the level-of-analysis problem is not only analytical in nature. When describing the Rambouillet Agreement, a peace agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and representatives of Kosovo, Wille (2017) concluded that agency should not be a factor which is to be taken for granted. It was during the negotiations leading up to the agreement that the several factions 'representing' Kosovo could not reach an internal agreement on which factions spoke on behalf of the prospective state. The case of Kosovo poses two different sets of issues. Firstly, the level-of-analysis problem poses that one cannot understand IR theory through the use of one particular lens but only grants the national state and the international system as suitable lenses (pp. 808-809). And in the case of Kosovo, the second lens of the nation state was mostly absent due to internal disagreements. Second, when approaching IR through Waltz's three images, it poses the question of what level of analysis constitutes the agent and the structure. Since agency implies a smaller unit of analysis and structure a relatively larger unit of analysis, both can refer to differing units of analysis. For instance, when perceiving the structure to be the international system, agency could refer to individuals, nation states or both. Additionally, when perceiving agency to lay within the human individual level, structure is able to refer to the nation state, the international system or both. Noting these issues is of importance to this thesis because they provide us with the necessary critical understanding to examine systems and reductionist theories alike.

## **2.2. System-based approaches**

Now that the structure-agency debate has been highlighted and been placed within an IR relevant context it is possible to examine systems and reductionist theories, as well as their stances vis-à-vis China within China-US relations since the adaptation of the BRI. System-based approaches refer to the set of theories wherein the international system is perceived to be the explanatory factor in examining causes (Waltz, 2010, p. 40). This set of approaches differs from reductionist approaches, which perceive these causes to be concentrated at an individual or national level (p. 19). System-based approaches thus coincide with Waltz's third

image, whilst reductionist approaches are more related to Waltz's first and second image. The system-based approaches discussed within this literature review are that of neorealism and liberalism. Additionally, the literature review will review several middle-range theories such as Organski's Power Transition Theory and Thucydides' Trap.

### **2.2.1. Neorealism**

The first system-based approach which will be analyzed is that of neorealism. Neorealism, as a subset of the realism train of thought, began with the works of Kenneth Waltz in the 1970s. In order to understand neorealism, it will prove useful to first look at classical realism and its tenets. Classical realism, as a theory of IR, emerged in the wake of the Second World War II following the work of Hans J. Morgenthau and the 1954 Rockefeller Center meeting (Guilhot, 2011). However, modern-day realists would argue that the roots of this theoretical approach lie far deeper in history. Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes are commonly used historical examples of where the realist approach began, thereby showing the history within the approach. Realism is centered around four basic tenets. Firstly, realism assumes that human nature is inherently egoistic and self-interested (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 4). Second, realism argues that politics is practiced between and within groups (Wohlforth, 2008, p. 133). Third, the system in which states operate is anarchic of nature, meaning that there is no overarching body which is able to effectively act as a rule-making and rule-enforcing authority (p. 133). Lastly, as a result of states acting in a self-interested manner and the absence of any overarching entity, politics largely revolve around power and security (p. 133). Neorealism adopts these assumptions to a large extent but differs in one essential aspect. Whereas classical realism finds human nature and domestic factors to be at the core of understanding state behavior, neorealism perceives the structure and nature of the international system to be the key determinant (Joseph, 2014). For this reason, neorealism is oftentimes referred to as structural realism, in order to emphasize the primary difference between realism and its neo-version. Deriving from these assumptions, (neo)realism perceives states to be primarily concerned with their relative power, or relative gains, to other states. This results in a zero-sum game wherein states are averse to cooperation among each other (Snidal, 1991, p. 702), although some exceptions will be discussed later on.

Important to note is the fact that as neorealism can be perceived as a protrusion of classical realism, so does neorealism itself have a twofold of protrusions of itself. Generally speaking, neorealism can be divided into defensive realism and offensive realism. Both strands differ in

what they perceive to be the goal of states and by what means these goals are obtained. Defensive realists argue that due to the anarchic nature of the international system, the primary concern of states is to maintain their position, or survival, in this system (Waltz, 2010, p. 126). States need to be powerful enough to ensure their own security, and with-it survival, but need not to overextend their efforts. Striving for a hegemonic position within the international order will lead to balancing acts through alliances of other countries in order to counter such an effort (Walt, 1985; Waltz, 2010). In order to illustrate the act of balancing within defensive realism, Walt (1985) used the example of the broad coalition against Nazi Germany, which tried to become a regional hegemon (p. 12). Another example could be the alliance between France, England and the Prince-Bishoprics of Münster and Cologne, which eventually lead to an *annus horribilis*, or *Rampjaar*, in the Dutch Republic (Munt, 1997). Another reason why states strive for survival instead of hegemony is because the offensive-defensive military balance favors the defensive side as this side has the capability to perform a second-strike (Jervis, 1978). Ultimately, defensive realists perceive states to be more defensive oriented as they can afford to. As states are less likely to perish in a single attack, they often have the luxury to wait for unambiguous signs of aggression (Jervis, 1978; Lobell, 2017). This ties into Jervis' earlier works on misperceptions, as these have the potential to lead to severely disadvantageous outcomes (Jervis, 1968).

On the other hand, offensive realists argue that states strive to become a hegemon, as only the status of hegemonic power can ensure survival in an international system wherein security a scarce resource is (Mearsheimer, 2001; Lobell, 2017). States are constantly trying to tip the balance of power scale in their advantage. If the opportunity arises for a state to make gains relative to adversaries, this state will attempt to alter the status quo. However, if the status of hegemonic power has been acquired, this same state will attempt to keep the status quo intact (Mearsheimer, 2001). Unlike defensive realism, this is increasingly difficult to accomplish, as offensive realists perceive offensive capabilities to be more potent than defensive ones. And it is this status quo bias that encompasses one of Mearsheimer's main criticisms towards defensive realism. Similar to defensive realism, offensive realism perceives cooperation between states to be possible, in order to prevent rival states from gathering relative power (Taliaferro, 2001). However, unlike defensive realism, these cooperation agreements are nothing more than mere 'marriages of convenience' (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 33), and are thus purely the product of the opportunistic nature of states. On the other end, defensive realists note that cooperation is possible between states because the anarchic nature of the international

systems forces them into mutually beneficial cooperation (Taliaferro, 2001, p. 138; Waltz, 2010, pp. 104-106).

Applying the neorealist framework onto the case of the BRI, China and the United States reveals a set of interesting notions. As the Belt and Road Initiative is a Sino-centric economic project on a global scale it is able to grant considerable economic power to China. Following the (neo)realist logic, economic power is, next to military power, one of the core ways of gauging a state's capabilities (Nau, 2021, pp. 36-38). Both defensive and offensive structural realism see this economic power as an integral part of China's survival within the international system but differ over whether the status of regional hegemon is a requirement for survival (Smith, 2020). Defensive realists argue that if China continues its strive for the status of hegemony, it will be balanced by an alliance of nearby countries. Examples of balancing could be the emergence of the Blue Dot Network, an Australia-Japanese-US economic alliance (United States Department of State, 2021). Offensive realists persuasively argue that China will continue this strive for hegemony as this status alone is able to guarantee the state's security. Mearsheimer (2010) notes that China and its leaders have surely not forgotten what happens if a country is unable to provide its own security (pp. 374-375). He hereby refers to the set of wars fought from the middle of the 19th century up until the First World War. Both of the Opium Wars, as well as the Eight-Nation Alliance, have all had a severe impact on the Chinese economy and autonomy (Flint & Xiaotong, 2019, p. 312). Offensive realists therefore argue that China has already learned that absence of the hegemonic status leads to substantial insecurity.

### **2.2.2. Liberalism**

Liberalism emerged as a theoretical approach critical of realism and therefore differs on several core assumptions. Liberalism, often seen as the second great theory of IR, perceives to be international politics to be more cooperative and has been the primary method of US foreign policy (Friedberg, 2005, p. 32). It has three main assumptions which help shape this cooperative nature. First, liberalism perceives globalization to be one of the critical sources of social interests (Moravcsik, 2008, p. 236). It is globalization which shapes the preferences of sub-state groups of actors as it offers restrictions and opportunities to these groups. Second, liberalism considers a state's preferences to be decided by these sub-state groups (pp. 237-238). The state operates as a conveyor belt whereby it translates the by globalization shaped sub-state preferences into a coherent set of foreign policy. Lastly, liberalism perceives cooperation

to be possible if the by globalization shaped preferences are similar or converging (pp. 239-240). Similarities in preferences lead to higher mutual gains, and therefore cooperation. As a result of these assumptions, liberalism rejects the realist notion of power politics as being the core of international politics (Shirayev & Zubok, 2019). They perceive cooperation within the international system as a valid and intricate strategy through the existence of absolute gains, as it additionally skews the self-help nature of states and thereby undermines the fundamentals of power politics. Similar to realism, so does liberalism have its subsidiary schools and middle-range theories. Of these schools and theories, two contribute to our understanding of China-US relations and will therefore be elaborated upon. Neoliberal institutionalism combines, as the name already suggests, elements of (neo)liberalism and institutionalism. At the core of neoliberal institutionalism lies the notion that contemporary society is heavily interconnected and therefore interdependent (Stein, 2008). And it is within this interdependent global society that international institutions are able to play such an essential role. By ensuring legal liability, lowering transaction costs and solving problems of uncertainty institutions are able to increase net gains and thereby stimulate cooperation (Keohane, 2017, pp. 288-291). Second is the middle-range theory of democratic peace, which has been popularized by Michael W. Doyle from 1983 onwards. Doyle builds upon the liberalist assumption that state preferences are shaped by sub-state interest groups, all of which react differently to the opportunities and restrictions of globalization. Building on these premises, democratic peace theory assumes that in part because of democratic mechanisms within a state but also perceiving another state's internal polity as democratic contributes to peace among democratic states (Doyle, 1983, pp. 207-208).

Returning to the structure-agency debate, in what ways does the liberalist theory approach this debate? Here, scholars are divided in their understanding of liberalism. On one hand, there are scholars who claim that liberalism cannot be understood as a system-based approach due to its emphasis on dominant domestic group preferences driving their state's preferences (Smith, 2020). Hereby, they underscore that it is reductionist in the sense that it is domestic factors who decide the course of international politics. On the other hand, there are those that claim that liberalism is systemic in the same sense that classical realism and structural realism are systemic, in the Waltzian sense (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 519). He notes that one of the ways to answer the question of what a systems approach is, is by following an analytic method. This method states that "the whole is understood by studying its elements in their relative simplicity and by observing the relations between them" (Waltz, 2010, p. 39). And it is in this sense that

liberalism is understood as being a systems approach. Classical realism and neorealism are system approaches because they consist of an enumeration of individual state powers and liberalism is a system approach because it implies an aggregation of individual state preferences.

Liberalism helps to explain several aspects of the case of BRI and China-US relations. First, liberalism perceives the OBOR to be the result of competition between Chinese sub-state groups on how to handle the challenges and opportunities created by globalization (Karlis & Polemis, 2019). Additionally, the initiative embodies the economic interdependence which shapes contemporary global society. Second, liberalism takes into account that states should not be considered unitary actors but allows for sub-state groups to possess differing preferences (Smith, 2020, pp. 13-14). As China and the US mostly adhere to liberalist foreign policies (Rigger, 2014), so do both countries also contain groups critical of these policy choices thus being non-unitary. Third, whilst liberalism emphasizes cooperation and economic interdependence, it does not preclude conflict. If preferences, as a result of internal mechanism and politics between states, between states differ to an existential degree conflict between these states may arise. An example of this is the suspicion amongst Americans vis-à-vis China's adherence to, or lack thereof, human rights. Those in a liberal society perceive a lack of regard for human rights as "not only intrinsically wrong; they are also a sure sign that a regime is evil and illegitimate, and therefore cannot be trusted" (Friedberg, 2005, p. 32). This mutual suspicion between liberal and authoritarian regimes is reiterated in the democratic peace theory (Doyle, 1986). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, liberalism sees further integration of China within the global economy as a positive development. At the core of this point lies the liberalist notion that states with deeply intertwined economic ties are less likely to be at odds with one another (Moravcsik, 2008).

### **2.3. Power Transition Theory and Thucydides' Trap**

Organski's Power Transition Theory is a subset theory potent in explaining the Belt and Road Initiative and the US response. Before explaining the theory and its practical implications, justification is required as to why this theory has not been placed under the (neo)realist umbrella, as many scholars have done (Taliaferro, 2001; Khoo, 2013; Yang, 2018). This is due to three distinct differences between this theory and the neorealist approach. Firstly, whilst neorealism perceives the international system to be anarchic, Organski sees the international system as hierarchically ordered (Kugler & Organski, 1989, p. 172). Additionally, motivation

leading to competition differs between the Power Transition Theory and neorealism. Neorealism considers a state's self-interest to be the primary driving force for competition. The Power Transition Theory believes gain maximization within a state's own hierarchical order to be its motive (Unoki, 2016, pp. 16-17). Last, neorealists see the international system as the prime causative agent for peace or war, while this subset emphasizes the aggregate (dis)satisfaction of states with the current order to determine whether peace or war is present (p. 17). Similarities shared between both theories are the central role of power and the importance of relative gains but these are, especially when analyzing the cases at hand, insufficient to justify aggregation.

The Power Transition Theory was first proposed by A.F.K. Organski in 1958. Building on the realist hegemonic stability theory, it describes the hierarchical order of international politics and attempts to explain when and how change within this hierarchy emerges (Kugler & Organski, 1989, p. 171). Within this hierarchical order the hegemon shapes the status quo and does this to its advantage because hierarchically lower states are unable to challenge this hegemon. And it is in this sense that the Power Transition Theory is identical to the Athenian belief that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Thucydides, 2017, p. 14). In summary, Organski notes that as long as the aggregated power of states satisfied with the contemporary order outweighs the aggregated power of states dissatisfied with the contemporary distribution the status quo is maintained. If enough states, through increasing political capacity-building and economic development, perceive themselves as disadvantaged by the status quo order, they may want to redress the current status quo to a more desirable one (Packer, 2003).

Whilst the Thucydides Trap is not a part of Organski's Power Transition Theory, it does have important implications in understanding China-US relations and helps us understand how states deal with periods of transition. Additionally, whilst being a purely analytical tool of scholars, it has been shown that actors themselves are aware of the trap and are actively trying to avoid it. Thucydides Trap lends its name from the Athenian historian Thucydides and his accounts of the Peloponnesian War. The term more specifically refers to his popularized one-liner "it was the rise of Athens and the fear that this inspired in Sparta that made war inevitable" (Levy, 1987, p. 83). The trap thus refers to the high plausibility of conflict between the ruling state and a rising power (Chan, 2020). Similar to the Power Transition Theory, Thucydides Trap assumes a hierarchically ordered international system. However, it deviates from the former by

stating that power transitions do not necessarily entail conflict. Lastly, we return to the notion that Thucydides' Trap is not merely an analytical tool. Xi Jinping, whilst visiting Seattle in 2015, refuted the existence of Thucydides' Trap in China-US relations (Xinhua, 2015). Thereafter, Xi emphasized that the trap is able to be circumvented through cooperation as long as China and the United States respect each other's core interests, thereby drawing a line in the sand.

#### **2.4. Leadership matters**

The aforementioned system-based approaches are not without their shortcomings in understanding and explaining instances of international politics. For instance, if we apply these theoretical lenses onto the Belt and Road Initiative as a new era in China-US relations, they are unable to explain certain aspects. Neorealism emphasized the importance of power in international politics and is therefore unable to explain why US foreign policy, with respect to China, did not significantly change following the establishment of the OBOR. It is here that neorealism would perceive this initiative to be a threat to its hegemonic status and it is here that neorealists would expect the US to adopt policies reflecting its fears of being dethroned as hegemon (He & Feng, 2013). As the BRI was adopted in 2013, how could it be that the American discourse in regards to China only severely changed from 2017 onward? Liberalism, on the other hand, underscores that economic ties can create tension, for instance if the relationship is perceived as asymmetric or unfair by one side (Moravcsik, 1997; Rigger, 2014). However, what it fails to explain is why the United States, in 2017, perceived its economic relationship with China to be lopsided all of a sudden.

Whilst system-based approaches argue that international politics are defined by either power or interdependence, there are different lenses through which the OBOR and China-US relations are able to be examined. First, when defining neorealism, this literature review found that classical realism placed great emphasis on individuals within the realm of IR. For instance, Morgenthau (1978) noted that politics is governed by certain objective laws, derived from human nature. Realists argue that it lies within our nature to be aggressive and competitive, which is often described as having a Type A personality (Ray & Bozek, 1980). By attributing conflict to human nature classical realists perceive nations and leaders to always take similar decisions. In the case of the OBOR, China and the United States, classical realists expect the US to prevent itself from making a Type II error, one of Jervis' error-biases. The Type II error entails the incorrect identification of a state with expansionist aspirations as being a status quo



power, thereby being taken off-guard by its expansionism (Jervis, 1976; Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001). It is because of this error that classical realists expect the US to adopt aggressive foreign policies regarding China, especially following the inception of the BRI. However, US foreign policy did not significantly change in the period following the BRI's inception, it only did so following the 2017 US Presidential Election (Tzogopoulos, 2017). Constructivism, often acknowledged as the third big theoretical approach in IR theory alongside realism and liberalism, could also provide an insight to the case of the BRI within Sino-American relations. Wendt (1999) identifies two central tenets to the theoretical approach of constructivism. The first dictates that human association and interaction are shaped by shared, intersubjective ideas rather than material forces, whilst the second argues that identities and interests are constructed by these ideas instead of being 'given' by nature (p. 1). Thereby, constructivism departs from the neorealist and neoliberal idea that the international system is immutable and given by nature. It perceives the international system to be a product of intersubjective ideas between sets of actors but underscores the fact that the identity of actors is also shaped by this international system, making them mutually constitutive (Wendt, 1992, p. 399). Two sets of identities and perceptions take center stage within the constructivist analysis of the OBOR. First, there is the American perception of China as being a threat to peace in the Pacific, an area liberated from Japanese rule by the US (Friedberg, 2005, p. 37). Second, contemporary situations influenced the perception of China. Aggression in the South China Sea, the lack of adherence to human rights in regards to the Uyghur population in Xinjiang and the COVID-19 pandemic have all had their influence on how the international system perceives China (Silver *et al.*, 2020). As cognitions and identities are mutually constitutive, China will continue onto the path set out by the international system, which in turn will perceive China as an emerging power with a revisionist political agenda.

However, the approaches of classical realism and constructivism do form the fundamentals of this thesis. It is the objective nature of main, classical realism's main tenet, which has become its primary source of critique. For instance, neorealists reject the notion that the United Kingdom or the Soviet Union would have acted similar to the German Third Reich if it found itself in the same situation (Mearsheimer, 2001). Constructivism, on the other hand, lacks analytical vigor which leads to it delegating interpretation to the researcher at hand. Ultimately, constructivism is unable to dissect issues of IR as it continues to build on identities without giving any analytical tools as to how these identities should be studied. This critique is perhaps best explained by Chadwick (2004) when he adequately notes that "the idea [of constructivism] is so ridiculous that only an intellectual would believe it" (p. 49).

It has become apparent that both neorealism and liberalism, as system-based approaches, struggle with explaining events within China-US relations. This inability is connected to how both theories approach the structure-agency debate. When analyzing their approaches to this debate, it sometimes appears like the role of agency merely resembles a distant figure in the rearview mirror. And as these approaches accelerate towards explaining the next phenomenon within the field of IR, they neglect the role of seminal debates which have shaped the foundations of their academic field. And it is here that this thesis would like to offer its academic contribution. Similar to the mutually constitutive nature of constructivism's cognitions and identities, it is important to note that the structure-agency debate does not necessarily implicate a zero-sum game wherein behavior is purely and exclusively shaped by either structural institutions or human agency. Reason for this absence is the fact that it was and are human individuals who create and shape all structural social phenomena, including institutions (Popper, 1966). Additionally, these human individuals are in turn shaped by these social phenomena, thus showing an interrelated nature between both concepts (Carlsnaes, 1992, pp. 245-246). Perhaps the best illustration of this interconnectedness is Giddens' theory of structuration, which encompasses a third strand of thinking in regards to the structure-agency debate (Vadrot, 2016). In his seminal work *The Constitution of Society*, Giddens (1984) argues that neither structure nor human agency can be solely used to explain human behavior to its fullest. Instead, institutions socialize individual human behavior through Social Systems of Interaction (p. 163-165). However, Giddens introduces agency through reflexive monitoring by agents. This reflexive monitoring consists of using two methods of consciousness. While discursive consciousness enables agents to rationalize their own actions, practical consciousness enables actors to orient themselves in situations and to interpret actions by others (Turner, 1986, p. 973). Simultaneously, reflexive monitoring enables agents to shape the institutions by which they are socialized, thus finalizing this reciprocal relationship.

As this thesis has critiqued constructivism's lack of analytical tools and underscored the importance of agency through leadership, what tools will it offer in order to analyze the case of the One Belt One Road in China-US relations? And it is here that we turn to the concept of beliefs and the analytical tool of the Operational Code Analysis.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

Where the literature review ended with underscoring the importance of agency through the implementation of agency-based approaches when analyzing China-US relations, the theoretical framework will elaborate further on the specific theoretical and analytical considerations of the Operational Code Analysis. It will do so in an attempt to lay bare to what extent leadership matters when analyzing the Belt and Road Initiative in China-US relations. Firstly, its historical development, modus operandi and critiques will be clarified. Secondly, the primary independent variable deriving from the OCA will be developed. Lastly, the causal mechanism between this independent variable and the dependent variable will be laid bare. The theoretical framework will be concluded by formulating substantiated expectations for the forthcoming analysis.

#### **3.1. Beliefs**

In order to understand the Operational Code Analysis and how it functions, it is essential to look at what it attempts to map out and analyze. Central to the OCA are Operational Codes, a specific subset of beliefs that political leaders hold about the world and their respective position within this world (Willigen & Bakker, 2021). As the definition already indicates, Operational Codes are merely a specific subset of a much broader plethora. What characterizes these beliefs and what characterizes the systems wherein they are situated? To put it quite bluntly, beliefs are what we hold to be true about ourselves and the world around us (Primmer, 2018). One would assume that a belief system is the entire aggregation of beliefs but one would be wrong. A belief system can be best conceptualized as "a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence" (Converse, 1964, p. 209). By adding the interdependent nature and constraints of these belief systems, Converse's definition most importantly contributes to our understanding that belief systems are greater than the mere sum of their parts. A threefold of characteristics are necessary in understanding beliefs and belief systems, and therefore the conceptual and theoretical foundation of this thesis. First and foremost, beliefs have varying degrees of centrality (Converse, 1964). This degree of centrality refers to the likelihood of it being subject to change, with less centralized beliefs being the first to be changed once new information is absorbed which challenges these beliefs. Whilst Abelson (1986) introduces the distinction between core beliefs and peripheral beliefs, it is important to keep in mind that a strong dichotomy between the core and the periphery remains absent and beliefs are best visualized as a spectrum. However, in order to understand the two different sides of this spectrum, it is fruitful to look at

the features of these ideal types. Central beliefs, in some scholarly works referred to as master beliefs, core beliefs or convictions, are defined as being the most important to one's belief system. These beliefs are more stable over time, held with a higher degree of certainty, are more strongly related to individual behavior and people will go to greater lengths to preserve the status of these beliefs (Thomsen *et al.*, 1995; Rosen, 2009). Peripheral beliefs on the other hand are defined as being less important, more dynamic and largely finding their foundations in central beliefs (Rokeach, 1963).

Second, beliefs are characterized as being internally consistent. This is largely due to Festinger's (1957) psychological theory of cognitive dissonance. Cognitions in this sense refer to "any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior" (Festinger, 1957, p. 3), thereby showing similarities to the aforementioned concept of beliefs. Cognitive dissonance refers to situations of (internal) inconsistency of beliefs, instigated by either the acquisition of new information or the emergence of new events (pp. 4-5). It has been shown that instances of cognitive dissonance lead to psychological discomfort as conflicting beliefs create tension between one another (Pfleeger & Caputo, 2012). Research has shown that individuals go to great lengths to prevent or solve instances of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Fisher *et al.*, 2008; Gawronski & Brannon, 2019). What measurements are taken in order to resolve instances of dissonance depends on what beliefs or are affected by the dissonance. Individuals either change their existing beliefs to fit the influx of new information and this is often the case with the more dynamic peripheral beliefs. A second method involves altering the incoming information to match pre-existing beliefs, a process which prevails when central beliefs are affected. Considering the fact that freshly acquired information can create tension between itself and its beliefs, this information can also create tension between multiple pre-existing beliefs. As peripheral beliefs often find their origins in central beliefs, less centralized beliefs will change in favor of core beliefs (Renshon, 2008).

The third characteristic prescribes that beliefs are, besides from being internally consistent, also subject to temporal consistency. This consistency over time is primarily the result of adjusting new pieces of information to match the already existing set of beliefs (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Renshon, 2008). Classical scholarly works on temporal consistency emphasize the stability of beliefs as, even in times of great crisis, exogenous shocks can reinforce one's pre-existing convictions about what they hold to be true (Tetlock, 1991; 2005). If beliefs were to be the subject of change, scholars argue that peripheral beliefs are most likely

to change. However, more recent research has shown that even centralized beliefs are able to change as a result of traumatic exogenous events (Renshon, 2008).

### **3.2. Operational Codes and the OCA**

As previously noted, one's Operational Codes are those beliefs which are most closely related to their political convictions and thus most relevant to the field of political science and IR. As these beliefs are a specific subset within the wider belief system, they share the characteristics of hierarchy, internal consistency and temporal consistency. However, Operational Codes differ from 'ordinary' beliefs because of the ability to order them into dichotomous categories. The first category of Operational Codes, philosophical beliefs, reflect a leader's view on the nature of the international political system surrounding him or her. Instrumental beliefs encompass the second category within one's Operational Code and depict what a leader thinks to be the best approach to reaching one's goals in this political environment (George, 1969; Schafer & Walker, 2006a). Before discussing each Operational Code belief individually, it is essential to first clarify the way in which these beliefs are best understood. Operational Codes are best understood by approaching them as bottom-up beliefs as supposed to top-down (Walker, 1983). Understanding Operational Codes as bottom-up indicates that beliefs differ based on the domain examined. A top-down approach assumes that if a subject's Operational Codes contain value *X* in a certain political domain, they are value *X* across the board. However, because Operational Codes are bottom-up, they are best understood as differing based on the specific context they are examined in. For instance, and related to the topic of this thesis, Trump's Operational Code might be different when examining it in the context of Russia or the Paris Climate Change Agreement. This bottom-up approach to Operational Codes best reflects the psychological state-of-mind as stances versus certain situations vary based on context.

As has become clear from the previous analysis, beliefs are a concept thoroughly connected to the field of psychology. Why would the scholarly field of International Relations be interested in a concept which seems to be so far from it, conceptually and theoretically speaking? A twofold of reasons lie at the heart of this. First, Kertzer and Tingley (2018) suggested that more often than not foreign policy attitudes are partially prepolitical, shaped by the broader belief systems that guide our choices outside of IR (p. 327). The second reason is understood by examining the aforementioned difference between structural theories and cognitive theories when approaching the concept of rationality. Structural theories assume decision-makers to make choices based on substantive or objective rationality, meaning that they decide based on

goals and knowledge of the external environment (Simon, 1985; Schafer & Walker, 2006a). Within this context, beliefs simply mirror the outcome of a rational cost-benefit analysis relying on this external environment. Additionally, these mirrored beliefs implicate that they are able to be subject to considerable change, if any specific situation calls for it (Simon, 1985). Cognitive theories differ in two notable instances. They prescribe an exogenous role for beliefs, not simply mirroring the external environment but steering a decision-maker's range of choices based on what they know about their contemporary environment and how this environment ought to be. Whereas structural theories assume beliefs to be rational and objective, meaning that every decision-maker has the same beliefs in the same situation, cognitive theories argue that leaders possess a bounded rationality (Jervis, 1976; Schafer & Walker, 2006b). This makes them subject to biases, take sub-optimal choices and refuse to revise their beliefs when confronted with previously created mistakes (Levy, 1994).

Examining the development of the Operational Code Analysis grants us the ability to best understand the OCA in its contemporary form. The Operational Code Analysis, as a theoretical subdivision of cognitive research approaches to foreign policy and IR, traces its roots back to the works of Nathan Leites, who analyzed the psychology of the Soviet Bolshevik party in an attempt to assist the United States Armed Forces in understanding its primary adversary during the Cold War (1951; 1953). Following Leites' foundational write-up there are three theoretical and analytical additions which helped shape the development of the OCA and help our understanding of its contemporary state. Left largely untouched, it was not until 1969 that Alexander George transformed Leites' works significantly. The Operational Code before George's transformation could be qualified as being subjective and unsystematic in nature, leaving considerable room for interpretation by the researcher (Willigen & Bakker, 2021). Additionally, the lack of hierarchy in Leites' beliefs and the underlying relations between beliefs remained undefined (George, 1969). George addressed both these criticisms by separating the Operational Code from its theoretical big brother; psychoanalytic theory. Developing a set of ten questions, he enabled researchers to map and organize beliefs. These questions, forming the core of the modern-day OCA, can be observed in Table 1. Largely based on the works of Leites and George, Ole Holsti developed a typology in 1977 in an attempt to order the systems containing beliefs. Along two notable cleavages, the fundamental nature of the international system and the fundamental source of conflict, Holsti was able to categorize six types of belief systems (Holsti, 1977; Walker, 1990). Whilst detrimental to the development of the OCA, going into detail on each specific category would be beyond the scope of this

thesis. The last development in regard to the OCA is the addition of the Verbs-In-Context-System (VICS) method by Walker, Schafer and Young in 1998 (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998). The addition of VICS as a means of conducting quantitative content analysis enabled the OCA to branch out and develop rapidly due to receiving much-needed analytical vigor. Whereas earlier inceptions of the OCA were still largely subjective and vague, the addition of VICS as a method of analysis connected discourse with numerical data, thus increasing objectivity, clarity and comparability.

As previously mentioned, the philosophical beliefs are best understood as a subject's convictions on the nature of the political universe and the nature of other political actors (Schafer & Walker, 2006a).

*P-1. Fundamental nature of political universe.* Similar to Holsti's typology, which will be discussed further on, the first philosophical belief measures whether one perceives the political universe to be conflictual or harmonious (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998). Additionally, this belief measures the nature of strategies employed by other political actors as perceived by the subject at hand. The first philosophical belief forms, together with the first instrumental belief, the 'master beliefs' within the Operational Code construct (Schafer & Walker, 2006a, p. 33).

*P-2. Realization of political values.* Showing similarities to the literature on social power (Baldwin, 1978; Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998), the realization of values is multi-faceted in the sense that the same goal can be achieved using varying routes. One can achieve (political) goals through either strategies of cooperation, harmony and consensus or strategies characterized by conflict, instability and constraint (Dahrendorf, 1958).

*P-3. Political future.* Predictability about one's political future is rooted within information theory (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998). If a leader was given a set of categories, based on possible actions for others, and would show a high distribution over this set of categories, he or she would show low predictability. If, from this set, only a limited number of categories is selected, predictability is relatively high as the distribution of options is considerably smaller (Garner, 1962; Schafer & Walker, 2006a).

*P-4. Control over historical development.* The fourth philosophical belief measures whether a leader perceives the locus of power to be internal or external (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998). Internal refers to positive or negative events to be the consequence of one's own actions, while external refers to these same events being the consequence of actions by others (Lefcourt, 1966, p. 207).

*P-5. Role of chance.* The role of chance flows logically from the beliefs on the predictability of others (*P-3*) and one's own ability to control events (*P-4*). The role of chance is high if both previous philosophical beliefs are relatively low and the role of chance is low if predictability by others and the ability to control one's own fate is high (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998).

As previously mentioned, instrumental beliefs reflect a leader's means-end analysis based on his or her perception of the political universe.

*I-1. Direction of strategy.* One of two master beliefs, it measures whether a leader finds cooperative or conflictual strategies to be more successful in reaching maximum utility within the political universe (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998; Schafer & Walker, 2006a).

*I-2. Intensity of tactics.* As utterances are weighted, so can one's intensity in regard to his or her chosen tactics differ in weight. In this regard negative utterances range from Oppose (-1) to Threaten (-2) towards Punish (-3) and positive utterances from Support (+1) to Promise (+2) to Reward (+3) (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998).

*I-3. Risk orientation.* Risks can be defined as undesirable outcomes resulting from one's own actions or words (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998, p. 180). Similar to the predictability of one's political future (*P-3*), the distribution of one's categorial verbs is important as it measures the stance vis-a-vis risks. If the subject shows a wide variety of categories employed, he or she is more risk averse as ambiguity diminishes risks when assessing one's words. Risk acceptant behavior is characterized by employing less diverse verb categories, thus showing less variety and thereby more clearly distinguishable language.

*I-4. Importance of timing of actions.* Split into two indices, the fourth instrumental belief denotes a subject's willingness to shift between cooperative and conflictual tactics and between words and deeds (Schafer & Walker, 2006a, pp. 36-37). Both indices are in essence related to one's risk orientation as switching between strategies and the way in which these strategies are articulated, either through words or deeds, show a degree of risk acceptance. In the same sense, 'sticking to one's guns' indicates risk acceptant behavior.

*I-5. Utility of means.* Split into the six verb categories, the last instrumental belief indicates to what extent the subject a specific discursive tool employs in order to maximize their political utility (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998; Schafer & Walker, 2006a).



**Table 1. Operational Code questions**

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<b>Philosophical questions</b>	
P-1.	What is the “essential” nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or of conflict? What is the fundamental character of one’s political opponents?
P-2.	What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one’s fundamental values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic, or must one be pessimistic on this score; and in what respects the one and/or the other?
P-3.	Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?
P-4.	How much “control” or “mastery” can one have over historical development? What is one’s role in “moving” and “shaping” history in the desired direction?
P-5.	What is the role of “chance” in human affairs and in historical development?
<b>Instrumental questions</b>	
I-1.	What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?
I-2.	How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?
I-3.	How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?
I-4.	What is the best “timing” of action to advance one’s interests?
I-5.	What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one’s interests?

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Source: George (1969)

### **3.2.1. Critiques**

Important to note is that Operational Code Analysis has become subject to criticism and this thesis would like to address several points of criticism as the OCA has developed in part due to these criticisms. The first point of critique stems from the aforementioned system-based approaches, which the OCA attempts to complement by offering leadership as an additional important variable. These system-based approaches emphasize the influence of institutional constraints, possibilities and role expectations when examining a leader's beliefs (Cuhadar *et al.*, 2016, pp. 39-40). However, multiple studies employing both OCA and LTA research have shown that the beliefs held by leaders are fairly resistant to these institutional influences (Renshon, 2008; Cuhadar *et al.*, 2016). A second point is to what extent do prepared remarks reflect a leader's true psychological beliefs? Leaders could engage in impression management or even deception as to keep political adversaries, or the public in general, on their toes. Additionally, leaders become increasingly aware of the research conducted in the scholarly field of IR. For one, the literature review noted how president Xi mentioned the existence of Thucydides' Trap, thereby showing awareness of such models analyzing China-US relations. Tetlock and Manstead (1985) researched the notion of impression management within speech acts and found that whilst impression management might be present, speech acts still reflect one's true beliefs. The rationale behind this notion is that speech acts result in action and

changing one's speech acts results in performing actions which are not preferred by the subject performing the speech act (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985, p. 64). Additionally, they found that whilst prepared remarks are easy to manipulate, spontaneous remarks are less easily altered because leaders often do not know precisely what questions will be directed at them (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985, p. 67). The last point of criticism is related to the linkages between a leader's beliefs and policy decisions and eventually, policy outcomes (Schafer & Walker, 2006a, p. 48). Here, it is important to note that beliefs do not unilaterally determine one's choice of actions but do influence one's preference for this choice of action (George, 1979, p. 104). Decision-makers, whilst also being influenced by their beliefs, also take into account cognitive shortcuts, decision heuristics, domestic politics and strategic decisions (Lake & Powell, 1999; Mintz, 2004; Schafer & Walker, 2006a; Brulé *et al.*, 2014;). Alongside informing one's policy preferences within the sphere of foreign policy, beliefs also influence a leader's approach the process of foreign policy-making (Marfleet & Walker, 2006). When examining the previously mentioned Operational Codes, it becomes clear that especially the fourth philosophical, *control over historical development*, and virtually all instrumental beliefs inform us about a leader's approach to the process of bargaining with differing domestic and international actors in order to realize his or her foreign policy preferences into policy decisions and policy outcomes.

### **3.3. Presidential role within foreign affairs**

As this thesis analyzes the beliefs of both President Obama and President Trump it implicitly notes the importance of the United States President as an actor within the US foreign policy decision-making process. However, this assumption is in need of further (scholarly) justification. When examining the role of the President within the realm of foreign affairs it becomes apparent that there is a notable difference in the role granted to him by the US Constitution and his observable role (Fink, 1983). Constitutionally speaking, the President is only able to unilaterally receive foreign ambassadors or public ministers and is able to, in agreement with two thirds of the US Senate, make treaties and appoint ambassadors and ministers (United States Constitution, 2020).

However, the observable presidential role in US foreign policy is much grander than has been constitutionally laid out by the Founding Fathers. There are two notable reasonings behind the discrepancy between the constitutional and effective role of the President. The first, a result from the *United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp.* case, was a notion upheld by the US Supreme Court on the interpretation of the US Constitution. The Court found that, although the

US Constitution had not explicitly stated all foreign policy power granted to the US President, the Constitution did imply certain powers to the US President as to fulfill his role as commander-in-chief of the US Army and head of the executive branch of government (United States Supreme Court, 1936). This view differed from the previously held idea of express constitutional provision, which emphasized the importance of the separation of power as a way to prevent any one branch of government becoming too powerful (Fink, 1983, pp. 782-783). The second, and perhaps more political reason, is the fact that the President encompasses one individual with relatively considerable aggregation of information to his disposal. This eventually led to the decision in the *Zemel v. Rusk* case, where the US Supreme Court found that "Congress - in giving the Executive authority over matters of foreign affairs -- must of necessity paint with a brush broader than that it customarily wields in domestic areas" (United States Supreme Court, 1965). The reason for using this 'broader brush' in matters of foreign affairs was the explosive nature of international politics and the proneness of international affairs to change in the short term. The notions of implied constitution powers and the considerable amount of information at the president's disposal have enabled US Presidents to perform an ever-increasing, and sometimes ambiguous, role in the establishment of US foreign policy.

### **3.4. Expectations**

Based on the theoretical notions on Operational Codes and beliefs to a broader extent, this thesis has articulated a two-fold of expectations which will be justified theoretically.

Expectation 1: *There will be no significant change to Obama's (instrumental) beliefs on China-US relations following the adaptation of the Belt and Road Initiative.*  
*(Phase 1 → Phase 2)*

Expectation 1.1: *There will be no significant change in US foreign policy towards China following the adaptation of the Belt and Road Initiative.*

This thesis' first major expectation is grounded within the literature on belief stability. Within this body of literature, classical research utilized the hierarchical structure of belief systems in order to argue that central beliefs are less prone to change as they play a pivotal role within one's belief system and often act as beacons for less important beliefs (Tetlock, 1991, pp. 27-

31). However, more recent research on the Operational Code of George W. Bush revealed a conflicting image to these previously held convictions on the stability of beliefs. Renshon (2008) examined GWB's political career in order to better understand how and when changes to a leader's beliefs occur as a result of role changes, a traumatic event or learning in office. Whilst the research found role change to reinforce GWB's beliefs, the traumatic events following the 9/11 terrorist attacks changed GWB's beliefs severely (p. 842). A traumatic event can be defined as “an event that involves the confrontation with war, violence, disasters, sudden loss, serious illness, and other overwhelming and disturbing events” (Kleber, 2019, p. 1). Whilst differing events can cause traumatic experiences, several elements remain stable; a loss of life or bodily harm (McNally, 2003). Examining our case using these elements, it is difficult to approach the BRI as a traumatic event for President Obama. Therefore, this thesis argues that the adoption of the Belt and Road Initiative does not qualify as a traumatic event in the eyes of President Obama, thereby assuming that his beliefs will remain stable.

Expectation 2: *There will be a significant difference in Trump’s beliefs on China US relations vis-a-vis Obama’s beliefs on China-US relations.*  
(Phase 2 → Phase 3)

Expectation 2.1: *There will be a significant change in US foreign policy vis-a-vis China between the Trump administration and the Obama administration.*

The second theoretical expectation stems from a two-fold of rationales. First, because President Trump consists of an entirely different person than President Obama, causing his beliefs to be different. This however does not grant us any knowledge on the question in what direction his beliefs would differ from his predecessor. However, using the Power Transition Theory and Thucydides’ Trap, we can expect Trump’s beliefs to overall be less cooperative and more conflictual as he perceives the international system to become less American-centric and more Sino-centric. In response to this shifting international system, we expect President Trump to become more assertive in his pursuit of political goals.

## **4. Methodology**

Whereas the earlier chapters encompassing the literature review and the theoretical framework discussed the literature and theories of Operational Codes, belief systems and the prospective power transition from an American-centric order to a Sino-centric order in a more generalized manner, the methodology will discuss all this thesis' specific considerations in terms of methodological tools. First, it will discuss case selection and will go into detail on the notions of used variables, as well as unit of analysis and unit of observation. Second, it will shed light on the manner in which the data has been gathered and subsequently analyzed. Finally, several limitations to the specific context in which this research has been performed will be mentioned and discussed.

### **4.1. Case selection**

This thesis will employ a single-case design with multiple levels of analysis. Single-case designs are best suited for usage to specific research ends, depending on the nature of the case at hand. The case of the BRI and China-US relations presents itself as such a fitting match. The Belt and Road Initiative has been noted as a tipping point in China-US relations as the initiative itself signals the beginning of a Sino-centric global economic order (Wethington & Manning, 2015; Chance & Mafinezam, 2016). Using this description of our case, as well as examining the typology offered by Seawright and Gerring (2008) one could argue that the case at hand is a typical or representative case. Using the case of the BRI for examining the linkages between a leader's beliefs and foreign policy within a specific political domain. The study utilizes the Operational Code Analysis for examining these linkages and is representative in doing so. On the other hand, it could be argued that the BRI case poses as a unique case. This type of case is best understood as being a (statistical) outlier when it comes to comparing it to other instances basically researching identical phenomena (Yin, 2003; Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Within the body of literature on the Operational Codes of political figures, research on heads of government in the process of power transition is rare but the case of the BRI proves to be a fitting case, especially when examining the differences between Obama and Trump. The reason for this is the repeated usage of the power transition by Trump when justifying his foreign policy. Even when examining the body of literature on power transitions, the contemporary case of China and the US stands out for two reasons. The first being that the emergence, or re-emergence, of China raises the fact that for the first time that a non-Western state was as close to the position of forthcoming hegemony. A case could be made for Japan following its war with Russia. However, while the Russo-Japanese War did lead to a shift in the balance of power

in East Asia, it did nothing to alter the hegemonic status of the United Kingdom (Kim, 1997). A second reason why the case of China and the US can be qualified as being unique is due to the low geographical proximity between both countries. The variable of geographical proximity is noted by Lemke (1995) as being "extremely important because power must be transported across borders if it is to be of use to its possessor in actions against another country" (p. 150). Due to the loss-of-strength gradient, states with low geographical proximity and in competition with one another need additional resources as a considerable amount of power is lost in transit (Boulding, 1962; Lemke, 1995; Lemke & Reed, 2001). The most fitting answer to the question as to what type of case the BRI and Sino-US relations would constitute is an overlap of both representativeness and uniqueness.

#### **4.2. Dependent and independent variable**

In terms of independent variable, dependent variable, as well as for both the unit of analysis and unit of observation, there are several considerations to be made. For its independent variable, the research uses the belief systems of both President Obama and President Trump. As outlined in the theoretical framework, US foreign policy is not established in its entirety by the President. Au contraire, the role of the President has long been, and perhaps still is, an ambiguous position in terms of foreign affairs (Fink, 1983). Additional to the previously mentioned reasons why the President is at the heart of the analysis is the consideration that the President is able to appoint the Secretary of State, the President's principal adviser on U.S. foreign policy (United States Government, 2020). Additional to being a principal adviser, the Secretary of State is tasked with enforcing the foreign policies set out by the President. The research uses the policy preferences of both Presidents Obama and Trump as its primary dependent variable. As noted in the theoretical framework, establishing a causal link between a decision-maker's belief system and eventual policy decisions is rather complicated, due to the wide range of actors involved in the foreign policy decision-making process (George, 1979). Policy preferences, what policy options a leader prefers, are therefore taken as intermediary dependent variables. Using these policy preferences, the forthcoming analysis and discussion will relate the policy preferences of both President Obama and President Trump to US policies vis-a-vis China that lie in the past. Whilst policy preferences make it almost impossible to predict which policy will be adopted, we are able to relate policy preferences of one of US foreign affairs' major decision-makers to eventual policy outcomes. However, it is important to remind ourselves that the relation between policy preferences and eventual policy decisions and outcomes remains obscure.

### 4.3. Data collection

The Operational Code construct and the analytical tool of the Verbs-In-Context-System (VICS), which inner workings will be discussed later on, operate on the premises that a leader's beliefs influence his or her policy preferences and that these beliefs can be derived from public speeches. Combining these premises with the case of the OBOR within China-US relations, this thesis set out its data collection strategy. Due to the lack of direct access to political decision-makers, due to time constraints and reluctance, the next best method of data collection is the usage of at-a-distance material (Schafer, 2000; Brummer, 2016). Additionally, when examining public material, to what extent do these types of materials grant us insight into a leader's private beliefs? An important factor to this question lies within the nature of both materials. Public material, such as speeches and public remarks, are in essence prepared and rehearsed, whilst private material is more often than not spontaneous in nature (Dille, 2000). Research has shown that, while different in nature, public material is able to reflect private beliefs (Renshon, 2009, p. 658). However, to still control for the influence of non-spontaneous remarks, answers to questions by members of the audience or the media were included, as long as the answer dealt with bilateral relations between China and the USA. This thesis employed two primary sources of data; the archived White House websites of both President Obama<sup>1</sup> and President Trump<sup>2</sup>. Benefits of using archival sources for one's research are that archives are often stable in the data they provide, the process of data collection is unobtrusive and grants a researcher the ability to collect a broad coverage of data (Yin, 2003, p. 86). An important factor in considering these White House archives was to limit the number of used sources. The research utilized one data source per president. A deliberate choice, as these official governmental archives were chosen for their authenticity, as well as for their perceived desire to get a message across. This last aspect refers to the limited possibility that if the written speech on the governmental website differs from what has actually been said by the president, we can assume that this is either to correct some error or to convey a message to any political actor reading these speeches. The desire to transmit a message within these written speeches therefore adds another layer to the puzzle. As previously noted, beliefs should be perceived as constructed in a bottom-up, and therefore domain-specific, fashion (Schafer & Walker, 2006b). In terms of data collection, this entails that in order to comment on how Presidents Obama and Trump perceive China-US relations, the subject of any point of data needs to be these bilateral

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<sup>1</sup> <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/>

relations. Finding public material by either President Obama or President Trump on China-US relations in their respective archived White House websites was executed using the search terms noted in Table 2.

**Table 2. Documentation of Search Terms**

Term	Rationale
‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (including variations, such as ‘Belt and Road’, ‘BRI’, ‘One Belt One Road’, ‘OBOR’)	Preliminary search terms used in order to establish the number of public speeches. However, usage of just these terms proved to be problematic as the archives automatically presented speeches which contained only parts of these search terms. An example of this was the ‘Rust Belt’, referring to the industrial region in the United States.
‘Silk Road’, ‘New Silk Road’	Examining speeches and policy documents, especially from President Obama and his administration, revealed the usage of the terms ‘Silk Road’ and ‘New Silk Road’ in order to refer to the Belt and Road Initiative (perhaps to increase distinguishability from the Rust Belt. Therefore, these terms have been included as search terms.
‘China’	Using the two previously mentioned search terms certain key speeches still remained concealed. Especially President Obama’s speeches signaling the ‘Pivot to Asia’ strategy remained at large. Therefore, inclusion of the search term ‘China’ was needed. This resulted in an altered search strategy whereby the wheat was to be separated from the chaff but also ensured that no relevant speech was overlooked.

Using these search terms produced a significant number of results. President Obama's archived White House website produced a total of 3,020 results, while President Trump's website produced 1,255 results. The difference between these totals can be allotted to the fact that Obama served two terms as President of the United States. Another factor could be the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019, which severely restricted international travel of political leaders, thus diminishing their ability to give speeches. However, not all 4,275 results were usable for research purposes. As these archived websites do not give a researcher the option to filter any type of speeches, all materials containing the entered search terms are shown. This requires one to filter through the materials manually in order to find usable speeches and public remarks. The manual analysis was performed with two notable requirements in mind. The first required that in order to be usable, a speech had to be given by



either President Obama or President Trump. The second requirement states that all material should address the international domain of China-US relations. Notably, President Trump's archive revealed a significant number of speeches where the term 'China' was used but where the speech was not on matters of international politics or China-US relations. This coincides again with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic wherein President Trump had repeatedly referred to the virus as the 'China Virus' (The White House, 2020), thereby constituting a speech on matters of national health instead of international relations. Manual analysis of all 4,275 search results subsequently led to the identification of 60 sources meeting both requirements. The texts of all 60 sources were saved into individual documents within an external drive. Protective data storage was unnecessary as all material is widely available but data storage was performed in order to easily retrieve the public remarks used for the forthcoming analysis. To further facilitate replicability, the White House links to all 60 speeches can be retrieved from Appendix A.

#### **4.4. Data analysis**

Subsequent to the process of data collection is the analysis of all gathered materials. However, before describing the process in which speeches by President Obama and President Trump on Sino-American relations there are several considerations to be made in regard to the data analysis. First, as this thesis analyzes whether the One Belt One Road Initiative had an effect on the beliefs of President Obama, his presidency needs to be dissected into two different phases with the Belt and Road serving as the point of dissection. As the BRI was announced by China's President Xi Jinping during a state visit to Kazakhstan on the 7th of September 2013 (Xinhua, 2016), this date will serve as cleavage between Obama's beliefs before and after the adoption of the BRI. In addition to this divide, Table 3 shows all phases under examination within the research. A second point of consideration is raised by the literature on the Operational Code Analysis, which initially requires speeches to consist of at least 1,500 words (Renshon, 2009, p. 655). Schafer & Walker (2006a) argue that the word limit is not a hard requirement, but a minimum of 15-20 coded verbs is needed in order to avoid skewness by outliers (pp. 43-44) and additionally offer the option of aggregating multiple smaller speeches into speeches which do meet both requirements. However, the method of aggregation has come under scrutiny as scholars argue the continuous influence of outliers on these aggregated speeches (Dille, 2000; Marfleet, 2000; Schafer, 2000; Renshon, 2009) Out of the 60 speeches meeting initial requirements, 43 speeches did not meet the limit of 1,500 words, whilst 24 speeches did not meet the coded verb threshold of 20. Ultimately 36 speeches, of which the

periodical distribution can be assessed in Table 3, formed the eventual core of this research's analysis.

**Table 3. Time Periods Under Examination**

Phase	Time Period
1. Obama before BRI ( <i>N</i> = 13)	January 20, 2009 (Inauguration Day Obama) → September 2013 (Xi announces the BRI during a state visit in Kazakhstan on the 7 <sup>th</sup> of September)
2. Obama after BRI ( <i>N</i> = 14)	October 2013 → January 20, 2017 (Inauguration Day Trump)
3. Trump ( <i>N</i> = 9)	January 20, 2017 → January 20, 2021 (Inauguration Day Biden)

Whilst the process of coding was done automatically, it is useful to discuss the gradual coding method of the Verbs-In-Context-System (VICS). Walker, Schafer and Young (1998) identify four steps in the VICS in order to categorize the primary recording unit; utterances. These steps, as outlined in Appendix B, will be shortly discussed and applied onto an utterance of President Obama. The first step is to identify the subject of the utterance, coding it as either self or other, based on whether the subject is identical to the speaker. Identifying the verb's tense and its direction, positive or negative, consist of the second step. Third is identification of the domain as either domestic or foreign. The fourth and last step is formulating the sentence's target and its context (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1998, p. 183). As for our example, on the 23rd of September President Obama met with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao before a bilateral meeting. In his speech during the meeting, he stated:

*"I have great confidence in the interest of both President Hu and Premier Wen to continue on the path of cooperation and mutually beneficial policies"* (The White House, 2010).

The sentence's subject is *I* and thus refers to President Obama, therefore requiring coding in the Self category. The transitive verb, *to have*, is in present tense and can be observed as being positive. Being a positive verb, this utterance is only able to be categorized as Appeal (+1), Promise (+2) or Reward (+3). Being present tense and low in relative intensity, this utterance is coded as being Appeal (+1). Examining the context of the sentence reveals that the domain is foreign, as the sentence's target are the interests of President Hu and Premier Wen. The specific context of the sentence are economic relations between China and the United States.

Analysis of the speeches was executed using Michael Young's *Profiler Plus* (version 7.3.17), which automatically performs the manual VICS method mentioned above. The Profiler Plus program outputs the coded verbs in their corresponding categories, as well as the first two philosophical and instrumental beliefs. Using the categorized verbs and an Operational Code formula sheet, one is able to calculate the remaining beliefs<sup>3</sup>. After having imported all speeches' philosophical beliefs and instrumental beliefs into a data overview, which can be assessed in Appendix C, this data was subsequently subject to several statistical measurements. In order to examine the first theoretical expectation, a statistical test between President Obama's beliefs before (Phase 1) and after (Phase 2) the BRI's introduction is required. The second theoretical expectation requires us to control whether President Obama's (Phase 2) beliefs differ from those of President Trump (Phase 3). Comparing the means between these groups, but doing so separately, requires us to conduct two t-tests. A versatile statistical tool, the t-test allows a research to measure several aspects of two groups (Field, 2009). However, we are mostly interested in its ability to analyze whether the means of two groups differ in a statistically significant manner. Whilst neither t-test deals with both groups of similar circumstances, as the BRI poses as a differing variable between Phase 1 and 2, and similar participants, as there is a different president being analyzed between Phase 2 and 3, each test requires an independent-means t-test (Field, 2009, p. 325). However, these independent-means t-tests require us to test certain data properties; homogeneity of variances and normality. The assumption of homogeneity of variances sets the requirement that variances among both compared groups are equal, whilst the assumption of normality establishes that the populations of both groups are normally distributed (Hoekstra *et al.*, 2012, p. 2). In order to check if both assumptions are met a two-fold of assumption tests are conducted. To check for the assumption of homogeneity of variances a Levene's test is executed and in order to check for the assumption of normality, a Shapiro-Wilk test is run. A final point of consideration touches upon the choice of running independent-means t-tests instead of an ANOVA test. Whilst an ANOVA test is able to measure statistically significant differences between more than two groups, it could have been considered for this research' data analysis. However, justifying comparison between Phase 1 and 3 is problematic as a broad spectrum of variables differs between these phases, with President Obama's 2nd term dividing both these phases. The theoretical strength of the two-run t-tests lies within the fact that these periods follow each other chronologically, thereby eliminating as much variance on coinciding variables.

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<sup>3</sup> Special thanks to dr. Femke Bakker for providing the OCA formula sheet.

#### **4.5. Limitations of the study**

The last section of this methodology chapter will go over a notable limitation in terms of (construct) validity. This limitation refers to the lack of triangulation within the research. Four types of triangulation are distinguishable; data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (Patton, 2015). Whilst every type refers to their own terrain, the core remains similar; diversification. Data triangulation refers to a diversified set of data sources, investigator triangulation refers to a diversified set of evaluators, theory triangulation refers to a diversified set of theoretical perspectives, and methodological triangulation refers to a diversification in terms of research methods (Yin, 2017). A noticeable limitation is the lack of diversification in terms of data, investigators and methods, thereby hampering the research's construct validity. Construct validity refers to the identification of correct operational measures for the studied concepts (Kidder & Judd, 1986; Yin, 2017). This thesis' usage of speeches as a singular data type by a single researcher employing a single research method thereby show this lack of triangulation, and therefore construct validity.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

The subsequent chapter will first grant an overview of the outcomes of both assumption tests, a Levene's test for homogeneity of variances and a Shapiro-Wilk test for assessing the normality of the employed data. Second, the analysis will highlight any statistically significant outcome. Lastly, these outcomes will be discussed in light of the various policies adopted by both the Obama and Trump administration.

### 5.1. Analysis

As previously outlined within the methodology chapter, getting to the actual findings and analysis thereof requires further examination of two important assumptions made about the statistical test. In order to test for these assumptions, this thesis employed both a Levene's test, for assessing the homogeneity of variances, and a Shapiro-Wilk test, for assessing whether the data was distributed normally. Appendix D and E show the results of both assumption tests. Levene's test for the first independent-means t-test, between Phase 1 and Phase 2, revealed heterogeneity of variances only within the fifth philosophical belief ( $p = .010$ ). Performing this same test for the second t-test, between Phase 2 and Phase 3, revealed heterogeneity of variances on again the fifth philosophical belief ( $p = .034$ ) and the fifth instrumental belief in regard to threatening utterances ( $p = .040$ ). In order to respond to these violations, the tool of analysis was slightly altered. Delacre *et al.* (2004) note that performing a Welch's t-test can provide better control over inducing a Type-I error when the assumption of equal variances is not met (p. 92). Additionally, Welch's t-test requires more careful consideration when noting the degrees of freedom, as these are not simply calculated by taking the sample size  $N$  and subtracting it by 1. As it will become more relevant when examining the assumption of normality, a Type-I error is an instance where a false positive conclusion is reached based on statistical results (Zimmerman, 2004). In other words, if this paper would not respect this type of error and would do nothing as to limit its implications, it could occur that a statistically significant result would reveal itself whilst not actually being present. However, in order to control for unequal variances, a Welch's t-test was chosen as opposed to a t-test which does assume equal variances. When examining the Shapiro-Wilk test for all data entries, several problems arise as nine beliefs violate the assumption of normality. Literature on preliminary assumption tests notes that the probability of non-normality inducing a Type-I error severely decreases as the population size increases (Banerjee *et al.*, 2009). With a population size of  $N = 36$  our data, whilst still being at some risk of a Type-I error, is still within the parameters set out by the literature on preliminary assumption tests (Banerjee *et al.*, 2009; Nguyen *et al.*,

2016). With both assumptions either accounted for through the usage of Welch's t-test or by utilizing a big enough population size, we turn to the statistical results of both t-tests.

Table 4 shows the results of the first t-test. As China's Belt and Road Initiative marks a divide between both phases, Phase 1 highlights the mean score of Obama's Operational Code beliefs before the establishment of the BRI ( $N = 13$ ). Additionally, Phase 2 highlights the mean score of Obama's Operational Codes beliefs after the establishment of the BRI ( $N = 14$ ). The right-hand side of the table shows two differing statistical results: the t-score, indicating the number of standard variations the means of the compared Operational Code differ from one another, and its subsequent p-value.

**Table 4.** Results of independent-means t-test between Phase 1 and Phase 2

	Mean index scores			
	Phase 1	Phase 2	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Philosophical beliefs</i>				
P-1 Nature of political universe	.672	.533	1.465	.157
P-2 Value realization	.410	.272	1.772	<b>.092*</b>
P-3 Predictability of political universe	.280	.202	1.890	<b>.071*</b>
P-4 Historical control	.718	.482	1.985	<b>.063*</b>
P-5 Role of chance	.782	.898	2.404	<b>.029**</b>
<i>Instrumental beliefs</i>				
I-1 Strategic orientation	.664	.542	1.264	.218
I-2 Tactical orientation	.327	.234	1.120	.274
I-3 Risk orientation	.317	.273	.819	.421
I-4a Flexibility of tactics (cooperation v. conflict)	.335	.457	1.264	.218
I-4b Flexibility of tactics (words v. deeds)	.629	.586	.582	.566
I-5 Utility of means				
a. Punish	.127	.137	.247	.807
b. Threaten	.011	.013	.200	.843
c. Oppose	.029	.077	2.041	<b>.056*</b>
d. Appeal	.518	.516	.039	.969
e. Promise	.042	.059	.736	.469
f. Reward	.271	.195	1.268	.218

\* $p \leq .1$ , \*\* $p \leq .05$ , results in bold indicate statistical significance

Before turning towards any statistically significant results, a consideration in regard to significance parameters should be made. Fischer (1950) introduced the notion of statistical significance and placed the threshold for statistical significance on a  $p$ -value of  $p < .05$ . However, the forthcoming results will showcase results as having either weak statistical significance, when  $p$  is  $.05 < p < .1$ , or strong statistical significance, when  $p$  is  $p < .05$ .

First, the t-test observed a difference in the second philosophical belief, prospects for realizing fundamental values, between Phase 1 ( $M = .410$ ,  $SE = .066$ ) and Phase 2 ( $M = .272$ ,  $SE = .040$ ). This difference,  $.138$ , represents a weak statistically significant outcome,  $t(20.071) = 1.772$ ,  $p = .092$ .

Second, the t-test observed a difference in the third philosophical belief, predictability of the political universe, between Phase 1 ( $M = .280$ ,  $SE = .033$ ) and Phase 2 ( $M = .202$ ,  $SE = .025$ ). This difference,  $.080$ , represents a weak statistically significant outcome,  $t(22.909) = 1.890$ ,  $p = 0.071$ .

Third, the t-test observed a difference in the fourth philosophical belief, control over historical development, between Phase 1 ( $M = .718$ ,  $SE = .106$ ) and Phase 2 ( $M = .482$ ,  $SE = .054$ ). This difference,  $.236$ , represents a weak statistically significant outcome,  $t(17.861) = 1.985$ ,  $p = .063$ .

Fourth, the t-test observed a difference in the fifth philosophical belief, role of chance, between Phase 1 ( $M = .782$ ,  $SE = .045$ ) and Phase 2 ( $M = .898$ ,  $SE = .017$ ). This difference,  $.116$ , represents a strong statistically significant outcome,  $t(15.584) = 2.404$ ,  $p = .029$ .

Lastly, the t-test observed a difference in the fifth instrumental belief, utility of ‘oppose’ means, between Phase 1 ( $M = .029$ ,  $SE = .010$ ) and Phase 2 ( $M = .077$ ,  $SE = .022$ ). This difference,  $.048$ , represents a weak statistically significant outcome,  $t(17.767) = 2.401$ ,  $p = .056$ .

The results of the second t-test are shown in Table 5. Whereas the first t-test encompassed Operational Code beliefs by the same individual, President Obama, the second t-test examines the beliefs of both Obama after the establishment of the BRI ( $N = 14$ ) and President Trump ( $N = 9$ ). In regard to analyzing these two phases this independent-means t-test found the following statistically significant outcomes.

First, the t-test observed a difference in the second philosophical belief, prospects for realizing fundamental values, between Phase 2 ( $M = .272$ ,  $SE = .041$ ) and Phase 3 ( $M = .074$ ,  $SE = .063$ ). This difference,  $.198$ , represents a strong statistically significant outcome,  $t(14.421) = 2.639$ ,  $p = .019$ .

Second, the t-test observed a difference in the third instrumental belief, risk orientation, between Phase 2 (M = .273, SE = .040) and Phase 3 (M = .447, SE = .084). This difference, .174, represents a weak statistically significant outcome,  $t(11.641) = 1.872, p = .087$ .

Third, the t-test observed a difference in the fourth instrumental belief, flexibility of tactics, between Phase 2 (M = .586, SE = .055) and Phase 3 (M = .338, SE = .091). This difference, .248, represents a strong statistically significant outcome,  $t(13.729) = 2.335, p = .035$ .

Lastly, the t-test observed a difference in the fifth instrumental belief, utility of ‘reward’ means, between Phase 2 (M = .195, SE = .035) and Phase 3 (M = .077, SE = .028). This difference, .118, represents a strong statistically significant outcome,  $t(20.964) = 2.642, p = .015$ .

**Table 5.** Results of independent-means t-test between Phase 2 and Phase 3

	Mean index scores			
	Phase 2	Phase 3	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Philosophical beliefs</i>				
P-1 Nature of political universe	.533	.391	1.212	.248
P-2 Value realization	.272	.074	2.639	<b>.019**</b>
P-3 Predictability of political universe	.202	.322	1.242	.245
P-4 Historical control	.482	.606	1.128	.280
P-5 Role of chance	.898	.760	1.348	.212
<i>Instrumental beliefs</i>				
I-1 Strategic orientation	.542	.614	.675	.509
I-2 Tactical orientation	.234	.224	.130	.898
I-3 Risk orientation	.273	.447	1.872	<b>.087*</b>
I-4a Flexibility of tactics (cooperation v. conflict)	.457	.385	.674	.510
I-4b Flexibility of tactics (words v. deeds)	.586	.338	2.335	<b>.035**</b>
I-5 Utility of means				
a. Punish	.137	.092	.926	.368
b. Threaten	.013	.038	.816	.435
c. Oppose	.077	.061	.481	.637
d. Appeal	.516	.600	.823	.428
e. Promise	.059	.129	.953	.365
f. Reward	.195	.077	2.642	<b>.015**</b>

\* $p \leq .1$ , \*\* $p \leq .05$ , results in bold indicate statistical significance



## **5.2. Discussion on Obama's beliefs and effect of the BRI**

The first statistically significant outcome, when examining Obama before and following the establishment of the BRI, was related to the way he prospects the realization of his fundamental values. Before the BRI Obama was notably more optimistic about realizing his core values compared to with after the BRI's inception. As previously mentioned, the P-2 belief is in a way related to the P-1 belief. Those who perceive the political universe to be friendly tend to be more optimistic about realizing one's own values and those who perceive the political universe to be more hostile are more pessimistic about value realization. The relation between these beliefs follows the simple logic that friendliness, to some extent, implies cooperation between actors and therefore greater capabilities to realize values. However, in a hostile political universe, other actors will employ methods in order to block this value realization, especially if this other actor is perceived to be an adversary. And as the analysis already highlighted, Obama is significantly more pessimistic about realizing his own fundamental values in Phase 2. Relating this back to the relation between the two philosophical master beliefs; although Obama's image of the political universe has become more hostile in Phase 2, this result is not statistically significant. Secondly, Obama perceived the political universe to be less predictable in Phase 2, as supposed to Phase 1. As Schafer and Walker (2006a) underscore, this belief is not about assessing reality and subsequently analyzing whether it was predictable. This third philosophical belief is about whether the individual in question is able to accurately predict the actions of others in terms of cooperative or conflictual methods. For instance, if Obama lived in a world where political actors operate using cooperative or conflictual methods and he would perceive all other actors to pursue cooperation and peace. In that case, any forthcoming action by another actor would be predicted as being cooperative in nature. However, if other actors do not act according to the individual's perception of this political universe, he or she perceives this universe to be less predictable. The third difference was related to whether Obama perceives himself or others to be in a position of power. It is here where the analysis found that Obama perceived himself to be less in control in Phase 2. Following a logic of 'who acts is in control', this belief thus measures whether Obama takes control himself or leaves others to act, thereby exerting control. Flowing logically from the third and fourth philosophical beliefs is the role conferred upon chance. If one perceives the political universe to be predictable and himself to be in power, the role of chance is rather minimal. However, and as is the case with Obama in Phase 2, the political universe is perceived to be unpredictable and he perceives others to be in power, thus noting a considerable high role of chance. The final difference was found to be present within the fifth instrumental belief. Here, Obama utilized the usage of

opposing word utterances considerably more. Before the BRI, Obama utilized this form of utterance in 2.9% of the total utterances, following the BRI he utilized opposing utterances in 7.7% of all cases.

### **5.2.1. Foreign policy outcomes**

Linking these statistical differences to our dependent variable of US foreign policy vis-a-vis China reveals several interesting notions. US foreign policy in Phase 1 has been largely influenced by the 'Pivot to Asia' policy. First described by Obama's then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, it noted that "the future of US politics was to be decided in the Pacific", instead of areas where the US previously had considerable political and military influence, such as Iraq and Afghanistan (Clinton, 2011). This rebalancing act of US interests fell in line with an earlier reassurance by the US president towards his Pacific allies. Here, Obama spoke that "as America's first Pacific President, I promise you that this Pacific nation will strengthen and sustain our leadership in this vitally important part of the world" (The White House, 2009). This pivotal shift in US foreign policy towards the Pacific is also present within Phase 2 of the analysis, following the establishment of the BRI. The most important post-BRI agreement is the Trans-Pacific Partnership with ten other nations located in the Pacific region, reached in 2016, with China being the most notable absentee from this trade agreement. Engagement and rebalancing of US foreign policy towards the Pacific, and thus China, is shown to have experienced limited changes. Another linkage between Obama's beliefs and US policy towards China can be observed by analyzing the Defense Department Strategic Guidance. In these documents, the Department of Defense notes that "the growth of China's military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region" (Secretary of Defense, 2012). This need for further clarification on China's strategic intentions showcases a lack of knowledge within the US government on those intentions. In turn, this could be reflected onto Obama's perceptions on the unpredictability of the political universe and the relatively high role of chance he perceives to be active.

### **5.2.2. Meeting expectations?**

The first primary theoretical expectation noted that Obama's Operational Code beliefs would not change significantly in the period following the BRI's establishment. Whilst being technically true, the statistical tests revealed a far more interesting pattern in Obama's beliefs. The theoretical expectation related to the first statistical test assumed no differences within Obama's beliefs altogether, citing the concept of belief stability offered by Renshon (2008).

Using the BRI as a division between the two phases in Obama's presidency, our analysis found statistically significant outcomes within five beliefs, a considerably high number. Whereas the theoretical framework argued the fact that the BRI would not pose a crossroads in Obama's envisioning of international politics, due to it missing certain aspects related to a traumatic event (Kleber, 2019). Additionally, and following the logic of beliefs being hierarchically ordered, scholars believe that philosophical beliefs are less prone to change than instrumental beliefs, and if change occurs within philosophical beliefs, these are often preceded by severe changes within one's instrumental beliefs (Tetlock, 1991, pp. 27-31). However, the statistical test performed in this paper concluded the opposite. It found statistically significant differences within four philosophical beliefs, with P-2 through P-5 being different, and only one statistically significant outcome within Obama's instrumental beliefs, within the I-5 belief. All in all, the expectation that Obama's (instrumental) beliefs would not differ from Phase 1 to Phase 2 has to be *rejected* as a result of widespread changes in his philosophical beliefs. The rejection of Expectation 1.1 thus begs the question of whether the BRI might have had more of an impact on Obama's beliefs as previously thought. Additionally, these results might open avenues for further research on the impact of political events being categorized as being traumatic in their own right. As previously noted, and related to Expectation 1.2, a considerable change in US foreign policy in Phase 1 and Phase 2 is absent. It is for this reason that Expectation 1.2 has to be *accepted*. One could argue that the rejection of Expectation 1.1 and the acceptance of Expectation 1.2 might show a disconnect between the independent and dependent variable. However, as we will see within the following section, the absence of change in US foreign policy towards China might be the result of Obama's self-reinforcing beliefs, thereby showing the importance of these in IR analyses.

### **5.2.3. Other explanatory factors**

It is important to note that there are other possible explanatory factors for changes in Obama's beliefs and thus our analytical results. A first variable which might have influenced the first statistical test is the fact that the 2012 US presidential elections are chronologically closely located to the establishment of the Belt and Road, which was used as a divide between Phase 1 and Phase 2. Whereas the Belt and Road was announced in September 2013, the US presidential elections were held in November 2012. As for the data used in the analysis, only one included speech followed the presidential elections but preceded the establishment of the BRI. This, to some extent, shows the possible influence of these presidential elections on the first statistical analysis. However, in terms of foreign policy debates, China and its US

engagement were no key issues for the Obama campaign. Instead, the Obama campaign focused more on policy issues within the Middle-East and how these issues relate to its biggest ally in that region; Israel (Cavari *et al.*, 2014). It was the Republican campaign which mentioned the foreign policy towards China and was repeatedly marked by Republican nominee Mitt Romney as being "too weak" (Mason, 2012). Obama only mentioned foreign policy towards China independently within his first presidential campaign, back in 2009. Here, Obama accused Chinese leadership of manipulating its own currency, the yuan, in order to push the prices of Chinese export products (Wearden, 2009). Eventually back-tracking on this accusation, Obama has not put Chinese foreign policy at the center stage within his second presidential campaign and a possible reason for that might have been the then already-existing US pivot policy, which went into effect in 2010. A second explanatory factor might be the founding of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. With its primary goals being to "seek to foster sustainable economic development, create wealth and improve infrastructure connectivity" (AIIB, 2018), the AIIB offers a competent opposing force to American hegemony in terms of currency reserves and is often seen as an important factor for US foreign policy towards China (Kim & Gates, 2015, p. 223). However, there are two notable deficits with perceiving the AIIB to be a factor in the observed outcomes of the first statistical test. Most notably, Obama has repeatedly articulated his positive stance towards the establishment of the AIIB (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2015; The White House, 2015). Secondly, the AIIB is listed as one of four multilateral financial funding institutions related to the BRI project, the others being China Development Bank (CBD), Export-Import Bank of China (EXIM) and New Development Bank (NDB) (Belt and Road Initiative, 2018). This last aspect specifically enables us to examine this often-mentioned bank as just another institution within a broader framework of institutions and therefore accredit its influence to the Belt and Road Initiative. A third explanatory factor of Obama's belief changes might have been the presence of a self-fulfilling prophecy within the Asian Pacific. A critique on Obama's rebalancing of US interests, Ross (2012) notes the possible existence of Thucydides' Trap and a conflictual power transition between the US and China in the Pacific. However, instead of noting this as a positivistic trend he holds Obama's pivot policy accountable. As the US increasingly intervenes within the Asian Pacific region China is bound to lash out, triggering another reaction by the US. By proxy, one could argue that the change in Obama's beliefs vis-a-vis China-US relations might be the product of his own policies. This however does not change the fact that Obama's beliefs are in large part shaped through self-enforcement as a result of earlier adopted foreign policies.

### **5.3. Discussion on Obama's post-BRI beliefs and Trump**

Examining the differences in Operational Code beliefs between Obama's second phase, following the BRI, and Trump's four years in office, the first significant difference was the way in which Trump perceives his ability to realize his fundamental values. Whereas Obama's pessimism grew from Phase 1 to Phase 2, Trump is significantly more pessimistic about his ability to realize his values. Whilst, similar to the first statistical test, the differences on the P-1 belief are not statistically significant, Trump perceives the political universe as more conflictual than Obama. As aforementioned, those who perceive the political universe to be conflictual are more pessimistic about value realization as other actors are perceived as threats. The second difference between Obama and Trump's Operational Codes is found within their instrumental beliefs, within their respective risk orientations. It is here that we observe Trump employing a smaller distribution of choices, thereby indicating more risk acceptant behavior. The distribution of choices translating to risk orientation follows a similar logic to that of an investor. By deploying a diversified portfolio investors aim to lower the risk of big losses due to not placing all eggs in one basket (Schafer & Walker, 2006a). The third difference between Obama and Trump is related to their flexibility of actions. Whereas the risk orientation measures distribution across all six verb categories, this index measures distribution between the 'words' categories (Promise/Appeal/Oppose/Threaten) and the 'deeds' categories (Reward/Punish). Therefore, additional to showing a low distribution of choices, thereby being more risk acceptant, Trump also shows low flexibility when utilizing either word or deed utterances. The last notable difference between both presidents was lower usage of Reward deed utterances by Trump. Whereas Obama used this discursive tool in 19.5% of all total utterances, Trump employed the same method in 7.7% of all his utterances.

#### **5.3.1. Foreign policy outcomes**

There are two notable instances where a linkage between Trump's beliefs and the dependent variable of US foreign policy vis-a-vis China can be observed. The first linkage is related to Trump's pessimistic perception of his ability to realize fundamental values within the political universe. The first major policy move within the Pacific region was the US withdrawal from the TPP-agreement. Trump had been a vocal critic of the agreement, claiming that the US people were at the receiving end of what he described as a 'rape to our country's interests' (Rushe, 2018). Additionally, Trump noted that China could enter the agreement using a backdoor and underscored the TPP's inability to stop currency manipulation (Trump, 2015), an aspect which Obama had been accusing Chinese leadership of as well. Opting out of the TPP-

agreement could fall in line with Trump's own perception of realizing his fundamental values. Normally speaking, these values are highly personal and therefore obscure for third party observers. However, as Trump has been very communicative in his 2016 presidential campaign about what the value he places on economic efficacy and that his presidential bid's eventual goal is 'To Make America Great Again' (Trump, 2020). Having some knowledge on Trump's values and his stance on the TPP-agreement, the US withdrawal from the agreement seems to fall in line with the second philosophical belief of Trump's perception about his value realization. Another aspect which can be related to Trump's second philosophical belief is the establishment of the Blue Dot Network (BDN). A multi-stakeholder initiative, the Blue Dot Network's primary goals are "to promote quality infrastructure investment that is open and inclusive, transparent, economically viable, financially, environmentally and socially sustainable, and compliant with international standards, laws, and regulations" (United States Department of State, 2021). However, the BDN has also been perceived as a response to the BRI and therefore a means to keep competing with China on economic and infrastructural matters in the Pacific region (Hansbrough, 2020). Relating this back to the Operational Codes, Trump could have created the Network in order to facilitate the realization of his fundamental values. A second linkage, and related to Trump's risk acceptant behavior, is the trade war Trump initiated in January 2018 by setting tariffs on imported Chinese products like washing machines and solar panels (Singh, 2019, pp. 1-2). Knowing the associated costs of such a trade conflict with the US' biggest trading partner, Trump accepted this risk in hope of receiving a better trade deal and ultimately shifting the status quo, which he perceived to be Sino-favored. Literature on risk behavior within International Relations notes that states shift towards risk acceptant behavior when not in a position of hegemony (O'Neill, 2001). With Trump repeatedly mentioning the unfavorability of the status quo, he might perceive the US to not be in a hegemonic position and would therefore shift to a higher degree of risk acceptance in order to change the status quo.

### **5.3.2. Meeting expectations?**

Before ultimately discussing the two theoretical expectations, as posed in an earlier chapter, there is one factor about the pattern of significant outcomes which is interesting, especially in light of the first set of significant outcomes. Following the logic of central and peripheral beliefs and the way in which these are able to change, this set of significant outcomes is what one could normally expect when expecting belief changes within a single individual. Therefore, the pattern of changes from the second statistical test is one best corresponding with the rationale

of Obama changing his beliefs due to the Belt and Road Initiative. As Trump perceived the status quo to not favor American interests he showed more pessimism in his ability to realize fundamental values within the political universe and showed a higher degree of risk acceptant beliefs than his predecessor. For these reasons, we *accept* Expectation 2.1, which stated that Trump's beliefs would differ from those of Obama. Expectation 2.2 stated that US foreign policy vis-a-vis China would change as a result of change of leadership by Trump winning the US presidential election in 2016. Observing Trump's withdrawal from the TPP-agreement, the creation of the Blue Dot Network and his risk acceptant behavior in trade disputes with China shows that US foreign policy had shifted as opposed to before he was elected president. And it is for these reasons that we *accept* Expectation 2.2.

## 6. Conclusion

Arguing the importance of agency within International Relations, this thesis examined the case of China's Belt and Road Initiative and how US presidents Obama and Trump reacted to this geopolitical shift. It found that Obama's beliefs changed significantly following the adaptation of the BRI but argued that the change might be the result of the self-reinforcing nature of beliefs. Additionally, the analysis showed that Trump's beliefs and his foreign policy vis-à-vis China both differed considerably from those of Obama. Whilst not all expectations were in line with the empirical findings, the deviating expectation did reveal a more interesting notion. Related to this notion is the only recommendation for further research this thesis would like to offer. As noted in the section discussing the BRI and its impact on Obama's beliefs, further research could explore the impact of political or economically extreme events on a leader's beliefs. Even though these types of events do not fit the traditional description of a traumatic event (Kleber, 2019; McNally, 2003), this thesis has shown that politically relevant events can impact a leader's beliefs and are therefore able to shape policy outcomes. Another, more case-specific, recommendation would be to assess Trump's beliefs long before he would enter the Oval Office. Already an influential individual, a preliminary search of internet sources showed that Trump made a sizeable number of remarks on US foreign policy towards China. Comparing these with his beliefs as US president could shed a brighter light on our understanding of the differences in foreign policies between Obama and Trump.

The fact that the expectations and analysis to a large extent showed corresponding results leads us towards an answer of the research question *"To what extent did leadership matter in US foreign policy towards China in light of the Belt and Road Initiative"*. As shown by the case of the BRI and US foreign policy towards China, system-based approaches showed themselves to have considerable explanatory value, this thesis showed the importance of including agency, through political leadership, as another important factor when examining geopolitical issues. This is perhaps the most important lesson to take out of this analysis; neither structure nor agency can completely explain every IR phenomenon in its entirety. Both should be combined for our best possible understanding.



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## Appendix A

### The White House archived speeches

#### Phase 1: Obama pre-BRI (20.1.2009-7.9.2013)

*Statement of President Barack Obama to the U.S.-China Strategic & Economic Dialogue (Obama\_1\_01)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-barack-obama-us-china-strategic-economic-dialogue>

*Joint Press Statement by President Obama and President Hu of China (Obama\_1\_02)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/joint-press-statement-president-obama-and-president-hu-china>

*Remarks by President Barack Obama at Town Hall Meeting with Future Chinese Leaders (Obama\_1\_03)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-town-hall-meeting-with-future-chinese-leaders>

*Presidents Obama, Hu Meet with Business Leaders (Obama\_1\_04)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/photos-and-video/video/2011/01/19/presidents-obama-hu-meet-business-leaders#transcript>

*President Obama's Bilateral Meeting with President Xi of China (Obama\_1\_05)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/photos-and-video/video/2013/09/06/president-obamas-bilateral-meeting-president-xi-china#transcript>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu of China (Obama\_1\_06)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/12/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-china>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu of China before Meeting (Obama\_1\_07)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-china-meeting>

*Press Conference with President Obama and President Hu of the People's Republic of China (Obama\_1\_08)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/19/press-conference-president-obama-and-president-hu-peoples-republic-china>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu Jintao of China before meeting (Obama\_1\_09)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-jintao-china-meeting>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_10)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/11/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-china-bilateral-meeting>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu of China Before Expanded Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_11)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-china-expanded-bilateral-meeting>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu Jintao of China before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_12)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/19/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-jintao-china-bilateral-meeting>

*Remarks by President Obama and Premier Wen Jiabao of China before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_13)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/09/23/remarks-president-obama-and-premier-wen-jiabao-china-bilateral-meeting>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu of the People's Republic of China at Official Arrival Ceremony (Obama\_1\_14)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/19/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-peoples-republic-china-official>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_15)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/06/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-bilatera>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_16)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/07/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-jinping-peoples-republic-china->

*Remarks by President Obama and Vice President Xi of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_17)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/14/remarks-president-obama-and-vice-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-bil>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu Jintao of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_18)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/26/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-jintao-peoples-republic-china-b>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu of the People's Republic of China in an Exchange of Toasts at State Dinner (Obama\_1\_19)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/19/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-peoples-republic-china-exchange>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Hu Jintao of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_1\_20)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-president-hu-jintao-peoples-republic-china-bilateral-me>

*Interview of President Obama by Xiang Xi of Southern Weekly (Obama\_1\_21)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/interview-president-obama-xiang-xi-southern-weekly>

*President Obama at the APEC Business Summit (Obama\_1\_22)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/photos-and-video/video/2011/11/12/president-obama-apec-business-summit#transcript>

*President Obama Holds a Press Conference at the APEC Summit (Obama\_1\_23)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/photos-and-video/video/2011/11/13/president-obama-holds-press-conference-apec-summit#transcript>

*Remarks by President Obama at G-20 Press Conference in Toronto, Canada (Obama\_1\_24)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-g-20-press-conference-toronto-canada>

## **Phase 2: Obama post-BRI (1.10.2013-20.1.2017)**

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping in Joint Press Conference (Obama\_2\_01)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/12/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-jinping-joint-press-conference>

*Remarks by President Obama Before Bilateral Meeting with President Xi Jinping of China at the G20 Summit (Obama\_2\_02)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/04/remarks-president-obama-bilateral-meeting-president-xi-jinping-china-g20>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_2\_03)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/24/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-jinping-china-bilateral-meeting>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People's Republic of China in Joint Press Conference (Obama\_2\_04)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-joint>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_2\_05)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/11/19/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-china-bilateral-meeting>

*Press Conference by President Obama after G20 Summit (Obama\_2\_06)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/05/press-conference-president-obama-after-g20-summit>

*Remarks by President Obama on the United States Formally Entering into the Paris Agreement (Obama\_2\_07)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/04/remarks-president-obama-united-states-formally-entering-paris-agreement>

*Toast Remarks by President Obama in Luncheon with President Xi of China (Obama\_2\_08)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/12/toast-remarks-president-obama-luncheon-president-xi-china>

*Press Conference of President Obama after ASEAN Summit (Obama\_2\_09)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/08/press-conference-president-obama-after-asean-summit>

*Joint Press Conference with President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan (Obama\_2\_10)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/24/joint-press-conference-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_2\_11)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/30/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-china-bilateral-meeting>

*Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in Joint Press Conference (Obama\_2\_12)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/28/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-confere>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Obama\_2\_13)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/31/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People's Republic of China in an Exchange of Toasts (Obama\_2\_14)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/28/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-exchange>

*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People's Republic of China at Arrival Ceremony (Obama\_2\_15)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-arrival>

*Remarks by President Obama to the United Nations General Assembly (Obama\_2\_16)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/28/remarks-president-obama-united-nations-general-assembly>

*Remarks by President Obama at G20 Press Conference | November 16, 2014 (Obama\_2\_17)*  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/16/remarks-president-obama-g20-press-conference-november-16-2014>

*Remarks by the President on the Paris Agreement (Obama\_2\_18)*

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/10/05/remarks-president-paris-agreement>

### **Phase 3: Trump (20.1.2017-20.1.2021)**

*Remarks by President Trump on Actions Against China (Trump\_01)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-actions-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump at Signing of the U.S.-China Phase One Trade Agreement (Trump\_02)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-u-s-china-phase-one-trade-agreement-2/>

*Remarks by President Trump in Luncheon with Vice Premier Liu He of the People's Republic of China (Trump\_03)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-luncheon-vice-premier-liu-peoples-republic-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump and Vice Premier Liu He of the People's Republic of China in a Meeting (Trump\_04)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-premier-liu-peoples-republic-china-meeting/>

*Remarks by President Trump and President Xi of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting | Osaka, Japan (Trump\_05)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-bilateral-meeting-osaka-japan/>

*Remarks by President Trump and Vice Premier Liu He of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Trump\_06)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-premier-liu-peoples-republic-china-bilateral-meeting/>

*Remarks by President Trump Before Meeting with Vice Premier Liu He of the People's Republic of China (Trump\_07)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-meeting-vice-premier-liu-peoples-republic-china-2/>

*Remarks by President Trump in Meeting with Vice Premier Liu He of the People's Republic of China (Trump\_08)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-meeting-vice-premier-liu-peoples-republic-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump and President Xi of China Before Bilateral Meeting (Trump\_09)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-xi-china-bilateral-meeting/>

*Statement from the President Regarding Trade with China (Trump\_10)*



<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-regarding-trade-china-2/>

*Statement by the President Regarding Trade with China (Trump\_11)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-regarding-trade-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump at Signing of a Presidential Memorandum Targeting China's Economic Aggression (Trump\_12)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-presidential-memorandum-targeting-chinas-economic-aggression/>

*Remarks by President Trump at Business Event with President Xi of China | Beijing, China (Trump\_13)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-business-event-president-xi-china-beijing-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump and President Xi of China Before Expanded Bilateral Meeting | Beijing, China (Trump\_14)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-xi-china-expanded-bilateral-meeting-beijing-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump and President Xi of China in Joint Press Statement | Beijing, China (Trump\_15)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-xi-china-joint-press-statement-beijing-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump and President Xi of China at State Dinner | Beijing, China (Trump\_16)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-by-president-trump-and-president-xi-of-china-at-state-dinner-beijing-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump Before Bilateral Meeting with President Xi of China (Trump\_17)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-bilateral-meeting-president-xi-china/>

*Remarks by President Trump After Meeting with President Xi of China (Trump\_18)*

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-meeting-president-xi-china/>

## Appendix B

### Steps in the Verbs-In-Context-System

#### STEPS IN THE VERBS IN CONTEXT SYSTEM

##### 1. IDENTIFY THE SUBJECT AS

SELF OR OTHER

##### 2. IDENTIFY THE TENSE OF THE TRANSITIVE VERB AS

PAST PRESENT FUTURE

##### AND IDENTIFY THE CATEGORY OF THE VERB AS

POSITIVE (+) OR NEGATIVE (-)

WORDS	APPEAL, SUPPORT (+ 1)	OPPOSE, RESIST (-1)
	PROMISE BENEFITS (+2)	THREATEN COSTS (-2)

DEEDS	REWARDS (+3)	PUNISHMENTS (-3)
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##### 3. IDENTIFY THE DOMAIN AS

DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN

##### 4. IDENTIFY TARGET AND PLACE IN CONTEXT

#### An Example

A quote taken from President Carter's January 4, 1980, address to the nation: "Massive Soviet military forces have invaded the small, non-aligned, sovereign nation of Afghanistan... "

1. **Subject.** The subject is "Massive Soviet military forces" which is coded as other, that is, the speaker is not referring to his or her self or his or her state.
2. **Tense and Category.** The verb phrase "have invaded" is in the past tense and is a negative deed coded, therefore, as punish.
3. **Domain.** The action involves an actor (Soviet military forces) external to the speaker's state (the United States); therefore, the domain is foreign.
4. **Target and Context.** The action is directed toward Afghanistan; therefore, the target is coded as Afghanistan. In addition, we designate a context: Soviet-Afghanistan-conflict- 1979-88.

The **complete data line** for this statement is: other -3 foreign past Afghanistan soviet afghanistan-conflict- 1 979-88.

# Appendix C

## Table of data overview

Data entry	Leader	Title	Date	Valid?	word count	self punish	self threaten	self oppose	self appeal	self promise	self reward	other punish	other threaten	other oppose	other appeal	other promise	other reward	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	I1	I2	I3	I4a	I4b	IS Punish	IS Threaten	IS Oppose	IS Appeal	IS Promise	IS Reward
Obama 1_01	Obama	Statement of Pres	24/05/2010	yes	688	2	0	1	9	0	2	0	0	2	17	2	3	0.833	0.389	0.438	0.583	0.745	0.571	0.190	0.351	0.429	0.571	0.143	0.000	0.071	0.643	0.000	0.143
Obama 1_02	Obama	Joint Press Statem	17/11/2009	yes	1224	3	0	0	12	2	2	0	0	2	11	1	6	0.800	0.483	0.286	0.950	0.728	0.684	0.228	0.335	0.316	0.528	0.158	0.000	0.000	0.632	0.105	0.105
Obama 1_03	Obama	Remarks by Presid	16/11/2009	yes	7170	15	0	2	20	0	13	21	2	11	89	3	43	0.544	0.282	0.188	0.336	0.937	0.320	0.080	0.183	0.680	0.880	0.300	0.000	0.040	0.400	0.000	0.260
Obama 1_04	Obama	Presidents Obama	19/12/2009	yes	587	2	0	0	3	0	4	5	0	0	1	0	5	0.091	0.030	0.306	0.818	0.750	0.556	0.333	0.230	0.444	0.667	0.222	0.000	0.000	0.333	0.000	0.444
Obama 1_05	Obama	President Obama's	6/9/2013	no	341	1	2	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	6	1	1	0.778	0.296	0.378	0.333	0.874	1.000	0.333	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Obama 1_06	Obama	Remarks by Presid	12/11/2011	no	357	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	5	0	0	0.667	0.111	0.667	0.667	0.555	1.000	0.500	0.500	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.750	0.000	0.250
Obama 1_07	Obama	Remarks by Presid	1/4/2009	no	283	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	2	0.500	0.375	0.138	0.000	1.000	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR
Obama 1_08	Obama	Press Conference	19/12/2011	yes	3292	2	2	3	38	2	8	8	0	7	36	10	20	0.630	0.350	0.149	0.679	0.899	0.745	0.321	0.407	0.255	0.364	0.360	0.036	0.055	0.691	0.036	0.145
Obama 1_09	Obama	Remarks by Presid	22/9/2009	no	201	0	0	1	4	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	-1.000	-1.000	1.000	3.000	-2.000	0.667	0.333	0.400	0.333	0.000	0.000	0.167	0.667	0.000	0.167	
Obama 1_10	Obama	Remarks by Presid	11/11/2010	no	165	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0.333	0.333	0.200	0.333	0.933	1.000	0.333	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	
Obama 1_11	Obama	Remarks by Presid	17/11/2009	no	209	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0.500	0.167	0.550	1.000	0.450	1.000	0.333	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	
Obama 1_12	Obama	Remarks by Presid	19/6/2012	no	323	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	2	-2.000	0.067	0.232	0.400	0.907	1.000	0.667	0.400	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.500	0.000	0.500
Obama 1_13	Obama	Remarks by Presid	23/9/2010	yes	442	0	0	0	5	0	7	0	0	0	4	0	8	1.000	0.778	0.467	1.000	0.533	1.000	0.722	0.417	0.000	0.833	0.000	0.000	0.417	0.000	0.583	
Obama 1_14	Obama	Remarks by Presid	19/12/2011	no	403	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	8	0	1	0.500	0.056	0.417	0.083	0.966	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000
Obama 1_15	Obama	Remarks by Presid	6/9/2013	no	236	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	6	1	1	0.778	0.296	0.378	0.333	0.874	1.000	0.333	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	
Obama 1_16	Obama	Remarks by Presid	7/6/2013	yes	645	0	0	0	6	0	2	1	0	1	11	0	4	0.765	0.373	0.377	0.471	0.822	1.000	0.500	0.500	0.000	0.500	0.000	0.000	0.750	0.000	0.250	
Obama 1_17	Obama	Remarks by Presid	14/2/2012	yes	696	1	0	0	12	1	2	0	0	0	3	1	5	1.000	0.741	0.319	1.778	0.434	0.875	0.354	0.503	0.125	0.375	0.063	0.000	0.000	0.750	0.063	0.125
Obama 1_18	Obama	Remarks by Presid	26/3/2012	no	397	0	0	0	3	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	2	-0.333	-0.333	0.467	0.500	0.767	1.000	0.333	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	
Obama 1_19	Obama	Remarks by Presid	19/12/2011	yes	405	2	0	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	5	0	6	1.000	0.697	0.405	0.818	0.666	0.556	0.333	0.230	0.444	0.667	0.222	0.000	0.000	0.333	0.000	0.444
Obama 1_20	Obama	Remarks by Presid	26/6/2010	no	159	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	ERROR	1.000	0.333	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000
Obama 1_21	Obama	Interview of Presid	19/12/2009	yes	768	0	0	0	2	1	4	1	0	2	5	0	9	0.647	0.529	0.261	0.412	0.893	1.000	0.762	0.314	0.000	0.857	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.286	0.143	0.571
Obama 1_22	Obama	President Obama	12/11/2010	yes	4313	4	1	4	26	2	8	5	2	3	36	6	26	0.744	0.444	0.204	0.577	0.883	0.600	0.267	0.200	0.400	0.533	0.089	0.022	0.089	0.576	0.044	0.178
Obama 1_23	Obama	President Obama	13/11/2011	yes	3398	10	3	2	13	2	4	15	1	5	27	3	13	0.344	0.104	0.139	0.531	0.926	0.118	-0.088	0.113	0.882	0.824	0.294	0.088	0.059	0.382	0.059	0.118
Obama 1_24	Obama	Remarks by Presid	27/7/2010	yes	3262	4	0	2	17	3	5	13	4	9	33	5	15	0.342	0.135	0.109	0.392	0.957	0.613	0.258	0.228	0.387	0.581	0.129	0.000	0.065	0.548	0.097	0.161
Obama 2_01	Obama	Remarks by Presid	12/11/2014	yes	2452	3	0	3	33	4	2	4	0	4	30	3	16	0.719	0.398	0.242	0.789	0.809	0.733	0.259	0.468	0.267	0.222	0.067	0.000	0.067	0.733	0.089	0.044
Obama 2_02	Obama	Remarks by Presid	4/9/2014	no	388	0	0	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1.000	0.750	0.250	1.500	0.625	0.667	0.389	0.200	0.333	0.333	0.000	0.167	0.500	0.167	0.167	
Obama 2_03	Obama	Remarks by Presid	24/03/2014	no	439	0	0	0	4	0	1	1	0	0	5	0	1	0.714	0.238	0.461	0.714	0.671	1.000	0.467	0.616	0.000	0.400	0.000	0.000	0.800	0.000	0.200	
Obama 2_04	Obama	Remarks by Presid	25/09/2015	yes	3771	4	5	7	35	3	9	17	1	6	29	10	23	0.442	0.229	0.091	0.733	0.933	0.492	0.206	0.225	0.508	0.413	0.063	0.079	0.111	0.556	0.048	0.143
Obama 2_05	Obama	Remarks by Presid	19/11/2016	no	329	0	0	2	5	0	0	5	0	1	1	0	2	-0.333	-0.333	0.259	0.778	0.798	0.429	0.143	0.510	0.571	0.000	0.000	0.286	0.714	0.000	0.000	
Obama 2_06	Obama	Press Conference	5/9/2016	yes	1619	1	0	0	7	1	5	10	1	4	12	1	16	0.318	0.197	0.121	0.318	0.961	0.857	0.500	0.265	0.143	0.857	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.500	0.071	0.357
Obama 2_07	Obama	Remarks by Presid	3/9/2016	yes	1034	0	0	1	3	2	4	4	1	0	14	1	4	0.583	0.194	0.279	0.417	0.884	0.800	0.600	0.160	0.200	0.800	0.000	0.100	0.300	0.200	0.400	
Obama 2_08	Obama	Toast Remarks by	12/11/2014	no	351	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	5	0.500	0.500	0.325	0.125	0.959	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000
Obama 2_09	Obama	Press Conference	8/9/2016	yes	2802	1	1	2	15	3	5	3	0	3	32	1	11	0.760	0.367	0.359	0.540	0.806	0.704	0.358	0.236	0.296	0.444	0.037	0.037	0.074	0.556	0.111	0.185
Obama 2_10	Obama	Joint Press Confer	24/4/2014	yes	3579	4	0	3	21	0	5	15	2	7	28	5	22	0.392	0.203	0.102	0.418	0.957	0.576	0.212	0.341	0.424	0.545	0.121	0.000	0.091	0.636	0.000	0.152
Obama 2_11	Obama	Remarks by Presid	30/11/2015	yes	504	3	0	4	0	2	4	0	0	0	5	0	3	0.333	0.056	0.217	0.750	0.838	0.333	0.037	0.230	0.667	0.889	0.333	0.000	0.000	0.444	0.000	0.222
Obama 2_12	Obama	Remarks by Presid	28/4/2015	yes	5022	3	3	3	18	7	9	29	5	10	36	9	25	0.228	0.064	0.074	0.377	0.972	0.581	0.318	0.112	0.419	0.558	0.070	0.000	0.070	0.419	0.163	0.209
Obama 2_13	Obama	Remarks by Presid	31/3/2016	yes	518	1	0	1	7	0	2	2	1	0	9	0	5	0.647	0.314	0.261	0.647	0.831	0.636	0.273	0.345	0.364	0.545	0.091	0.000	0.091	0.636	0.000	0.182
Obama 2_14	Obama	Remarks by Presid	25/9/2015	yes	397	1	0	0	5	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	7	0.857	0.571	0.327	0.429	0.860	0.667	0.111	0.667	0.333	0.333	0.167	0.000	0.000	0.833	0.000	0.000
Obama 2_15	Obama	Remarks by Presid	25/9/2015	yes	439	1	0	0	2	0	2	3	0	0	8	0	8	0.684	0.404	0.255	0.263	0.933	0.600	0.333	0.232	0.400	0.800	0.200	0.000	0.000	0.400	0.000	0.400
Obama 2_16	Obama	Remarks by Presid	28/9/2015	yes	4783	4	0	11	16	7	9	28	3	18	47	6	35	0.285	0.136	0.093	0.343	0.968	0.362	0.241	0.084	0.638	0.553	0.085	0.000	0.234	0.340	0.149	0.191
Obama 2_17	Obama	Remarks by Presid	16/11/2014	yes	881	1	0	1	2	0	0	6	0	2	16	3	7	0.529	0.225	0.167	0.118	0.980	0.000	-0.167	0.250	1.000	0.500	0.250	0.000	0.250	0.500	0.000	0.000
Obama 2_18	Obama	Remarks by the P	5/10/2016	yes	801	3	0	0	3	0	2	0	1	1	6	0	5	0.692	0.462	0.247													

## Appendix D

### Levene's test for homogeneity of variances

Phase 1 → Phase 2

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
		F	Sig.
P1	Equal variances assumed	,930	,344
	Equal variances not assumed		
P2	Equal variances assumed	1,987	,171
	Equal variances not assumed		
P3	Equal variances assumed	,680	,417
	Equal variances not assumed		
P4	Equal variances assumed	1,971	,173
	Equal variances not assumed		
P5	Equal variances assumed	7,792	<b>,010*</b>
	Equal variances not assumed		
I1	Equal variances assumed	,127	,724
	Equal variances not assumed		
I2	Equal variances assumed	,079	,782
	Equal variances not assumed		
I3	Equal variances assumed	,004	,949
	Equal variances not assumed		
I4a	Equal variances assumed	,127	,724
	Equal variances not assumed		
I4b	Equal variances assumed	,259	,615
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_punish	Equal variances assumed	,009	,925
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_threaten	Equal variances assumed	,275	,605
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_oppose	Equal variances assumed	3,160	,088
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_appeal	Equal variances assumed	,769	,389
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_promise	Equal variances assumed	3,301	,081
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_reward	Equal variances assumed	2,502	,126
	Equal variances not assumed		

Phase 2 → Phase 3

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
		F	Sig.
P1	Equal variances assumed	2,166	,156
	Equal variances not assumed		
P2	Equal variances assumed	,686	,417
	Equal variances not assumed		
P3	Equal variances assumed	3,622	,071
	Equal variances not assumed		
P4	Equal variances assumed	,186	,671
	Equal variances not assumed		
P5	Equal variances assumed	5,120	<b>,034</b>
	Equal variances not assumed		
I1	Equal variances assumed	,064	,802
	Equal variances not assumed		
I2	Equal variances assumed	,497	,489
	Equal variances not assumed		
I3	Equal variances assumed	1,825	,191
	Equal variances not assumed		
I4a	Equal variances assumed	,065	,801
	Equal variances not assumed		
I4b	Equal variances assumed	1,015	,325
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_punish	Equal variances assumed	,001	,976
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_threaten	Equal variances assumed	4,771	<b>,040</b>
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_oppose	Equal variances assumed	,265	,612
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_appeal	Equal variances assumed	1,404	,249
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_promise	Equal variances assumed	2,985	,099
	Equal variances not assumed		
I5_reward	Equal variances assumed	,571	,458
	Equal variances not assumed		

## Appendix E

### Shapiro-Wilk test for normality

**Tests of Normality**

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
P1	,084	36	,200 <sup>*</sup>	,961	36	,238
P2	,063	36	,200 <sup>*</sup>	,987	36	,945
P3	,153	36	<b>,032</b>	,798	36	<b>,000</b>
P4	,123	36	,182	,892	36	<b>,002</b>
P5	,188	36	<b>,002</b>	,723	36	<b>,000</b>
I1	,118	36	,200 <sup>*</sup>	,961	36	,223
I2	,156	36	<b>,026</b>	,960	36	,217
I3	,154	36	<b>,030</b>	,881	36	<b>,001</b>
I4a	,118	36	,200 <sup>*</sup>	,961	36	,223
I4b	,111	36	,200 <sup>*</sup>	,955	36	,147
I5_punish	,168	36	<b>,011</b>	,904	36	<b>,004</b>
I5_threaten	,424	36	<b>,000</b>	,431	36	<b>,000</b>
I5_oppose	,267	36	<b>,000</b>	,803	36	<b>,000</b>
I5_appeal	,091	36	,200 <sup>*</sup>	,978	36	,690
I5_promise	,277	36	<b>,000</b>	,583	36	<b>,000</b>
I5_reward	,154	36	<b>,030</b>	,905	36	<b>,005</b>

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction