

Sacred Rhetoric and the Legitimacy of Unrecognized States

Sovereignty may exist in rhetoric before reality. This article examines how the first is employed on the path to the second, especially how absolutist language or sacred rhetoric is employed by unrecognized states in the pursuit of international sovereignty.

It was Mircea Eliade who wrote that human experience takes place in “a world capable of becoming sacred.”¹ Here he means that all aspects of society, not just those that are religious, are capable of becoming sacred. As Marietta writes, “the sacred is not only for the pious.”² Absolutist appeals, or sacred rhetoric, are a common feature in political systems around the world, where sacred values are espoused. In the U.S. in particular, sacred rhetoric is often employed with great success regarding a variety of topics, from the National Rifle Association’s slogan “from my cold dead hands,” to more recently with President Joe Biden’s frequent claim during the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election that this election was “a battle for our nation’s soul.”³ Sacred rhetoric supports absolute, unquestionable values (that can be religious in nature but often concern secular issues) and establishes boundaries that, if crossed, can have dire consequences.

Sacred rhetoric is prominent throughout international relations, but the majority of studies have focused on its impact in American politics. They place particular attention on understanding the reasoning of citizens in their beliefs as well as how sacred rhetoric can inspire them to become politically active. This study, however, expands the analysis of sacred rhetoric to the international system and examines how it is employed on a state level by unrecognized states in order to engage not only their citizens, but the international community from which they seek recognition. Specifically, among unrecognized states, this paper contends there are three primary topics from which sacred rhetoric is created. The first comes from the claim of sovereignty, the second

comes from the creation of a national culture, and the third comes from the identification of an enemy, as all unrecognized states are born out of conflict.

These unrecognized states, found in the “shadows of the international system,” lack the international recognition necessary for membership in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN), denying them the benefits of recognition.⁴ Numerous unrecognized states exist around the world in Africa, Asia, and Europe with varying levels of sovereignty and recognition. While on the road to statehood, unrecognized states have found themselves derailed in the state-building process while pursuing the final goal of UN membership, widespread international recognition, and therefore external sovereignty. Despite widespread misconceptions that unrecognized states are areas where rule of law is nonexistent, many unrecognized states have advanced economies, functional bureaucracies, and sometimes even democracy.⁵

This internal sovereignty, or Westphalian sovereignty, that unrecognized states have achieved, was for centuries the only important test that needed to be passed for a state to be considered sovereign within the international system.⁶ Indeed, after the Treaty of Westphalia, power and sovereignty emanated from within the state. However, following World War One and the creation of the League of Nations, international recognition and membership into crucial multilateral organizations became a fundamental aspect of statehood.⁷ Following the end of the Second World War and the creation of the League of Nations’ successor body, the United Nations, the quest for membership and international recognition continued to be of increasing importance, especially as the major European powers began to decolonize their possessions in Africa and Asia. With the decolonization process, however, the European parent states often withdrew their claims on these emerging states, easing the pathway to UN membership.

For unrecognized states, it is the case that the parent state is unwilling to withdraw their claims on the land controlled and administered by the unrecognized state. This conflict over “*who is the sovereign state?*” leads to a difficult question of who deserves national self-determination, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.⁸ In Cyprus, for example, the 1974 invasion of the northern half of the Mediterranean island by Turkey and the ensuing establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), was argued to be a violation of the Republic of Cyprus’ (ROC) sovereignty.⁹ However, the difficult dilemma of Greek support for the Greek-majority ROC and Turkish support of the TRNC led to a deep conflict as both the Greeks and the Turks were members of NATO. Unable to resolve the conflict with a withdrawal of the Turkish military or a ceding of territory by the Greek Cypriots, the UN has since established a Buffer Zone, keeping the recognized state, the unrecognized state, and the capital city of Nicosia divided.¹⁰

During my time as an intern at the U.S. Embassy in Nicosia, I was able to see firsthand the startling transition that occurs when traveling between a recognized state and an unrecognized state. As I was living a few blocks from the UN Buffer Zone that separated the ROC and the unrecognized TRNC, the sudden shift from kebab shops and the shouting of Greek store clerks in the ROC to the hookah stands and amplified calls to prayer in the TRNC was dramatic. My work at the embassy also meant that I had the opportunity to meet with “citizens” of the TRNC. Their fundamental belief that the TRNC is its own state, that the Turkish Cypriots are their own people, and that the Greek-majority ROC are keeping them left in political isolation, was resolute.

As unrecognized states lack the ability to express themselves politically throughout the international system with the methods that are available to UN member-states, their expressions of political persuasion are crucial and often follow an absolutist reasoning as their position

within the international system is an insecure one. Through sacred rhetoric, one can understand the absolute values espoused by unrecognized states because of their very limited ability to engage in international discourse. Caspersen nevertheless asserts that their different, and clearly disadvantaged form of statehood—lack of recognition (or lack of external sovereignty)—does not exclude unrecognized states from being considered “states.” This perspective—that unrecognized states exercise a different form of statehood—is crucial in examining the three major sources of sacred rhetoric being produced by these “states,” as they all speak to key features that they seek in order to obtain a normal form of statehood: sovereignty, nation-building, and the maligning of those that deny them the former.

By examining this rhetoric, there can be a more nuanced understanding of sovereignty, nation-building, and further develop our comprehension of the nature of the conflicts in which unrecognized states find themselves engaged. For example, as the Eastern Mediterranean grows increasingly tense over fuel deposits off the coast of Cyprus, Nagorno-Karabakh reels from a bloody conflict against its parent state (Azerbaijan), and U.S. President Joe Biden seems prepared to continue arm sales to Taiwan to the immense anger of the People’s Republic of China, the study of the absolutist reasoning dictated through sacred rhetoric from within unrecognized states is of crucial importance to understanding the current conditions of the international system.¹¹

Sacred Rhetoric: What It Is and What It Is Not

For sacred rhetoric, this paper uses the definition established by Marietta in his work, *The Politics of Sacred Rhetoric*.¹² Sacred rhetoric or absolutist reasoning can be associated with one or more of the following elements:

1. *Protected status*: placing a value beyond question or set apart from trade-offs with other values.
2. *Nonconsequentialism*: privileging values over costs or consequences.
3. *Noninstrumentalism*: rejecting calculated self-interest.
4. *Nonnegotiability*: denying the legitimacy of a compromise.
5. *Citation of boundaries*: invoking a boundary of what is acceptable or tolerable.
6. *Citation of authority*: invoking an authority for the value or boundary.
7. *Moral outrage*: expressing anger at the violation of a value or boundary.¹³

On the opposite end of the spectrum from absolutism is consequentialism. Non-sacred rhetoric can be associated with one or more of the following qualities:

1. *Relativism*: implying value trade-offs or comparability with other competing values.
2. *Consequentialism*: invoking costs or consequences.
3. *Instrumentalism*: referencing calculated self-interest.
4. *Negotiability*: invoking compromise.
5. *Denial of boundaries*: denying the validity of a known authority for a boundary.
6. *Denial of authority*: denying the validity of a known authority for the boundary.
7. *Denial of moral outrage*: denying the validity of moral anger.¹⁴

Marietta argues “when a belief is unquestionable and its holder unconflicted, it enters the range of a sacred value.”¹⁵ When a value becomes sacred, the holder of this value may go to great lengths to protect that value, spend massive amounts of money in support of the value, and sometimes even die for that value. The belief or support for this value is absolute. When this happens, a value is given *protected status*. In the United States, one can identify politicians from both sides of the aisle espousing their obligation to defend the U.S. Constitution, giving this document and its contents a *protected status*. Looking at the unrecognized states that are the focus of the study, Taiwan is a strong example. The Taiwanese, keen to keep their democratic values intact, refuse to reunite with China, where their democracy would be essentially erased or at the very least, radically altered, frequently cite the Three Principles of the People in a similar way to establish the sacredness of their democracy. Therefore, they have refused reunification, in order to protect this democratic status.

Another facet of sacredness is *nonconsequentialism*. If the holder of the value truly believes the value to be sacred, no justification of the positive benefits is necessary nor does the negative consequences detract from the value's sacredness. Thinking of the summer of 2020, America and many other Western countries saw protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. In America in particular, there were mass arrests of protestors and many cases of police brutality. However, protesters continued to show up to demand action against the police officers who killed unarmed Black Americans as well as the reform or defunding of police forces around the United States. For them, the possible physical and legal harm that could be endured by attending one of these protests was inconsequential as they placed their value on this brand of civil rights and social justice as sacred. Looking to an unrecognized state, such as Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh), the Artsakhis refused to budge on their claims of independence from Azerbaijan, as they held their right to self-determination to be sacred. The consequence was a bloody conflict in the summer and fall of 2020 that resulted in significant casualties and territorial losses.

Another facet of sacred values is *noninstrumentalism*. When it comes to instrumentality, a distinction is drawn between being motivated by values or being motivated by calculated self-interest (i.e. "what is *good* versus what is *good for me*").¹⁶ When a value reaches a level of sacredness that action on behalf of that value does not need to be justified by the prospect of success, it is noninstrumental. For example, if an individual were to make an anonymous donation to a charity, such as Amnesty International (and not claim it as a tax write-off), they have allowed their values to create action in which there is not self-interest at play, only the act of supporting something they hold to be sacred.

Nonnegotiability, another facet of sacredness, is often seen within the rhetoric of unrecognized states. One can think of the internal process of negotiability as the degrees of freedom the holder of a value may have before a boundary has been crossed, the value has become compromised, and the situation is no longer acceptable. A good example of these degrees of freedom is a survey conducted by the Election Study Center in Taiwan where only 10.2 percent of Taiwaners supported reunification with China.¹⁷ While 58.8 percent expressed a willingness to continue with the status quo of unrecognized statehood for varying amounts of time, 23.8 percent supported full independence (meaning full recognized statehood) immediately.¹⁸ Here the variable of negotiability is at work in relation to Taiwan's status with its parent state and within the international community. While the 58.8 percent of Taiwaners that found unrecognized statehood to be varyingly acceptable, reunification with China was *nonnegotiable*. Likewise, the 23.8 percent that found anything but full statehood acceptable, the continuation of unrecognized statehood or reunification with China was *nonnegotiable*. For this group, the only path for Taiwan is one of self-governance.

Another aspect of sacredness, the *citation of boundaries*, is frequently seen amongst unrecognized states. By creating boundaries, the holder of a value essentially says: "If you do X, there will be consequences, likely violent consequences." Examples of the crossing of boundaries and the consequences are aplenty in history such as, "if you continue to raise my taxes on imports, I will throw your tea into the Boston Harbor" or "if your army crosses the UN-designated Buffer Zone, we will go to war once again" (as is the case in Cyprus).

Often, sacred values and the boundaries that those values may set come from an *authority*. While in U.S. politics, it is frequent for American politicians to cite the U.S. Constitution as a

sacred source, unrecognized states have various sources of a sacred authority. Most often, unrecognized states will cite Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points as a sacred authority, as it established an international right to national self-determination, which serves as the main justification for many unrecognized states' pursuit of recognized statehood.

The final aspect of sacred rhetoric is *moral outrage*. This reaction is caused by the violation of a sacred value. For someone who holds a negotiable value, the violation or disagreement over that value can be summed up as an annoyance, or a mere "difference of opinion."¹⁹ Philip Tetlock is one of the psychologists who developed the concept and evidence regarding sacred values.²⁰ In Tetlock's Sacred Value Protection Model, those that hold sacred values are more likely to support policies that protect those values and respond with moral outrage when their sacred value is publicly violated and even seek moral cleansing, which can range from public statements to an activation of political participation.²¹

Unrecognized States: What They Are and What They Are Not

Unrecognized states, through state fragmentation or successful bids for independence (often through war) have achieved autonomy from their parent states. However, without the legal recognition of the international community, unrecognized states are denied a form of sovereignty. This study relies heavily on the definition set by Caspersen in her work *Unrecognized States*:

1. An unrecognized state has achieved *de facto* independence.
2. Its leadership is seeking to build further state institutions and demonstrate its own legitimacy.
3. The entity has declared formal independence.
4. The entity has not gained international recognition (or has, at the most, been recognized by its patron state and a few other states of no great importance).
5. It has existed for at least two years.²²

While defining the first criterion—*de facto* independence—Caspersen limits her parameters to "an unrecognized state has achieved *de facto* independence, covering at least two-thirds of

the territory to which it lays claim and including its main city and key region.”²³ This study excludes this “two-thirds” clause of *de facto* independence. This results in the inclusion of Western Sahara, or the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as an unrecognized state. While the SADR claims the entirety of Western Saharan territory, it controls slivers of land along its eastern and southern borders, resulting in enclaves alongside Algeria and Mauritania with the remaining land and its claimed capital of Laayoune under Moroccan control.²⁴ The SADR features every aspect of an unrecognized state with the exception being their territorial claims, hence its inclusion in this study. The SADR is also of increasing importance in international politics, as former U.S. President Donald Trump made a surprise recognition of Morocco’s claims over Western Sahara. This recognition was tied with an exchange of Morocco’s establishment of full diplomatic relations with the State of Israel, further cementing the SADR’s status as an unrecognized state.²⁵ This claim of territory beyond their control is a somewhat common feature in unrecognized states, as Taiwan, arguably the most successful unrecognized state both democratically and economically, maintained its claims on mainland China into the 1990’s. Likewise Nagorno-Karabakh and Somaliland both make claims on relatively small regions or districts that they do not control (although these claims do not constitute more than two-thirds of their overall territorial claim).²⁶

The next criterion—*its leadership is seeking to build further state institutions and demonstrate its own legitimacy*—is crucial in the argument that there is internal sovereignty within the unrecognized state. With state building as a focus of unrecognized states, this distinguishes them from what has been called “black spots” or “insurgent states” in the international system. Within “black spots,” the central government is no longer able to govern or administer control over the territory and regional warlords have seized control.²⁷ Areas such as the territory held by ISIL in

Iraq and Syria from 2014-2019 or the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan, where it is believed that al-Qaeda leadership reside, can be considered “black spots.”²⁸ In “insurgent states,” the leaders may be able to provide basic services to those within its territory, but its goal is not independence, but to overthrow the existing government.²⁹ A good example of an insurgent state is the People’s Republic of China under the leadership of Mao Zedong until their victory over the Republic of China in 1949. Zedong did not seek to create a communist state that coexisted with the Republic of China, instead he fully intended to *replace* the Republic of China with a communist system.³⁰ A more recent example of an insurgent state can be the Taliban’s seizing of the rest of Afghan territory and their formation of a government in Kabul. While their government is not recognized by many recognized states, they do not qualify as an unrecognized state due to their goal not being to breakaway from an existing recognized state, but to replace the government of the recognized state.

For entities such as the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhank People’s Republic, this criterion also omits their inclusion in this study. While these rebel-led groups have declared independence and carved out portions of Ukrainian territory, both have failed to create meaningful state institutions, with the Ukrainian government having been reported to still be paying wages and pensions to individuals living within rebel-held territory.³¹

While the third criterion—a declaration of independence—is not a decisive factor in unrecognized or recognized statehood, it is key. Abkhazia did not formally declare independence from Georgia until 1999, but it had been functioning as a *de facto* state for the previous six years.³² This feature of declaring independence also distinguishes unrecognized states from autonomous regions or territories where there is a desire for independence amongst at least a portion of its citizenry. For example, Catalonia, until its 2017 referendum on independence was an autonomous

region where there was, and still is, a large desire for independence from Spain. However, Catalonia's referendum did not result in an actual declaration of independence.

The fourth criterion—lack of international recognition—is a central feature of unrecognized statehood. While some unrecognized states have achieved recognition from numerous UN member states, unrecognized states such as Kosovo (recognized by 98/193 UN member states) and Taiwan (recognized by 14/193 UN member states and the Holy See) are still considered to be unrecognized due to their lack of the UN membership and widespread nonrecognition by UN member states.³³ In the case of Israel and Palestine, there are a notable number of UN member states that do not recognize either entity. However, Israel's recognition by 164/193 UN member states and membership in the UN, as well as Palestine's recognition by 138/193 UN member states and its status as a non-member observer in the UN have led to the consensus that neither Israel nor Palestine can be considered to be unrecognized states, despite having "limited" recognition.³⁴

While numerous unrecognized states have achieved recognition by one or more recognized states, this recognition is often from their parent state or other states of little geopolitical significance. For example, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have both been recognized by their parent state Russia and a few other UN member states (primarily allies of Russia including Syria).³⁵ Abkhazia and South Ossetia are also recognized by Nauru, which frequently employs its status as a UN member state to elicit aid from the parent states or patron states of unrecognized states by recognizing the latter.³⁶ In exchange for its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is believed that the Nauran government received \$50 million in humanitarian aid from Russia and

Nauru has flip-flopped its recognition of Taiwan and the SADR in order to receive aid from Morocco and China.³⁷ Despite recognition from a limited number of UN member states, this does very little to change to the reality for unrecognized states in their pursuit of external sovereignty.

The final criteria for unrecognized statehood, existence for more than two years, is generally agreed upon by scholars so that peripheral entities that lack robust state building features do not detract from the study of the more durable unrecognized states.

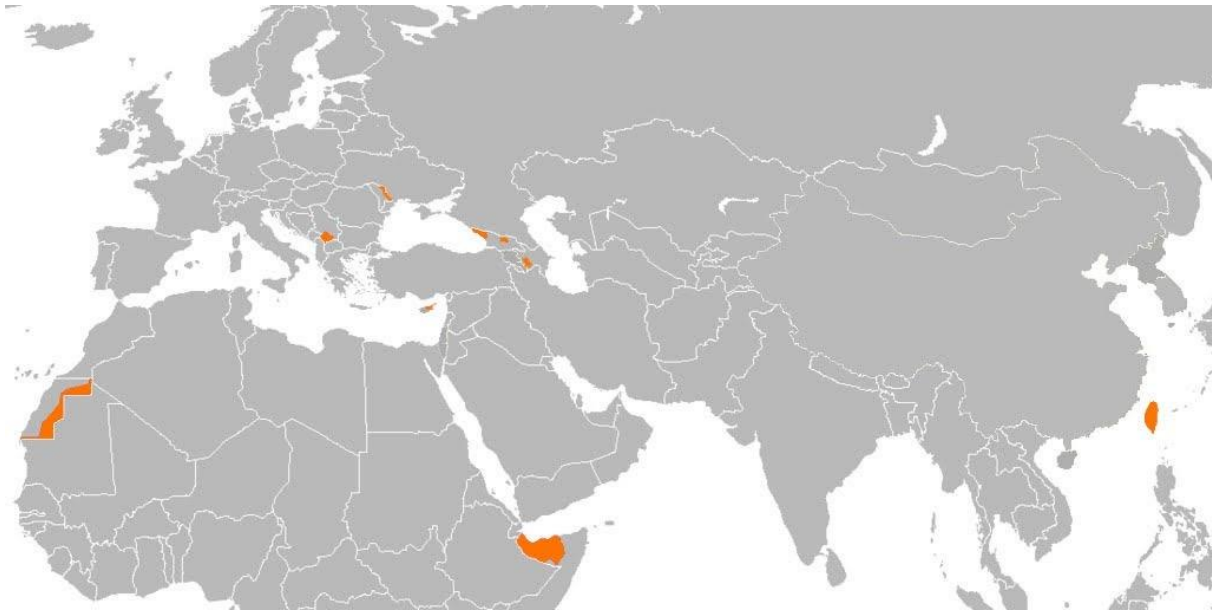
The complete list of unrecognized states that currently exist within the international system can be found below along with a map highlighting unrecognized states in orange.

Table 1

<u>Unrecognized State</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Parent State</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Existence</u>
Abkhazia	Sukhumi	Georgia	245,246	1993-Present
Kosovo	Pristina	Serbia	1,873,160	1999-Present
Nagorno-Karabakh, or Republic of Artsakh	Stepanakert	Azerbaijan	150,932	1994-Present
Somaliland	Hargeisa	Somalia	3,500,000	1991-Present
South Ossetia	Tskhinvali	Georgia	53,532	1991-Present
Transnistria	Tiraspol	Moldova	469,000	1974-Present
Taiwan, or Republic of China	Taipei	China	23,568,378	1971-Present

Northern Cyprus, or Turkish Re- public of North- ern Cyprus	Nicosia	Cyprus	326,000	1983-Present
Western Sahara, or Sahrawi Arab Democratic Re- public , or the Polisario Front	Laayoune (claimed) Tifariti (<i>de facto</i>)	Morocco	612,000	1976-Present

Map 1



Methodology

The following three sections examine various absolutist claims made by unrecognized states for sovereignty, nation-building, or the vilifying of their enemies. This examination will focus on sacred rhetoric located in founding documents, speeches delivered by leading political

figures, and even some examples of sacred rhetoric employed by ordinary citizens of unrecognized states. These examples will illuminate not only the frequent usage of sacred rhetoric in unrecognized states, but also certain facets of sacred rhetoric that unrecognized states, their politicians, and citizens tend to gravitate toward. Additionally, these examples will demonstrate that even across different time periods and a diverse array of geographic and political spaces, unrecognized states tend to discuss the same subjects regarding their different form of statehood with sacred rhetoric.

The final two sections will examine the key question of *what does this sacred rhetoric do for unrecognized states?* In particular, it will examine how the reasoning effect and the activation effect play into the rhetoric and politics of unrecognized states as well as its influence on the greater international system. Through the reasoning effect, one can see how sacred rhetoric inspires its citizens to become more thoroughly invested in their unrecognized state's pursuit of recognition. With the activation effect, we can see how unrecognized states' use of sacred rhetoric succeeds or fails in their ultimate goal of widespread international recognition.

Sacred Rhetoric and Claims of Sovereignty in Unrecognized States

One of the most essential elements of statehood is sovereignty. A state's sovereignty is a sacred right afforded to each *recognized* state and violating the sacred boundary of a state's sovereignty (or territorial integrity) often results in violent repercussions. During the decolonization of Europe's African colonies, the United Nations growing anticolonial stance led to a declaration that "inability to self-govern was not a reason to delay independence," with some arguing that all one needed to be a state today was "to have been a colony yesterday."³⁸ While numerous UN member-states have not achieved a functioning level of internal sovereignty, especially at the time of their admission, unrecognized states have achieved this internal sovereignty. In the case

of Somaliland, which exists due to its ability to maintain internal sovereignty while the state of Somalia collapsed around it, it is its defining characteristic.³⁹

For Somaliland, a focus on their sovereignty exclusive from the ineffectual government that claims to govern Somalia, but in actuality only carries authority over a small portion of Mogadishu, is crucial to their push for international recognition. Moreover, the robust nature of their democratic institutions point to their bid for membership in international organizations recognized as necessary for ultimate success on the international stage. While Somaliland has successfully navigated peaceful transitions of power and demonstrated economic vigor, especially when compared to Somalia, Somali leaders remain the sole representatives at the UN, the World Bank, and other multilateral organizations at great cost to the stable Somaliland. In particular, Somaliland has placed their inability to receive aid from organizations such as UNESCO, despite their democratic successes and internal sovereignty, to be both a threat to would-be world heritage sites within their borders and the status of democracy in other unrecognized states.

In particular, Somaliland finds itself underfunded in its efforts to preserve the 10,000 year old cave paintings found in Laas Geel caves. These paintings normally would be afforded funding for their protection through UNESCO. However, Somalia's refusal to apply for protection on behalf of Somaliland endangers the preservation efforts.⁴⁰ In an interview with the Washington Post, a Somalilander tour guide for the Laas Geel caves argued "...our ability to preserve them and their [Somalia's] inability to, is our greatest argument for recognition."⁴¹ By placing the preservation of Somaliland's ancient art at the heart of their bid for recognition, Somlilanders afford them a *protected status*.

This contrast between the ability to function as a normal and productive state if afforded the recognition that Somalia has, despite having extremely limited internal sovereignty, has

caused Somalilanders to grow increasingly frustrated over the lack of reward for their achievements, particularly their democratic success. One Somaliland opposition leader lamented, “if democracy does not win recognition, people will look elsewhere.”⁴² Invoking *moral outrage* at the lack of credit that their democracy receives, Somalilanders warn that this international inability to see through the norms of recognition could come at the cost of budding democracies in unrecognized states as well as threaten the integrity of sites crucial to understanding human heritage.

In the Constitution of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the framers of this founding document place the ideals of sovereignty at its very center. In Article III, the idea of sovereignty is framed in a Westphalian but also an absolutist stance: “Sovereignty shall vest in the people comprising the citizens of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, without condition or reservation. The people shall exercise its sovereignty, within the framework of the principles laid down by the Constitution...”⁴³ By placing sovereignty in such a central position in their founding document, the Turkish Cypriots place their sovereignty, particularly their internal sovereignty, as a sacred value. While framing the importance of their sovereignty within their constitution, the Turkish Cypriot founders give the sovereignty of their country and its citizens a *protected status*, create *boundaries* (i.e. “if this sovereignty is violated, you have violated the sovereignty of the people of the TRNC and there will be consequences”), and place their sovereignty as *nonnegotiable*.

Likewise, the Constitution of Nagorno-Karabakh (or Artsakh) similarly establishes the sacredness of sovereignty. In the very first sentence of Article I, the authors describe Nagorno-Karabakh as a “...sovereign, democratic, and social State governed by the rule of law.”⁴⁴ In this crucial introduction, the Artsakhis place a *sacred label* upon themselves. Once placed upon a

subject, whether self-placed or imposed upon another state, group, or individual, sacred labels establish boundaries that cannot be crossed when describing or interacting with said state, group, or individual.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, the Artsakhi's self-imposed sacred label as "sovereign" designates their unrecognized country as a state within which internal sovereignty exists and power is vested in the people. However, the application of these labels mean that they are nonnegotiable. This becomes problematic when evaluating the level of truth found in sacred rhetoric. Nagorno-Karabakh does in fact have a high degree of internal sovereignty, despite a heavy reliance upon their patron state, Armenia, which is typical for an unrecognized state.⁴⁵ However, when evaluating their external sovereignty, it is nearly nonexistent. This is best exemplified in the outbreak of conflict between the Azerbaijanis and the Artsakhis in 2020. With Azerbaijan making major territorial gains into the unrecognized state, claims that the violation of Artsakhi sovereignty was ignored by the international community, with the exception of Armenia.⁴⁶ In fact, open Turkish support of the Azerbaijani invasion pointed to a truth that Azerbaijan could make more serious claims about their own sovereignty being violated by the existence of Nagorno-Karabakh than the Artsakhis could that the invasion had violated their sovereignty.⁴⁷

The supposition that Nagorno-Karabakh is a democratic state, thus making its bid for external sovereignty and international recognition much more appealing to the UN and a majority of the international community, can also be contested. Caspersen's assertions of Nagorno-Karabakh's flawed democracy come not only from an academic perspective, but also from her work as an election monitor in Nagorno-Karabakh. Caspersen points to demonstrable evidence of election fraud within the unrecognized state, with many of the winning candidates garnering unlikely high percentages of the electorate. Similarly, in the Abkhazian Constitution, the framers

describe their state as “...a sovereign, democratic state established historically under the right of a people to free self-determination...” and that “Democracy shall be the basis of authority in the Republic of Abkhazia.”⁴⁸ Of the value-claims produced by unrecognized states in their bids to certify their sovereignty, claiming democracy as a sacred value is a common, but disputed feature. In Freedom House’s Democracy Index, unrecognized states, such as Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia are rated as only “Partly Free” despite their claims to be a democracy.⁴⁹ Freedom House also rates Western Sahara, Transnistria, and South Ossetia as “Not Free,” with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Taiwan rated as “Free.”⁵⁰

Taiwan is notable in this examination, as for many years it fought against the process of derecognition it endured, as many in the international community favored recognition of the communist People’s Republic of China (PRC). Despite the pro-Western stance of the Taiwanese government, the thirty years of martial law imposed on the island by the one-party government affected the state’s rhetorical ability to maintain an argument for its external sovereignty as the countries it relied most heavily upon for support (such as the United States) could not make claims that the state represented not only those on the island of Taiwan, but also the people of mainland China.⁵¹ With a nearly worldwide acceptance of a “One-China” policy, with many states engaging in only unofficial interactions with Taiwan, the Taiwanese found themselves caught in opposition to a bid to external sovereignty from the PRC. Today, the Taiwanese struggle for the external sovereignty that they denied the PRC for decades. With their renouncement of their claims to mainland China in the 1990s, Taiwan has been engaged in a long game for international recognition for over forty years now.⁵² Commencing with the Trump administration’s possibly accidental acceptance of a congratulatory call from the Taiwanese President over his electoral success, the U.S. has increased its engagement with Taiwan.⁵³ Rooted in Taiwan’s

long-term democratic and economic success, the U.S. appears poised to continue its support for Taiwan, particularly military support, under the Biden presidency.⁵⁴

For unrecognized states, few of their political interests can be expressed as absolutely as their pursuit of sovereignty. With the frequent crowning of sovereignty with a *protected status*, considering it *nonnegotiable*, and the creation of *boundaries*, unrecognized states fight for their right to the sovereignty they claim is due to them through international laws and norms. With sovereignty, unrecognized states have the ability to free themselves from the frustrating exercise of unrecognized statehood, as well as unlock the political and economic benefits of membership in the UN, World Bank, and many other multilateral organizations.

Sacred Rhetoric and Nation-Building in Unrecognized States

Since the appearance of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, the right for groups of people to pursue their own state has not only been a consistently recognized right within the international system but also an effective gauge of a sovereign state's democratic strength when dealing with appeals for self-determination from groups within their own borders. For unrecognized states, the pursuit of self-determination is an essential element of their state building. Therefore, the construction of a nation in their rhetoric is a common feature in unrecognized states' founding documents and political discourse. Most commonly, unrecognized states give features that distinguish their culture from that of their parent state a *protected status*.

In Nagorno-Karabkh's constitution, the distinguishing features of the Artsakhis from Azerbaijanis are given such protected status. The ethnically Armenian majority found within Nagorno-Karabakh's borders are distinguished from the Azerbaijanis through, most prominently, language and religion. In Article XV of Nagorno-Karabakh's Constitution, the authors claim that "The Armenian language and cultural heritage shall be under the care and protection of the

State.”⁵⁵ This protected status afforded to the Armenian language lays a clear boundary that they are not Azerbaijani, they speak Armenian, and they deserve to exercise their right to self-determination.

In Article XVIII of Nagorno-Karabakh’s Constitution, protected status is placed upon the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church. With 98% of Artsakhis identifying as Armenian Apostolic, the authors of the constitution designate “...the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, as a national church, in the spiritual life of the Armenian people, in the development of their national culture, and preservation of their national identity.”⁵⁶ This sacred status is afforded due to the overwhelming presence of the Armenian Apostolic tradition in the region. When this is compared to the 96.8 percent Muslim population of Azerbaijan, this protected status shows the gulf between the unrecognized state and its parent state.⁵⁷ In particular, this religious divide sparked the greatest international outcry for support of Artsakhi sovereignty as the Azerbaijani army was reported to have targeted, destroyed, and vandalized centuries-old Armenian Apostolic churches in Nagorno-Karabakh during the outbreak of conflict in October 2020.⁵⁸

Sometimes, the cultural distinctions from parent states made by the unrecognized state in founding documents or constitutions mask the demographic realities found within the space. In Article VII of the Constitution of Abkhazia, it is designated that one of the requirements to be President of Abkhazia, one must be an ethnic Abkhaz.⁵⁹ By making this designation, the Abkhazian framers establish a boundary: the highest office of the land will be held by someone representing the people of an Akhaz “nation-state.” However, it should be acknowledged that ethnic Abkhazians only represent approximately half of the population of Abkhazia.⁶⁰ The rest of the unrecognized state has significant Armenian, Georgian, and Russian populations that are effectively removed from political representation in the highest office.⁶¹ While some unrecognized

states enshrine their nation building project in overwhelmingly ethnically homogeneous states, the pursuit of a self-determination claim in Abkhazia is muddled by their diversity and contradicts their claims that the Abkhazian people deserve their own state exclusive from Georgia when their population is only half Abkhazian. This arguably causes the insecurity in their claim necessary to make a sacred boundary around the office of the presidency that elevates the status of citizens of a certain ethnicity.

In present-day Taiwan, nation-building heavily relies upon identification with the government's democratic tradition. In the Taiwanese constitution, Article I states that "The Republic of China, founded on the Three Principles of the People, shall be a democratic republic of the people, to be governed by the people and for the people."⁶² In this text, the Taiwanese framers distinguish themselves from their communist counterparts in the People's Republic of China. Likewise, the Taiwanese framers called upon a *sacred source* in Sun Yat-sen's, Three Principles of the People, which identified democracy as one of the central tenets of the Republic of China.⁶³ This legacy of creating a sense of nationhood around democracy rather than an ethnic or religious identification can be seen in countries such as the United States and Canada, as well as Taiwan.

In modern state building, Taiwan has further sanctified their nationhood based on the conjunction between ethnic Chinese nationalism and democratic values by allying itself with Hong Kong. In a 2020 speech given by current President of Taiwan Tsai Ing-Wen to the Hudson Institute in Washington DC, she argued,

When the rest of the world has been distracted in responding to one of the most significant crises in recent history [the COVID-19 pandemic], we're seeing a growing effort to pose ever more challenging threats to free and democratic societies. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Hong Kong. Taiwan hosts deep historical

and cultural ties with Hong Kong....we are the only two Chinese speaking societies around the world that commemorate June the Fourth and its profound significance for freedom and democracy. As a result, we are saddened and alarmed to see this beacon of civil liberties become extinguished in violation of the promises Beijing had made to the people of Hong Kong as well as the international community. We recognize the bravery of the people of Hong Kong.⁶⁴

By establishing the connection between Taiwan and Hong Kong by giving a *protected status* and demonstrating *moral outrage* at the anti-democratic actions taken by the People's Republic of China against Hong Kong, Tsai Ing-Wen demonstrates the fundamental aspects of Taiwanese nationhood being founded on a democratic tradition.

For unrecognized states, the *protected status* afforded to their nation-building projects is essential in their pursuit of statehood and sovereignty. While sovereignty is a legal status afforded to the state itself, the unrecognized states' claims for their right to self-determination, the basis of their appeal for statehood, is fully dependent upon their legitimacy as a distinct nation. Without placing unrecognized states' nation as a sacred value, there is very little hope for international recognition. Even Somaliland, whose existence is due to the collapse of the state apparatus in Somalia, focuses a significant amount of energy into their separateness from their parent state by frequently citing their history as a distinct British colony and four days of international recognition in 1960 before their union with Somalia.⁶⁵

Sacred Rhetoric and the Identifying of Enemies by Unrecognized States

All current unrecognized states have emerged out of conflict. Unrecognized states are also denied their sovereignty from the state from which they wished to secede as well as the state from which they succeeded in creating a space of internal sovereignty within the former border of that state. This language places the parent state in the position of an undisputed enemy and a denier of their right to sovereignty and self-determination.

This identification of an enemy is an essential element of the national narrative created by unrecognized states about themselves. In the Preamble of the Constitution of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the authors describe their people as having been ripped from their nation in 1878 when the Ottomans lost control of Cyprus.⁶⁶ The document goes on to describe the armed struggle that began in 1955 between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots over *enosis*, the Greek movement to unify the Greek speaking peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean.⁶⁷ The Turkish Cypriots' *moral outrage* at this violence, particularly at “the form of armed terrorism, aggression and suppression” against their people for the cause of further separating them from their nation designates the Greek Cypriots as *enemies* and these actions of violence as *blood events*.⁶⁸ Blood events are a remembrance of a specific violent event, invoking the blood spilled as an act of consecration, employing sacred rhetoric focusing on moral outrage, boundary violation, and the boundary reinforcement of an identity. The historical reality of an event and the political remembrance of an event may diverge significantly; blood events may be most powerful when the two are most different. Many blood events invoked in political rhetoric may not have occurred exactly as they are described, though they likely have a kernel of truth to them. The concept refers to the description—the rhetorical, remembered event—rather than the historically accurate one.

While the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey and the ensuing war could be seen as a blood event in of itself, the massacres that occurred in the villages of Maratha, Santalaris, and Aloda have been described by the UN as a “crime against humanity.”⁶⁹ For blood events such as these, *moral outrage*, *nonconsequentialism*, *nonnegotiability*, and a *citation of boundaries* can all be found as these violent actions make reconciliation against the parent state nearly impossible.

Similar to the massacres in Maratha, Santalaris, and Aloda, the attack on Prekaz in the spring of 1998 served as a catalyst for widespread support for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) among the Kosovar Albanian population in Serbia. In this attack carried out by the Special Anti-Terrorism Unit of Serbia, fifty-eight Kosovar Albanians were killed with eighteen of those deaths being women and ten of them being children.⁷⁰ This blood event sparked not only international outcry with Amnesty International reporting that “the attack was not intended to apprehend armed Albanians, but ‘to eliminate the suspects and their families’” but also inspired thousands of ethnic Albanians in Serbia to join the KLA and the effort for independence as a sacred boundary had been violated.⁷¹ Here we see not only *moral outrage* at the actions of the Serbians (what can be more outrageous than indiscriminate killing of children?), but also an activation effect. In response to this blood event and the absolutist rhetoric from the KLA that it inspired, the KLA saw a massive increase in their troop numbers and turned what could have been a fringe movement into an armed conflict successful enough to carve out what is now Kosovo from Serbian territory.

Also in recent news, the Brahim Gali, the leader of the Polisario Front (the Sahrawi-led government in Western Sahara), declared the end of their twenty-nine year ceasefire agreement with Morocco after a Moroccan raid of a Sahrawi camp in November 2020. This raid, which resulted in nineteen dead, 723 injuries, and 159 missing persons, coincided with UN supported peace talks, effectively derailing the peacebuilding process.⁷² Gali cited the “loss of lives” as his reason for calling an end to the ceasefire that had brought the region into a form of stagnant peace that had been preceded by sixteen years of war.⁷³ By citing the *moral outrage* at the actions of the Moroccans, Gali also makes clear that a *boundary* had been crossed that was unacceptable to the Sahrawis. This absolutist stance that has been taken by the Sahrawis came two

months before the American recognition of Morocco's claims on all of Western Sahara (including territory controlled by the Polisario Front), that current U.S. President Biden seems prepared to leave in place.⁷⁴ Left with a collapsed ceasefire, failed peace talks, and an even greater position of instability in the international system, the Sahrawis and the Moroccans seem to be, for the first time in nearly three decades, on the edge of a full-scale military confrontation.

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, started by Azerbaijani offensives, produced Nagorno-Karabakh's near-desperate plea for international recognition. As the Azerbaijanis sought to occupy unfortified southern districts of the unrecognized state, the Nagorno-Karabakh Foreign Ministry stated,

Since 27 September 2020, the Azerbaijani armed forces, with the support of Turkey and terrorist organizations from the Middle East, have unleashed an aggressive war against Artsakh. The large-scale armed attack by Azerbaijan is accompanied by serious violations of the norms of international humanitarian law, as well as the laws and customs applicable in armed conflict. In particular, the Azerbaijani-Turkish armed formations are deliberately shelling cities, villages and civilian objects of Artsakh with the aim of terrorizing and destroying the civilian population.⁷⁵

Here we see a clear vilification of the Azerbaijanis by the Artsakhis. Through the expression of *moral outrage*, the Artsakhis establish that they are not only the victims of Azeri aggression, but also their allies who they cite as "terrorist organizations" (in this case Syrian mercenaries). They then go on to cite a sacred *authority* (in this case "international humanitarian law") and establish that a *boundary* has been crossed with the attacks launched by the Azeris. Through this rhetorical strategy, the Artsakhis place themselves not only in the position of a victim, but also as the entity that would be a much more peaceful and suitable member of the international system than their parent state. The Artsakhis make the case that they play by the rules and respect the laws of the international system and do not fraternize with unsavory characters.

For unrecognized states, the ultimate absolutist stance could be considered to be the animosity that exists between them and their parent state. The denial of sovereignty and lack of recognition of their appeals for self-determination that have resulted in blood events over these values means that for unrecognized states, there is very little chance of reuniting with the parent state, for too much has been lost. This struggle between these entities is a defining aspect of unrecognized states and the source of the struggle that unrecognized statehood holds.

The Reasoning Effect and Unrecognized States

Marietta demonstrates that with the use of sacred rhetoric, a reasoning effect occurs within those that hold a certain value. The more elements of sacredness that the holder can apply to a particular value they believe to be sacred, the more absolutist their reasoning. In previous studies of the reasoning effect, investigations have been done regarding the reasoning effect at the individual level. However, in this study's examination of sacred rhetoric of mainly rhetoric produced at the state-level, we must ask, *why do unrecognized states think the way they do?*

Beginning with sovereignty, one sees a trend among the founding documents of unrecognized states specifically describing themselves as a "sovereign state." By describing themselves first as sovereign, amongst the other descriptors they use, they frequently give sovereignty a protected status, make their sovereignty nonnegotiable, establish boundaries to protect their sovereignty, and cite sacred authorities to justify their claim to sovereignty and independent statehood.

Due to the violent nature of the emergence of all unrecognized states, the reasoning for why the sovereignty (mainly internal sovereignty) is simple: too much has been lost to go back. Looking at specific blood events, we can see rhetoric emerge around individual events. However, on a broader scale, the wars that unrecognized states have waged against the parent state create a more widespread sentiment of, at the very least, retaining the independence from the parent state

that has already been established. Therefore, boundaries are created by the state: if this sovereignty is infringed upon, there will be violence in return. This can be exemplified by the SADR's successive attacks along its border with Morocco following the Moroccan raid that resulted in the termination of the twenty-nine year ceasefire agreement. Finally, the sacredness of sovereignty is justified through the citation of the international right to self-determination. Wilson's Fourteen Points as well as the previous founding documents of nation-states that have emerged post-WWI all justify unrecognized states' pursuit of sovereignty on the basis that they are an independent people seeking their own state.

With nation-building, unrecognized states create a protected status around their nation and cite moral outrage at those that attack the nation. From founding documents to nation-building projects, such as those seen in Taiwan, the nation must be protected. This is based on the reasoning that the only way for an unrecognized state to continue to pursue international recognition of their independence from the parent state is again, based on their claim to the right of national self-determination. Therefore, the nation must be protected or the state will fail.

This can be best exemplified by the near-destruction of indigenous Taiwanese cultures by the Republic of China upon their arrival to the island. Through propaganda campaigns that promoted Mandarin language instruction and an ethnic Han culture that has since dominated the island, the indigenous cultures of Taiwan have been nearly erased. What replaced it instead was the idea of a ethnically Han, Mandarin speaking, democratic nation. This model, possibly adopted for consequentialist reasons for survival is protected through absolutist logic and rhetoric.

Finally, the vilification of the parent state by unrecognized states is based frequently upon moral outrage and boundaries that have been crossed. Deeply interrelated with unrecognized

states' claims of sovereignty from the parent state, the blood events that unrecognized states claim to have suffered at the hands of the parent state create a perpetrator-victim relationship between the two entities. Boundaries that have been crossed can go back to the events that sparked the fissure between the unrecognized state and the parent state or can be events that occurred since the unrecognized state achieved internal sovereignty, but both affect the reasoning for vilifying the parent state.

Looking back at boundaries that have been crossed, we can examine the case of Morocco and Western Sahara. Moroccans were ambitious enough to lay claim to Western Sahara only a year after their independence at the United Nations due to the fact that they already had a history of administering this territory during its colonial period under Spanish rule. After bringing their claim on Western Sahara to the UN, the body decided that while there were historical links between Western Sahara and Morocco (and also between Western Sahara and Mauritania), there was not a clear link. Therefore, the UN decided that the Sahrawis had a right to national self-determination. In response to this ruling, the Moroccans launched the Green March (green being the color of Islam) in November 1975. This mass demonstration of nearly 350,000 unarmed civilians being escorted by 20,000 Moroccan soldiers, marching a few miles into Western Saharan territory was meant to put political pressure on the Spanish to decolonize the space so that they could assume what they believed to be their rightful control of the colony. Led by King Hassan II himself, the presence of thousands of Moroccans marching into Spanish Sahara, praying, and returning a few hours later perpetuated the idea of a "Greater Morocco" espoused by numerous Moroccan nationalists.

While the Green March created the necessary climate for Spain to withdraw from Western Sahara, it awakened resentment from a powerful force in the territory: the Polisario Front. The

Polisario Front began as a rebel group committed to fighting a guerilla war against the Spanish forces in Western Sahara. However, upon the end of the Spanish rule after the Madrid Accords, their attention shifted to fighting Moroccan forces and has continued to claim to represent the Sahrawi people by establishing the SADR. For those involved with the Polisario Front, the Moroccans, even through holding a nonviolent march, crossed a boundary by claiming Western Sahara for themselves and instigated the conflict that is very much continuing today in the form of raids, skirmishes, and various geopolitical deals.

Through the attribution of aspects of sacredness to their values, unrecognized states become progressively more deeply entrenched in these positions than they would if such values were held for consequentialist reasons. This can explain the longevity of some unrecognized states such as Taiwan and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, who have both existed in unrecognized statehood for decades rather than pursue reunification with their parent state. The reasoning effect seen in unrecognized states can also contribute to the absolutist stances held by those living within these spaces and their willingness to engage in a spectrum of political actions that can be as extreme as joining in armed conflict.

The Activation Effect and Unrecognized States

While the reasoning effect addresses the question of *why do people think the way they do?*, the activation effect addresses *why do people do the things they do?* Previous studies look at aspects of the activation effect that sacred rhetoric has in regards to aspects of political participation such as voter turnout. However, this study's main interest lies in how absolutism can cause activation in extreme political participation, such as joining in military conflicts, and ultimately how the use of sacred rhetoric translates into helping unrecognized states achieve their goal of international recognition.

Looking at military participation, it is easy to imagine the reasons those who join their state's military give for their enlistment, (serving their country, protecting their country, etc.). A condition frequently necessary for unrecognized states to exist is the relative military weakness of the parent state. While it would likely be impossible for any individual state to secede from the United States and attempt to maintain internal sovereignty while combating a military superpower, unrecognized states usually deal with militaries ill equipped to reunify an unrecognized state by force.

In unrecognized states, it can certainly be argued that an activation effect occurs in response to a blood event. In Kosovo, the KLA had only a few hundred fighters in 1996 and was largely incapable of leading a movement to breakaway from Serbia.⁷⁶ However, the attack of Prekaz which resulted in the deaths of women and children sparked a moral outrage that saw surges in enlistment. The effect of the *moral outrage* seen amongst the Kosovar community resulted in a force of 17,000 soldiers by the end of 1998.⁷⁷ By 1999, Serbian forces had withdrawn from Kosovo, and after another nine years of United Nation administration, Kosovo had declared itself independent from Serbia.

Through this study, we have identified absolutist stances held by unrecognized states and the sacred rhetoric that is created to defend these values. However, the frequent utilization of sacred rhetoric by unrecognized states raises the question of how it helps these entities achieve their goal of international recognition. While the use of sacred rhetoric has been determined to inspire higher voter turnout and electoral success, recognition is a quite different goal to achieve. Simply put, several unrecognized states have become the subject of international headlines in the last year, nevertheless, an influx of recognition for any of the unrecognized states has not been seen.

Although unrecognized states frequently recognize each other (see for example the establishment of diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Somaliland) it changes very little in terms of their status as an unrecognized state or their ability to achieve external sovereignty. Therefore, unrecognized states rarely recognize one another for consequentialist reasons, such as a clear economic gain (an example of instrumentalism). When Taiwan and Somaliland established diplomatic relations, their foreign ministers cited their countries shared “political and economic freedoms,” “international values,” and “sovereignty” when explaining their excitement over their new relationship. The citation of these sacred values demonstrate that the establishment of this relationship was noninstrumental and in essence, a joining of those participating in the shared struggle of unrecognized statehood.

Looking beyond unrecognized states recognizing one another, recent cases of recognized, UN member-states recognizing unrecognized states is limited. However, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have had recent success in recognition, likely in no small part due to Russia’s status as their patron state. In 2018, Syria notably recognized both Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad accusing the international community of applying “double standards” to the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia sovereignty and of “ignoring for some reason the rights of the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.”⁷⁸ Many will realize the deep irony of this statement, the most significant reason being that the Syrian Kurds have been able to carve out a significant amount of territory in northern Syria and may well be on their way toward unrecognized statehood themselves in the future.⁷⁹ While it is highly likely that Assad had instrumental reasons for his recognition of these two unrecognized states, as Russia has provided massive military support for the Assad regime in the Syrian Civil War in recent years, Assad’s rhetoric regarding the Abkhazians and South Ossetians is notable.⁸⁰ Assad’s citation of “the rights of

people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia” for his reason for recognition reveal a certain truth.⁸¹

While sacred rhetoric may not frequently result in recognition and consequentialist reasoning may more frequently result in recognition, the consequentialist action will be publicly justified through absolutist reasoning.

What this means for unrecognized states is that while protecting sacred values such as democracy can appear to be a futile gesture that results in little reward from the international community, it may be necessary for these sacred values to be afforded such status when it becomes convenient for members of the international community to provide recognition. While consequentialism may be the greatest factor in terms of giving out recognition, the justification of the recognition through the citation of the sacred values that unrecognized states repeat constantly, such as the right to national self-determination, appear to be quite necessary.

Conclusion

While driving up US 40 after a weekend in Little Rock in the spring of 2019, a few days after I had come up for the idea for this project, I found myself wondering, *who is going to care about sacred rhetoric in unrecognized states?* However, as I spent that summer meandering across the UN Buffer Zone into the half of Nicosia controlled by Northern Cyprus and enjoying the hospitality of the proprietors of its many shops and restaurants, having deeply political conversations (especially after they discovered I was interning for the State Department), and often hearing words and phrases that sounded quite absolutist, I knew that this topic was central to understanding these spaces. That summer, from my tiny office in the U.S. Embassy, I remained largely unaware of the conflict that had begun brewing and continues to trouble the region. Dis-

greements over hydrocarbon deposits off the coast of Northern Cyprus has put the Eastern Mediterranean on a razor's edge that threatens to drag Greece, Turkey, France, and others into the Cyprus problem.

During the same time, the world has seen a bloody war vastly change the dynamic of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the first military engagement between the Sahrawis in Western Sahara and Morocco in decades, and Taiwan finding itself at the center of diplomatic sparring between China and the United States. This is all to say, unrecognized states matter, and unfortunately, we have spent a very long time ignoring them.

With a rise in identity politics around the world, it is possible, even likely, that more unrecognized states will emerge. This is to say that the rigid understanding of sovereignty that currently exists in international law does not suffice when it comes to creating an accurate understanding of the system in which it seeks to create order. Through sacred rhetoric, we can see through to the hearts and minds of unrecognized states and those that live within them, allowing us to see the world a little better than we did before. This study reveals that the subject of absolutist language in unrecognized states supports the formation of national identities that will demand a sovereign state at the expense of the territorial integrity of an existing, recognized state. This absolutist language shapes the way that the politicians and citizens of these unrecognized states think of themselves, their state, and their *otherness* from the parent state that perpetuates their commitment to the pursuit of sovereignty. Most importantly, the sacred rhetoric employed by unrecognized states has a demonstrated activation effect upon its citizens. As we can see quite clearly, unrecognized states find themselves at the center of violent conflicts that their citizens are willing to fight and die in due to their commitment to the pursuit of full recognized statehood for their nation. As identity politics rise around the world, it is quite likely that more scenarios

that created the unrecognized states that exist today could be repeated in other parts of the world. Therefore, sacred rhetoric is an essential tool in understanding how and why these conflicts occur, as anyone looking to create peace out of these tense situations must see that the world is not as “portioned into territorially differentiated independent countries” as most would like to believe.⁸²

ENDNOTES

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