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Ontological security and the power of self-identity: British neutrality and the American Civil War

BRENT J. STEELE*

Abstract. Why did Great Britain remain neutral during the American Civil War? Although several historical arguments have been put forth, few studies have explicitly used International Relations (IR) theories to understand this decision. Synthesising a discursive approach with an ontological security interpretation, I propose an alternative framework for understanding security-seeking behaviour and threats to identity. I assess the impact Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had upon the interventionist debates in Great Britain. I argue that the Proclamation reframed interventionist debates, thus (re)engendering the British anxiety over slavery and removing intervention as a viable policy. I conclude by proposing several issues relevant to using an ontological security interpretation in future IR studies.

This study seeks to assess whether the Emancipation Proclamation (EP) prevented British involvement in the American Civil War. I show how the EP changed the meaning of the American Civil War for the British, thus clarifying why nineteenth-century Britain remained neutral in a conflict whose increased duration had dire economic consequences for its citizens, and whose outcome would have important consequences for its future relative power trajectory. By focusing on British opinion leader debates occurring both before and after the issuance of the Proclamation, I assess the EP's impact upon Britain's decision not to recognise the Confederacy. Synthesising a discursive approach with the account of self-identity put forth by Anthony Giddens, I employ the concept of 'ontological security' (defined as 'a sense of continuity and order in events'),[1] to understand the process which produced Britain's decision. I argue that the British engaged in ontological security-seeking

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[1] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 243. Several IR scholars have used Giddens in their work. Besides those works discussed below see also Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia, SC: Columbia University Press), and Jef Huysmans, 'Security! What do you Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier', *European Journal of International Relations*, 4 (1998), pp. 226–55.

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behaviour in order to affirm their sense of self-identity, and this process resulted in British neutrality.

This case study is used to understand two important issues about identity in general and self-identity in particular. First, British contemplation over the meaning of the American Civil War, and an intervention to stop it, represents a form of reflexive behaviour. This provides an opportunity to develop a theory of security which can adequately interpret threats to identity and, more generally, assess the role that self-identity plays in the foreign policy decision-making process. Second, by using an ontological security interpretation this case is an example of how 'moral' action represents self-help behaviour because it is a form of identity reinforcement.

The article proceeds in four parts. In the first section, I provide an introduction to the case along with a summary of contending explanations. After briefly dispensing with realist and economic-based arguments, I deal more fully with John Owen's liberal argument, situating it against an ontological security interpretation. In the second section, I introduce the Giddensian concept of 'ontological security', contrasting it with traditional understandings of state security. Using an ontological security view of self-identity, I develop a theory for understanding identity threats and their role in foreign policy decisions. The third section uses this theory to understand the British decision regarding involvement in the American Civil War. I reconstruct the context of the crisis, focusing on the crucial period leading up to the issuance of the EP and the months that followed. Reviewing historical accounts, British parliamentary debates and diplomatic and private dispatches, I then assess the impact the EP had upon the British decision-making process. In the fourth and concluding section, I discuss the relevance of this approach and case to contemporary issues of identity threats and the potential benefits for focusing on self-identity in future studies.

Background and rival explanations

At several points during the War of American States, Great Britain contemplated some form of involvement to end the hostilities. The most notable reasons to intervene were that (1) a divided America was advantageous to hegemonic Britain; (2) the shortage of Southern cotton caused by the Union blockade hurt the British economy, most notably the textile and manufacturing sectors; and (3) the British wanted to see an end to what they called a 'fratricidal war'. By 1862, an intervention by an outside power appeared to be the only way to end the bloodshed.

A British move to recognise the Confederacy would have at the least led to diplomatic severance between the United States and Britain, and at the most would have led to war.[2] In essence, mediation by the British would have been an intervention, because the intention to separate the two warring parties featured securing some peace agreement that would have given the South formal status as a sovereign country. By 1862 the British did not see reconciliation as possible without some type of outside involvement. Although various interventionist actions were proposed by

[2] '. . . Recognition of the Confederacy would provide a tremendous boost to its morale by opening military and commercial avenues throughout Europe. Southern secession would achieve legitimacy, necessarily meaning that the Union had lost its permanency.' Howard Jones, *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1999), p. 137.

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British policymakers, in the end the outcome of all would be the same: formal recognition of the South and a semi-permanent division of antebellum America.[3]

What I argue in the following pages is that the changed meaning of the American Civil War following the EP's issuance changed the relevant costs an intervention would entail to British self-identity. The crux of my argument is that *a British intervention prior to the EP could have still been consistent with British self-identity, but* (after a bit of debate) *an intervention following the EP would most certainly have not.* Thus, the changed meaning of the Civil War from 'Northern Aggression' to 'liberation' meant that any intervention would threaten British identity, and ostensibly Britain's ontological security. What drove Britain's considerations was not a liberal affinity for abolition, nor changing coalitions which engendered 'moral' action, but a reflexively oriented policy that would serve Britain's ontological security needs.

Both realist- and economic-based arguments are both theoretically and temporally indeterminate in explaining this case. For realists, the British should have intervened in the American Civil War since a divided America would have been less of an immediate danger because of the preoccupation of the warring sides, and in the future a divided America undoubtedly would have been less powerful than a united one. British opinion leaders knew that the United States was a rising power, and these power considerations weighed heavily upon those leaders.[4] It was also likely that the British prime minister, Lord Palmerston, would support such an intervention, considering he has (by many accounts) been identified as a champion of realist ideology.[5] One would assume he would also see intervention as ensuring competitor division, British hegemony, and British survival. However, the realist argument suffers from theoretical indeterminancy. In other words, intervention was prudent because it would have split a rising competitor into two, ensuring British hegemony for years to come. But, on the other hand and using the same assumptions, the British avoided such an action because it would have been too costly and would have jeopardised British hegemony and, perhaps, survival.[6]

Economic motives also existed, since the British suffered from the Union blockade of Southern ports, constricting the supply of cotton that fuelled Britain's textile industry. But this line of argument is also indeterminate, since there are several

[3] Frank Owsley mentions the specific forms, at various times, intervention could have taken: repudiation of the blockade, mediation during a stalemate, formal recognition of the South following Confederate military successes, or outright armed intervention, Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 542.

[4] Prior to his prolific career as a novelist, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton was a member of the British Parliament, observing on 25 September 1861, that unencumbered American growth, 'would have hung over Europe like a gathering and destructive cloud. No single kingdom in Europe could have been strong enough to maintain itself against a nation that had once consolidated the gigantic resources of a quarter of the globe.' Quoted in Belle Becker Sideman (ed.), *Europe Looks at the Civil War* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 85.

[5] 'A veteran of a half-century in British politics, Palmerston was an exponent of *Realpolitik*'. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford Press, 1988), p. 553. For a gratingly reverent view of Palmerston as a realist, see Christopher Layne, 'Lord Palmerston and the Triumph of Realism: Anglo-French Relations, 1830–48', in Miriam Fendius Elman (ed.), *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 61–100.

[6] 'No one could argue convincingly that foreign intervention – whether a mediation or an armistice – offered a harmless means for ending the war . . . further, history demonstrates that once an intervention process begins, it takes on a life of its own'. Jones, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 121. Stephen Rock also accepts this line of reasoning: 'as a matter of principle, most (Palmerston) cabinet members favoured intervention; they refrained from it only because of doubts regarding its feasibility'. Rock, 'Anglo-US Relations', p. 123.

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economic-based counterarguments that can be posited.[7] In essence, an intervention could have been prudent to ensure the cotton supplied by the Confederacy and thus to ensure the welfare and employment of British citizens. But, on the other hand and using the same assumptions, such a policy was deemed foolish because, after economically adjusting to the situation, the British profited too much to want to see the conflict end. The most notable of these counterarguments is that England actually profited from the American Civil War because it drove up world cotton prices making existing English stockpiles quite valuable. In addition, the British were developing India as a colony largely for its (rival) cotton potential. By the time intervention would have been most prudent the British no longer needed to intervene. In fact, intervention would have jeopardised their growing profits from the war.[8] Finally, Confederate attacks on Union ships ostensibly destroyed the American merchant marine 'without England's lifting her hand'. The war would effectively eliminate the main seafaring rival to British hegemony, increasing Britain's economic leverage. This leads historian Frank Owsley to conclude that: 'England, far from being hag-ridden by poverty during the American Civil War, made enormous material profits'.[9]

Besides theoretical indeterminacy, both realist- and economic-based arguments are also temporally indeterminate. We can assume that at *some time* during the four and a half years of conflict England began to profit from the American Civil War. The British knew that the conflict would not come to a quick close. Not intervening therefore meant Britain needed to find alternative sources of textiles, such as linen and wool, as well as its precious cotton. Most historians agree with what I note in the case study section below – that by early 1863 Britain no longer *seriously* contemplated intervening in the American Civil War. Even though Britain benefited in the long term from a long American Civil War, in 1862 and early 1863 it could not yet foresee the golden rewards it would reap *if* it reoriented its economy through all the means outlined above. During this period, there was still much doubt about the events surrounding the American Civil War. There were many crucial battles, and devastating Union defeats at those battles, yet to transpire. Additionally, by the end of 1862 and through much of 1863 the large surpluses of cotton were depleted, with no immediate alternative source available, so interventionist incentives should have *increased* during that period.[10]

[7] Suffering from a short grain crop between 1860 and 1862, the British were vulnerable to a wheat famine, and thus more dependent upon the wheat and grain of the American North than they were on the cotton of the South. Owsley dismisses this argument quickly, noting that there is little correspondence within the Palmerston cabinet or amongst Parliament members that indicates this was a factor in the British decision. American Secretary of State William Seward did try to exploit the wheat connection in order to prevent the British from intervening, but Owsley dismisses this as 'federal propaganda'. In my review of the discourse and historical records of the decision I could not find much discussion about wheat shortages influencing the Palmerston cabinet; I concur with Owsley on this point; see Owsley, *King Cotton*, p. 549.

[8] Owsley argues that the revitalisation of the woollen and linen industries in England further fuelled this process. He also adds that industries linked to war, like those producing munitions or ships, also profited; Owsley, *King Cotton*, p. 556.

[9] Ibid., p. 556.

[10] At the time Britain also experienced a large number of domestic problems: 'nearly 300,000 persons were receiving poor relief. Twelve months later (by the end of 1863) 40 per cent of workers who had been employed in the mills at the beginning of the war were still out of work.' Britain recognised this problem and by 1864 had recovered on many fronts. But by mid-1863 intervention had already been discarded as a viable option even though economic recovery was still in doubt. The British decision to remain neutral occurred *first*, followed by an economic reorientation and recovery, and not the other way around. Stephen Rock, 'Anglo-US Relations, 1845–1930: Did Shared Liberal Values and Democratic Institutions Keep the Peace?', in Elman, *Paths to Peace*, p. 120.

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The challenge in this case is to demonstrate why something *did not* happen. How are we to know what conditions needed to be present for Britain to complete an intervention? The problem with the above approaches is that they make a 'positivist fallacy' of only studying overt behaviour in the form of outcomes.[11] Since the above approaches are indeterminate, and would 'predict' contradictory outcomes, process tracing is a better approach for studying the impact of normative changes upon the *continuity* of British action. We can address the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation by looking at the reasons British policymakers used for or against intervention prior to the issuance of the EP (t_1) and then after (t_2). If there is a distinct shift in the justifications made by British policymakers for remaining neutral, and there is a difference in the power of interventionist arguments prior to the EP than after, then an explanation is needed.

John Owen's study takes this approach. He argues that the British action rested upon domestic factors like the constraining effects of liberalism, and in order to measure this he (briefly) looks at the debates surrounding intervention following the issuance of the Proclamation. He concludes that liberalism affected the British decision in two respects: (1) British liberals trusted the Union; and (2) liberals agitated against intervention after the Proclamation.[12]

While I agree with, and in some ways replicate here, the approach taken by Owen, I disagree with his interpretation of the evidence. Owen argues that the issuance of the EP shifted liberal sympathies to the Union cause. This is true, but liberals did not carry the day when it came to foreign policy decisions. It was not just British liberals and radicals like John Bright, Richard Cobden, and Peter Taylor who Abraham Lincoln had to please when he issued the Proclamation. It was the majority of the Palmerston cabinet. Owen rightfully points out that the interventionist debate shifted in Britain sometime after the EP was issued in late September of 1862; even conservatives like Foreign Secretary Russell and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone, all proponents of intervention during the early autumn of 1862, became opposed to it a few months into 1863.[13] But these conservatives were sceptical of the American 'experiment' with democracy, so it was not an affinity with liberalism that the EP engendered in Britain but rather a more basic anxiety with slavery, a more congruent stance taken by a country that had banned the slave trade (and enforced the ban throughout the nineteenth century). Cobden, Bright and other radicals became fervently pro-Union following the EP because it assured them that the struggle was now largely about slavery; other members of British Parliament, regardless of their differences with radicals, became uneasy with an intervention for the same reason.

Therefore, Owen's case for the constraining effects of liberalism draws the wrong conclusion from an overall correct observation. The EP *did* influence British

[11] I borrow the term 'positivist fallacy' from Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 71.

[12] John Owen, 'How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace', *International Security*, 19:2 (Autumn 1994), pp. 87–125. There have been many historical studies which conclude this as well; Owsley identifies it as part of the 'older school' that 'placed England's non-intervention upon a high and idealistic basis: the sympathy of the Lancashire population – and of the common people generally – with the Union as a great experiment in democracy, as a great model which was held up to the English; and their antipathy to slavery'. Owsley, *King Cotton*, p. 545.

[13] Lincoln issued the EP in September of 1862, and most accounts show that it reached the shores of Britain sometime later that month. It went into effect on January 1st, 1863.

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policymakers' decisions. There was never a more crucial period for the Lincoln administration in its attempts to dissuade Britain from intervening than during the summer and autumn of 1862. All historical accounts generally confirm this.[14] Lincoln was fully aware of this situation when he decided to issue the EP. But the EP projected a different purpose for the war that appealed to a majority of British citizens whether they agreed with 'mob rule democracy' or not. In essence, an aristocracy like that in nineteenth-century Britain could still have been influenced by 'liberal' ideals – freedom or anti-slavery – without embracing an ethos of democratic reform. I return to Owen's argument during the third part of this article, where historical evidence shows that the fragile alliance between Liberals and Radicals in Britain was maintained *only* with reference to antislavery sentiments (see fn. 43 below).

The British decision process represents something more basic to state interests than a 'liberal affinity' for a common principle. For that matter, we can attribute Britain's decision not to 'moral action', but to identity reinforcement. Other studies, like Chaim Kaufman and Robert Pape's, as well as Oded Lowenheim's, argue that British 'moral action' is something that should be explained as *separate* from self-interest.[15] I show in the rest of this study (using the concepts of ontological security and self-identity), that actions like this can be better understood as something which attends to *identity threats*, that the British debates represent 'reflexive monitoring', and, most importantly, that this process *served* British self-interests. In order to understand the British reaction more completely, we first need to take a step back and form a better theory about states as social actors that reduces 'moral' action to a more primal security-seeking drive of states. In the following section, I develop a theory which is then used in the third section to better understand Britain's decision-making process during the American Civil War.

The power of self-identity and the strategy of discourse: pursuing ontological security

Alexander Wendt and other constructivists argue that states, like individuals, have both physical and social drives.[16] When we say that states are 'social' actors, what does that mean? *Why* do states want to affirm self-identity, or even pursue a foreign

[14] Recognition seemed to be a natural next step for Britain that autumn. Gladstone, on 7 October 1862, made a speech in front of a large crowd insinuating that the Palmerston government would extend recognition: 'we may have our own opinions about slavery; but there is no doubt that Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the South have made an army . . . we may anticipate with certainty the success of the Southern States so far as regards their separation from the North.' The British public received this speech in a manner that was 'uniformly conclusive and favorable'. Jones, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 122.

[15] See Kaufman and Pape's study on Britain's decisions to enforce the ban on the Atlantic slave trade. They explain this British policy as an example of 'costly moral action'. Lowenheim argues that the British intervention to stop white slavery was influenced by the benefits of international 'moral prestige'. Chaim Kaufman and Robert Pape, 'Explaining Costly International Moral Action: Britain's Sixty Year Campaign Against the Slave Trade', *International Organization*, 53:4 (1999) and Oded Lowenheim, ' ''Do Ourselves Credit and Render a Lasting Service to Mankind'': British Moral Prestige, Humanitarian Intervention and the Barbary Pirates', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47 (2003).

[16] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 122–3.

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policy that reflects their identities? And what role does discourse play in such processes? A more comprehensive account of states as social actors is needed to fully understand why constructivists argue that 'identities and interests are co-constituted'.

Cases like the American Civil War for the British are important because 'the reflexive monitoring of action depends upon rationalisation, understood here as a process rather than a state and as inherently involved in the competence of agents'.[17] Discourse analysis is useful in determining whether the EP, as an exogenous event, succeeded in reframing the American Civil War as, to borrow Jennifer Milliken's phrase, a different 'system of signification'.[18] Following Neta C. Crawford's argument analysis method, I attempt to: 'show how and why some beliefs and arguments (neutrality) won out over others (intervention) . . . and whether an ethical argument meant to overturn a practice was able to denormalise, delegitimise (or) change actors' conceptions of possibility and their interests'.[19]

The discourse that brackets the EP is important in two respects. First, discourse reveals how British actors construct the meaning of the American Civil War, thus creating a window into British self-identity. Second, since discourse can frame a crisis in a way in which this identity must be taken into account by actors, we can see non-forceful action, like the Emancipation Proclamation, as a strategic tool used by the Lincoln administration as a 'cue' towards British policymakers contemplating intervention. I argue that the EP constituted a social meaning that recreated and reconstituted the conditions for British action.

But why would reframing have the effect that it did? More generally, why do arguments, edicts or actions have the effect they do upon states? Realism argues that there is only one 'morality' for states: survival. In order to survive, states must seek out capabilities that add to their power. This competition produces conflict. But British 'survival' was hardly an issue in 1862. Powerful states (like nineteenth-century Britain) find themselves in a privileged position to transform the international system and survival is not the only issue determining their foreign policies.

Anthony Giddens' structuration theory provides a framework useful for understanding the motivations, desires and incentives of agents.[20] Specifically, Giddens proposes an individual need for ontological security. In most IR theories, the concept of security maintains this 'survival' meaning. Kenneth Waltz argues that 'survival is a prerequisite to achieving any goals that states may have.'[21] But when we say that an individual is 'insecure', do we mean that their survival is at stake? Not necessarily, unless that individual is so unsure of him/herself that he/she is suicidal. Rather, 'insecurity' in this sense means individuals are uncomfortable with who they are, more specifically they are uncomfortable with their identity as social (inter)actors.

[17] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 3.

[18] Jennifer Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods'. *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:2 (1999), p. 229.

[19] Neta C. Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 122.

[20] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, and *The Constitution of Society.* See also Alexander Wendt, 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory', *International Organization*, 41 (1987), pp. 335–70. Wendt does not focus on any one 'structuration' theorist, let alone Giddens. Wendt's purpose in 1987 was, 'less to advance Giddens's ideas . . . than to demonstrate the relevance of the overall problematic for international relations theory', see his fn. 2.

[21] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), p. 129.

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Ontological security, as opposed to security as survival, is security as being.[22] Being a human being means knowing both what one is doing and *why* one is doing it. Giddens explains that 'to be ontologically secure is to possess . . . answers to fundamental existential questions which all human life in some way addresses.'[23] An ontologically secure agent will reproduce these answers in the form of actions that take on the appearance or shape of a routine. Routines therefore define everyday life for agents. Agents self-monitor these routines on a regular basis through what Giddens calls 'reflexive' behaviour. Routines can be thought of as coping mechanisms that are both rigid and fragile, because they produce trust and yet are engendered by (malleable) *ideas* about an agent's self-identity.[24]

It is when this sense of trust is imperilled by 'critical situations' that agents must reflexively monitor, and, if necessary, change their behaviour. Critical situations are 'circumstances of a radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind which affect substantial numbers of individuals, situations that threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutionalised routines'.[25] Critical situations produce anxiety, which for Giddens must be distinguished from fear. Fear is 'a response to a specific threat and therefore has a definite object', whereas anxiety is 'a generalised state of the emotions of the given individual'. Fear can be thought of, for our purposes, as a response to something that threatens one's survival; anxiety is an emotional reaction produced when a person's self-identity is challenged. Someone who suffers from anxiety for a period of time is insecure insofar as their sense of being is challenged.[26]

An agent is ontologically secure when they choose a course of action comfortable with their sense of self-identity. When critical situations become frequent, agents feel insecure because their routine is incapable of accommodating such circumstances. An agent must therefore reform behaviour to accompany them. This explains why agents (states) change behaviour. It is important to note, however, that not all agents have equivalent reflexive capabilities. Some may be so incapable of adequately monitoring routines that they fail to accommodate identity threats.

An insecure agent exhibits a sense of failure to 'develop or sustain trust in (its) own self-integrity . . . quite often, the actor subjects his behaviour and thoughts to constant scrutiny.'[27] Conversely, a normal sense of self-identity means that an agent is able to accept its sense of integrity as worthwhile. When someone chooses a course of action that is incongruent with their sense of integrity, they experience what Giddens calls shame, which 'bites at the roots of self-esteem'. Shame can be distinguished from guilt, which is 'produced by the fear of transgression . . . in respect

[22] 'Security-as-being' is used in McSweeney, and he defines it as, 'confidence in an actor's capacity to manage relations with others', McSweeney, *Security, Identity, and Interests*, p. 157.

[23] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 47.

[24] Rigidity and flexibility refer to how critical situations disrupt an agent's routine. Routines can also be thought of as 'stable and flexible', in the sense that once agents recognise critical situations they must attempt to accommodate them into their routine. Or, put another way, rigidity and fragility are important regarding identity threats; stability and flexibility are important regarding the process of identity reinforcement. This is a completely different portrait of not only security, but also an agent's awareness of structures, than the one 'structural' realism paints. See especially Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 109.

[25] Giddens, *Constitution of Society,* p. 61.

[26] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 43–4.

[27] Giddens, *Constitution of Society,* p. 55. The language used in this quote is not meant to confuse the reader – 'self-integrity' is simply fundamental to defining 'self-identity'.

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Table 1. *Two conceptions of security*

	Traditional security	Ontological security
Security as . . .	Survival	Being
Agent 'structured' by . . .	Distribution of power	Routines and self-identity
Challenge/Source of insecurity	Fear (in face of threat)	Anxiety (uncomfortable disconnect with self)
Outcome of incorrect decision in face of challenge	Physical harm	Shame
Measurement of outcome	Change in material capabilities; deaths; damage	Difference between biographical narrative and actual behaviour; discursive remorse
Structural change . . .	Change in distribution of power	Routinised critical situations – change in self-identity – change in agent routine

of problems of self-identity, *shame* is more important.'[28] If an actor breaks a rule or oversteps its bounds, then it feels guilty. When we say someone is 'guilty of a crime', it means they broke a rule or law. But shame is a much more private sense of transgression, and produces a deeper feeling of insecurity because it means that someone behaved in a way that they feel was incongruent with their sense of self-identity (see Table 1).

To connect this discussion with international politics, we must seek to identify whether international actors (states or otherwise) feel shame. If states are 'social' actors, then they are also capable of feeling shame. In reflexively monitoring their behaviour, actors produce a discursive biographical narrative. Shame occurs when actors feel anxiety about the ability of their narrative to reflect their behaviour; put another way, they feel shame when there exists too much distance between this biographical narrative and the actions they seek to fulfil a sense of self-identity.

This is what constructivists mean when they say that identities and interests are 'co-constituted'. It is unnatural for a state to identify itself one way and to 'perform' acts in a different way. In this case, discourse is entirely constitutive because a biographical narrative is a device of comparison for actors, and disconnects between it and the actions of a state produce anxiety.

The 'screening' aspect of ontological security-seeking behaviour may include the need to avoid cognitive dissonance, 'wherein human beings tend not to perceive what is contrary to their preconceived or previously held perspectives.'[29] Indeed, Giddens argues that:

> [T]he plethora of available information is reduced via routinised attitudes which exclude, or reinterpret, potentially disturbing knowledge . . . avoidance of dissonance forms part of the protective cocoon which helps maintain ontological security.[30]

[28] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 64–5.
[29] Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism and Beyond* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), p. 472.
[30] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, p. 188.

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Cognitive dissonance, however, captures only part of the ontological security process – new information indeed challenges existing beliefs and engenders dissonance, but there is more to the 'story' of self-identity than that. The reason actors in general hold onto their 'beliefs' so strongly accords with how they see themselves and whether an action will reinforce that self-concept. Therefore, both self-identity and belief are important in engendering anxiety. This explains why actors maintain their beliefs so rigidly, because such beliefs are about the outside world and how the self is placed within that world.

In order to know why a state feels shame, we must understand its sense of self-identity. Similar actions in dissimilar actors will produce dissimilar feelings. For example, autocracies may experience guilt because they failed to abide by some rule, but we can surmise that they will not be 'ashamed' in the same way a liberal democracy is. Conversely, 'liberal' regimes may not feel *guilty* when they fail to act in a humanitarian crisis (because no rule existed requiring action), but they will feel *shame* because such inaction was inconsistent with their sense of integrity and self-identity, and because allowing humanitarian disasters to unfold threatens that regime's self-identity.[31] From this angle, then, 'humanitarian acts' are rational for certain actors because they fulfil a sense of self-identity and ensure a state's ontological security.

In addition, it may be the case that the 'routine' determining state identities is defined by the need for war, and thus could be recognised as a behaviour akin to traditional security. This compelling argument is made by Jennifer Mitzen, and it may be true, since certain states can be 'routinised' into 'security dilemmas' which provoke a continued need for arms races or physical insecurity.[32] Therefore it is hardly the case that ontological security is something only 'healthy' actors seek. Mitzen argues that all states seek ontological security, and as noted above some agents may be less capable than others to reflexively monitor their behaviours (perhaps autocracies, developing countries, and so on) and thus they may be so devoted to a routine that they fail to accommodate critical situations. The result is that such states will consistently experience shame rather than avoid it – examples of what we could call ontologically insecure 'problem states'.

Paradoxically, both contexts ('humanitarian' action or war hunger) represent examples where states pursue ontological security at the expense of physical security, in order to fulfil a routine. Mitzen notes that:

> Even harmful or self-defeating relationships can provide actors with ontological security; and as long as that relationship is reliable, actors may prefer to hold onto the relationship rather than to experiment with something new. From here it follows that breaking free of physical security dilemmas can generate ontological insecurity.[33]

States intervening to stop human rights abuses, for example, compromise (but do not 'imperil') their physical security just as states that engage in rhythmic arms buildups compromise their own well-being and add to regional discomfort.

[31] 'Liberal democracies' may be more exposed to shame because they are more vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy, both internally (by their citizens) and externally (by the international community). Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change*, p. 115, fn. 79.

[32] Jennifer Mitzen 'Ontological Security and World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma', manuscript.

[33] Mitzen, 'Ontological Security', p. 4.

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Had scholars applied the concepts of ontological security and shame to international relations theory in the late 1980s they may have been better prepared to understand the 'humanitarian' interventions conducted throughout the 1990s. Ontological security also provides us with an important insight into what has appeared to us as 'moral' action. Kaufman and Pape define 'moral action' as one 'that advances a moral principle rather than a selfish interest.'[34] Any actions, humanitarian, moral or otherwise, can be better understood by looking at states as pursuing ends that ensure their 'ontological security' needs rather than some 'cosmopolitan' ethic. It is those crises, like the American Civil War for the British, which bring about anxiety rather than fear, and produce shame if an agent makes a decision incongruent with its sense of self-identity. Thus, what many IR scholars (and policymakers, for that matter) interpret as something *separate* from 'normal' state interests – in this case 'moral' action – can actually be a rational response to fulfilling ontological security needs.

Other IR scholars have exploited this aspect of Giddens' sociology. Bill McSweeney points out that a state's sense of security is highly contingent upon its environment:

> If we *assume*, with Robert Gilpin, that wherever we live we live in a jungle, then it is reasonable to conclude that it is complacency rather than rational assessment not to elevate physical survival to the highest rank in the hierarchy of human needs. Conversely, it is paranoia to organise our lives on that assumption without compelling evidence to support it.[35]

In other words, security as 'survival' derives from an assumption of anarchy. But when we say, again, that 'states are social actors', we admit that they have needs, human needs, other than survival.

It is a somewhat controversial move to take an individual need and corresponding process and then apply it to the level of states (the 'levels-of-analysis problem'). But most models of International Relations base the needs of states on *some type* of individual and human need. Physical security is a human need, and it is the *only one* that neo-realists argue 'structures' state behaviour. Additionally, when we speak of states as 'revisionist', 'status-quo' or 'collectivist' we are in some respects attributing human qualities to states.[36] Policy leaders know they are making decisions for their nation-states, and therefore they are constrained by the identities not just of themselves but of their country as well. Because state leaders engage in decision-making processes which take into account the outcomes of their country's previous policies, the emotional processes they encounter as individuals have bearing upon their states' current and future foreign policy actions. We know this is especially relevant when decision-makers reference these past outcomes as a partial justification for their current policy. At a minimum, then, states experience identity commitments, and challenges to these identity

[34] Pape and Kaufman, 'Explaining Costly Moral Action', p. 633.

[35] Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests*, p. 153, emphasis original.

[36] '*Like terminally ill patients*, very hungry (revisionist) states are willing to take great risks – even if losing the gamble means extinction-to improve their condition . . . uninhibited by the fear of loss, they are free to pursue reckless expansion', Randall Schweller, 'Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?', in Benjamin Frankel (ed.), *Realism: Restatements and Revewal* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 107, emphasis added. Wendt adds 'collectivist' states to Schweller's 'revisionist' and 'status-quo' categories: Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

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commitments (either to self, collective, or both) violate the ontological security of a collective state.[37]

Materially 'powerful' states (like nineteenth-century Great Britain) are neither constantly paranoid nor complacent. Like all states, they wish to avoid shame because they want to reaffirm the routines that provide meaning to their everyday existence, but unlike other states their greater capabilities allow them to pursue ontological security in a different way. With this freedom comes greater responsibility. Thus they also have greater 'reflexive capability', making their decisions less 'deterministic' and constrained, something the international community knows all too well.

We can identify (through discourse, or the 'biographical narrative') an agent's sense of self-identity, and then outline what environment structures that agent's choices (such as previous actions that blueprint a 'moral' decision). With the above discussion in mind, in the following section I use an ontological security interpretation to assess the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation upon Britain's decision-making process regarding intervention in the American Civil War.

Case study: an ontological security interpretation of British neutrality

How did the Emancipation Proclamation help bring about British neutrality in the American Civil War? Discourse analysis is *most useful* in a case such as this one, where competing explanations in theory seem plausible, but are often too imprecise. I reviewed the debates in Britain to ascertain whether the *timing* of the EP influenced the *timing* of the British decision. My temporal parameter (the timeframe in which the discourse was created) included the summer of 1862 (around July 1st) through to the summer of 1863. My spatial parameter (the persons who create the discourse), includes members of Palmerston's cabinet, the debates among Parliament representatives, and correspondence among Palmerston's cabinet members. In addition, I also reviewed historical accounts for interpretive agreement.

British contemplations over intervention gradually increased following the commencement of hostilities in America through late 1862, when such contemplations seem to have levelled off and then gradually decreased. By the fall of 1862, the American North had suffered a series of embarrassing defeats; defeats which signalled to foreign states that a long struggle would be inevitable. Prior to the Proclamation, American President Abraham Lincoln consistently maintained that his purpose for fighting the war was to save the Union. Slavery was peripheral. In a published letter to writer Horace Greeley on 22 August 1862, Lincoln argued:

> If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I

[37] McSweeney also notes that using this process at the state level: 'is more problematic'. Nevertheless, he asserts that: 'what applies to agency at the individual level must apply at the collective level of states. It is the human beings who constitute the state as actor who ensure that state behaviour will follow a pattern . . .' Ibid., p. 159 and p. 103, respectively. For a larger discussion of this issue see the forum on the 'State as Person' published in *Review of International Studies*, 30:2 (2004), pp. 255–318.

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believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union[38]

By projecting these goals, Lincoln reinforced the idea in Britain that the conflict was not about slavery, lending the appearance that ending slavery, for the North, only offered military benefit.[39] But by the following month, Lincoln realised that emancipation had strategic benefits that extended across the Atlantic.[40]

It was in this atmosphere that Lincoln decided to issue a Proclamation freeing slaves because: 'the character of the war will be changed . . . The old South is to be destroyed and replaced by new propositions and ideas.'[41] The initial reaction to the EP, however, was mixed. The Proclamation almost backfired because it was perceived as having the cruel intention of starting a slave revolt. Immediately following the EP, largely because there was confusion over its true meaning and impact, some policymakers called for intervention against the North on humanitarian principles and a brotherly sense of duty. Such an action would end the bloody, 'fratricidal' conflict once and for all, saving fellow Anglos from further destruction. Because of its limited nature, many British citizens saw it as a strategic weapon rather than a form of liberation and some worried that it would start a slave revolt, or 'servile insurrection'. But by the time Parliament reconvened the following spring, no such events materialised.

The EP, therefore, produced two outcomes integral to British neutrality. First, *it unified liberals with radicals in Britain's domestic political landscape.* In this sense, the EP synthesised two political blocs that agreed about the immorality of slavery but disagreed about most everything else. As one historian notes: 'the standard of emancipation . . . was one to which most Radicals and many Liberals were prepared to rally. Their earlier divisions on the American war were put aside.' Chief among these divisions was the proper place of 'freedom' within British political reform. When separated from democratisation, emancipation maintained a fragile, but formidable, alliance in Britain that was hard for Palmerston's cabinet to ignore. Demonstrations throughout England, while referencing political reform, focused on the liberation of slaves as morally justifying support for the American North: 'the demonstrations in support of the Union continued to take place under the umbrella of antislavery. It alone protected the Liberals' fragile unity on the American War.'[42]

[38] The letter was published in newspapers across America that day, including Greeley's own *New York Tribune*.

[39] Howard Jones asserts that: 'the presence of Slaves in the South at first posed problems for the antislavery British . . . but President Lincoln unintentionally relieved them of that dilemma by denying any relationship between slavery and the war and arguing that his sole purpose was to serve the Union'. Jones, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 9.

[40] It is incorrect to assume that Lincoln's sole or even primary purpose in issuing the Proclamation was a strategic move to stem British intervention, for he was also influenced by the opinions of his military leaders, like Ulysses S. Grant, who stated around this time (late 1862) that: 'The policy is to be terrible on the enemy. I am using Negroes all the time for my work as teamsters', McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 502. That said, it is noteworthy that when his administration considered the Proclamation's potential, Lincoln found persuasive those arguments which noted its potential effect upon thwarting 'foreign intervention', see Jones, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 86. What *is* important in the context of this study is the effect the EP had upon the British and their perceptions of the *meaning* of the American Civil War upon British self-identity and interests.

[41] Mcpherson, *Battle Cry*, p. 558.

[42] Brian Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), pp. 214–5.

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This observation makes John Owen's claim that democratic liberalism produced the peace between the Union and Britain tenuous. Certain British leaders, and even many British liberals, distrusted democracy for its 'mob rule' mentality. The British attraction to the EP was not about democracy. An aristocracy can still be influenced by liberal ideals such as universal freedom without in turn reforming its own political system. Therefore the EP influenced British *identity*, not British *political structures*.[43]

Second, *it shifted British perceptions of the American Civil War.* In this case, the EP reframed the Civil War, creating an ontological distinction between the two warring parties. The Union went from an army of preservation to an army of liberation. The Confederacy went from an oppressed society to one constituted by the enslavement of four million people. A Union victory meant a return to an antebellum South was no longer possible. In short, once the American Civil War became, in British eyes, about slavery, policymakers' justifications for policy shifted.[44]

For instance, there was much debate during the late summer of 1862 in Parliament about the American Civil War. Most of the debate centred on first determining the nature of the war itself: for example, why it was being fought and what 'causes' motivated the warring parties. Before the EP, the British discussed what role slavery truly had played in the Union's fight against the South. An exchange took place in Parliament on 18 July 1862, between both William Lindsay and Lord Vane Tempest, Southern sympathisers on the one hand, and Peter Taylor, a British radical, on the other. Lindsay put forth a motion to recognise the Confederate government, and defended it by claiming that antislavery sentiment was a political tool:

> Though there had been an outcry on the part of a small section of the people in the North against slavery in the in the South, the suppression of slavery had very little, if anything, to do with the civil war. *If it had, the North would have received more sympathy from the people of England* . . . (and, therefore antislavery sentiment) had no reality.[45]

Taylor responded that slavery had made the 'war in itself inevitable'. This time Lord Vane Tempest rebutted in turn that the South was the true side of independence, and thus deserved English support:

> The cause of the South was that of six or seven million people struggling manfully for their independence . . . was it surprising that under those circumstances they should think they had a claim to the sympathy and good offices of the nations of Europe?[46]

The entire debate shows evidence that the British were trying to sort out the true meaning of the war. Initially, and bolstered by Lincoln's statements like the 22 August letter to Horace Greeley, many British decided that it was not about slavery.

Two of the strongest proponents for British intervention prior to the issuance of the EP were Lord John Russell, the British foreign secretary, and William Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer. Gladstone's infamous Newcastle speech in October of

[43] In addition to the collective historian opinion, archived Parliamentary debates indicate that once support for the Union became linked to an affinity for democracy, large opposition could be heard. See especially Bright's endorsement of both Union emancipation *and* democracy, and the outcries that surround the latter but not the former. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 30 June 1863, col. 1836.

[44] According to David Paul Crook, the EP's 'very existence added a new dimension to the dialectics on mediation which cannot be ignored'. Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers, 1961–1865* (New York, John Wiley and Sons), p. 238.

[45] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 18 July 1862, col. 520, emphasis added.

[46] Ibid., col. 532.

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1862 came dangerously close to recognising the Confederacy for the first time since the war began (see fn. 14 above). Russell had always favoured intervention on the premise that doing so was the quickest way to end the bloodbath.[47] He favoured intervention more adamantly if it was in conjunction with other foreign powers, most notably France. He too saw America's permanent separation as inevitable.

Almost all British policymakers, liberal and conservative, were sceptical of the Proclamation: 'the first British response was widespread indignation, though admittedly tempered by the grudging realisation that the president had finally drawn the line between opponents and supporters of slavery'.[48] They detested its limited nature, even if it was unconstitutional for Lincoln to emancipate slaves within existing Union border states. But it did briefly jolt British policymakers who were contemplating an intervention. The Prime Minister himself asked if whether Britain could

without offence to many People here recommend to the North to sanction Slavery and to undertake to give back Runaways, and yet would not the South insist upon some Conditions after Lincoln's Emancipation Decree.[49]

Even after the EP was issued, Russell was nervous about the effects it would have upon America. In correspondence with Earl Cowley dated 13 November 1862, he argued for why Englishmen should be nervous: 'to these accompaniments is to be added the apprehension of a servile war.'[50] In an exchange with Lord Lyons dated 17 January 1863, Russell also expressed bewilderment over the limited nature of the Proclamation:

The Proclamation makes slavery at once legal (in border states) and illegal (everywhere else) . . . There seems to be no declaration of principle adverse to slavery in this Proclamation. It is a measure of war, and a measure of war of a very questionable kind.[51]

But once the Proclamation became law on 1 January 1863, and the months followed with no 'servile' war, British opinion moved away from intervention. Why was this so? While we cannot fully conclude that the EP was *solely* responsible for this shift, we can see a distinct change in the justifications Gladstone, Russell, and others make for *not* intervening during 1863. Because these two men were so adamant about intervention in the fall of 1862, and because they had the ability to affect policy within the Palmerston cabinet, their justifications are perhaps the most noteworthy in the context of this study.

[47] Most historians would agree with Howard Jones' claim that: 'admittedly, Russell recognised the role of slavery in bringing on the war, but he did not go any farther than to assert that the establishment of two American republics – one slave – the other free – was the solution'. Howard Jones, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 53.

[48] Ibid., p. 110.

[49] Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union*, p. 176. Secretary of War George Cornewall Lewis had been against intervention based on its untenable legal grounds. The EP reinforced his view, but in a new light. Writing (with the assistance of his stepson-in-law, William Vernon Harcourt), under the pseudonym 'Historicus' in the *London Times*, Lewis stated that: 'to my mind, in the one word ''slavery'' is comprehended a perpetual bar to the notion of English mediation as between the North and the South . . . (a bar) to forcible intervention, because it would be immoral'. Quoted in Crook, *The North, the South*, p. 240.

[50] *Parliamentary Papers*, vol. LXXII; 69.557. Most historical accounts support this view that Russell and Gladstone, 'clung to intervention as the most humanitarian way to end a war that had reached a new level of intensity at Antietam. Few British observers initially recognised that the struggle had quietly taken an antislavery turn': Howard Jones, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 111.

[51] Ibid.

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Gladstone on 30 June 1863, conceded in a Parliament debate that 'a war with the United States ought to be unpopular on far higher grounds . . . because it would be a war with our own kinsmen for slavery.' Gladstone, who had once debated the true meaning of the war, knew by 1863 that it was more concretely about slavery: 'I do not think there is any real or serious ground for doubt as to the true issue of this contest'.[52]

Russell reversed his views, both in public and private, on the issue of British intervention when slave revolts failed to materialise. We can best see this in two separate exchanges with Lord Campbell, one in August 1862 and the other in March 1863. In the first, Campbell makes what amounts to a realist argument for intervention, because failing to intervene jeopardised Britain's possession of Canada: 'if Canada was unable to support a numerous militia, if Britain was unable to send large armies to her successor, what defence could they rely on except a firm ally on that continent?' Russell's response was tempered, but still kept open the option for intervention in conjunction with other European 'maritime Powers'.[53]

By March of 1863 both the tone of Russell's response and the Palmerston cabinet's policy changed. Campbell again proposed intervention in Parliament, but this time he was well aware that the slavery issue clouded British judgment:

> These grand considerations would lead the people of the country to require an acknowledgement of Southern independence were it not for the delusions as to slavery (which) . . . have deceived the working classes of the country by confounding questions about slavery.[54]

Russell responded by first citing past occasions for British intervention into foreign states' civil conflicts. He then argued the reason for each intervention. In Holland the British had rescued the people from religious and political tyranny in the face of Phillip II. In Portugal they had relieved the people from Spanish tyranny and helped establish an independent state. They also helped Greece establish independence and helped found a free and independent monarchy. Finally, they helped ensure Belgian freedom from Holland. He uses these cases to generalise about British foreign policy in general:

> In all of these instances, whether the intervention was carried on by our ancestors or in our own times, *there is nothing of which an Englishmen need be ashamed.* If we have taken part in interventions, it has been in behalf of the independence, freedom and welfare of a great portion of mankind. I should be *sorry* indeed if there should be any intervention on the part of this country which could bear another character.[55]

Russell was performing what Giddens calls 'historicity', or 'the use of history to make history'. Historicity, according to Giddens, is 'a fundamental aspect of reflexivity'.[56] But what did this mean for British interests within the United States? Russell stated that:

[52] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 30 June 1863, col. 1807.

[53] 'I should think it necessary to communicate with the maritime Powers of Europe before taking any steps.' *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 4 August 1862, col. 1179 – 1183.

[54] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 23 March 1863, col. 1730.

[55] Ibid, col. 1740, emphasis added. The concept of 'routines' is also alluded to in Kaufman and Pape's study, where they assert the reason for abolitionists being able to 'keep British anti-slavery moving forward' was because of 'simple inertia. After the Slave Trade Department of the Foreign Office was established in 1821, anti-slavery gradually became increasingly routinised and institutionalised in British foreign and colonial policy.' They note that a 'few committed abolitionists served directly in the corridors of power', and place Lord Palmerston as one of those who 'generally supported anti-slavery'. Kaufman and Pape, 'Explaining Costly Moral Action', p. 660.

[56] Giddens, *Modernity*, p. 243.

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No interests, deeply as they may affect us – *interests which may imply the well-being of a great portion of our people*, but interests which may affect also the freedom and happiness of other parts of the globe – will induce us to set an example different from that of our ancestors. But (if) we feel ourselves bound to interfere, it will be an interference in the cause of liberty, and to promote the freedom of mankind, as we have hitherto done in these cases.[57]

Russell failed to use *any* of this language during his response to Campbell nine months prior. It is also noteworthy that Russell feels justified in pursuing a policy that compromises the 'well-being' of British citizens if it means securing freedom and happiness around the globe *and* keeping in tune with the 'examples of our ancestors'. While we cannot link this language specifically to the Emancipation Proclamation, we can assume that Russell's, as well as Gladstone's and many others' opinions on the Civil War shifted because the meaning of the war, in the minds of most British, had also shifted (see Table 2 for summary).

It is also important to note the context of both Russell's and Gladstone's post-EP justifications – they came *before* the crucial Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg during the first week of July, 1863, and *after* the Union defeat at Fredericksburg (in late December of 1862). The British were close to intervention prior to the EP because (1) they did not recognise the American Civil War as being fought over the issue of slavery and (2) Abraham Lincoln reinforced this view with his own words. The focus for the Palmerston cabinet became the battlefield itself – where Palmerston wanted to see sustained Confederate victories to demonstrate that they were a nation worth recognising.[58] Gladstone's Newcastle comments, in fact, came close to proposing just such a recognition in October of 1862. However, after the EP, while Confederate victories *continued*, the tone of the interventionist debate changed.[59] While the *outcome* of the war remained uncertain, the *meaning* of it did not.

To connect this with an ontological security interpretation, states seek to maintain consistent self-concepts, and the self is constituted and maintained through routines that affect other states. Structures must consistently provide answers that states have about themselves and others. In particular, Russell's response to this motion reveals not only the shifting effects of the Emancipation Proclamation, but also the determination to maintain a 'routine' which had provided answers for a British identity. This self-identity thus affected their decision to abstain from intervening in America this time.

This does not mean that British identity 'clicked in' and prevented intervention. In many ways during the months that followed the Proclamation, identity was contested during street debates, town hall meetings, and demonstrations. Debates throughout England between Confederate agents and Southern supporters, on the one hand, and freed slaves, Northern abolitionists, and British abolitionists on the other, also

[57] Ibid., emphasis added.

[58] Jones states that: 'intervention became even more likely in mid-September 1862, when news arrived in Europe of the Union's second resounding defeat at Bull Run . . . Russell triumphantly assured Palmerston that (Union General George) McClellan's failure to deliver on his promise to conquer the South gave further justification for a British intervention'. Jones, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 98. But after the Union victory at Antietam, Palmerston stated to Russell that, 'the whole matter is full of difficulty, and can only be cleared up by some more decided events between the contending army': McPherson, *Battle Cry*, p. 556.

[59] Gladstone's post-EP statements were also made after the devastating Union defeat at Chancellorsville in May of 1863.

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Table 2. *Emancipation proclamation and discursive change*

Palmerston Cabinet official	T1 (Summer and Autumn 1862)	Emancipation Proclamation (22 September 1862)	T2 (mid-1863)
William Gladstone, Chancellor of Exchequer	Newcastle speech: 'Certainty of Separation'		30 June 1863, 'A war with the United States . . . ought to be unpopular on far higher grounds, because it would be a war with our own kinsmen for slavery.'
Lord John Russell, Foreign Secretary	'I think unless some miracle takes place, this will be the very time for offering mediation'	Worries of 'Servile Insurrection' (November 1862)	23 March 1863, 'no interests, deeply as they may affect us . . . which may affect also the freedom and happiness of other parts of the globe will induce us to set an example different from that of our ancestors.'

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swayed public opinion in favour of the Union.[60] Thus, identity was being negotiated, as it always is, because agents are always 'reflexively monitoring their behaviour'. Opinion leaders, citizens, and ostensibly states spend time figuring out what course of action is most proper in light of who they are – and they discuss who they are in order to determine what to do.

Identity is not, nor was it really ever in most constructivist theories, 'culturally determined'.[61] Giddens notes: 'self-identity is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual's action-system, *but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual*'.[62] Social structures are routines that both constrain and enable agents.[63] The word 'enable' means: 'to supply with the means, knowledge or opportunity'.[64] Therefore, Britain was provided with an opportunity during this time to affirm a 'healthy' sense of self-identity, but they first had to argue over how best to accomplish this. Part of this contestation rested over the meaning of the American Civil War. Once that was determined, the British had to decide upon a policy that reflected their sense of self-identity. That is what makes 'critical situations' for states so intriguing, because it is then that states must make a decision about who they are, and then address whether their proposed course of action fits that self-vision.

While historians on the topic have disparate views on what truly prevented British intervention into the American Civil War, most agree on the 'mood' evident in Britain in mid-1863. Calls for intervention based on the fear of servile insurrection, 'no longer carried quite the same conviction or excited the same public response. Months had passed since Lincoln's preliminary proclamation and there had been no hint of a slave uprising.'[65]

Another historian writes, 'once the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863, the momentum began to build for supporting black freedom as an essential part of the struggle for a more perfect Union, making it extremely difficult for either England or France to consider any form of intervention that might prolong the life of slavery', and as such, 'by early 1863 the British government finally realised that the Lincoln administration had taken a move against slavery, and it dropped all official talk of intervention'. The result? 'Its (EP) enactment led to a change in British attitude toward the Proclamation which suggested that the Lincoln administration had finally achieved its central objective in foreign affairs of keeping England out of war'.[66]

[60] See Blackett's review of how the debates affected the British populace, R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Press, 2001).

[61] McSweeney's otherwise compelling work makes the mistake of placing this label on most constructivist literature (McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests*, p. 126). This is incorrect because constructivists account for the structure of identities and how those structures change, hardly making identities deterministic. See also Rodney Bruce Hall, Review of *Security, Identity and Interests*, *American Political Science Review*, 94:4 (2000).

[62] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 52.

[63] Giddens argues that structuration theory is: 'based on the view that structure is always both enabling and constraining, in virtue of the inherent relations between structure and agency (and agency and power)'. Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, p. 169.

[64] ⟨http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=enabling⟩

[65] Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union*, p. 218.

[66] Jones, *Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 146–7 and 154. McPherson notes that the 'South's best chance for European intervention' thus ended by late 1862. McPherson, *Battle Cry for Freedom*, p. 556.

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Conclusion: the power of self-identity

Political scientists often times fail to give credit where credit is due – to humans themselves. While it is not wholly responsible for preventing foreign intervention, and while the primary motives for its issuance lay elsewhere, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did shift foreign perception of the conflict, making it much more difficult for Britain to intervene (ostensibly) on behalf of the Confederacy without subjecting themselves to ridicule over the issue of slavery.

Does an ontological security interpretation assist our understanding of Britain's decision? I think so. We can assume that British policymakers performed an at-the-time counterfactual when they asked what the result would have been had they recognised the South (which would have been tantamount to a hostile act against the North). They may have been more physically secure had separation occurred, but they surely would have been less ontologically secure because the result would have been shame(ful). Russell's shifting references to the American Civil War, for instance, and his final justifications for not intervening, suggest that shame would have resulted from recognising the Confederacy. At the heart of this would-be shame was British anxiety with slavery. To return to the Giddensian sense of self-identity, supporting a slavery state was inconsistent with the integrity of the British 'self'. This shift was largely uniform in the Palmerston cabinet. Even Palmerston himself, a champion of *Realpolitik* and realists alike, was apprehensive about a post-Emancipation Proclamation intervention.

Why is using an ontological security interpretation for this nineteenth-century case important in contemporary world politics? Recently, theorists have sought to explain why 'humanitarian' crises threaten states and thus how 'humanitarian' or 'moral' action is in a state's interest. A large bit of the literature seeking to explain these actions argues that changes in *collective* identity (that is, a new 'us' worthy of rescue) and thus a new normative order may be responsible for these actions. Thus, states seek to legitimate these actions on principles generated to provide 'order' to *international* society.[67] The common proposition which follows is that individual state interests will develop, in turn, from the collective interests of the emerging society which finds human rights abuses intolerable. Consistent intervention will occur once these principles of a new order are internalised by a significant number of international actors. The framework presented in this article argues that such crises, like the American Civil War for 1860's England, are 'critical situations' that threaten the *self-identity* of key international actors. Therefore, humanitarian action becomes a rational expression of self-help behaviour that (in turn) benefits others because it establishes continuity and healthy self-concepts for the 'intervening' party. Besides this possibility, there are several further implications which should be stated about using ontological security in future IR studies.

First, ontological security can adequately capture which situations pose 'identity threats' to states. In today's world, 'humanitarian' crises will not always threaten the physical security of states (though some will), but bearing witness to such crises disturbs those actors who know that such crises can be ameliorated through their own actions. Or, to return to Giddens, these situations do not produce 'fear' but

[67] See Wheeler, *Saving Strangers*.

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instead 'anxiety' for certain states. This threatens the 'continuity' and 'predictability' of the future world for liberal societies.

A second implication which follows from the British case is that *non-forceful* actions have consequences. Events such as the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation reconstituted the meaning of the American Civil War not only for the Union and Confederate armies and American citizens and leaders, but also for an international audience. The larger issue is that discursive representations can be just as powerful as physical presentations of force – because they can compel other international actors to 'do what they otherwise would not do'. The possibility is that states not only know what actions will make other states *physically* insecure, but also *ontologically* insecure as well. Thus, just as arms buildups are a 'strategic signal' to adversaries in order to produce an intended outcome, discursive representations can 'shame' states into certain processes which benefit the signaller, and, perhaps, the international community.[68]

Third, the more promising possibilities noted above which could follow will be rare if states are not capable of reflexively monitoring their actions – since this is the only way ontological insecurity can be consistently avoided. Since some actors may be less capable of doing this, the drive for ontological security may lead states to 'structure' their behaviour in problematically violent ways. Therefore, while no actors can adequately predict when and where 'critical situations' will occur,[69] we must continue to develop our understanding of reflexive processes so that we know what actors must do to increase their 'reflexive capabilities'. What form these 'capabilities' take is less clear, since ontological security research remains in a rather incipient stage – although we could surmise that communicative action and the acceptance of societal dissent are immediate examples of many viable reflexivity categories.

Finally, possibilities exist for 'mining the fertile terrain' of the ontological security research programme. Jennifer Mitzen has demonstrated that ontological security can be used to explain something that appears to us as driven by 'traditional' security incentives; I have used it to explain a process that appears to us as a 'moral' action. *Both* accounts attempt to view these empirical phenomena as *identity threats.* We should credit these uses to the viability of an ontological security research programme, one that can account for a large amount of the 'behaviour' that we see in world politics. Thus, if we are to accept the scientific realist argument that 'the greater the number of independent phenomena a theory reduces, the better it is', then we should consider how much variation in social life can be reduced to the drive for ontological security.[70] In both Mitzen's account and mine, the fulfilment of the ontological security drive comes, even to a small but significant degree, *at the direct*

[68] IR scholars are fortunate to have approaches which can capably uncover discursive strategies and meanings. Both critical theorists and constructivists have developed rigorous methods for interpreting the discursive strategies of international actors – especially in foreign policy studies. For instance, Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations'; Crawford, *Argument and Change*; Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Rodney Bruce Hall, 'The Discursive Demolition of the Asian Development Model', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47:1 (2003).

[69] As noted above, what partially defines critical situations is that they are 'unpredictable'.

[70] David Dessler, 'What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?' *International Organisation*, 43:3, p. 446.

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expense of traditional security. Thus, the purpose of developing a research programme based on the ontological security drive is not to falsify traditional security as to uncover more processes than it.[71] If this can be consistently demonstrated, then studies which prioritise self-identity and agency may hold promise after all.

[71] It is not that traditional security is 'wrong' as it is explaining very little in world politics, and I therefore echo Martha Finnemore, who stated that her: 'argument is not so much that neorealism and neoliberalism are wrong as they are grossly incomplete'. *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p. 27.

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