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# Case Analysis

## Madeleine Albright: Negotiating Gender at Home and Abroad

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*As the first female United States Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright redefined the role of America's top diplomat. While Albright's prolific foreign policy achievements are well documented, there has been little analysis of the negotiation style that contributed to her accomplishments. This article argues that Secretary Albright's negotiation style was formed, at least in part, by the need to respond to her counterparts' gender-based stereotypes. Albright managed those stereotypes in two ways: by leveraging them in her negotiations, and by framing her assertiveness so as to avoid a counter stereotypic backlash. How exactly she did so is the focus of this article. Using two case studies from Albright's tenure as Secretary of State, I draw generalizable lessons for other negotiators looking not only to mitigate, but also exploit, the gender-based assumptions that they face.*

**Keywords:** negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution, diplomacy, foreign policy, gender stereotypes, Madeleine Albright

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10.1111/nej.12392

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*Negotiation Journal* Spring 2022 235

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According to Dean Acheson, “The first requirement of a statesman is that he is dull.” Acheson said nothing about stateswomen, however, so I didn’t feel bound by his prescription.

—Madeleine K. Albright

## Introduction

The first female United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright served from 1997 to 2001 under President Bill Clinton. Of her many achievements during this time, one of the most impactful was offering a new model for female negotiators to leverage the identity-based assumptions held by those at the negotiation table. That model was not based on traditional (and contradictory) assumptions that women can succeed in negotiations by “acting like a man” or by demonstrating the value of “a feminine touch” (Chazan 2006; Peacock 2013). Instead, Secretary Albright cast a new mold, as she described in her memoir:

I could have chosen to submerge the differences as much as possible and done my best to imitate the men who preceded me. I could have shunned informal settings, dressed conservatively, and reined in my penchant for blunt speaking. But the job would not have been as enjoyable, and I would not have been able to accomplish as much as I did. (Albright 2013: 532)

Core to Albright’s approach was playing into gender stereotypes—of which she was acutely aware—when needing to build a relationship or cushion her assertiveness with an ally, but not hesitating to subvert those stereotypes when confronting an adversary. Thus, Albright’s tenure as Secretary of State is not a story of overcoming her gender; it is a story of knowing when to *use* her gender, and how to prevent backlash when doing so. She accomplished all this while staring down one of the U.S. government’s tallest glass ceilings (Mnookin, Burns, and Sebenius 2015c).

While this article focuses on gender stereotypes, Albright’s negotiation style presents a broader lesson in confronting other identity-based assumptions or stereotypes, whatever they may be. Traditional negotiation courses teach about the effects of identity-based biases and assumptions, but often provide little guidance on what exactly to do about them.<sup>1</sup> Albright’s approach stands as one person’s answer for negotiators looking to confront such assumptions.

At the same time, Albright’s negotiation style accommodates, in part, patriarchal norms for the “good” female negotiator. Those norms encourage men to be assertive and effective, while women hoping to be the same must first contort themselves into someone who is at once likable, reasonable, and gender-conforming. Thus, this article does not argue that

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Secretary Albright's negotiation style is the "best" way for women to succeed at the negotiation table, or that working within these norms is the only route for female negotiators. Its value is in breaking down the mechanisms by which a top female official in a male-dominated field defined by competitive bargaining effectively leveraged gender-based assumptions. Such analysis is valuable to negotiators looking for methods to confront identity-based assumptions that fit their own style and cultural context.

This article proceeds in two parts. The first part provides an overview of the current research on gender and negotiation. The second part examines the two prongs of Secretary Albright's negotiation style: (1) leveraging stereotypes about gender, evaluated through a case study of her negotiations with U.S. Republican leader Jesse Helms, and (2) framing her assertiveness in a way that forestalls counter stereotypic backlash, evaluated through a case study of her efforts to negotiate the NATO-led intervention in Kosovo.

## Gender and Negotiation

Meta-analyses of gender and negotiation have found that men often fare better in mixed-gender dyadic negotiations than their female counterparts (Stuhlmacher and Walters 1999; Mazei et al. 2015; Kugler, Reif, and Kaschner 2018).<sup>2</sup> But it is also well-settled that this advantage is due not to any inherent trait in male negotiators, but rather to situational factors that favor men (Bowles and Thomason 2015; Mazei et al. 2015; Kugler et al. 2018; Olekalns and Kennedy 2020).

Further inquiry has converged largely on role congruity as a significant—if not the predominant—situational factor contributing to better negotiation outcomes for men than women (Eagly and Wood 2012; Mazei et al. 2015; Kugler et al. 2018). According to role congruity theory, Western society promotes expectations and stereotypes about men's and women's general behavior, disposition, and nature based on each gender's traditional economic and social roles (Eagly and Wood 2012; Koenig and Eagly 2014; Kugler et al. 2018). As the traditional homemakers and child-rearers, women have been assigned a *communal* gender role; the associated stereotype is that they are warm, pacifist, accommodating, and largely concerned with the welfare of others. Men, as the historical breadwinners, are by contrast assigned an *agentic* gender role; the accompanying stereotype is that they are task-focused, decisive, competitive, and largely concerned with control and personal success (Kray and Locke 2008; Rudman and Phelan 2008; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, and Glick 2012; Mazei et al. 2015). These gender stereotypes about themselves and others are internalized by men and women alike and influence their behavior throughout their lives.

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The qualities reflected in these gender stereotypes are not equally valued. In the context of negotiation, agentic characteristics congruent with the male gender role (e.g., assertiveness, competitiveness, and ambition) are considered essential for success. Communal characteristics associated with the female gender role are considered incongruent with negotiation success (Kray 2007; Rudman et al. 2012; Mazei et al. 2015; Bear and Pittinsky 2020). Thus, not only are men perceived as more agentic than women but they are also deemed better *negotiators* (Kray and Thompson 2005; Kugler et al. 2018; Bear and Pittinsky 2020). Such stereotypes have persisted even as more women have entered the workplace and ascended to positions of high status and authority (Rudman and Phelan 2008).

The influence of these stereotypes may be found in all types of negotiation, including national and international conflicts.<sup>3</sup> One study, focused on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, found that female negotiators offering a compromise proposal were perceived as warmer and more trustworthy, but less assertive, than male negotiators (Maoz 2009). And despite little evidence that women are more “peaceful” foreign policymakers than men (one study found that Albright’s presence had no pacifying effect on U.S. foreign policy), there is a prevailing stereotype that female leaders will use less force (Lasher 2005). In fact, as two studies have found, the exact opposite may be true (Post and Sen 2020; Schramm and Stark 2020).

What’s more, these gender stereotypes are prescriptive as well as descriptive. They not only set an expectation for how men and women *do* act, but also how they *should* act (Rudman and Phelan 2008; Rudman et al. 2012; Mazei et al. 2015; Kugler et al. 2018; Olekalns and Kennedy 2020)—they tell society at large that women should act like women, and not as men. These prescriptive stereotypes affect female negotiators in two chief ways. First, as women internalize these gender beliefs and subsequently strive to act in conformity with them, they engage in behaviors that disadvantage them at the negotiating table. Researchers have found that compared to men, women set lower goals (Kray and Thompson 2005), ask for less in negotiations, more readily accept subpar agreements (Eckel, De Oliveira, and Grossman 2008), are less likely to initiate negotiations (Kugler et al. 2018), and often cooperate to their detriment (Stuhlmacher and Walters 1999; Walters et al. 1998). Even mere conformity to a feminine gender role creates a perception of incompetence that encourages men to engage in tougher distributive tactics, more deception, and less willingness to concede (Kennedy and Kray 2015). Poor performance then leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy of perceived incompetence that reinforces the negative stereotype (Kennedy and Kray 2015).

Second, those negotiating with women will often punish them for acting “out of role.” Women who “act like men” by engaging in assertive behavior risk triggering a backlash for violating prescriptive stereotypes

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(Rudman and Phelan 2008; Mazei et al. 2015; Olekalns and Kennedy 2020); there is a wealth of evidence documenting the economic and social repercussions. Women who act assertively are evaluated as less likable than men who engage in similar behavior (Tinsley, Cheldelin, and Schneider 2009), receive poorer offers (Ayres and Siegelman 1995), encounter more demanding counteroffers from male counterparts (Netchaeva and Kouchake 2015), are more likely to be deceived by a male negotiating counterpart (Kray, Kennedy, and Van Zant 2014), and are viewed as less persuasive (Carli 2001). And when they engage in unethical bargaining behavior, women are judged more harshly than men who engage in the same behavior (Olekalns and Kennedy 2020). Men, on the other hand, elicit almost no negative reaction for assertive behavior (Rudman et al. 2012).

In sum, women who wish to close the negotiation gap with their male counterparts must overcome a punishing double bind: they can be perceived as likable and communal and be taken advantage of at the table, or they can be perceived as assertive and trigger a backlash that disadvantages them at the table. Thus, women cannot simply engage in counter stereotypic behavior to gain a competitive advantage. “Acting like a man” is a losing strategy.

If female negotiators can’t “act like women,” and they can’t “act like men,” then what are they to do? When investigating this dilemma, researchers have found that counter stereotypic backlash is often triggered when a woman is perceived as acting insufficiently “feminine.” In other words, it is specifically the *deficiency* of stereotypically feminine traits, rather than the use of behavior stereotypically considered to be “masculine,” that is the source of the backlash. This finding suggests that there is a way for women to—as Tinsley et al. put it—“balance and monitor one’s self-presentation as both competent (masculine) and likable (feminine)” (Tinsley et al. 2009: 240). This insight builds on Ames and Flynn’s research (2006) on self-monitoring, which found that women who skillfully adapted their behavior to include both agentic and communal characteristics wielded more influence at the table and claimed more resources in dyadic negotiations with men than women who did not. For women looking to “utilize both masculine and feminine approaches to get to yes” (Kray and Kennedy 2017), researchers have identified a few key strategies that fall into two buckets: (1) leveraging stereotypes about gender, and (2) framing assertiveness in a way that prevents counter stereotypic backlash.

### ***Leveraging Stereotypes***

One line of research has found that by playing into gender stereotypes, women negotiating with men were able to wield influence without “bringing social sanctions down on their heads” (Kray, Locke, and Van Zant 2012: 1345; see also Kray and Locke 2008). Researchers have focused in

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particular on women's ability to deploy a "feminine charm" in their negotiations, whereby they can assert their interests yet maximize their sociability and likability through low levels of flirtation, such as smiling and acting warm and friendly. Such feminine charm can thus soften the blow of assertiveness and disarm a counterpart who might otherwise lash out against a "no" from a female party. One study concluded:

[W]omen confederates who adopted a social style were *more* rather than *less* influential than those who adopted a task-focused style because the former were perceived to be more likable. . . . women's displays of competence alone threatened men's higher status, and were insufficient to overcome women's lower status. By combining competence cues with sociability cues, the threat was eliminated, thus rendering women more influential. (emphasis in original) (Kray, Locke, and Van Zant 2012: 1344)

By mixing agentic characteristics with communal warmth, women can better demonstrate their competence, influence their counterparts, and mitigate a risk of backlash. Their charm and warmth may allow them to assert themselves while remaining likable, which studies have established as correlated to better outcomes (Carli 2001; Kray and Locke 2008). One study found that female negotiators who used feminine charm tactics were perceived as (1) more effective, (2) possessing a greater understanding of the other side's interests, and (3) enhancing the other side's mood. They also achieved better economic outcomes (Kray, Locke, and Van Zant 2012). Another study found that women who conform to stereotypes of cooperativeness and vulnerability may trigger a "chivalry" reaction in their male counterparts, who "seem to play into the stereotype that women are less skilled negotiators as a result of disadvantageous feminine traits by offering special, compensating treatment to them but not to male partners" (Naurin, Naurin, and Alexander 2019: 475). However, other studies have found that women who used a flirtatious style were perceived as less authentic and more manipulative, suggesting that such a tactic (like any other) has its limits (Kray and Locke 2008).

### ***Framing Assertiveness***

Researchers also have identified tactics that allow women to succeed *without* leveraging gender stereotypes. These tactics allow women to be assertive and display other agentic characteristics in ways that are perceived as legitimate (and thus tolerable) by their male counterparts and that do not trigger a counter stereotypic backlash. Researchers primarily have focused on four chief strategies.



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First, women who emphasize their position of authority have been able to diminish backlash (Mazei et al. 2015). As Tinsley et al. has explained, women who are perceived to have high status while asserting themselves “are seen through a status and position ‘lens,’ rather than through a gender lens ... because successful executives are expected to assert themselves, this behavior is no longer perceived as a violation of expectations” (2009: 238). A study from the foreign policy domain reached a similar conclusion. An analysis of thirty-four female ambassadors in the mid-1990s found that, while these women all had faced discrimination in their *own* departments, they rarely encountered a backlash when negotiating with a foreign counterpart: “All American women ambassadors have been accorded the deference and respect appropriate to their position. The power of the United States ensures that the sex of the ambassador is irrelevant” (Lasher 2005: 46).

Second, women in lower-status positions who assert themselves may be able to mitigate backlash against them by appealing to higher-status legitimizing agents. For example, women may obtain better outcomes in negotiations involving their own promotion when they have the support of higher-status figures, especially males “who can lend social capital and credibility to their ascent” (Bowles 2012: 191). However, Bowles cautioned that simply establishing mentorship programs for women is not enough to substitute for the “old boys clubs” that traditionally have excluded women from men’s networks.

Third, researchers have found that women can more successfully assert their interests without generating a backlash when they appeal to a shared identity, reframing what otherwise might be a distributive negotiation into a communal exercise requiring collaboration. Kennedy and Kray (2015) have described this strategy as refocusing the negotiation on “superordinate identities”—by emphasizing what the negotiators had in common or their shared interests, women were able to frame their assertiveness as benefiting their male counterparts.

Finally, studies have demonstrated that women can mitigate counter stereotypic backlash when they are perceived as acting as agents (Bowles, Babcock, and McGinn 2005; Amanatullah and Tinsley 2013). Women advocating for others can minimize backlash because “[a]ssertive women advocating for others confirm gender role expectations of being supportive and nurturing,” thereby legitimizing their assertiveness (Amanatullah and Tinsley 2013: 112). One experiment found that female managers negotiating on behalf of a group are “no less likely to get what they ask for nor more likely to incur social sanctions than similarly assertive men” (Tinsley et al. 2009: 238). Moreover, research has found that since other-advocating women

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anticipate less backlash, they negotiate more assertively than self-advocating women (Mazei et al. 2015). However, researchers also have found that other-advocating women were “punished” for not negotiating assertively enough, thus swapping one set of gender constraints for another (Amanatullah and Tinsley 2013), and there may be a dampening of the positive effects when women are merely acting as representatives for a larger group, rather than as agents for a clearly identifiable person (Mazei et al. 2015).

### ***Strategies for Now***

Leveraging stereotypes and thoughtfully framing assertiveness are, as discussed above, effective strategies for women to avoid the double bind and counter stereotypic backlash. However, these strategies place the burden of adapting to stereotypes, and changing them, on the women who confront them rather than the people who hold them. The solution to gender bias in negotiation does not lie with “fixing the women.” What’s more, the labor of deploying all these tactics to build influence and ward off backlash should not be understated. The research reveals a tightrope-thin line across which female negotiators must constantly walk. They must remake themselves into negotiators who are confident but not aggressive, friendly but not weak, charming but not vulnerable. And they must do so amidst a minefield of triggers for counter stereotypic backlash.

Hopefully, further research and advocacy will help effectuate social and cultural change sufficient to upend gender stereotypes, so that women who assert themselves at the negotiation table are no longer perceived as illegitimate or threatening. However, as our society has not yet reached that point, it is valuable for women to have strategies that they can deploy in the present moment. This article follows Bowles and Thomason (2015) in arguing that there is enormous value in not only diagnosing the problems that women face but also in providing grounded, theory-based prescriptive advice that they can use today at the negotiating table. Moreover, much can be added to the literature by illustrating how recommended strategies have been utilized by high-profile negotiators such as Madeleine Albright. Studying Albright’s career can help normalize the behaviors of stereotype-defying women, broaden understandings of what it means to “act like a woman,” and exemplify the successful implementation of theory-based strategies and tactics.

### **Madeleine Albright’s Negotiation Style**

Secretary Albright first started wearing her now-famous pins after an Iraqi newspaper controlled by former President Saddam Hussein



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published a poem comparing her to a snake, an epithet with obvious gendered undertones. In her next meeting with Hussein, Albright wore a serpent on her jacket lapel to register her displeasure and her resolve to push back against his country's policies. Thereafter, if anyone from the press asked how she was feeling, she would reply, "Read my pins" (Albright 2013).

With some notable exceptions (including Hussein's poem), Albright has stated that she "didn't have any problems with foreign governments" or their leaders during her negotiations with them (Carroll 2020). However, she often has reflected on the sexist remarks and behavior that came from high-ranking officials in the Clinton administration, who made it clear that they saw her as little more than a carpool mom, no matter how high her position (Carroll 2020).

What is most interesting is not the bias itself, but Albright's approach to dealing with it, which often utilized the tactics discussed above. By leveraging stereotypes and asserting while legitimizing, Albright did more than just overcome obstacles; she built a diplomatic toolbox that no male Secretary of State could access. In part, it was *because* of her gender, and not in spite of it, that she was able to build bridges, avoid diplomatic debacles, and assert the interests of the U.S. in the new and innovative ways that she did. It is unlikely, for example, that Henry Kissinger could have so successfully wooed the attendees of an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting by singing, "Don't Cry for Me, ASEANies" from *Evita*, while wearing a long black dress and crimson lipstick (Albright 2013). Moreover, Albright achieved her success without being called "Iron Lady," "bitch," or "Ice Queen," labels with which contemporaries like Hillary Clinton and Charlene Barshefsky often were saddled (Walsh 1996; Rudman and Phelan 2008).

The two case studies below illustrate Albright's implementation of her two-pronged strategy. First, I discuss Albright's use of charm to build a crucial relationship with Senate Republican Jesse Helms. Second, I describe Albright's role in the negotiations leading up to the 1999 NATO air campaign in Kosovo. These two cases are certainly not the only ones in which Albright deployed these strategies, nor are they even the most pivotal negotiations of her tenure.<sup>4</sup> However, they are illustrative of the strategies that she deployed both domestically and abroad.

### ***Leveraging Gender Stereotypes: Deploying a Charm Offensive Against Jesse Helms***

In a 1997 article assessing the first eight months of Albright's tenure as Secretary of State, the *Wall Street Journal* noted, "[I]n the male-bonding

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world of the State Department, Ms. Albright... has brought an overt femininity and a flirtatiousness to the job” (Robbins and McGinley 1997). When asked directly whether she flirted with her negotiation counterparts, Albright laughed and replied: “I did. I did. Absolutely” (Maher 2009).

Albright used gender stereotypes to build critical relationships, including with foreign counterparts (Lasher 2005; Kray, Locke, and Van Zant 2012). At an ASEAN conference where participants traditionally gave musical performances, she sang a duet from *West Side Story* with Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov called “East–West Story.” Playing with the lyrics, she sang, “The most beautiful sound I ever heard—Yevgeny, Yevgeny, Yevgeny,” and Primakov replied in turn, “Madeleine Albright—I just met a girl named Madeleine Albright” (Albright 2013: 444). Throughout her tenure, Albright’s reportedly “candlelit” dinners with Primakov were so frequent that at her 60th birthday party a top aide joked that her upcoming autobiography was titled “Strange Bedfellows” (Robbins and McGinley 1997).

Albright allowed foreign counterparts to charm her in return. The French foreign minister often greeted her with roses and a kiss on the hand (Lasher 2005). Other foreign dignitaries showed their affection in similar ways, leading Albright to quip, “I invented the art of diplomatic kissing” (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015a: 13). After a photo of her gazing into Sean Connery’s eyes went viral, on her next trip to Saudi Arabia the Saudi Ambassador escorted her through the airport, shouting, “Make way for Madeleine Albright, the new Bond girl!” (Albright 2013: 444). Albright recalled that her counterparts went to such great lengths to parade her around their countries that she developed a catchphrase to turn their attention to the work at hand: “I have come a long way, so I must be frank” (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015c: 3).

While such charm may be dismissed as simply the trappings of cultural diplomacy, to Albright, “[E]very diplomatic conversation really does begin in a human way” (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015c: 3). The personal relationships that Albright nurtured with her charm yielded real results, and there is perhaps no better example of this than the relationships she built with Congressional Republicans, whose assistance Albright sought in furthering her agenda. One Republican on whom Albright turned her charm was the firebrand Jesse Helms, the controversial senator from North Carolina who stood in stark ideological opposition to her.

One of Albright’s primary goals in her first year as Secretary of State was, in her words, “to reengage a bipartisan spirit. It’s a fairly pragmatic thing to say, given the fact that everybody I have to deal

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with on the Hill in chairmanship positions is a Republican” (Lippman 2000: 1739). Moreover, after the end of the Cold War, the Department of State could no longer depend on a blank check from Congress (Albright 1998). As Albright framed the challenge at the time, “For the first time since the early 1930s, we face no single powerful enemy to concentrate the mind. To most Americans, the success or failure of U.S. foreign policy no longer seems a matter of life and death. We invest fewer resources in defence, diplomacy, and development” (Albright 1998: 50–51). In such an environment, Albright’s foreign policy agenda lived or died with Congress, and in particular Helms, who chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee while she was Secretary of State.

Albright first met Helms during her confirmation hearing in January 1997, when she pledged that she would “never advocate giving up sovereignty of the American people in an area where it is in our national interest” (Lasher 2005: 75–76). Two months later, Helms invited her to visit his alma mater, Wingate University, where they were photographed holding hands (Lasher 2005). During that trip, Albright gifted Helms with a nightshirt that read: “Somebody at the State Department Loves You” (Albright 2013). Later that year, in May, Albright gave Helms the first dance at her 60th birthday party (Matthews 1997). One report at the time said this of Albright’s strategy: “‘Wooring’ is the only word to describe her campaign to win over Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Jesse Helms” (Robbins and McGinley 1997).

By the end of her first year in office, Albright and Helms had developed a strong personal relationship and deep mutual respect. When asked his opinion of the Secretary, Helms remarked, “Albright understands the world like a refugee, a multilingual, multicultural warrior for human rights and democratic principles” (Lasher 2005: 76). Helms’s confidence in Albright spread to other Senate Republicans. One political consultant reportedly noted at the time that she had “a trust level with conservatives enjoyed by no secretary of state since [John Foster] Dulles” (Dobbs 1997a).

That high degree of trust took Albright’s agenda far. It was on their trip to Wingate that Helms conceded to Albright that he would no longer block ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention—a key agenda item for the administration—and afterward he let it through his committee for the first time (Albright 2013). Their relationship also was pivotal to other achievements, including NATO expansion; a major reorganization of the State Department; a delay in pulling back U.S. troops from Bosnia; the abolition of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the U.S. Information Agency; payment by

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the U.S. of its debt to the UN; and a reversal of the Senate's rampage on the State Department's budget (Lasher 2005). And when she faced criticism in the early stages of the NATO air campaign in Kosovo, which commentators derided as "Madeleine's War," Helms called the Secretary to reassure her that her job was secure, saying, "Remember, if anyone tries to take your job, they'll have to go through this committee" (Albright 2013: 451).

Albright also turned her charm on the American people. Unlike any other Secretary of State before her, she pursued the public's adoration. To Albright, the public's support was pivotal to holding Congress's feet to the fire on her agenda. As one of her aides explained:

What makes Pete Domenici and Mitch McConnell or Hal Rogers or Bob Livingston give us more money is not because they suddenly think foreign policy is great. It's because when they come into a room with Madeleine Albright, there are 10 TV cameras there ... Jesse Helms has never been as popular as the day he was leading Madeleine Albright around his hometown. He had five thousand people in a stadium cheering, and those people didn't all vote for him. That's power. (Lippman 2000: 1740)

In just her first year in office, Albright made nineteen domestic trips, more than any of her predecessors (Lasher 2005). She read to children, accompanied senators to their hometowns, and spoke at colleges across the country to crowds swelling into the thousands. One biographer summed up her draw as such: "For the first time, instead of seeing a middle-aged white man in a dull suit, they see a grandmother in a flak jacket, someone whom people flock to see like a rock star" (Blood 1999: 264). No other Secretary of State had so effectively wielded their popularity—and gender—as a key tool in negotiations with Congress. Albright "sought to redefine the job of America's top diplomat in a way not attempted since the days of Henry Kissinger" (Lasher 2005: 59). By the end of her first year as Secretary, Albright had endeared herself not just to Republicans, but the entire country, giving her the leverage she needed to effectively implement the Clinton administration's foreign policy agenda.

### ***Asserting while Legitimizing: Kosovo and the NATO Air Campaign***

Although Albright's use of charm and femininity in her personal relationships was important to her success, she is perhaps better known for her searing bluntness and assertiveness, most often deployed when she was standing up to her own administration's officials or the many

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dictators with whom she dealt (Maher 2009). It was a reputation she intentionally cultivated, telling interviewers:

As the first woman Secretary of State ... I think that there is an attempt by—if the person on the other side is a man—to think that he can charm you and you're just a pushover. And I ultimately got to be known as not being a pushover. (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015b: 6)

When Albright visited a military base, she made sure to be photographed surrounded by soldiers and wearing a flak jacket or a Stetson hat (Lasher: 2005). In one famous anecdote, a White House official once walked by her and then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili and greeted them as “war and peace.” Shalikashvili reportedly shot back: “Yes, but which is which?” (Albright 2013: 832–833).

What's perhaps most fascinating about Albright's assertiveness is not that she acted aggressively, but *how* she did so. She framed her assertiveness in a manner that prevented backlash. In keeping with many of the research findings explored above, when Albright asserted her interests, she most often:

1. relied on her position as Secretary of State
2. relied on legitimizing agents
3. positioned herself as acting as an agent for the US, while also emphasizing superordinate identities
4. relied on her personal background and biography

The last tactic is not mentioned in the literature reviewed above but was nevertheless a centerpiece of some of Albright's negotiations (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015b).

It cannot be said with certainty that these tactics made Albright's male counterparts less inclined to lash out when she took an assertive position. But Albright has recalled that she often used these framing devices to mitigate gender-based backlash or dismissals and that they gave her assertions legitimacy and authority (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015c). Albright relied on these tactics in one of her most challenging negotiations—rallying international support for a NATO-led air campaign in Kosovo.

Albright first encountered Serbia's President Slobodan Milošević during her tenure as US Ambassador to the UN. The disintegration of the Yugoslav federation brought with it a series of bloody wars for independence in the 1990s, the fourth of which, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see, e.g., Ullman 1996), was well underway when Albright became an ambassador in 1993. She vigorously called for the use of force to stop the Serb assault (Albright 2013) but was outnumbered by both the Pentagon<sup>5</sup> and

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a wary Secretary of State (Christopher Warren). For two years the Clinton administration refused to apply a credible threat of force, moving forward only after the genocide in Srebrenica (Albright 2013).

Albright's concern for Bosnia and the rest of the Balkans was "personal, even visceral" (Lasher 2005: 69). She had lived under authoritarianism, fleeing Czechoslovakia with her family after the communist takeover when she was almost two years old, coming to the U.S. nine years later. Because of these experiences, as well as her studies, Albright understood the importance of the region, its potential to join a free Western Europe, and the dangers of autocratic rule (Albright 2013). She believed that no one stood in the way of a free and democratic Balkans more than Milošević. She saw Milošević as an "irrational" thug, a "ruthless opportunist" who would respond only to force. And though Albright was not able to convince the Clinton administration—let alone the international community—to answer her call for intervention during the Bosnian civil war, when she became Secretary of State in 1997 she had a second chance to face Milošević, this time in Kosovo (Albright 2013).

The Albanian community in Kosovo had declared its independence in 1991, following Milošević's decision in 1989 to roll back a slate of constitutional measures granting the area a fully autonomous status. But the international community largely had been too distracted with the region's other crises to pay Kosovo much attention. Before Secretary Albright assumed office, the Albanian Kosovars had used mostly peaceful methods to resist Milošević, electing Ibrahim Rugova to lead a shadow government and press for full independence. However, a violent resistance movement called the KLA had launched small-scale attacks against the Serb population in Kosovo, and by January 1998, it became clear that Milošević was preparing for a wider military crackdown. To Albright, it was time to oust Milošević for good (Albright 2013).

Despite her resolve, it took Albright over a year to consolidate support for an intervention in Kosovo. After a failed first start with the Contact Group—a task force consisting of the US, Russia, the U.K., France, Germany, and Italy—Albright attempted to shore up support for an intervention by NATO. To do so, she had to convince the administration that Milošević would only capitulate in the face of a credible military threat, cajole US allies to join in the effort, and keep US adversaries like Russia from standing in the way. Aided in part by Milošević's own continued aggression, by January 1999 Albright had successfully pushed the US administration's Principals Committee to endorse a plan to force Milošević to the table through a NATO-led air campaign. Not long after, she flew to Moscow and secured



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Russia's cooperation following a lengthy negotiation with Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov. After a final diplomatic push in Rambouillet in February 1999 ended in a stalemate between the Kosovars, the KLA, and Milošević, Albright secured what she had been seeking for years: the will of the international community to confront Milošević militarily and force him to the table. In March 1999, the NATO air campaign was launched. Three months later, in June, Milošević capitulated and withdrew his forces from the region, agreeing to a UN Interim Administration Mission over Kosovo (Albright 2013).

Throughout her time as UN ambassador, and during her yearlong campaign as Secretary to rally a NATO air campaign, Albright had to push back relentlessly against Milošević's manipulations at the negotiation table and pressure the Clinton administration and the international community to adopt her strategy. Those efforts highlighted both her ferocity as a negotiator as well as the difficulties she faced as a woman spearheading a military intervention. The remainder of this section analyzes how Albright used the four framing devices set forth above to make the case for a NATO intervention to both her allies and adversaries.

**Factor 1: Relying on her own status.** Albright has noted that when she was UN ambassador and spoke up on the need to confront Milošević during the Bosnian war, her words carried little weight. She often got knocked down the pecking order during Principals Committee meetings, especially when confronting then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell, who insisted that a US military engagement in Bosnia would be nothing but a lengthy and deadly affair. She wrote, "In the face of all his medals and prestige, I found it hard to argue with Powell about the proper way to employ American force. Even though I was a member of the Principals Committee, I was still a mere female civilian" (Albright 2013: 237). Her sparring matches with cabinet members largely reached the same result, with officials ignoring or dismissing her, sometimes with overtly sexist remarks. Although then-Secretary of State Christopher encouraged her to speak her mind, she was not taken seriously. She wrote, "I'd speak. And then Tony Lake would go [dismissing me]. And then somebody would say, 'Don't be so emotional, Madeleine'" (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015c: 4).

After Albright became Secretary of State, her ability to assert herself effectively rose considerably. When National Security Adviser Sandy Berger criticized Albright's advocacy for the use of force in Kosovo, she interrupted him, saying:

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I'm tired of this. Every time someone talks about using force, they're subject to ad hominem attacks. Five years ago, when I proposed using force in Bosnia, Tony Lake never let me finish my argument. Well, now I'm Secretary of State and I'm going to insist we at least have this discussion. (Albright 2013: 489–490)

And they did. Leveraging her “louder voice” as Secretary of State, Albright pressured the Principals Committee to take her seriously and persuaded the administration to lead an intervention in 1999 (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015b).

**Factor 2: Relying on others' status.** Appealing to higher-status legitimizing agents was also key to Albright's ability to assert herself successfully. When pushing for intervention in Bosnia as UN ambassador, she often emphasized that President Clinton valued her counsel, in order to increase the power of her arguments (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015c: 5). Later, as Secretary, and with the President in the room, it made a big difference when the President would say, “I want to hear what Madeleine has to say” or asked, “What does the Secretary of State think?” (Carroll 2020). By waiting for that validation from the largest voice in the room, Albright was able to anchor her advice to a higher authority. She has noted that the President's validation was one of the primary reasons that any of the men with whom she had worked as ambassador took her seriously as Secretary of State. To those men who had known her before she entered politics, and then diplomacy as UN ambassador, she was still just a “a carpool mother... somebody who would cook dinner for them.” In Albright's view, her nomination “obviously would not have worked if it hadn't been for President Clinton” and his championship of her qualifications (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015a: 9).

**Factor 3: Emphasizing agency and superordinate identities.** When Albright asserted herself, she often told her counterparts that she spoke bluntly and forcefully not on her own behalf, but as an agent of the US. At the same time, she emphasized the principles and interests that she shared with her counterpart. She was not blunt because *she* was blunt—she was blunt because shared interests were urgently at stake, or because she was promoting the positions of the US. In her memoir, writing of the time she flew to Moscow to get the Russian government's formal support of the NATO air campaign, she described a pivotal moment in her negotiations with Foreign Minister Ivanov that took place during the intermission of a performance of *La Traviata*:

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During the intermission, Ivanov and I went into an anteroom, where champagne and caviar were laid out. I didn't waste words. "Look, Igor," I said, "I'll tell it to you straight. If Kosovo explodes, we'll face huge obstacles in working together on a whole range of issues. We can't let that happen. There has to be a political settlement. But the Albanians won't lay down their arms unless NATO is there to protect them. And Milošević will never allow NATO in unless we threaten force. The Europeans are worried about your reaction if NATO tries to act without going to the Security Council, but I can't entrust this to the council, because Milošević knows you will veto force, which means our threats won't be credible, which means there will be no political settlement, which means war in Kosovo. (Albright 2013: 506)

Albright essentially had thrown down the gauntlet at Ivanov's feet, but she did not frame her confrontation in terms of how he must do what she wanted simply because she wanted it. She rooted her assertiveness in the idea that larger, global principles and goals that they *both* shared were at stake. After days of gridlock, her framing of the issue helped sway Ivanov not to stand in the way of a NATO intervention (Albright 2013).

**Factor 4: Leveraging her expertise.** To Albright, Milošević was a uniquely challenging negotiation counterpart, at once a "hearty" and "stylish" character who was also relentlessly manipulative (Albright 2013: 232). As Milošević seemed to live in a distorted version of reality, Albright's conversations with him felt like entering into a "parallel universe" (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015b: 5). Reflecting later on their negotiations, she viewed them as "one of the worst experiences of her life" (Dobbs 2000: 416). What anchored her, and occasionally successfully threw Milošević off his guard, was her deep historical knowledge of the region, gained through her personal background as well as her studies. Milošević could not drag their negotiation down a rabbit hole into his Alice-in-Wonderland version of events, because Albright's keen understanding of the region allowed her to call out his efforts to manipulate her analysis. She recalled one negotiation with Milošević in Belgrade, where he first attempted to charm her:

I was not charmed. And he started telling me about Serb history. And this is where my own background was a disadvantage to him, because he was telling me everything—I said, "Look, you don't need to tell me. I know everything about Serb history. I've spent my life studying this. I actually speak Serbian." (Mnookin, Sebenius, and Burns 2015b: 6)

Milošević was unable to anchor the conversation in his distorted version of events because Albright pushed back with the full moral

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and technical authority of both a refugee from the region and a historian.

## Conclusion

Of her many diplomatic achievements, one of Madeleine Albright's lasting impacts was her modeling of a new paradigm for women who negotiate on the world stage. Just as she was able to deliver a blistering one-liner without an avalanche of criticism decrying her "unladylike" behavior, she could charm reluctant allies like Jesse Helms into enduring relationships. Moreover, she did so in a way that yielded concrete, lasting results for the foreign policy agenda of the United States and bolstered the State Department's credibility around the world.

Albright's example shows that it is not always necessary to overcome assumptions about identity; instead, they may be used as an advantage. Secretary Albright knew well what her male counterparts assumed about her, and she used those assumptions to wrangle together unlikely allies, turn the Republican foreign policy agenda on its head, and smooth over diplomatic tiffs. She demonstrated that, in certain situations, such assumptions may be an asset rather than a liability. And when she needed to assert her positions forcefully, either abroad or within the Clinton administration, she relied on many of the same tactics that have been found to minimize counter stereotypic triggers, including relying on her own position of authority and on others as legitimizing agents; positioning herself as an agent while also emphasizing superordinate identities; and leaning on her own personal background and biography.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Robert Mnookin, Nicholas Burns, and James K. Sebenius of the American Secretaries of State Project (SOSP), sponsored by the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, for their encouragement and guidance, as well as their generous provision of material from interviews with Secretary Albright.

## NOTES

1. This assertion is informed by the author's participation on teams teaching negotiation courses at Harvard.

2. It is important to note that almost all the studies analyzed in these meta-analyses, and mentioned in this section of the article, involve dyadic economic bargaining situations in Western contexts. There are very few studies on the role of gender in international dispute resolution (Post and Sen 2020; Schramm and Stark 2020). Some have noted the need to evaluate how gender has impacted the negotiation practices of Secretaries of State (Menkel-Meadow 2019). The current research offers only imperfect analogues to the more complex realm of

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international diplomacy and negotiation, which often involves both economic and non-economic, multiparty bargaining situations.

3. None of these assumptions—whether applied to international dispute resolution or any other type of bargaining behavior—are grounded in reality (Neiderle and Vesterlund 2008). One meta-analysis concluded that “[c]onsidering all the factors that shape our decisions to be competitive or cooperative in interpersonal bargaining, our gender accounts for but a small fraction” (Walters, Stuhlmacher, and Meyer 1998: 23). Women’s true negotiation styles are far richer, more complex, and more diverse than the stereotypes would have us believe.

4. It is important to note that while these case studies look favorably on Secretary Albright’s negotiation style, such praise does not suggest approval of every aspect of her tenure in the Clinton Administration. Albright faced much controversy, perhaps most infamously around her failure to galvanize sufficient UN action in the face of the Rwandan genocide and her response to the death of half a million Iraqi children due to US-led sanctions. This article does not seek to diminish the significance of these controversies. Rather, it seeks only to highlight the strategies of an innovative female negotiator.

5. After hearing nothing but negative reports on the possibility of an invasion from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell, then-Ambassador Albright asked in exasperation, “What are you saving this superb military for, Colin, if we can’t use it?” According to Powell’s memoir, the question nearly gave him an aneurysm (Albright 2013: 236).

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