All About Politics?

The American Electoral Cycle and Decision-Making in War

Andrew Payne – Merton College

Trinity Term 2019

Word Count: 100,000

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DPhil in International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford.



Abstract

How does electoral politics affect presidential decision-making in war? As both Commanders-in-Chief and elected officeholders, American presidents must balance the national interest with their often competing interest in political survival when assessing alternative strategies in war. Yet despite the increasing attention paid to domestic political explanations of international relations, surprisingly little has been written on the electoral connection. It can still seem as if the politicians are left out of international politics. Grounded in the field of foreign policy analysis and drawing on the logic of democratic constraint, this thesis argues that electoral pressures in fact play a profound role in wartime decision-making, systematically pushing and pulling the president away from courses of action he perceives to be strategically optimal. Going beyond the existing literature's focus on cases of conflict initiation, it outlines five mechanisms – *delay*, *dampening*, *spur*, *hangover* and *spoiler* – which capture the ways in which electoral considerations shape both decisions to escalate an ongoing conflict and efforts to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Rich historical case studies of the wars in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq illustrate how these pressures conform to a rhythm dictated by the electoral cycle. Using a qualitative methodological approach, employing material from extensive archival research and a series of interviews with senior officials, this thesis offers an in-depth look at exactly *how* electoral constraints have materially affected past decisions. The findings of this thesis carry broader implications for the literature on democracy and war, enriching our understanding of electoral accountability, and provide a new conceptual lens through which scholars can analyse presidential decision-making.

Contents

Introduction 1

Elections and Foreign Policy 5

Summary of the Argument 12

Methodology 13

Theoretical Grounding 24

Structure of the Thesis..... 27

I – Electoral Constraints and Decision-Making in War 29

The Logic of Electoral "Constraint" 29

When Do Electoral Constraints Matter? 33

How Do Electoral Constraints Matter? 44

The Rhythm of the Electoral Cycle 55

Assumptions 60

Alternative Explanations 65

II – Truman, Eisenhower and the Korean War 77

Expanding the War 81

Seeking an Armistice 97

Alternative Explanations 118

Conclusion 130

III – Lyndon Johnson and the "Americanization" of the Vietnam War 137

"Americanizing the War" 139

The Pursuit of Peace 153

Alternative Explanations 168

Conclusion 174

IV – Richard Nixon and the "Vietnamization" of the War 177

Seeking Victory 179

Seeking Re-Election 185

Alternative Explanations 202

Conclusion 205

V – George W. Bush and the "Surge" in Iraq 209

The "Surge" 213

Two Clocks and a SOFA 238

Alternative Explanations 259

Conclusion 267

VI – Barack Obama and the Endgame in Iraq 271

A Responsible Plan to End the War 274

"Going to Zero" 280

Alternative Explanations 297

Conclusion 301

Conclusion 307

Reviewing the Evidence 308

Democracy and War 314

Future Research 320

Bibliography 325

Introduction

"We… have to realise, Henry, that winning an election is terribly important."

Richard Nixon[1]

"Politics and military; and politics and diplomacy; these are all interwoven."

General William C. Westmoreland[2]

It is an inconvenient truth, rarely admitted, that leaders habitually take electoral considerations into account when making decisions about military and diplomatic strategy in war. At once Commander-in-Chief and holder of the highest elected office, presidents must balance the often competing objectives of the national interest with personal political survival when assessing alternative strategies in war.[3] While arguably true of all regime types, this is especially the case in democracies like the United States, where a fixed four-year electoral cycle provides clear and periodic opportunities for voters to give their verdict on the leader's performance and thus hold them to account. Elections therefore represent the bedrock of democratic accountability. Any U.S. president cannot craft policy without due regard for the anticipated reaction of public opinion without risking the forfeit of his or her future political life and vision for the country.[4]

It is surprising, then, that so little has been written on the relationship between electoral politics and wartime decision-making. To be sure, there has been a notable growth in the attention paid to domestic political explanations of international relations in recent years,

[1] Nixon and Kissinger, 3 August 1972, WHT, RNL.
[2] Westmoreland, Oral History, AMHI.
[3] Trubowitz (2011); Bueno de Mesquita and Ray (2004). For a classic statement of the political survival motivation, see Downs (1957).
[4] Since all past U.S. presidents to date have been men, this thesis uses the pronouns he/him. The author looks forward to the day when this grammatically convenient yet socially regrettable fact requires revision.

and a rich literature now exists concerning the broader role of democratic accountability in foreign policy decision-making, especially as applied to the United States. A whole host of internal determinants of foreign policy have been examined, including public opinion, partisanship, and Congress.[5] Collectively, these studies undergird key research programs exploring varied theoretical phenomena, including audience costs and the democratic peace.[6] Yet while this thesis naturally touches on many of these issues in some way, it is distinct in its focus on an often-overlooked component: the influence of specifically *electoral* constraints, defined here as the institutional limitations on presidential decision-making imposed by the U.S. electoral cycle. Opinion polls and the atmosphere in Congress of course act as political bellwethers for any elected official, but the relative weight accorded to them will vary depending on how close the "accountability moment" of Election Day is, to use a phrase famously coined by George W. Bush.[7] As such, then, a major purpose of this thesis is to highlight the much-understudied and often surprising electoral face of democratic accountability, putting the politicians back into international politics.

Specifically, this thesis explores how electoral politics influences presidential decision-making in war. In doing so, it makes a number of important contributions, which may be roughly divided into three categories. The first is conceptual in nature. Within the much smaller literature which does address the role of elections, there is an apparent disagreement on the fundamental question of *how* they affect the development of policy. Traditionally, adherents of what is called here the "accountability" approach suggest that

[5] On public opinion, see especially Baum and Potter (2015); Holsti (2004). On partisanship, see Kupchan and Trubowitz (2007). On Congress, Howell and Pevehouse (2005, 2007) and Kriner (2010).
[6] A useful overview is Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2012).
[7] "Bush Says Election Ratified Iraq Policy," 16 January 2005, *Washington Post*. Available online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A12450-2005Jan15.html (accessed 25 September 2019).

elections encourage leaders to act cautiously in matters of war and peace. Against this, diversionary war theorists generally see elections as phenomena which may incentivise belligerence. This thesis demonstrates that while not mutually exclusive, the former perspective best captures the effect that electoral politics typically has on a leader's behaviour. Elections tend to act as a constraint on wartime decision-making, and not an opportunity to use force.

A related problem in existing studies relates to the dependent variable of interest, which in the vast majority of existing analyses refers to initial decisions to enter into a conflict or the "use of force" by the United States short of war. It seems plausible, however, that electoral constraints do not simply dissipate once an initial decision to enter into a conflict is made. Instead, these pressures will likely continue to exert influence after the Rubicon has been crossed and the President finds himself actively carrying out his additional responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief. This thesis, then, examines how the domestic political calendar influences decision-making *during* war, with a primary emphasis on decisions to escalate or de-escalate a conflict. Filling this conceptual gap in the literature is no trivial matter. Contrary to much conventional wisdom in international relations theory, war outcomes are not pre-determined based on some probabilistic relationship between relative capabilities.[8] Instead, it matters how leaders choose to fight a war and how they subsequently approach negotiations aimed at reaching a peaceful settlement. If, as this thesis argues, both of these activities are conditioned by political pressures generated by the electoral cycle, addressing this lacuna in existing studies of elections and war is of considerable importance.

The second form of contribution this study makes is methodological. The existing literature is overwhelmingly quantitative and theoretical in nature. While this has proven

[8] Fearon (1995).

invaluable in establishing a number of important patterns about elections and foreign policy, less work has been done on understanding the full causal mechanisms underpinning the relationships identified. This thesis brings the rich, historical approach which is essential to understanding these deeper questions about exactly *how* electoral politics matters. Specifically, it explores in-depth case studies of the wars in Korea (1950-53), Vietnam (1963-1973) and Iraq (2003-2011), drawing on extensive original archival research and a series of elite interviews with senior decision-makers. Using this material to trace the genesis of critical decisions across the span of a conflict, it is possible to capture the nuanced role that elections play at different points of the electoral cycle in ways not easily observable through other methods.

The final contribution made relates to the several empirical and wider substantive implications of this research. While electoral politics is not a "silver bullet" which explains *everything* in any given case – and is therefore considered an *intervening* variable in the analysis that follows – it is an intrinsically significant factor which cannot be overlooked if a full account of any specific course of action is desired. Indeed, the thorough historical approach adopted here, supported with counterfactual reasoning and a consideration of paths not taken, reveals the often-crucial material significance of electoral constraints. On several occasions, the findings of this thesis imply that a series of opportunities to gain advantage on the battlefield, chances to limit the human and financial cost of a war, and possibilities to sue for peace were all missed thanks to the prevailing attention being paid to the political calendar at home. In turn, this adds nuance to the conventional wisdom regarding the effectiveness of democracies in fighting wars, instead shedding light on the institutional limitations elected leaders face during conflict.

Elections and Foreign Policy

At first glance, the claim that electoral politics is an understudied phenomenon in international relations may seem quite remarkable. Of course, we all have some intuitive sense that elections "matter" in some way. Yet exactly how, why or when they do so is not well understood. Often invoked in an *ad hoc* manner to give colour to historical accounts of international politics, the systematic analysis of the relationship between foreign policy and American presidential elections is a blind spot in an otherwise bountiful literature on the domestic components of international politics.

There are a number of plausible reasons for what some scholars have recently called a "persistent lack of attention to the relationship between foreign policy and American presidential elections."[9] First, the assumption that the president has a relatively free hand in foreign policy compared to domestic affairs, most famously articulated in the "two presidencies" thesis, has helped erect an artificial distinction between the president's dual responsibilities as a statesman in the international sphere and elected politician at home.[10] Second, the dominance of realism, whether in its classical or structural form, further embedded the idea that international politics was a professional activity which is not or should not be responsive to the ill-informed whims of the voting public.[11] Third, and perhaps most relevant to the political science literature, the dominance of quantitative methods has hamstrung scholars in efforts to unearth the often subtle and tacit evidence of electorally-motivated behaviours which may be construed as cynical and as such hidden from the public record. Yet just because this evidence is difficult to observe using a scholar's preferred methodology does not mean, as some appear to conclude, that the relationship between elections and foreign policy does not exist, for statistical significance

[9] Johnstone and Priest (2017) 1.
[10] Wildavsky (1966). See also Howell (2011).
[11] Nincic (1992); Holsti (2004).

is not the same thing as historical reality.[12] Even those scholars who do find evidence of a relationship between policy-making and elections using these methods admit that their findings are "probably just the visible tip of the iceberg."[13]

Historians and qualitatively-minded political scientists are perhaps better equipped to illuminate the electoral connection, yet even here the move towards a more systematic examination of the influence of elections is a relatively recent phenomenon, sparked by Thomas Schwartz's presidential address at *SHAFR* just a decade ago.[14] As the "internationalist turn" in diplomatic history continues apace, the internal politics of American foreign policy has been at risk of falling by the historiographical wayside.[15] While a number of valuable overviews of the influence of domestic politics on U.S. policymaking in general remain, few have zeroed in on the role of elections.[16] In this respect, then, a recent collection of studies centring on several presidential campaigns of the 20th century, edited by Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest, is a very welcome update to Robert Divine's earlier and now dated examination of presidential races and foreign policy debates of the 1950s.[17] Equally refreshing is Michael Armacost's sketch of how the various phases of a presidential campaign have generated opportunities and threats to a president's priorities in foreign affairs, drawing on the author's extensive diplomatic experience and anecdotal evidence.[18] Andrew Preston's overview, meanwhile, similarly notes the long and inextricable link between electoral politics and American policies overseas, rightly declaring the traditional notion that "politics stops at the water's edge" to be a "fictive nonsense."[19]

---

[12] See, for instance, Gowa (1998); Moore and Lanoue (2003).
[13] Gaubatz (1999) 86.
[14] Schwartz (2008). See also Logevall (2009).
[15] Logevall (2009); Hanhimäki (2003).
[16] Small (1996); Zelizer (2012).
[17] Johnstone and Priest (2017); Divine (1974).
[18] Armacost (2015).
[19] Preston (2015) 220.

Efforts by political scientists to go beyond the general notion that elections "matter" have generated little consensus and much controversy. As Douglas Foyle observes, "public opinion seems more prone to influence decision makers when they face an upcoming election, but it remains unclear whether it causes presidents to act more forcefully or more timidly."[20] As mentioned earlier, it is possible to divide these studies along two broad lines:

The "Accountability" Approach

In what we might term the "accountability" school, elections are considered to encourage cautious and typically peaceful behaviour. Since democratic leaders are vulnerable to retrospective punishment at the polls for the implementation of any unpopular foreign policy initiative, they are incentivised to avoid any course of action which strays too far from their constituents' preferences. While some point to increased presidential responsiveness to these preferences as an election approaches, whatever their nature,[21] most agree that electoral accountability systematically pushes leaders towards more peaceful choices, since voters tend to be conflict-averse. The most well-known empirical work here remains Kurt Gaubatz's finding that democracies tend to avoid entering into wars as an election approaches, instead engaging in conflicts more often after polling day.[22] More recent work has supported this conclusion, pointing out that leaders are freer to use force after an election than before, since this is where audience costs and other political constraints are lowest in an electoral cycle.[23]

Other scholars have argued that presidential caution in an election year stems not from responsiveness to the preferences of the voting public, but to more pragmatic concerns

[20] Foyle (1999) 272.
[21] Shapiro and Jacobs (2000); Canes-Wrones (2006).
[22] Gaubatz (1991, 1999).
[23] Chiozza (2017); Potter (2013). See also Auerswald (2000).

about the inherent risks of failure in any policy initiative. Since the overwhelming preoccupation with campaigning leaves little time to embark on new ventures in foreign affairs anyway, most presidents are best advised to sit on their hands and "stick with safe themes and patriotic rhetoric."[24] This frequently makes presidents "prudent to the point of inaction during their fourth year."[25]

The latest studies of electoral accountability examine the role of term limits. Since tenure restrictions "decouple policy performance and leader survival," leaders who are not facing re-election contests are not subject to the pressures of electoral accountability, and should therefore be more conflict-prone than those who are.[26] Indeed, Conconi, Sahuguet and Zanardi find that term-limited leaders, who know they will be removed from office regardless of their policy decisions, behave like autocrats when deciding whether to use force, acting more aggressively than leaders facing voters again. Similarly, Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder find evidence that "lame ducks" are more likely to initiate conflicts than those still subject to re-election, giving further credence to Alexander Hamilton's insistence that imposing tenure restrictions on American presidents would cause "a diminution of the inducements to good behavior."[27] By implication, all these studies corroborate the claim that the presence of elections are associated with peaceful policies.

[24] Quandt (1986) 833.
[25] Nincic (1992) 108.
[26] Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) 315.
[27] Conconi, Sahuguet and Zanardi (2014); Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder (2014); Alexander Hamilton, "The Federalist Papers: No. 72." Available online at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed72.asp, (accessed 15 July 2018). See also Huth and Allee (2002); Carter and Nordstrom (2017); Haynes (2012).

The "Diversionary" Approach

The "diversionary" approach instead sees an election as a source of aggressive and conflict-prone behaviour. Noting the existence of a "rally" phenomenon, whereby a national crisis sparks a boost of patriotic support for the leader, this research suggests that leaders may artificially create such a rally through the cynical use of force, most often in order to improve their polling ahead of an election.[28] To be clear, this is not a perfect mirror image of the "accountability" approach. As adherents of that school readily acknowledge, when facing long odds in a tough re-election campaign, a democratic leader's interest in political survival logically incentivises risky policies in a "gamble for resurrection."[29] What makes this type of behaviour distinct, however, is that the electoral consequences of any chosen policy are not perceived as *risks* to be managed, but rather *incentives* to pursue. The primary objective of diversionary action is to manufacture a crisis in order to instrumentally manipulate public opinion in such a way that favours the president's electoral prospects; any strategic benefit is of secondary importance. In the "accountability" approach, by contrast, the primary objective is dealing with a problem that reaches the president's desk in a manner least electorally costly to him.

The empirical record for the diversionary hypothesis is decidedly mixed, however. Its repeated failure to show up as statistically significant in a series of studies during decades of subsequent research does not render it entirely elusive, but does suggest that it is likely the exception to the rule of caution.[30] Beyond several methodological critiques of the diversionary approach, most notably spearheaded by James Meernik and Jack Levy, there

[28] On rally effects, see Mueller (1973). For notable early examples of studies which find evidence of electorally-motivated diversionary action, see Ostrom and Job (1986); Stoll (1984); Hess and Orphanides (1995).
[29] Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) ch. 6. For perspectives on the "gambling for resurrection" mechanism, see Downs and Rocke (1994); Chiozza and Goemans (2003).
[30] Gowa (1998); Meernik (1994); Meernik (2004) 157-205; Gaubatz (1991); Potter (2007); Zeigler, Pierskalla and Mazumder (2014); Chiozza and Goemans (2003).

are several further logical reasons for its rarity in the empirical record.[31] First, in order to carry out a diversionary use of force, a suitable opportunity needs to be present, with a viable plan, sufficient military resources, and a would-be opponent.[32] If the need and opportunity are present, the expected electoral gain is still far from certain. Both the size of a "rally" effect and its duration can be small and dependent on factors outside the leader's control.[33] Moreover, this all assumes that the belligerent act taken will be perceived as successful and credited to the leader's own actions by the electorate. This is often not the case, particularly when partisan elites and the media seek to downplay any success of the incumbent, or in situations where the notion of success itself is ambiguous.[34]

More generally, foreign policy has a well-earned reputation for destroying the campaigns of innumerable presidential candidates (think Barry Goldwater and the infamous "daisy ad"), and as such typically represents more risk than opportunity as a campaign issue.[35] Though some sections of the public may be in the grips of war enthusiasm, there will usually be a prominent anti-war voice, and when the "warmonger" label has such powerful repercussions, the prudent choice for a leader is to refrain from sabre rattling at this moment of greatest political sensitivity.[36] Or, as President Bush quipped to troops deployed to the Middle East in 2006, "you don't run for office in a democracy and say, please vote for me, I promise you war."[37] In short, it seems very reasonable to conclude that the prospect of re-election keeps any belligerent behaviour of leaders in check.

---

[31] Meernik (2001); Meernik and Waterman (1996); Levy (1989).
[32] Meernik (1994); Tarar (2006).
[33] Lian and Oneal (1993); Oneal and Bryan (1995); Baum (2002); Brody (1991).
[34] Johnson and Tierney (2006); Baum and Potter (2008).
[35] Mintz and Geva (1993).
[36] Gaubatz (1999) 16-18, 55-57.
[37] "President Thanks U.S. and Coalition Troops in Afghanistan," 1 March 2006. Available online at: https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060301-3.html (accessed 9 September 2019).

Gaps

Yet if the "accountability" approach tends to be the norm, the existing literature still contains three interrelated problems which this thesis seeks to resolve.

First, there remains an overwhelming focus on cases of conflict initiation and the use of force short of war as dependent variables. It is unclear how presidents balance their often competing responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief and holder of the highest elected office when military force is already committed and engaged overseas.[38] Since we know from related studies of public opinion and war that leaders are often granted broad latitude in the beginning of a conflict, when the public "rallies" around the flag, this focus fails to capture the nuanced ways in which decision-makers are subsequently constrained as a war goes on.[39]

Second, we still lack in-depth mechanistic explanations of exactly how we might expect electoral constraints to operate in any given case. While the overwhelmingly quantitative nature of the existing literature has been helpful in identifying general patterns of conflict-aversion as an election approaches, it is limited in its ability to shed light on the more nuanced decision-making behaviours that electoral pressures generate.

Third, the existing literature tends to treat electoral pressures in an artificially bounded way which reflects the scholar's desire for neat units of analysis rather than the messiness of real life. In many cases, electoral dynamics are accounted for by dummy variables referring to a period of time preceding an election, either one quarter or the whole election year. Even in qualitative work, the focus is too often myopic, centering on presidential elections only at the height of the campaign season.

---

[38] Gartner and Siverson (1996) is a notable exception, though his focus is not on internal decision-making but the expansion of a war via the introduction of other belligerent states.
[39] Baum and Groeling (2010).

Summary of the Argument

Drawing on the logic of democratic accountability, this thesis argues that electoral politics acts as an important constraint on presidential decision-making during war. Conceptualising the decision-making process as a balancing act between often competing strategic and electoral preferences, it suggests that electoral pressures may push and pull the president away from the course of action he deems strategically optimal. Going beyond the existing literature's focus on cases of conflict initiation, this study gives primary attention to decisions to escalate or de-escalate a war in which military force has already been committed. While the initial decision to use force undoubtedly shapes the nature of any ensuing conflict in important ways, it is crucial to understand not simply *why* decision-makers decided to go to war, but *how* they decided to fight that war and sought to bring it to a conclusion. This focus is of much intrinsic significance to studies of decision-making, but also carries substantive importance, since a war is not won or lost once troops are committed; how leaders adapt to changing political and military conditions during war is a key contributing factor to a war's outcome.

More specifically, this thesis outlines five mechanisms of electoral constraint which explore exactly how electoral politics affects decision-making in war, at a level of historical specificity rarely employed in earlier studies. When the strategically optimal preference does not align with that which carries least political risk, electoral considerations may encourage the president to *delay* making a controversial decision, *dampen* its "noisier" aspects, or act as a *spur* to dial up the aggressiveness of a proposed option. In addition, a recent election may create a *hangover* effect, whereby a newly (re)elected president must contend with the commitments made during his campaign when assessing new strategies. Finally, even independent of the president's political sensitivities, the very prospect of a

change in administration can *spoil* a president's ability to conduct negotiations during a war on his preferred terms.

Which of these mechanisms operate in any given scenario is held to depend on the relative alignment between the president's strategic and electoral preferences, the salience of the issue in question, and the stage of the electoral cycle. This latter condition is particularly important, since it overcomes the existing literature's myopic focus on presidential election campaign seasons. While it remains the case that the impact of electoral pressures will naturally increase as an election approaches, the anticipation of that election season and memory of the previous one may also be important components of any electoral preference, while congressional elections may also generate similar limitations on a president's room for manoeuvre. Rejecting the narrow temporal focus of much previous work, this thesis is oriented towards explaining the key decisions concerning military and diplomatic strategy, wherever they lie in the electoral cycle, before drilling down to understand exactly how electoral pressures may (or may not) have influenced their gestation. By doing this it is possible to capture a far more accurate picture of the non-linear way in which electoral constraints affect decision-making across the political calendar.

Methodology

This thesis employs a series of historical case studies to illuminate the relationship between electoral politics and wartime decision-making. Less interested in parsimony for its own sake than a rich understanding of exactly how electoral constraints operate in specific contexts, this form of historical explanation is well-suited to this study.[40] In turn, process

[40] George and Bennett (2005) 21.

tracing, recently described as "a key technique for capturing causal mechanisms in action," is adopted to uncover evidence of the observable implications of each form of electoral constraint outlined in the following chapter.[41] While the empirical chapters embrace a degree of detailed narrative required to account for the strongly context-specific nature of decisions, the case studies are not intended as comprehensive chronicles of historical events. Instead, they focus on aspects relevant to the framework outlined in the following chapter, which like any conceptual lens necessarily highlights certain aspects at the expense of other underlying social or political explanations of each course of action.

While many other methods for establishing causation exist, process tracing carries a comparative advantage in the empirical analysis of internal decision-making processes, including the analysis of leaders' perceptions, preferences and choices.[42] Though experiments, for instance, can capture patterns of human decision-making in the laboratory, it is inherently difficult to replicate these findings in the highly contingent environment of presidential decision-making during a war. Even among more traditional qualitative approaches, methods of controlled comparison require a high degree of covariation or comparability which is difficult to achieve with such context-specific cases, something process tracing can address with its higher tolerance for equifinality.[43] Content analysis, moreover, while offering a sophisticated means of unpacking rhetoric and discourse, often abstracts presidential statements from their rich historical context. Since presidents may be expected to obscure the extent to which arguably cynical political motivations drive their decisions on matters of war and peace, it may be what goes unsaid which is most telling. These subtle inferences cannot be captured by methods insufficiently attuned to the messiness and complexity of decision-making in the real world.

---

[41] Bennett and Checkel (2015) 9.
[42] Levy (2008) 11.
[43] Bennett and Checkel (2015) 19-20; George and Bennett (2005) 214-215.

Case Selection

Three cases are examined in order to test the plausibility of the conceptual framework offered in this thesis. In each case, the analysis centres on the major decisions to escalate or de-escalate a conflict. Since the focus here is on generating insight relating to the presidential decision-making process and the specific conflicts in question, rather than explaining different types of escalation, per se, the exact episodes examined are those which feature prominently in secondary accounts of the wars in question. These include a range of decisions, including the expansion or contraction of broad political aims, shifts in military strategy entailing significant commitment of military force, the authorisation of notable military operations, and the bargaining positions adopted during negotiations. To the extent that there is variation in the susceptibility of each of these kinds of decisions to electoral pressures, this is accounted for in the conceptual framework outlined in the following chapter.

Given the aforementioned difficulties of comparing highly context-specific cases, no formal comparative analysis of decision-making across multiple wars is attempted in this thesis, which instead relies on process tracing to establish internal validity. Nevertheless, to the extent that the findings of each case can be shown to corroborate the same conceptual framework, our confidence in it should increase.[44]

The Vietnam War is arguably the "classic" example of a war in which politics and strategy were inextricably linked, as the opening quotations of this chapter suggest.[45] As such, its nature as a pivotal case for this thesis is almost self-evident. It is also an unusually rich case, covering three presidential election campaigns and supported by a documentary record which is as massive as it is revealing. In turn, this provides opportunity for much

[44] See George and Bennett (2005) 178-179.
[45] See Hughes (2014, 2015); Kimball (1998); Small (2005).

within-case variation, and sources such as taped telephone conversations provide a uniquely clear window into the contemporary decision-making environment. For all these reasons, it could be considered a "crucial" case, in that it is most likely to exhibit evidence of the causal mechanisms outlined earlier, and must do so for the broader conceptual framework to retain plausible validity.[46] The empirical analysis will focus on both the "Americanization" of the war under Lyndon Johnson and its subsequent "Vietnamization" under Richard Nixon.

Relative to Vietnam, the earlier Korean War may be considered a "most similar" case. Another Cold War conflict in Asia, it shared the same broad objective of the containment of communism and was expanded under a Democratic president before being brought to a close by a Republican successor. Temporally just a decade apart, both wars saw the U.S. rely heavily on conscription, and even share a similar cast of characters in terms of presidential advisers and senior diplomatic officers. In both cases, moreover, direct taxation was used to fund American intervention. As such, for the conceptual framework to carry plausible generalisability, it should be possible to observe similar patterns in both cases. Though a shorter war, Korea should still offer an important snapshot of a subset of electoral timeframes, especially the "lame duck" and transition periods. Of primary interest here is Truman's decision to expand the war by crossing the 38th parallel in 1950, followed by the fitful progress of armistice talks which concluded under Eisenhower in July 1953.

The war in Iraq, by contrast, represents a "most different" case, which will help indicate how far any findings from the first two cases might travel beyond their specific contexts. Unlike the first two wars, this conflict took place in the Middle East some twenty years after the end of the Cold War, initially under a Republican president who completed a full two terms before handing over to a Democratic successor. While U.S. objectives

[46] See Gerring (2008) on this and other categories of case study used here.

could be described as containment of a regional power, they did not carry the anti-communist baggage of the earlier Cold War conflicts, instead reflecting a complex blend of counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and neoconservative democracy promotion. With conscription having ended in 1973, the U.S. went to war in Iraq with an all-volunteer force, and in far fewer numbers than in the previous conflicts explored here, incurring a fraction of the casualties in the process. Finally, the war was funded primarily through borrowing, with no "war tax" levied upon voters. If electoral constraints can be identified here operating in similar ways, it would cast doubt on any critique that the patterns observed in the earlier cases were simply a product of these features. With the first draft of the history of the war having yet to fully settle, this case also offers a significant opportunity to make an original contribution to the emerging literature on its course and conduct. The episodes of particular interest to this study are the 2007 "surge," whereby President Bush sent additional troops to Iraq and shifted towards a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy, and the subsequent drawdown process started under Bush and expedited under Barack Obama.

Insofar as the war records of each president can be considered a "case within a case," it could be said that there is a lack of independence within and between these sub-cases. Yet while it is undoubtedly true that a president's decisions partially depend on the legacy of their forebears and other path-dependent actions taken in the past, process tracing can help uncover and account for these relationships which need not detract from the value of the case.[47] In addition, these dynamics offer an excellent opportunity for within-case analysis, comparing how different leaders respond to electoral pressures under roughly similar conditions. Perhaps most interestingly, they also render our studies of presidents who inherited wars somewhat "hard" tests for the central claims made here about the

[47] George and Bennett (2005) 33-34.

significance of electoral constraints, since we know that leaders who are not seen as "culpable" for starting a war should in theory be less susceptible to domestic political punishment for their outcome.[48] Often elected on a pledge to end ongoing wars, however, it stands to reason that these leaders may in fact remain acutely sensitive to voters' concerns, having politically committed to their successful conclusion. The opportunity to examine these kinds of issues and thereby enrich our understanding of electoral accountability in war only further substantiates the importance of analysing decisions beyond the initial use of force.

Since each of the three cases comprise post-1945 "wars of choice", the explanatory breadth of this thesis does not in itself extend to earlier conflicts or broader "wars of necessity." Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the patterns observed here may well hold across these different types of war. Franklin Roosevelt, for instance, while deeply concerned in private about the growing threat of war in Europe, remained very cautious in his public comments until after the 1940 election was over, and later overruled his Joint Chiefs by explicitly ordering that the invasion of North Africa should take place prior to the 1942 midterms.[49] To be sure, a series of broader changes may affect the strength of electoral constraints over time, such as the steady expansion of the franchise, the decline of censorship and increasing access to independent media sources, or the shift away from large conscripted armies towards smaller professional forces. Yet since the underlying logic of electoral accountability derives from the institutional make-up of the American political system, rather than more contingent variables, it remains plausible that the claims made here might hold in earlier periods. Nevertheless, a limitation of the case selection strategy

[48] Croco (2011).
[49] See Casey (2001) ch. 1; Lee (2019).

adopted here is that this wider applicability of the conceptual framework can only be suggested rather than tested.

Yet if this thesis remains essentially bound to the post-war experience, there are a number of reasonable justifications for this. First, and most obviously, this thesis still covers a time-span of over 60 years and examines three of the longest and most costly wars in American history. Beyond the intrinsic historical significance of studying these wars, their length allows plenty of scope for examination of decision-making during the full course of a war, beyond the initial decision to intervene.

Second, this timeframe allows for significant institutional continuity across cases, since each was fought under broadly the same bureaucratic structure, after the National Security Act of 1947 established a series of key bodies which operate in functionally similar ways to this day, including the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Korea thus serves as a particularly apt starting point as the first conflict fought under this structure. Insofar as there have been notable reforms to this bureaucratic environment, moreover, these changes have come after the end of the Vietnam War, and thus only serve to increase the utility of the Iraq War as a "most different" case. Perhaps the most notable change in this respect is the elevation of the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs as principal military adviser to the president under the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act.

Third, a focus on the American experience in fighting limited wars affords an opportunity to add nuance to the conventional wisdom that democracies are good at fighting and winning wars. According to this common line of argument, democratic leaders, who face greater domestic political costs for public policy failures than autocrats, tend to enter into wars only when highly confident of swift victory and fight harder once engaged so as to avoid incurring punishment by voters, resulting in an impressive success

rate in war of 76 percent.[50] Yet each of the wars considered here seem to deviate in important ways from this pattern.[51] Most notably, of course, it would be difficult to chalk any of the three conflicts up as a clear victory for the U.S., with two draws and a loss probably the most that could be awarded. Since electoral accountability is cited as a leading explanation for the *effectiveness* of democracies in fighting wars, a closer examination of how electoral constraints operated in these apparently contradictory cases may yield importance implications for theories of democratic victory in war.

The United States is of course not the only state to have fought limited wars, and the claims made in this thesis may well apply to other democracies. Yet the focus on the U.S. carries significant empirical and theoretical benefits. Most obviously, the United States has been engaged in some of the longest and bloodiest wars of the modern era, rendering a greater understanding of how decisions on strategy came to be of intrinsic importance. In addition, since not all democracies are alike in terms of institutional structure, a single-state analysis minimises the influence of a series of confounding variables, from the degree of enfranchisement to the openness of the media, which would make comparison between democracies difficult. While statistical methods have been able to yield important insights regarding the operation of democratic constraint in different systems,[52] a cross-national study at the level of analysis required here would be difficult.[53] In this respect, the fixed four-year electoral cycle of the U.S. adds consistency and predictability which ensures that audience costs vary exogenously across the political calendar, unlike in a parliamentary

[50] Reiter and Stam (2002) 28-33. See also Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) ch. 6; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995).
[51] See Downes (2009); Caverley (2009).
[52] Notable examples include Huth and Allee (2002); Baum and Potter (2015); Reiter and Tillman (2002); Clark and Nordstrom (2005).
[53] Auerswald (2000) is a notable exception.

system, where a prime minister can manipulate election timing in anticipation of future events.[54]

Sources

Archival research offers scholars of foreign policy decision-making a valuable glimpse into a president's calculations and preferences and is essential for any study of causal mechanisms.[55] The best sources of evidence for this thesis include contemporary memoranda, letters and meeting minutes documenting private conversations involving the president in which electoral considerations are discussed in relation to a decision of interest. The secondary literature of each war along with published documentary collections, such as the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, serve as a useful primer on the sources and holdings likely to be of most relevance.[56] Yet, since historians often ask different questions to political scientists, and an editor's assessment of the most important documents is likely to be subjective, there is no substitute for first-hand archival work.[57] This thesis therefore draws on extensive original research undertaken in the following eight archives across the United States:

i) Harry S. Truman Presidential Library (Independence, Missouri)
ii) Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (Abilene, Kansas)
iii) Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (Austin, Texas)
iv) Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library (Yorba Linda, California)
v) Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.)
vi) National Defense University (Washington, D.C.)
vii) U.S. Army Military History Institute (Carlisle, Pennsylvania)
viii) Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archive (Norfolk, Virginia)

[54] Chiozza (2017) 4; Smith (1996); Williams (2013).
[55] Larson (2001).
[56] Trachtenburg (2006).
[57] Larson (2001).

Redactions, omissions and archival procedures may still introduce biases, however. While the use of the "official" presidential library holdings, managed by the National Archives and Records Administration, is generally held to be a reliable means to access the most relevant papers relating to presidential decision-making, this is not foolproof, and does not apply to more recent cases, like Iraq, where much of the paper trail of key decisions remains classified.[58] Since creating policy motivated by electoral incentives may be considered cynical behaviour, such evidence is likely to be scarce anyway, and may never have been put to paper in official documents. One is reminded of Lyndon Johnson's remark here, that "if you have a mother-in-law with only one eye and she has it in the centre of her forehead, you don't keep her in the living room."[59] It is important, therefore, not to mistake the evidence of absence for the absence of evidence when it comes to substantiating the claim that electoral considerations "mattered." Equally, however, it is important to search beyond the surface interpretation of a document and examine its origins, authorship and purpose in the broader decision-making process, rather than simply treat a single working memorandum as a legal document, something which Henry Kissinger recently termed, perhaps self-servingly, "the curse of modern archivism."[60]

Using alternative archives can help address some of these issues, but the triangulation with other sources is essential. In part, this has been achieved through a comprehensive trawl of the relevant secondary literature of each war, as well as the use of memoirs and oral histories. Caution is of course required when interpreting these sources, which may be less reliable than contemporary "official" records, thanks to either self-serving retrospective judgements, faulty memories or simply distance of the observer from the

[58] This point should not be overstated, however. FOIA requests, collections of private individuals or non-U.S. sources and a series of leaks have yielded a relatively strong documentary record for this case.
[59] Quoted in Halberstam (1972) 424.
[60] Kissinger, Remarks at the Vietnam War Summit, LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, 26 April 2016. See also Larson (2001).

centre of decision-making processes. Nevertheless, each can help place original documents into their proper historical context, corroborate claims found elsewhere, and offer insight into aspects of a decision which may not otherwise be found. Similarly, media sources and evidence of contemporary commentary on presidential decisions by influential public figures or congressmen can be valuable measures of the public mood, which itself is crucial to a study interested in electoral politics.[61]

Finally, over twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted for this thesis with senior administration officials and military figures. This forms an important additional source of evidence for the Iraq case in particular, where a relative paucity of documentary material exists. In light of both the limited sampling frame of individuals privy to the inner decision-making process and primary interest in obtaining rich and specific qualitative data rather than achieving representativeness, a random sampling strategy was deemed inappropriate. Instead, the secondary record and open source research was used to compile an initial list of possible interviewees, while a "snowball" technique was then used to increase the size of the sample in later stages. While this approach necessarily risked introducing a degree of nonresponse bias, there is no *a priori* reason why those who agreed to be interviewed should hold systematically different views on the role of electoral politics in decision-making from those who did not. In the event, the nearly two-dozen individuals include a reasonable balance between representatives of various government departments (i.e. State, Defense, JCS, NSC and White House), civilian and military figures, and those known to have broadly sympathetic or critical views of the president's policies.

[61] Larson (2001).

Theoretical Grounding

In the spirit of "analytical eclecticism," this thesis is not intended to establish or test a new theory of international relations, per se, but instead draws pragmatically on a range of approaches which can shed light on the problem at hand – how electoral politics affects wartime decision-making.[62] Nevertheless, it can be broadly ~~be~~ considered a contribution to what has recently been described as the "domestic politics turn in IR theory."[63] Sparked by Robert Putnam's conceptualisation of international politics as a "two-level game," an increasing number of scholars now give weight to actors and institutions within the "black box" of a state.[64] While sympathetic to the idea that systemic theories can offer a parsimonious account of broad patterns, such as the likelihood of war in the international system, they cannot explain why different states make specific foreign policy choices at particular times.[65] This thesis, then, echoes Christopher Hill's statement that "foreign policy can never be abstracted from the domestic context out of which it springs."[66]

At the broadest level, this dissertation is sympathetic to the assumption inherent in many liberal approaches to international relations that regime type matters in international politics. As detailed further in the following chapter, the conceptualisation of electoral politics as a constraint on decision-making draws strongly from the same logic underpinning many institutional explanations of the democratic peace phenomenon.[67] Since war is costly, and elected leaders are particularly dependent on success for political survival, they tend to be highly cautious before entering into a conflict which could lead

[62] Sil and Katzenstein (2010).
[63] Kaarbo (2015).
[64] Putnam (1988); Trubowitz (2011); Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2012).
[65] Waltz (1996).
[66] Hill (2003) 37.
[67] Among the landmark studies are Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999); Doyle (1983a, 1983b); Russett and Oneal (2001); Ray (1995).

to their removal from office.[68] Embracing this underlying logic, this thesis zeroes in on the concept of electoral accountability, seeking to enrich our understanding of how it operates not just in relation to war entry and anticipated outcomes, but during a conflict and across the various phases of the electoral cycle, as seen through the prism of the United States, the most powerful modern democracy in the international system. In so doing, its conceptualisation of electoral constraints also shares a logic with the notion of "audience costs," whereby the prospect of domestic political punishment shapes a leader's behaviour on the international level.[69] While traditionally applied to crisis bargaining scenarios, this thesis extends the general theme of democratic accountability to the study of decision-making during a war.

While classical and structural realism has little place for public opinion, and by extension elections, in its theoretical approach, more recent trends in neoclassical realism are more useful in thinking about this dissertation's research question, given its incorporation of unit-level variables in analyses of specific foreign policy outcomes.[70] Indeed, insomuch as it conceives of domestic constraints as an intervening variable which shapes how leaders interpret and respond to international pressures, it is broadly consistent with the approach adopted here. This study may even be seen as complementary to recent efforts to move beyond a previously ad hoc treatment of intervening variables in neoclassical research, and towards a more sophisticated understanding of which of these matter and under what conditions. Under Ripsman et al.'s recent categorisation, for

[68] This derives largely from "selectorate theory," whereby the size of an incumbent's "winning margin" (i.e. the group of people a leader needs support from in order to stay in power) relative to the "selectorate" (i.e. the set of people with a say in choosing leaders) determines his or her sensitivity to democratic constraints. In an autocracy, a leader can bypass public opinion and compensate for defeat in war by doling out private goods to a small coalition of supporters. See Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) ch. 6.
[69] Fearon (1994).
[70] Rose (1998); Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro (2009); Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016).

instance, electoral politics clearly fits within a discussion of "domestic political institutions" as a key mediating variable.[71]

This thesis departs from neoclassical realism, however, when it comes to its automatic privileging of the international system over domestic politics. Perceptions, strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutions are all seen merely as filters or "transmission belts that channel, mediate and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces."[72] Yet while the relative distribution of power undoubtedly plays a role in shaping the range of possible options available to a decision-maker in any given case, the continued reification of such structural variables is largely an artificial assumption made in the name of theoretical convenience. If international politics can in some sense be viewed as the aggregated outcomes of choices by individual leaders, using the realist conception of the "national interest" as a starting point for a theory is problematic, since it is a leader's subjective assessment of that "national interest" which matters, not some independent calculation of material capabilities which is exogenous to the actual decision-making process.

It follows, then, that the field of foreign policy analysis (FPA) provides the most natural theoretical "home" for this study. As Valerie Hudson has noted, FPA's core feature is its actor-specific focus, based on the idea that "all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups."[73] As such, it can be said to offer the theoretical micro-foundations upon which traditional international relations theories are grounded.[74] Still too-often denigrated as a sub-field which offers but a laundry list of unparsimonious variables, FPA may more wisely be considered a treasure

[71] Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016) 76-80.
[72] Schweller (2004) 164.
[73] Hudson (2005) 1.
[74] *Ibid*.

trove of analytical "tools" which help us explore the crucial role of the central decision-making unit, unpacking how the subjective understandings of leaders act as funnels for other international and domestic factors.[75] Indeed, FPA has a decades-old pedigree of developing organisational, psychological and rationalist frameworks for understanding decision-making processes.[76] This thesis fully embraces its underlying approach while shining a spotlight on electoral politics as a lacuna in an otherwise impressive range of perspectives.[77]

Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this study proceeds as follows: Chapter I fleshes out a new conceptual framework for understanding the impact of electoral politics on wartime decision-making. Building on the logic of democratic constraint, it outlines in more detail five mechanisms which influence presidential behaviour and maps them across the domestic political calendar. The case studies then proceed chronologically through Chapters II to VI, beginning with the Korean War. The Vietnam and Iraq cases are sub-divided into two chapters each to account for their longer duration. The conclusion summarises the principal findings from the case studies, addresses several wider implications for the literature on democracy and war, and suggests future avenues for research.

[75] Kaarbo (2015).
[76] For comprehensive coverage, see Carlsnaes and Guzzini (2011); Thies (2018).
[77] In over 100 entries in Thies' (2018) encyclopedia of FPA, for instance, elections feature just twice in the index whereas infectious disease and organized crime get their own chapters.

I

Electoral Constraints and Decision-Making in War

> "If you're going to be involved in some type of foreign activity that is going to take resources and entail risks to forces, you need to do it in a manner that is both most practical and most effective, but at the same time try to keep your political support at home, in terms of the Congress, in terms of the American public, and with the election cycles, both midterm elections as well as presidential elections."
>
> John Brennan[1]

This chapter introduces a new conceptual framework for understanding the influence of electoral politics on presidential decision-making in war. It begins by offering a critical review of the related literature on democracy and war in order to lay the theoretical groundwork for the approach taken in this study. In the core of the chapter, a series of five mechanisms of electoral constraint are outlined, alongside the conditions under which they might be expected to operate. These are then plotted onto a model of the electoral cycle, explaining how the domestic political calendar provides a certain rhythm to the practical manifestation of democratic accountability. The chapter concludes with two further sections covering several key assumptions underpinning this framework and the alternative explanations to be explored throughout the study.

The Logic of Electoral "Constraint"

The idea that electoral politics acts as a constraint on decision-making derives from the broader literature on democratic accountability and war. In its most traditional form, drawing on the ideas of Immanuel Kant, the basic logic holds that since the public bear the

[1] John Brennan, Interview (2018).

brunt of the human and financial costs of war, they will hold a natural aversion to conflict. In a democracy, elections are the central means through which voters can retrospectively punish decision-makers for excessive belligerence. Since political leaders are at least in part motivated by the desire to remain in office, they are therefore incentivised *ex ante* to act with a degree of caution in matters of war and peace for fear of later reprisal at the ballot box.[2] Or, as Kant himself summarised: "If (as must inevitably be the case, given this form of constitution) the consent of the citizenry is required in order to determine whether or not there will be war, it is natural that they consider all its calamities before committing themselves to so risky a game."[3]

This central logic has informed decades of fruitful research analysing the connection between democracy and war. At the broadest level, of course, this insight has animated a wealth of studies analysing the institutional explanations of the democratic peace phenomenon, a core component of the liberal tradition in international relations.[4] More specifically, it spawned a profound academic interest in casualty-sensitivity and public attitudes towards war. Taking body counts as a proxy for the human costs of a conflict, John Mueller's pioneering study established and quantified the relationship between public support for a war and cumulative casualties.[5] More recent studies have added nuance to this finding, arguing that contextual factors mitigate this relationship, including the geographic distribution of casualties, recent trends, and how casualty figures are reported.[6] Public sensitivity to the financial costs of war may be of second-order importance compared to the more visceral impact of casualties, but a vibrant research programme is emerging here, too. Increased government expenditure on defence during a war has been

[2] Bueno de Mesquita et al (2003); Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995). See also Russett (1990).
[3] Kant, (1983 [1796]), 113.
[4] Among the landmark studies are Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999); Doyle (1983a, 1983b); Russett and Oneal (2001); Ray (1995).
[5] Mueller (1973).
[6] Gartner (2008); Gartner and Segura (2008); Casey (2014).

shown to be salient to the public and negatively correlated with presidential approval ratings.[7] The most recent work suggests that the *source* of funding may be particularly critical, with voters more attentive to the direct impact of taxation than the indirect costs of deficit-spending or increasing the money supply.[8]

In response to this aversion to spending blood and treasure on overseas conflicts, political leaders apparently seek to minimise the costs of war wherever possible. Since democratic leaders are particularly susceptible to domestic political backlash if they enter into such a risky endeavour as war, they appear to be more selective about doing so in the first place. This plausibly explains why democracies tend to only enter into conflicts they are confident of winning, or where the likelihood of high casualty rates is low.[9] Once in a war, moreover, they may seek to limit losses by shifting some of the burden of fighting to coalition partners, adopting military strategies which minimise fatalities (notably, favouring technology, speed and mobility over manpower and attrition), or choosing to fight on battlefields far away from their civilian population.[10] Similarly, by relying on borrowing rather than taxation, successive American administrations have shielded the public from the direct financial costs of war, thereby avoiding a divisive public debate that the imposition of a dreaded "war tax" often triggers.[11] In all these behaviours designed to free leaders from domestic constraints, we find *prima facie* evidence that such pressures exist and materially alter the way in which democracies go to war.

In recent years, this simplistic conception of Kantian constraint has been challenged. It is argued that both the costs of war and the public's sensitivity to them has been exaggerated. This is in part thanks to changes in mobilisation strategies and the character

[7] Geys (2010).
[8] Flores Macias and Kreps (2017); Kreps (2018).
[9] Reiter and Stam (2002); Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003); Siverson (1995).
[10] Valentino, Huth and Croco (2010); Casey (2014).
[11] Flores Macias and Kreps (2017); Kreps (2018).

of war. Since the demise of conscription in the 1970s, the average voter is less likely than ever to be asked to fight, particularly at a time when battlefields are increasingly occupied by drones and precision-guided munitions, rather than boots on the ground.[12] Even when the public does have "skin in the game," moreover, they may be willing to stomach a higher number of casualties than is traditionally assumed if they believe that victory is likely, that the mission in question is sufficiently worthy, or if a consensus exists among elites in favour of the war.[13] On the financial side, Jonathan Caverley has convincingly argued that these financial burdens can be shifted towards an affluent minority, particularly in democracies with high income inequality and progressive taxation systems.[14] In short, if the price of war, measured in blood or treasure, is perceived to be falling or can otherwise be redistributed away from the average voter, it seems plausible to conclude that the Kantian constraint on the use of force is being eroded as we look ahead to an era of greater permissiveness regarding decisions to deploy military force.

Yet in truth these nuances do not so much invalidate the basic premise of democratic accountability as point towards the reality that such constraints are neither fixed nor uniformly pacific in nature. If war costs less, perhaps the public, too, may be more willing to embrace it. Under certain conditions, notably in the wake of a national security crisis, and especially following a direct attack on the homeland, patriotic sentiment and a desire for revenge can also tend to fuel "war fever."[15] Moreover, in cases where the public has greater access to information about the relative costs and benefits of the use of force, and particularly when partisan elites or media sources frame this information in ways which

[12] Kaag and Kreps, (2014), 53-77.
[13] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler (2006); Jentleson (1992); Larson (1996).
[14] Caverley (2014).
[15] For the classic statement of the associated "rally" hypothesis, see Mueller (1973). See also Gaubatz (1999) 9-13; Reiter and Stam (2002) 149.

favour action, public sentiment may become more hawkish than is conventionally held.[16] In such a scenario elected leaders will surely be incentivised to dial up the aggressiveness of their policy for fear of punishment at the polling booths for excessive caution.

The term "constraint" is thus used advisedly throughout this thesis. In line with this literature on democratic accountability, it refers to the way in which elected officeholders are structurally incentivised to care about public attitudes towards war and act accordingly. Taking no particular stance on related academic debates regarding the determinants of those public attitudes, which may be more dovish or more hawkish under different circumstances, this study instead focuses on the underlying truth that policymakers both worry about those attitudes and act upon them.[17] More specifically, it explores what this means for wartime decision-making in the broader context of the American electoral cycle.

When do Electoral Constraints Matter?

Building on this logic of democratic accountability, this thesis argues that electoral constraints do not exert a constant effect on decision-making. Instead, the strength and nature of these constraints depends on the following three conditions:

Presidential Preference Alignment

In approaching decisions about military and diplomatic strategy in war, the American president has dual responsibilities. On one hand, he is Commander-in-Chief, responsible

[16] On information and the role of the media in shaping public attitudes towards war, see Baum and Groeling (2010); Baum and Potter (2008, 2015). On elite cues and framing, see Berinsky (2007, 2009); Johnson and Tierney (2006).

[17] These debates divide broadly into those who argue that the public rationally assesses the costs and benefits of war and those who instead see public attitudes as shaped by elite cues. For the former, see Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler (2006, 2009); Jentleson (1992); Larson (1996); Mueller (1973). For the latter, see especially Berinsky (2007, 2009). Arguably the best recent work bridges the divide by focusing on the role of information and mediating actors, such as political opponents and the media; see Baum and Groeling (2010); Baum and Potter (2008, 2015).

for pursuing a course of action he deems to be in the national interest. On the other hand, as an elected officeholder, he must ensure that any course of action he chooses carries minimal electoral risk to his personal political future. In thinking about how electoral constraints affect wartime decision-making, then, we can employ a useful heuristic which conceptualises decision-making as a balancing process between two sets of preferences, as illustrated in *Figure 1*.[18] This conceptualisation may be considered an application of the logic of a two-level game, in which the president is driven by concerns about the national interest at the international level, and political survival at the domestic level.[19]

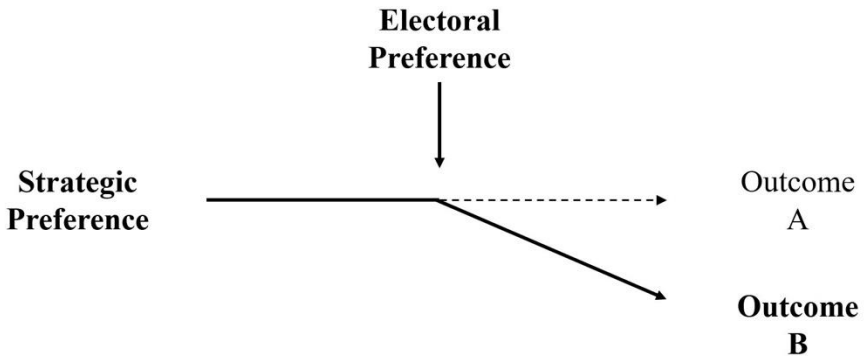


Figure 1: Presidential Preference Alignment

On one side of this balance sits what is called here the "strategic preference" of the president. This refers to the course of action on the table which the president perceives to carry optimal characteristics in terms of military and diplomatic utility. What exactly this looks like in practice will of course depend on the nature of the broader war objectives being sought and the president's assessment of the relative costs and benefits of the

[18] As with any heuristic, this of course does not perfectly approximate reality; decision-makers will not always consider these preferences in a discrete two-step process. Moreover, an awareness of the broader political environment may form an important component of effective strategy. For the purposes of conceptual clarity, however, it is useful to separate out specifically *electoral* considerations from assessments of strategy based on their military and diplomatic utility.
[19] Bueno de Mesquita and Ray (2004); Putnam (1988).

proposed action, measured in terms of expected advantage on the battlefield, likely diplomatic repercussions, financial cost, and so on.

On the other side of this decision-making process is the president's "electoral preference." This refers to the course of action which the president understands to carry minimal risk to his electoral fortunes. Since electoral pressures are conceptualised as *constraints* on decision-making, rather than independent sources of strategic preferences, they are denoted as an intervening variable in this model, which acts to push and pull the president away from the option he deems to be strategically optimal. The character of this preference depends on the president's understanding of the likely reaction of the electorate to a proposed course of action.

This thesis is largely agnostic as to precisely what factors make up these preferences. While a rough approximation might be assumed or deduced from prior theoretical assumptions, in practice this will vary depending on the strategic and political environment, as well as the president's own subjective *perception* of the costs, benefits and risks of the options available to him.[20] Perceptions are of course difficult to directly observe, yet a careful examination of the documentary record is likely to reveal evidence of the president sharing his views on the proposals before him. In the absence of categorical statements to this effect, the recommendations of close and trusted advisers may serve as a useful proxy or supplement to this analysis, since it is often they who play a key role in framing options for the president.

The outcomes in this heuristic refer to the decisions to escalate or de-escalate a conflict to which the United States is already committed. This dependent variable can include a

[20] It is nevertheless assumed here that presidents are essentially rational actors, in that they make reasonable decisions about strategy based on a set of preferences. While the specific manifestation of these preferences may vary in any given case, the primary motivations of the national interest (strategic optimality) and political survival (minimisation of electoral risk) are assumed to be relatively stable across contexts.

wide variety of military actions, from operational decisions (such as the authorisation or cessation of bombing programmes or alterations to the number of troops committed to a conflict) to broader strategic shifts (such as changes to the aims being sought through military means). In the diplomatic sphere, it includes various bargaining positions adopted during negotiations designed to bring about peace through the granting of concessions or the use of threats to generate concessions from an opponent. This thesis makes no prior selection regarding the types of escalatory decisions analysed, since the primary object here is to shed light on how presidential decision-making behaviours are affected by electoral pressures in the messy real world of wartime decision-making. To the extent that variation in the susceptibility of each form of escalation to electoral constraints may be hypothesised, however, this is accounted for by the "issue salience" condition discussed in the next sub-section.

In *Figure 1* above, Outcome A may be considered the strategically optimal outcome, which reflects purely the strategic preference in any given case. If electoral considerations have no effect on decision-making – akin to the null hypothesis in this analysis – we would expect to be able to observe a correlation between the strategic preference and the ultimate outcome. If, however, as is argued here, electoral pressures do matter, we would expect the outcome to look meaningfully different, with the strategic preference pushed off course by such electoral constraints, as represented by Outcome B. As the following section explores, the president may choose to adapt the proposed course of action in various ways, for instance by altering the size of proposed troop deployments, employing alternative means of escalation (such as bombing raids or covert operations instead of ground troops) or delaying a decision altogether. The primary point here, however, is that this course of action will not be predicted by an examination of the strategic preference alone, but also by the electoral one.

The degree of (mis)alignment between these preferences is also key to determining the strength of the electoral pressures which shape decision-making. In general, it may be reasonably inferred that as the gap between each preference increases, so does the potential impact that electoral constraints may have, as more adjustment will be required to bring a proposed course of action to an acceptable balance. Extreme cases of near-perfect alignment or near-total misalignment may also be observed. In the former scenario, in which a proposed course of action is deemed both strategically optimal and of virtually no electoral risk (i.e. because overwhelming public approval is anticipated in response), electoral pressures will be pushing against an open door. More permissive than constraining in nature, they may in this situation be considered causally epiphenomenal. The latter scenario, in which presidents may struggle to find any viable course of action which sufficiently balances both his strategic and his electoral preferences, is more interesting. In this case, presidents may be forced to pick between the unpalatable choice of prioritising *either* strategic optimality *or* political survival. Indeed, in the empirical part of this thesis, we will see instances of both the noble and cynical outcomes of this conundrum.[21]

Issue Salience

If voters do not know or care about an issue, it logically follows that the electoral risks associated with it will be minimal, and thus electoral constraints on decisions about it will be weak. While the public are traditionally thought to know little and care less about foreign policy, more recent studies of mass attitudes point to significant variation across issue areas. Most notably, decisions involving the commitment of military forces abroad tend to

[21] Specifically, it may be argued that both Harry Truman and especially Lyndon Johnson prioritised strategic optimality in withdrawing from their re-election races at least in part to enable them to pursue wartime strategies which were politically divisive. On the contrary, Richard Nixon's actions in 1972 point strongly to his calculation that his own political survival outstripped any strategic benefit associated with continuing the war in Vietnam.

"activate" public attention and thus draw increased scrutiny.[22] During a war, when the costs of military engagements are most vividly felt and placed under a spotlight by political elites and the media, voters are particularly attentive. It is not without reason that elected officeholders worry about public appraisals of their war records.[23]

Nevertheless, not all decisions to use force are of equal salience.[24] Indeed, among the range of decisions by which a president may escalate a conflict considered in this thesis, we can reason that significant variation in issue salience may be observed. Decisions which involve the deployment of large numbers of "boots on the ground" may naturally be expected to be most salient, since this is the most direct and obvious way in which the costs of war may be perceived by the public.[25] It will be particularly acute, moreover, if those troops are tasked with manpower-intensive missions which put soldiers directly in harm's way, as in attrition strategies, or counterinsurgency campaigns.[26] While the average voter might not be expected to understand the intricacies of relevant military doctrine, these time- and troop-intensive strategies are more likely to fail the "Dover test," whereby mounting body bags indicate public concern with war policy. Similarly, if these deployments are paid for directly through an accompanying increase in taxes, the spotlight will be brighter still.

Public attention may reasonably be expected to be somewhat lower for strategies which emphasise firepower or mobility over manpower. Examples here might include so-called "light footprint" strategies involving precision munitions and high connectivity rather than

[22] Powlick and Katz (1998); Potter (2013); Knecht and Weatherford (2006). For excellent broader reviews of related debates around the consistency and coherence of public attitudes towards war, see Holsti (2004); Foyle and Van Belle (2010).
[23] Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida (1989); Aldrich et al (2006). For good recent empirical examples of public attentiveness during war see Jacobson (2010); Karol and Miguel (2007).
[24] Following Opperman (2014), issue salience refers to the relative significance and importance an actor ascribes to a given issue. In this case, it is the salience of proposed methods of conflict (de)escalation among voters which is of particular interest.
[25] This logic essentially underpins much of the literature on public opinion and casualties.
[26] Record (2006, 2007); Caverley (2009).

sheer troop numbers.[27] Operations involving air power may still attract criticism stemming from legal or ethical concerns regarding target selection and civilian casualties, but generally voters may be reasonably expected to care proportionately less about operations involving pilots as opposed to ground troops, given the lower risk to American lives. Examples here of course include strategic bombing campaigns, or the increasing political appeal of "no-fly zones."[28]

The strategies of lowest salience are plausibly those in which the risk to U.S. forces is either minimal or can simply be kept secret from the public, notably including the covert use of special forces, drones, and cyber technology. While, again, each of these methods may gather headlines for related ethical, moral or legal concerns – or indeed if they backfire, as in the "Black Hawk Down" scenario in Mogadishu – these are plausibly among the least susceptible to electoral constraints.[29] Though they may be more expensive per payload than the use of regular combat troops, the costs of these types of strategies may be hidden from voters, either by being buried in Pentagon budgets or financed through borrowing.

A focus on presidential decision-making necessarily weights any analysis towards decisions of high salience, since they tend to be the calls which a president himself is tasked with making. Nevertheless, examples of presidential engagement with medium and low salience issues are also identifiable in many accounts of wartime decision-making, and as such will also feature in the empirical parts of this thesis. As explored later, decisions to substitute in lower salience strategies to achieve substantially similar goals so as to reduce

[27] Caverley (2009); Kagan (2006).
[28] See Dill (2015); Biddle (2009); Pape (1996). On no-fly zones, see Meibauer (forthcoming).
[29] On drones, see Kaag and Kreps (2014); Singer (2009); Fuller (2017). On covert operations, see Scahill (2013); Cormac and Aldrich (2018). On cyber, see especially Kello (2013). On Somalia, see Johnson and Tierney (2006).

the electoral risks of a higher salience option may be considered an important way in which electoral constraints affect decision-making.

In reality, of course, what matters for this study of decision-making is not objective assessments of what public attitudes actually are, but what the president *perceives* them to be. Moreover, they usually involve perceptions of latent as well as active public opinion, since the president necessarily needs to gauge the expected public reaction to a decision *before* that decision is made.[30] In coming to these judgements, presidents may use a variety of different indicators. Most academic studies of public opinion analyse mass polling data, yet while approval ratings and trends may be generally instructive for presidents, attitudes towards more specific courses of action might show up only in more sophisticated surveys.[31] Media coverage and congressional sentiment may be monitored as alternative or additional bellwethers of the public mood on any given issue.[32] As seasoned politicians, of course, presidents may simply rely on their own political instincts to anticipate how voters might react.[33] Finally, in estimating current and especially future public opinion, it should be remembered that political leaders can be, and often are, wrong.[34]

In other words, there is a subtle conceptual distinction between the salience of policy issues to the public and its subjective representation in the minds of decision-makers. The former affects the intensity of the audience costs that will be paid by leaders if they take an unpopular decision, and may be accurately observed by scholars through a careful examination of opinion polls, media coverage and congressional sentiment. Yet it is the latter which shapes the way decision-makers respond to public attitudes during policy deliberations, and as such is more central to this study. Since presidents use many of the

[30] Hinckley (1992); Powlick and Katz (1995); Key (1961); Knecht and Weatherford (2006).
[31] Druckman and Jacobs (2006); Canes-Wrones (2006). For excellent examples of a presidents who did keenly engage with opinion polls, see Casey (2001); Katz (1997).
[32] Cohen (1973); Powlick (1995).
[33] Key (1961); Powlick (1991).
[34] Kull, Destler and Ramsay (1997); Kull and Ramsay (2002).

same indicators, it is to some extent possible to invoke these as roughly reliable proxies for presidents' perceptions of public opinion, as will be done in the empirical part of this thesis.[35] However, since individual leaders will vary in how they perceive public opinion, it is also particularly important to both be mindful of these differences, and to strive to uncover evidence of presidents actually engaging with and speaking about their thoughts on the public mood wherever possible. This is simply another reason why an in-depth historical methodology is essential for a study such as this.

Phase of the Electoral Cycle

The stage of the four-year electoral cycle is also clearly a crucial element to take into account, since different phases will carry varying degrees of political sensitivity. Building on earlier discursive models of the impact that the American electoral cycle has on foreign policy in general, this thesis begins with the general notion that the influence of electoral considerations rises with increased proximity to a presidential election.[36] Since the public tends to vote retrospectively, and discounts the significance of events as they recede into the past, it follows that the audience costs for any unpopular policy will be greatest on the eve of Election Day.[37] At root, this underpins a host of studies which find increased congruence between foreign policy choices and public preferences as an election approaches.[38] Drawing on the balancing heuristic described earlier, it can therefore be surmised that as an election approaches, the weight accorded to the electoral preference increases, and in cases where this misaligns with the strategic preference, we might expect particularly notable departures from the course of action originally deemed strategically

[35] This logic follows from Oppermann (2014).
[36] Nincic (1992); Quandt (1986).
[37] Fiorina (1978); Chiozza (2017).
[38] Canes-Wrones (2006); Shapiro and Jacobs (2002) 193; Foyle (1999). This also underpins many of the studies mentioned in the introductory chapter, most notably perhaps Gaubatz (1999).

optimal. By contrast, it is early in the electoral cycle that we might expect the null hypothesis – that electoral constraints have no impact – to be supported.

The connection between the electoral cycle and the strength of electoral constraints is, however, less linear and more nuanced than this simple picture, for three reasons.[39] First, it stands to reason that the *anticipation* of a campaign season may exert as much of an influence on decision-making as being in the midst of a campaign. Electorally optimal strategies might take some time to yield success on the battlefield, while other necessary yet electorally risky strategies might be better initiated before the political spotlights are fully on. In either case, if we restrict our analysis to an election year, or the three months preceding an election, as much existing research does, we are liable to mistake absence of evidence for evidence of absence thanks to the limited time frame.

Second, and relatedly, it is not simply future elections that matter.[40] Sensitivity to what had been promised in the *previous* election plausibly matters in decision-making, too, especially if a president is likely to be running for re-election in part on the basis of having demonstrated an ability to fulfil the mandate voters gave him the first time around. It is not axiomatic that the pressure to deliver on one's campaign pledges will be immediately felt, of course. Indeed, not having to face voters for another four years, it may be that campaign rhetoric offers only weak constraints on decision-making to begin with. By the time that a president begins to think about his re-election campaign, however, these earlier commitments could come back to bite. The extent to which this is the case will of course depend on how the public mood may have changed over time, but ongoing wars tend not to increase in popularity, meaning unfulfilled pledges to bring them to an end are likely to

[39] For excellent discussions of the broad patterns of responsiveness associated with the electoral cycle see also Quandt (1986); Nincic (1992).
[40] Potter (2013).

carry electoral risk as the incumbent seeks to bolster his record as a president who does what he promised voters he would do.[41]

Third, it seems fair to argue that it is not just presidential elections that matter, but congressional ones, too. Though the president's personal political survival is not directly at stake, the loss of political capital that follows a severe loss of support in Congress can jeopardise both his practical ability to pursue his various policy objectives as an officeholder and of course his own re-election prospects thereafter. Indeed, the midterms represent a moment when the balance of power in Congress can change, with a significant impact on the president's ability to push through legislative priorities for the remainder of his or her term, or indeed pursue any proposed military strategy free of congressional interference. Through its formal powers, Congress can undermine such strategy by withholding appropriations; and through its informal powers, such as in holding public hearings and providing scrutiny, it can make it hard to sustain an unpopular strategy.[42] With the president's popularity so tied to his or her party's fortunes, a similarly strong spotlight shines on the actions of the Commander in Chief during these electoral periods.[43] An increased sensitivity to voters' opinion on wartime decisions is therefore only natural.

~

Taking the previous three sections together, it is possible to summarise several conditions under which electoral constraints are likely to operate. At the most general level, their influence is expected to be greatest when the strategic and electoral preferences of the president are misaligned, when the issue at hand has high salience among voters, and when an election is approaching. It follows that electoral considerations will be weakest when

[41] On public attitudes towards war over time, see Baum and Groeling (2010).
[42] Kriner (2010); Howell and Pevehouse (2005, 2007).
[43] Preston (2015) 231-234.

preferences are aligned, voters care little about the issue or conflict at hand, and an election is far away.[44]

How Do Electoral Constraints Matter?

If we can conceptualise the theoretical basis for electoral constraints and have some understanding of the conditions under which they may be stronger or weaker, it remains to explain exactly *how* these constraints influence decision-making. Five mechanisms are outlined in this section.

Go Big or Go Home: Electoral Constraints and (De)Escalation

The first three mechanisms may be grouped together, since they derive primarily from the balancing process outlined in the previous section. Which of these may be observed in any given case may be deduced from the relative alignment between preferences, as illustrated in *Figure 2.*

i) Delay

When the president perceives a clear need to increase the level of military commitment to a conflict, but fears a political backlash as an election approaches, his first preference is likely to be to *delay* making any decision until after polling day.

This mechanism will be particularly prominent if the relative electoral risk of escalation strongly outweighs the strategic opportunity at stake. To take an obvious

[44] Each of these may be considered antecedent conditions mediating the strength of electoral constraints. The relationship is conceived of as probabilistic, however, rather than determinative. Since each condition either relies on a president's perception of various factors (as with preference alignment and issue salience) or is nuanced and non-linear in nature (as with the phase of the electoral cycle), no law-like assertions are offered here. As detailed further below, the impact of electoral pressures is highly context-specific does not force all presidents to act alike.

example, if on 1 October it is deemed militarily desirable to deploy a reserve battalion simply to shore up security in a certain position, but doing so risks the prospect of provoking an extreme political reaction at home given recent casualty trends, this course of action would be a prime candidate for the *delay* mechanism.

Even if the proposed action is deemed absolutely essential, however, the timing of that decision may be more flexible. Since the electoral risks of making unpopular changes to strategy are amplified the closer it gets to an election, the president may be willing to accept some substantive cost of postponement to avoid suffering any political fallout when it matters most.[45] For instance, if the position in question is anticipated to weaken and ultimately fall within six months unless reinforcements are sent, the president may simply wait until after the election before belatedly sending the required troops, hoping that the status quo policy could at least prevent a more serious setback in the meantime.

Similarly, this mechanism might occur even if the proposed course of action is expected to ultimately gain a significant strategic advantage or even turn the tide of the war in ways which would garner public acclaim. Both risky military gambles with tremendous political upside and slow-burning military strategies which will take time to yield visible success are best left until after the election. Much better to pursue such courses of action early in the following electoral period, giving them more time to succeed, or otherwise allowing political space for their failure to be forgotten by voters with notoriously short time-horizons.[46] Examples here include major offensive operations, or shifts to a counterinsurgency strategy.

In order to prove the existence of this delay effect, there are several observable implications which our case studies should be able to identify. First, of course, we should

[45] This applies Gaubatz's (1999: 53-55) logic regarding conflict initiation to wartime decision-making. See also Armacost (2015) 65-74.
[46] Chiozza (2017).

be able to find evidence that a change in strategy was deemed necessary and perceived as such by the president. Indications that the president specifically favoured an escalatory course of action would also ideally be identifiable. Next, we must be able to show that a decision was deferred, in the sense that viable opportunities to review the status quo strategy were not pursued. Relatedly, we must be able to show that the reason for the delay was electoral in nature. Finally, if the decision was truly delayed and not simply ignored, we should be able to find evidence of the same problem being considered in the post-election phase, likely with a degree of urgency not hitherto seen, and an escalatory decision being made very quickly.

ii) Dampening

If the president assesses the strategic cost of delaying a decision to be more significant than the electoral risk of doing so, or if a pre-election decision is made necessary by circumstances outside of the president's control (for instance, due to fixed deadlines imposed by international organisations, or immediate threats posed by other actors), political sensitivities remain a critical component of the decision-making process. Under the *dampening* mechanism, escalatory courses of action deemed to carry high utility in military and diplomatic terms will be watered down, with their most politically "noisy" aspects removed so as to satisfy the president's electoral preference.

There are two ways this may manifest in policy deliberations. First, the president may choose to employ broadly the same method of escalation, but scale down its intensity. For instance, more troops may be the order of the day, but a president could send lower numbers than militarily desirable, or insist on a guiding strategy employing these forces in less costly way, for instance assuming active defense rather than offensive operations. Second, a president may choose to adopt a different method of escalation which carries less salience

or electoral risk.[47] For instance, if it is deemed strategically optimal to destroy an enemy's military industrial base through strategic bombing operations, covert sabotage operations might plausibly be used instead to achieve some measure of the same goal.[48]

This mechanism operates in a fairly straightforward manner. In a "first cut," proposals brought to the White House must pass a test of "political acceptability".[49] If they are deemed to carry an unacceptable level of political risk, they will be rejected, often before any serious in-depth strategy review has even begun. After this initial screening, the remaining options will be assessed across a range of different metrics, of which political "noisiness" will remain an important one among many others.[50] The remaining proposals will now likely be finessed to provide what the president perceives to be the most optimal plan in military or diplomatic terms with a sufficiently low level of political risk.

iii) Spur

The *spur* mechanism describes a less common scenario in which the president dials up the bellicosity of any option under discussion in an effort to satisfy his electoral preference, despite such escalation not aligning with what he deems to be strategically optimal. This is in some sense the logical mirror of the *dampening* mechanism. Typically, this would entail the president responding to concerns that a belligerent mood among voters might imperil his political future should he appear to follow a course of action which may be branded excessively "weak" or "soft." Hence, we might expect to see decisions to send more troops

[47] This draws on the logic of "substitutability" in foreign policy, whereby leaders can use different policy instruments to achieve the same goals. See Most and Starr (1984). Of particular interest here are decisions to use different "tools" based on the domestic politics associated with them. See Milner and Tingley (2015); Chiozza (2017).
[48] See Reiter and Stam (2002) 159-162.
[49] See Farnham (2004). See also Powlick (1991); Foyle (1997) 146.
[50] This two-step process alludes to the central insight of poliheuristic theory, which suggests that a non-compensatory principle related to political acceptability is invoked by decision-makers first, before rational analysis kicks in again during deliberations over any remaining options. See Mintz (2004). This thesis is broadly sympathetic with the thrust of this argument.

than strictly needed to a conflict, or the authorisation of particularly bold major operations in the run-up to an election.

It should be noted that actions traditionally considered "diversionary" will be captured under the broad logic of this mechanism, too. As described in the previous chapter, this entails a president using force in order to generate a "rally" effect among public opinion sufficient to boost his political fortunes in time for an upcoming election.

Empirically, it may appear difficult to tease apart which variant of the *spur* mechanism is being observed, since both describe electoral considerations triggering an increased use of force under a similar alignment of presidential preferences. There is, however, a subtle difference: the first form involves a president seeking to avoid electoral *punishment* for perceived timidity and caution, whereas the diversionary form instead entails a president pro-actively seeking electoral *reward* for the use of force. While these are undoubtedly two sides of the same coin, a close reading of the evidence in any case should reveal which variant is being observed.

To observe the existence of this mechanism, we would *not* expect to see substantial evidence of a president expressing support for an escalatory course of action on the grounds of strategic optimality. Instead, we might find evidence of him favouring a much more constrained course of action or indeed the status quo on the grounds of military or diplomatic utility. Under the regular variant, we would then expect to uncover evidence of the president perceiving a generally hawkish *existing* public mood and adopting a course of action in line with these more belligerent tendencies. Under the diversionary variant, we might instead find evidence of the president's expectations of receiving *future* political support for a more aggressive step, and then adopting such a course of action. In neither case will the course of action be predicted by the president's more cautious strategic preference.

Which of the three preceding mechanisms operate depends in part on the nature and relative alignment between a president's strategic and electoral preferences, as illustrated in *Figure 2*:

i) When the president perceives an escalatory course of action to be strategically optimal, while his electoral preference points towards a de-escalatory decision as less political risky, the *delay* and/or *dampening* mechanisms are most likely to be observed.

ii) When the president deems a de-escalatory course of action to be strategically optimal, while voters are perceived to favour a more escalatory approach, the *spur* mechanism is most likely to operate.

iii) When the preferences are aligned, as explained in the previous section, electoral constraints push against an open door and thus carry minimal causal significance.

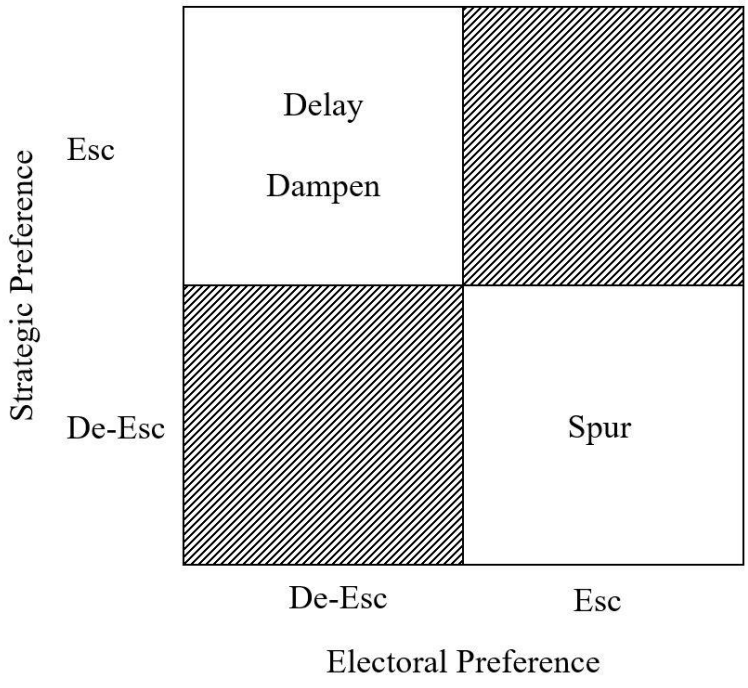


Figure 2: (De)Escalatory Mechanisms of Electoral Constraint

Auxiliary Mechanisms

Two further mechanisms may be derived from the discussion of the role that the electoral cycle plays in the previous section. They are considered separately here since they arise not as a product of the balancing heuristic but at certain points of the electoral cycle.

iv) Hangover

The *hangover* mechanism refers to way in which a newly (re)elected president will be limited in selecting between options regarding wartime policy by the pressure to fulfil his campaign promises.

Of course, the notion that winning candidates can be relied upon to act promptly on their campaign pledges once in office is commonly contested.[51] This is, however, not really a challenge to the framework offered in this thesis, in which electoral pressures are considered a confounding variable which pushes and pulls the president away from strategic considerations. In fact, from the arguments presented so far, we can deduce two good theoretical reasons why a perfect correlation between campaign promises and actual decisions taken in office may not be observed.

First, since presidential candidates by definition do not yet hold the dual responsibilities that come with being Commander-in-Chief and elected officeholder, their policy preferences will not result from the same set of interests. As aspirants to political office, they will be primarily motivated to hold and express prescriptions for wartime strategy which capture the minds of voters. These need to be rhetorically appealing, but not necessarily rooted in concrete analysis of feasibility or strategic desirability. In coming to these positions, moreover, they will generally not have access to the same level of advice

[51] Armacost (2015) 110-116; Preston (2015) 234-235; but see also Fishel (1985); Bernstein (2012, 2019); Klein (2012).

and information on the strategic aspects bearing on the problem at hand as would an incumbent president. Only when they find themselves in the Oval Office will they gain these additional responsibilities and perspectives. In turn, this may highlight the differences between being a candidate and actually having to make critical decisions bearing on U.S. national security, which may reveal their earlier pledges to be impractical or inadvisable.[52]

Second, even when a newly elected president does face this reality check, they find themselves in a highly favourable "honeymoon" phase of the electoral cycle. This permissive environment may be particularly beneficial for a new president who may not be perceived as "culpable" for an inherited war.[53] With four years until the next presidential election and with political capital at its peak, sensitivity to electoral pressures is likely to be at its weakest.[54] For both of these reasons, the retroactive weight accorded to campaign pledges is expected to be highly contingent and relatively mild, at least to begin with.

Nevertheless, we can infer that the exact strength of this electoral *hangover* mechanism is expected to depend on, first, the size of the margin of victory in the preceding election, and, second, on the specificity of the campaign pledges made. A president buoyed by a significant margin of victory who has made only vague promises on wartime policy will be granted much more latitude in decision-making than one elected by a slim margin, having made highly specific promises. The significance of margin size can be deduced from existing work which has shown that presidents are less constrained in their choice of foreign policy "tools" after a large electoral victory.[55] Since electoral outcomes are taken as powerful signals of presidential popularity, would-be critics among the public and in Congress are less likely to challenge popular presidents at the height of their political

[52] On these and related challenges, see also Campbell and Steinberg (2009) ch. 4.
[53] Croco (2011).
[54] See also Brody (1991), ch. 2.
[55] Potter (2013).

power.[56] The condition regarding pledge specificity follows from a logical deduction that presidents tend to be held to account at least in part on the ability to fulfil their campaign promises, which in turn often form a central component of any future re-election bid. While rhetorical ambiguity may be a wise strategy for candidates, to the extent that they do express concrete policy intentions on the campaign trail, they can be expected to be more strongly constrained by those statements once in office.[57]

The observable implications of this mechanism follow this conditionality. In cases where a president is resoundingly elected having made few specific pledges, we would expect to find few mentions of campaign pledges in the contemporary record of decision-making. Instead, decisions will largely reflect the option the president deems strategically optimal, based on his own instincts, or under advice from advisers and experts to whom he now, as Commander-in-Chief, has access to. By contrast, a president elected by a slim margin, having committed to highly specific pledges, may be observed justifying decisions by reference to these promises, and even choosing strategies which sacrifice some strategic optimality in order to be seen to fulfil them.

v) Spoiler

The American electoral cycle does not simply interfere with presidential decision-making regarding efforts to win a war militarily. Building on the more traditional conception of a "two-level game," it also presents obstacles to the president's ability to reach diplomatic agreements geared towards the peaceful de-escalation and resolution of a conflict.[58] The *spoiler* mechanism describes three ways in which an election can interfere with the

[56] Potter (2013).
[57] Fishel (1985); Campbell and Steinberg (2009) 53-54.
[58] Putnam (1988). See also Armacost (2015) 87-92 for some instructive examples.

bargaining positions of the president and erode his leverage during international negotiations.

Firstly, and closely related to the underlying logic of the previous four mechanisms, a president's status as an elected officeholder gives him additional political preferences beyond the national interest in any negotiation. While he may ideally desire a deal which maximises diplomatic utility, he also needs a deal which is "good enough" to allow him to be re-elected.[59] On one hand, this may lead the president to grant concessions which are strategically sub-optimal because the electoral significance of reaching *a* deal may outweigh the diplomatic cost of striking a "bad" deal. On the other hand, a strategically necessary deal may prove out of reach thanks to continued stubbornness on certain red lines which while of minimal diplomatic significance may carry considerable political weight. Either way, the president's interest in political survival serves to pressure him towards sub-optimal diplomatic positions.

Secondly, if the president can rise above the fray of partisan politics, the challenges posed by an election campaign are compounded by the presence of other actors with competing preferences. At home, presidential challengers carry similar political incentives to the incumbent but none of the international responsibilities that come with being the nation's Commander-in-Chief. As such, high-profile negotiations involving the United States represent opportunities for other candidates to differentiate themselves from one another and the current administration, with bold, imaginative, and sometimes downright unworkable alternative proposals. While these may be effective in garnering votes, they may also serve to weaken the incumbent administration's room for manoeuvre in ongoing talks. Already uncertain as to how credible any commitments made by a here-today, gone-tomorrow president may be in an election season, an opponent is incentivised to monitor

[59] Bueno de Mesquita et al (2003), ch. 6; Morrow (1991).

the alternative positions put forward by front-runners in the presidential race and alter their bargaining position accordingly.[60]

Thirdly, the fixed nature of the electoral calendar in the U.S. means proximity to polling day acts as a further key constraining factor. Since there is no guarantee that the president will be able to strike a deal after the results of the election are known, there is often a structural incentive to grant additional concessions as that time horizon shrinks. This may of course be compounded by the reality that opponents will also be aware of this, so may drag out negotiations until the last moments of a campaign in order to extract as much as possible from the U.S., even if the sitting president already offered better terms than any other opponent. This variant of the *spoiler* mechanism will be particularly acute, of course, for those who lose their re-election bids, since their ability to credibly commit to a deal will be at its weakest during the transition to a new administration.[61]

Each of these components of the *spoiler* effect may again be observed through a close analysis of private meetings and memoranda involving the president in which concerns about these electoral dynamics are raised and used to justify any alterations to the president's bargaining positions. We may also see efforts by the president to convince rival candidates to keep any ongoing talks off the campaign trail or even support the incumbent administration.

~

To recap, the previous two sections have argued that the strength of electoral constraints on wartime decision-making depends on the relative alignment between the president's

[60] This condition necessarily gives rise to consideration of other actors' preferences beyond those of the president. Since the focus here remains on the impact of electoral pressures on presidential decision-making, however, the strategic behaviour of other actors is considered only to the extent that it helps shed light on how the president's ability to pursue a preferred diplomatic strategy is affected.

[61] On foreign affairs challenges during transitions more generally, see Mosher, Clinton and Lang (1987); Campbell and Steinberg (2009).

strategic and electoral preferences, issue salience, and the phase of the electoral cycle. In turn, the exact nature of these constraints can be described using five mechanisms. When the president's strategic preference points to a more escalatory course of action than his electoral preference deems politically wise, he will *delay* making a decision if possible, or otherwise *dampen* the most unpopular aspects of the proposed action. By contrast, if the president's electoral interests suggest a more escalatory policy, he may take this as a *spur* to a more belligerent action than perceived strategically necessary. Somewhat independent of his assessments of the public mood, the electoral cycle also creates two further limitations on the president: he must reckon with the *hangover* effects of campaign pledges upon (re-)assuming office, and upcoming elections may also play a *spoiler* role during any negotiations with a foreign government.

The Rhythm of the Electoral Cycle

It is now possible to summarise the role that electoral politics plays in wartime decision-making, by mapping these mechanisms onto the electoral cycle. Adopting a tripartite periodization of the four-year process, as illustrated in *Figures 3* and *4*, it is argued that the American electoral cycle gives decision-making a certain rhythm.[62] As Commander-in-Chief and elected officeholder, the president's often competing interests of the national interest and political survival rise and fall in a pattern determined by the political calendar at home.

[62] This builds on an excellent earlier discursive model of the broad relationship between the electoral cycle and foreign policy decision-making offered by William Quandt (1986). See also Nincic (1990; 1992); Russett (1990) 12-14.

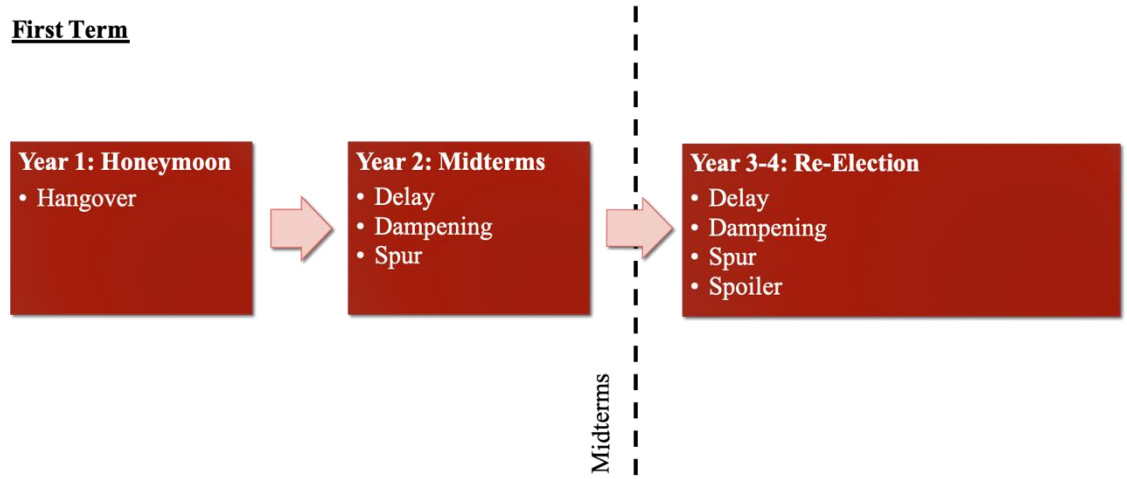


Figure 3: First Term Dynamics

The first year of a president's first term might be referred to as the "honeymoon" phase, in that it is here where he may experience the greatest relative freedom from electoral constraints, having just been given a boost of political capital from the recent electoral victory. In the balancing act between strategic and electoral preferences, the former will typically carry greater weight than at any other point in the cycle. Nevertheless, it is also here where the *hangover* effects of any campaign pledges made may serve to limit this freedom of manoeuvre, depending on the margin of victory and specificity of the commitments.

Into the second year, the looming congressional elections will serve to strengthen the influence of these political considerations on decision-making. Typically, a president will seek to *delay* escalatory decisions which carry excessive risk of backlash from a conflict-averse public, or otherwise *dampen* a necessary decision's more politically controversial aspects. If the president perceives escalation instead to be electorally preferable, he may take this as a *spur* to action, dialling up military intervention beyond what he deems strategically optimal.

It is in the re-election phase of the cycle, roughly from the midterms to the presidential election, that electoral constraints will have their greatest effect, however. With the president's personal future at stake, the importance of electoral preferences in the president's balancing calculus will increase significantly, and as such the *delay*, *dampening*, and (less frequently) *spur* mechanisms will be most likely to be observed as Election Day approaches. Should the U.S. be in the midst of negotiations, it is also here where the electoral cycle will serve to undermine the leverage afforded to the president, as the *spoiler* mechanism predicts.

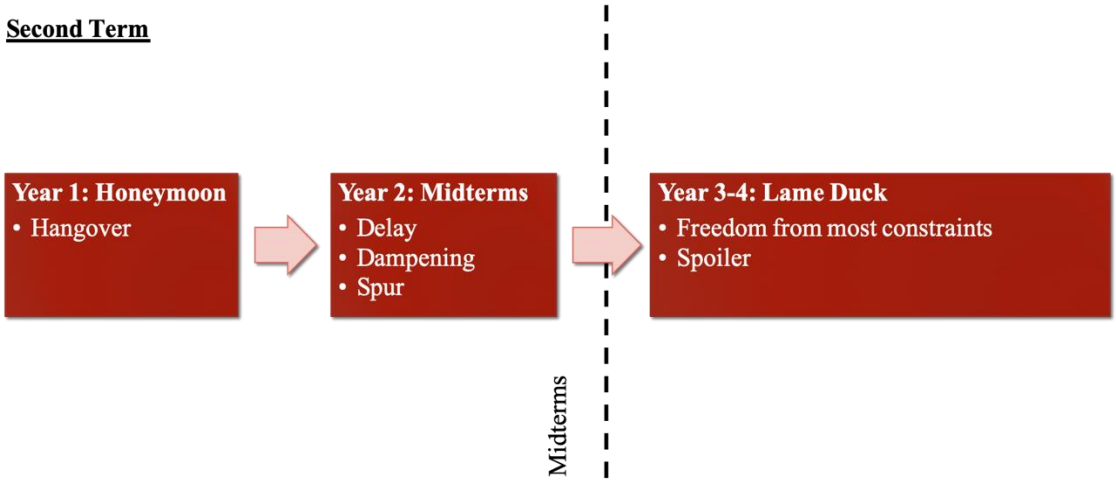


Figure 4: Second Term Dynamics

In the beginning of a second term, the pattern will be broadly similar. In the first year, we may expect the hangover effect to operate broadly as before, and any policies delayed during the previous period are now likely to be enacted. As the midterm elections approach, the president may again increase the attention paid to the electorally optimal outcome on any questions of strategy which may arise, resulting in decisions that are deferred, dampened or emboldened depending on the prevailing political climate.

Lame Ducks: A Special Case

After the midterms, a second-term president will enter a "lame-duck" phase. While the nadir of an incumbent's political power will hit during the ten-week transition, in a country like the U.S., with ever-longer campaign seasons, the slide into political impotence will realistically begin the moment the president has passed the congressional off-year elections.[63] Since the incumbent's interest in political survival is essentially removed during this phase, we should in theory see decisions being made unaffected by most of the mechanisms of electoral constraint offered here. Instead, with no fear of being "booted" out of office, decisions should hew closer to the president's strategic preference in any given case.[64]

In practice, of course, the changed political environment does not entirely eliminate the relevance of the domestic political calendar, but rather alters how the president's electoral incentives are affected by it. Not facing any further set of major national elections which might otherwise impinge on his political capital, a president's attention will now likely shift towards concerns about his legacy. Since a president can tend to act more freely in foreign affairs than domestic affairs, it ~~is likely that in is~~is in the international arena that he will seek to make progress.[65] Of course, during a war, the incentive to go down in the history books as a peacemaker, or perhaps as the person who won the war, will be particularly appealing. Thus, we may see stubborn stances in negotiation, risky escalation to make one last bid for victory, or indeed constrained policies designed to preserve the president's existing reputation. The term "lame duck" is something of a misnomer for a wartime president, then, since it is at this stage that we might expect an incumbent to double

[63] See Shogan (2006).
[64] Relatedly, Canes-Wrones (2006) finds decreased presidential responsiveness to public opinion among second-term presidents, albeit on budgetary issues.
[65] Wildavsky (1966).

down on efforts to end a war one way or the other, precisely because of the proximity of the election and his subsequent departure from office.[66]

If victory or peace through some decisive action on the battlefield or at the negotiating table is unattainable, another way the president may seek to protect his legacy is by trying to help the campaign of a preferred successor. While a presidential transition largely involves a clean slate at the executive level, particularly in terms of personnel, policy continuity is far more likely if the incoming president is a member of the same party as the incumbent.[67] Depending on how vested the incumbent is in the fortunes of his party's nominee,[68] it is possible that decisions will be minimally sensitive to the electoral knock-on effect they might have on the candidates who are running. Intriguingly, it seems plausible that it is here, too, that we might see presidents most likely to engage in diversionary behaviour, manifested in the shape of an "October surprise."

Nevertheless, if the electoral cycle encourages a president to be more active in foreign affairs in the twilight phase of his term, it also typically results in any such efforts failing to achieve significant progress.[69] Lacking the ability to credibly commit the U.S. to a certain course of action beyond January of the following year, and lacking political capital at home, it is in particular here where the *spoiler* effect may arguably be at its strongest. Even if the president is not on the ballot paper, his bargaining positions are still liable to be undercut by not one but *two* presidential candidates at home, while a negotiating opponent is likely to turn its attention to the positions of the next administration. As William Quandt has rightly observed, "The idea that a president who does not have to face reelection can

[66] Relatedly, Potter (2016) finds a statistically significant increase in foreign policy activity in this period of the cycle, including actions involving the use of force.
[67] Campbell and Steinberg (2009).
[68] This is no minor point, since the typical call for "change" at election time tends to encourage candidates to distance themselves from incumbents, particularly if they are especially unpopular.
[69] Potter (2016); Dunn (2006); Shogan (2006).

act free of domestic political concerns misses the point. He may be free, but he is not taken seriously as he reaches the end of his second term."[70]

"Lame duck" presidents thus serve as something of a special case in this analysis. Theoretically, it is likely that few of the electoral constraints outlined earlier will operate, other than the *spoiler* mechanism, which will be particularly acute. Nevertheless, the presence of a unique political environment in which the president is no longer running adds additional complexity.

Assumptions

Public Opinion: Who Leads? Who Follows?

The framework outlined above argues that presidents seek to satisfy their electoral preference by altering the course of action deemed strategically optimal. It could reasonably be argued, however, that leaders who believe in the necessity of a politically risky decision may instead seek to bring public opinion in line with their preferences. Indeed, from the broader literature on public attitudes towards war, we know that public opinion is somewhat malleable, driven at least in part by elite cues.[71] In turn, some scholars suggest that presidents not only have the power to shape and lead public attitudes, but have increasingly sought to do so.[72] For instance, even Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler leave room open for such an interpretation in their examination of public attitudes during the war in Iraq. While arguing that popularly held views concerning public casualty-sensitivity are exaggerated, their analysis implies some latitude for presidents to be able to increase public

[70] Quandt (1986) 833. See also Haynes (2012) who more recently argues that "lame ducks" are weakened in crisis-bargaining scenarios because their lack of accountability means they struggle to generate credible audience costs.
[71] Berinsky (2007, 2009); Drury et al. (2010).
[72] Shapiro and Jacobs (2000). See also Cohen (1973); Zaller (1992).

casualty tolerance and thereby maintain support for costly wars through carefully planned rhetorical strategies which emphasize the likelihood of success.[73]

Yet while presidents may well *try* to "lead" public opinion, a number of studies suggest their ability to do so is rather limited in practice.[74] More importantly, a broad scholarly consensus holds that presidents are in any case also bound in important ways when choosing between alternative policies. The menu of feasible options open to them will usually be limited by concerns about the expected public reaction, as perceived (accurately or otherwise) through polling data, congressional sentiment, or media sources.[75] Hence, as much as some might like to, presidents cannot entirely ignore public attitudes or write themselves a blank cheque of support for costly military operations through a smart communications strategy.

In reality, of course, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Just as public opinion can both shape and be shaped by elite rhetoric, so too presidents will both try to lead and be bound by their perceptions of public attitudes.[76] The more interesting question, then, is under what conditions presidents will choose to lead or follow. Foyle, for instance, argues that the president's beliefs regarding the desirability of public input into foreign policy choices are a key mediating variable in this respect.[77] Other studies explore variation across different stages of the decision-making process, with most noting that public attitudes exert more influence on decision-makers in earlier phases when options are

---

[73] This implication, and the Bush administration's subsequent efforts to effectively implement such a public communications strategy through 2004-2005 (with one of the co-authors then on the NSC staff), are explored in Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler (2009) 226-233, 260-262.
[74] Edwards (2006); Powlick and Katz (1998) 38.
[75] Sobel (2001); Powlick and Katz (1998); Russett (1990); Aldrich et al (2006); Key (1961); Graham (1989).
[76] Arguably the best recent work studying the formation of public opinion bridges the divide between the "rational public" and "elite cue" approaches by focusing on the role of information and mediating actors, such as political opponents and the media; see Baum and Groeling (2010); Baum and Potter (2008, 2015).
[77] Foyle (1997, 1999).

generated and policies selected compared with later implementation phases, where leaders seek to "sell" their chosen option.[78]

While this thesis is not a study of public opinion, per se, it does partly contribute to these debates. Specifically, the influence of public attitudes on wartime decision-making, as filtered through the president's perception of them, are implied to vary across the electoral cycle. While this will also depend on the issue in question and the president's strategic preference in any given case, it can reasonably be inferred that presidents will tend to hew closer to their perception of the public's preference – or at least the preference of an electorally significant subset of the public – at certain sensitive points in the domestic political calendar. In the lead-up to congressional or presidential elections (in which the incumbent is running), we should therefore expect to observe evidence of the president following the voters' preferences.[79] By contrast, after these moments of greatest political sensitivity have passed, we should instead expect to see far more evidence of a president making decisions he knows will fly against the grain of public opinion, instead seeking to lead the public in favour of his chosen course.[80]

Why Focus on Presidents?

The primary actor of interest in this study is the president. This is in line with the assumption that leaders matter when it comes to foreign policy decision-making.[81] More specifically, with respect to electoral politics and wartime decision-making, the president

[78] Foyle (1999); Knecht and Weatherford (2006); Powlick and Katz (1998).
[79] See also Shapiro and Jacobs (2000) 231-234; Canes-Wrones (2006). Foyle (1999: 272) similarly notes that proximity to an election erodes the significance of presidential beliefs about public opinion as greater responsiveness is observed.
[80] By definition, presidents will also seek to lead when engaging in diversionary behaviour. As detailed earlier, however, this is considered the exception to the rule of constraint.
[81] Byman and Pollack (2001); Jervis (2013).

is logically the key actor, since only he has the unique role as both Commander-in-Chief and holder of the highest elected office.[82]

In reality, of course, decisions regarding wartime strategy are not the sole preserve of political leaders. As noted earlier, advisers, both military and civilian, will play crucial roles in shaping the president's understanding of the issues at stake in any decision. In turn, of course, many of these advisers may be indirectly influenced by electoral considerations thanks to their association with the president, without whom they very well may not be in the position that they find themselves. For these reasons, it would be somewhat artificial to completely ignore the views of other administration officials, particularly those in senior positions or those with greatest access to the president. Insofar as senior officials had anything to do with a presidential decision, their views might sensibly be evaluated alongside those of the Commander-in-Chief, and are so in this thesis.

Context, Contingency and Comparison

If presidents share an underlying interest in political survival, it does not necessarily follow that they interpret information uniformly or act perfectly alike. Rather, each individual carries various personal attributes which influence their decision-making behaviours in different ways. A leader's beliefs concerning the use of force will inevitably shape their perception of the relative strategic requirements and electoral risks in any given case.[83] So too will their varying propensities for risk; a risk-acceptant hawk is thus more likely than a risk-averse dove to make a politically unpopular escalatory decision before an election, for example.[84] Experience matters, too, both in terms of the length of time in office as president and in terms of prior background, with fresh, untested presidents as well as those with

[82] Bueno de Mesquita et al (2003).
[83] Saunders (2011). See also George (1969) on operational codes.
[84] See Levy (1997), and the discussion below on prospect theory.

extensive prior military service being more prone to crises and the use of force than their more experienced civilian counterparts.[85]

Neither do presidents make decisions in a vacuum. Wars do not follow a predictable pattern, and each one is shaped by the broader political, strategic and social environment in which it takes place. Several contextual features can mediate the strength of democratic constraints in any given conflict, from the relative freedom of the press and professionalization of the armed forces to the technological sophistication of military operations and ways in which a war is financed. Wars which are conducted with an all-volunteer army, supported by drones, paid for by borrowing and with strict censorship in place are thus far less vulnerable to electoral pressures than those conducted by conscripted infantrymen, using taxes and reported on by a free press.

In short, contextual differences undoubtedly preclude perfect comparison across cases, and the role of contingency in the messy real world of international relations renders any firm predictions questionable. The framework outlined here is thus a necessarily stylised approximation of reality. It does not seek to provide law-like assertions, nor does it aim to predict when a need for a decision regarding military and diplomatic strategy will arise in any given conflict. Instead, it is intended to provide a rough guide to the relationship between electoral politics and presidential decision-making and a set of analytical tools with which to make sense of decisions which have reached the president's desk in any given case. Above all, it should be recalled that electoral pressures are just that, a *pressure*, and not a deterministic phenomenon forcing all presidents to act alike.

[85] Potter (2007); Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015).

Alternative Explanations

To recognise that electoral pressures exert a meaningful influence on wartime decision-making is not to deny the existence of alternative constraints. As explained in the introduction, the approach adopted in this thesis stems from and contributes to efforts by foreign policy analysts to better understand the decision-making dynamics internal to a state. While sympathetic to the notion that material or ideational variables outside of the "black box" may shape the broad contours of international conflict, it therefore makes sense to evaluate the significance of the conceptual framework adopted here against the leading research programmes within the FPA tradition. Among a variety of possibilities, bureaucratic and psychological approaches stand out as particularly influential, and are therefore invoked here to complement the empirical analysis that follows. Rather than treating these as rival explanations, however, this thesis will instead draw on them as supplements which may help explain variation in outcomes over and above that which can be explained through the electoral framework.

Bureaucratic Constraints

This thesis bestows much significance to the president's roles as Commander-in-Chief and elected leader. Yet he also acts as something of a Chief Executive Officer, sitting atop a vast array of government departments and agencies tasked with protecting the national security of the United States. When assessing alternative strategies during a war, it follows that the "essence of decision" may be profoundly influenced by the pulling and hauling of bureaucratic politics.[86]

[86] Note that Allison (1971) also outlined another model based on "organisational behaviour" which explored the role of "satisficing" and standard operating procedures driven by organisational biases. The bureaucratic politics model is prioritised here, since it more clearly focuses on individuals and the selection of policies.

In its classic formulation, government decisions are held to be the product of political bargaining between individual actors representing different agencies in the national security bureaucracy. The leaders of each organisation share different goals, many parochial in nature, which can be broadly derived from their bureaucratic position according to the maxim that "where you stand depends on where you sit." In competing for resources, responsibilities and personal advancement, each actor carries a different level of bureaucratic power, comprising charisma, skills of persuasion, and closeness to the decision-maker, which can help them "win" in any given bureaucratic turf war. The final decision that results from this process is not the product of a single rational choice but rather a compromise outcome which does not reflect the preference of any single actor.[87]

Allison's bureaucratic politics model has come in for much criticism over the years.[88] This thesis sympathises with three lines of critique in particular. First, in promoting the virtues of governmental politics as an alternative conceptual lens, the rational actor model was set up as a straw man. Of particular relevance here is the point that leaders can have multiple goals (for example, the national interest and political survival) and still be able to select options rationally based on the preferences that flow from them.[89] In Allison's rational actor model, a unitary actor sought to maximise utility based on a single objective. Relatedly, rational actors may have different time-period orientations than is assumed in the standard model.[90] Hence, presidents might want to maximise the strategic benefit of any course of action in the short term while also ensuring that the political fallout some time down the road is minimised.

[87] Allison (1971).
[88] See Jones (2010).
[89] Bendor and Hammond (1992) 305-306.
[90] *Ibid*. 306.

Secondly, the bureaucratic politics model holds a highly restrictive conception of roles and preferences. Bureaucratic actors are reduced to departmental managers, whereas in fact they may carry multiple and competing sets of responsibilities. For instance, much as this thesis argues that the president has dual roles, so too the Secretary of State is not simply the chief executive of the foreign service, but also acts as a principal foreign policy adviser to the president, a spokesperson for his policies, and the nation's Diplomat-in-Chief.[91] This may in turn account for the surprisingly large number of empirical cases in which a bureaucratic actor does not advocate the typical views of his or her department in policy deliberations. Even in Allison's classic examination of the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, the Secretary of Defense was among those advocating much more cautious options than his role as head of the military establishment might predict, while other influential figures like Dean Acheson or Robert Kennedy had no official or relevant bureaucratic position.[92]

The most relevant critique, however, centres on the dominant role of the president in the policymaking process. As Stephen Krasner most famously put it, "bureaucratic analysts ignore the critical effect which the President has in choosing his advisers, establishing their access to decision-making, and influencing bureaucratic interests."[93] It is therefore his views which help define the range of possible options which might be pursued, since advisers – who likely share similar values to the president, upon whom their positions in government depend – are incentivised to present options which the president might deem acceptable. Rather than bargain with subordinates, the president is more likely to overrule or simply dismiss bureaucratic agents with whom he disagrees. Bureaucratic politics will drive policy independently of the preferences of the president only to the extent that he

[91] Marsh and Jones (2017). See also Hollis and Smith (1986).
[92] Krasner (1972) 165-166.
[93] Krasner (1972) 168.

chooses to delegate authority to other officials, and this may be particularly rare in serious matters of war and peace.

Despite these points, the broad relevance of bureaucratic factors as an important feature of presidential decision-making is well-established. Since presidents have a vast number of decisions to make, they will naturally rely on the arguments made by advisers to help inform their choices, and some bureaucratic actors will tend to be more successful than others in bringing the president's preferences closer to theirs. The dialling up or down of any wartime decision may at least in part be attributable to the influence of advisers the president finds persuasive. Some advisers may even be able to single-handedly block changes to policy which they oppose, as "veto players."[94] This would partially help account for any delayed decisions, at least until those bureaucratic agents are removed or reduce their opposition to a proposed policy.

Where this thesis helps bureaucratic analyses, however, is in pointing to one often underappreciated source of an adviser's bureaucratic power – their role in partisan politics. While it is true that presidents can simply ignore or even fire particularly obstructive officials, they do not do so without due consideration of the political consequences. Disgruntled advisers may leak damaging assessments of presidential deliberations, while dismissed former officials may be a very public thorn in any administration's side. Given this, it may often be easier to defer to such problematic individuals rather than trigger a politically costly backlash by overruling them or forcing their resignation. As Lyndon Johnson famously said when resigning himself to the difficulty of firing one notably powerful bureaucratic actor, "it's probably better to have him inside the tent pissing out, than outside the tent pissing in."[95] Even if the official in question is not overtly partisan,

[94] Tsebilis (2002).
[95] Quoted in "The Vantage Point," 31 October 1971, *New York Times*.

the very fact of their departure may be taken as a signal of disarray in the White House and an admission of failure. This will be especially the case when it comes to the dismissal or resignation of senior military figures, to whom the public traditionally defers on assessments of the wisdom of military policy.[96] Finally, of course, the electoral cycle suggests that the bureaucratic power of this politically influential advisers waxes and wanes according to the domestic political calendar. We should expect to observe evidence of presidents bowing to such pressures especially at sensitive points of the cycle, such as in the lead-up to an election. The influence of bureaucratic politics, then, may well be conditional on electoral politics.

Psychological Constraints

Even if the president is assumed to be a dominant bureaucratic actor, there may still be scenarios in which he selects an outcome which cannot rationally be explained by reference to his strategic or electoral preference. This would come as no surprise to a growing number of scholars who challenge the validity of rational choice theory, pointing to the systematic influence of psychological biases in decision-making processes.[97]

The central starting premise of the "cognitive revolution" in international relations notes that while the world is extraordinarily complex, the human brain is fundamentally limited in its ability to process the vast amounts of information required to satisfy the standards of ideal rationality. As a result, people rely on a series of heuristics or cognitive shortcuts to help them make sense of the uncertain world around them. While these heuristics may generally serve people well, they are also a source of significant errors and bias. Often, they will serve to shape an individual's perceptions in ways which reaffirm

[96] Golby and Feaver (2019).
[97] These biases have been repeatedly observed in experimental studies. For an overview, see Kahneman (2011).

prior beliefs, encouraging selective attention to new information and the premature rejection of evidence that does not correspond with their prior assessments. This is a significant problem for presidents, who may be prone to particularly dangerous miscalculations regarding one's own capabilities, the intentions of others, and the consequences of one's actions, all of which may lead to conflict.[98]

Among the increasingly rich literature exploring psychological influences on decision-making, three perspectives stand out for their applicability to international relations:

i) Analogical Reasoning

One psychological research programme of particular relevance to presidential decision-making explores how people learn from history through analogical reasoning.[99] This draws on the "availability" heuristic, whereby assessments of probable outcomes are shaped by events which are familiar, salient and come readily to mind. Analogies help leaders define the nature of a situation, evaluate the relative risks of alternative options, and ultimately determine which policy is most likely to yield a desired outcome. Assuming the relevance of past events on the basis of surface similarity, of course, introduces exaggerations and distortions of reality which can cause individuals to draw the wrong inferences and lead to sub-optimal decisions. Perhaps the most famous example relevant to political leaders is the "Munich" analogy, whereby the failure of appeasement policies in the 1930s led generations of American policymakers to insist on a "tough" approach to communist aggression during the Cold War, leading to a series of costly interventions around the globe.

In the cases examined in this thesis, a series of analogies feature prominently both in the contemporary record of policy deliberations and in post-hoc assessments of wartime

[98] Jervis (2017a).
[99] May (1973); Khong (1992).

strategy. Without denying that these had significant material consequences for decision-making, it is nevertheless reasonable to point to the indeterminacy of this approach, since it is not always clear why one analogy might be invoked over another. Time is undoubtedly a key factor here, since "bad" decisions taken in more recent wars are far more likely to be made "available" to decision-makers. For example, the memory of Lyndon Johnson's descent into the "quagmire" of Vietnam appeared to point to the inadvisability of overseas intervention for an entire generation, yet had apparently been forgotten by the time of the Iraq War, indicating that even the most powerful of analogies have a shelf life. There may be more than one salient analogy from recent times, however, often pointing in entirely different directions. During Vietnam, for instance, the Munich analogy strongly pushed Lyndon Johnson and others to stand up to communist adversaries, yet other officials pointed to the more recent lesson of Dien Bien Phu, where French defeat at the hands of Vietnamese forces appeared to signal the futility of fighting in Southeast Asia. Even one single analogy may give contradictory lessons – did the stalemate in Korea suggest the U.S. should commit fully to a conflict once engaged, or that the U.S. should not engage in conflicts outside of its defensive perimeter of national interest?

It is here where a focus on electoral politics can help, since it is often the *political* significance of an analogy, and its propensity to be invoked by partisan critics, which helps shape how "available" any given analogy is to the president. As we will see, much as "appeasement" became a four-letter word in American politics, so too it was the rancorous debate about the "loss" of China in 1949 which framed Truman's intervention in Korea, and not the strategic similarities between the two cases. In turn, if, as Yuen Foong Khong has persuasively argued, it was the lesson from Korea that escalation might lead to overt Chinese or Soviet intervention which helped convince Lyndon Johnson to adopt a "limited" strategy in Vietnam, then it cannot have been lost on Johnson that his predecessor's

miscalculation also put the nail in the coffin of his re-election hopes.[100] Analogies matter, then, but electoral politics help explain *which* analogies matter.

ii) Overconfidence

A second bias strongly associated with wartime decision-making is overconfidence. People tend to carry exaggerated estimates of their own capabilities, chances of success and control over events. An adaptive trait that may be particularly associated with political leaders, harbouring "positive illusions" has tended to promote a series of decision-making behaviours which tend towards war.[101] This problem may be exacerbated in a group decision-making environment, where "groupthink" and "in-group/out-group" biases can reinforce perceptions of superiority and selection effects can push leaders towards policy options which have already been particularly exposed to exaggeration.[102]

Applied to this thesis, overconfidence may offer a compelling alternative explanation of decisions to escalate a conflict beyond what might be expected from a rational assessment of strategic considerations. As such, courses of action which should be explicable through the *spur* mechanism, including excessively risky military operations or particularly costly strategies, might be attributable to this form of psychological bias. On one hand, then, this psychological approach may supplement the primary argument of this thesis, stepping in to explain any cases of escalation where the soft rationalist electoral framework outlined earlier falls short.

On the other hand, the focus on electoral pressures may prove complementary to analyses of overconfidence. "Positive illusions" may be adaptive traits, but they and overconfidence in general may also derive from and be amplified by motivated biases.

[100] Khong (1992).
[101] Johnson (2004) 23-26
[102] Johnson (2004) 20-23; Altman (2015).

Unlike cognitive biases, which result from constraints on the way the brain works, motivated biases are instead driven by people's emotional needs, the need to maintain self-esteem, and by their broader diplomatic, political or personal interests.[103] The result of this is "wishful thinking," whereby people see what they *want* to see, rather than what they might otherwise *expect* to see.[104] As this thesis shows, political survival may be considered a vital interest which exerts a powerful influence on a president's perception of wartime strategy. It follows that the need to find options which carry minimal electoral risk may feed into motivated biases which skew a president's assessment of the purely strategic aspects of a proposed course of action. Overconfidence and electoral politics, then, may in some cases be inextricably linked.

iii) Prospect Theory

Perhaps the best-known approach in political psychology is prospect theory.[105] Central to this approach is the phenomenon of "loss aversion," whereby people tend to be more sensitive to expected losses relative to a certain reference point than to comparable gains. This bias leads people to be risk-acceptant when faced with possible losses, and risk-averse when faced with possible gains. Since people are slow to accommodate recent losses, moreover, they are prone instead to take excessive risks in order to recover the "sunk costs" associated with them. This behaviour is further exacerbated by the "endowment" effect. Since people value things in their possession more than comparable things not in their possession, actual losses hurt more than foregone gains, reinforcing the systematic pre-disposition towards risk-acceptance in a "domain" of losses.

[103] Johnson (2004) 8; Levy (2013); Jervis (2017a) lxxiv-lxxxviii.
[104] See also Walt (2011).
[105] Jervis (2017b) ch. 4; Levy (1997); Mercer (2005).

Prospect theory has been used to explain a variety of behaviours in American foreign policy and international relations more broadly, including the inclination of policymakers to embark on costly interventions in the periphery, and why those decision-makers continued to invest blood and treasure into these ventures despite clear evidence of their failure.[106] Its value for this thesis flows logically from these premises. Like overconfidence, loss-aversion tends to amplify hawkish arguments in foreign policy decision-making, providing a compelling alternative explanation of decisions to launch risky military gambles and double-down on stagnated wars.[107] The "endowment" effect, meanwhile, offers an alternative reason why reaching a negotiated settlement may be difficult, since people overvalue what they concede in bargaining relative to what they get in return, encouraging stubborn behaviour and deadlock.[108]

Despite its clear utility, prospect theory has been criticised as "a reference-dependent theory without a theory of the reference point."[109] This is a problem, since if we do not know the nature of the yard-stick by which leaders are measuring losses or gains (i.e. the reference point), it is difficult to assess whether an individual is risk-acceptant or risk-averse. The status quo is often assumed to be the reference point, which is both simple and relatively easy to observe, yet it may be the result of more subjective assessments drawing on an individual's aspirations, emotional needs, or salient analogies.[110] Even if we can be reasonably confident of how leaders frame risks in any given scenario, much existing work still assumes that risks are defined by factors derived from their perception of the national interest, including a state's relative power or reputation in the international arena.[111] Finally, if prospect theory can help determine *how* leaders will act under given conditions

[106] Taliaferro (2004); McDermott (2001); Jervis (2017b) 90-96.
[107] Kahneman and Renshon (2009).
[108] Levy (2013) 315.
[109] Levy (1997) 100.
[110] Mercer (2005).
[111] See, for instance, Taliaferro (2004).

of risk, it is less helpful in predicting *when* a leader might choose to pull the trigger on a military gamble designed to avert losses.

This thesis can help address these problems with prospect theory, by pointing to the electoral nature of the reference point and related risks. While a state's power and reputation may be important to a president, he may at least partially frame losses and gains relative to his future electoral prospects.[112] Hence, much as the *spur* mechanism predicts, he may choose to engage in risky military strategies when facing the possibility of electoral defeat (a domain of losses). By contrast, in cases where he is relatively confident of success at the polls (a domain of gains), he may instead be risk-averse when deliberating over wartime strategy so as not to jeopardise that favourable position, much as the *delay* and *dampening* mechanisms imply. Finally, as this chapter has made clear, the electoral cycle may play a key role in shaping how acute the president's sensitivity to these political risks are, thereby suggesting that loss-aversion may be particularly prevalent at key phases, such as in the period preceding an election. At other points, notably after an election, leaders will accommodate to a new reference point, and may therefore be more likely to write off sunk costs and embark on courses of action determined by more reasonable strategic considerations. Prospect theory is clearly not reducible to electoral politics, but a focus on the president's political interests can help sharpen its utility as an analytical tool.

~

This chapter has outlined a new conceptual framework for understanding the influence of electoral politics on wartime decision-making. Drawing on the literature on democracy and war from within the broad liberal IR tradition, it conceptualised electoral pressures as a constraint which serves to push and pull the president away from a course of action he perceives to be strategically optimal. Exactly *how* these constraints shaped decisions to

[112] See Jervis (2017b) 87-88.

escalate or de-escalate a conflict was suggested to depend on the relative alignment between presidential preferences, issue salience and, crucially, the phase of the electoral cycle. Taken together, it was argued that the pressures of democratic accountability operate according to a non-linear pattern given by the electoral cycle. The following empirical chapters apply this framework as a conceptual lens, exploring how much a focus on electoral politics can reveal about decision-making in some of the most significant conflicts of the post-World War II era.

II

Truman, Eisenhower and the Korean War

> "It's a political office, and unless the President maintains his political connections, he can't remain President."
>
> Harry Truman[1]

> "I have a mandate from the American people to stop this fighting."
>
> Dwight Eisenhower[2]

On Saturday, 24 June 1950, Harry S. Truman was at home in Independence, Missouri, when he received a call from his Secretary of State. "Mr. President," said Dean Acheson, "I have very serious news. The North Koreans have invaded South Korea."[3] So began a three-year conflict, the first "hot" war involving U.S. troops during the Cold War, and one which would come to redefine the terms on which the broader superpower confrontation was fought.[4] Closer to home, the conflict would help bring two decades of Democratic dominance in Washington to a close, elevating to power a popular general who promised to end the fighting in Korea and reverse years of "fumbling" policy in the Far East more broadly.

In deciding to meet the challenge by force, Truman initially carried the overwhelming support of the American people. In a classic example of the "rally" effect in public opinion, White House mail was running ten-to-one in favour of the President's actions.[5] On the Hill,

---

[1] "Memoirs: Politics, Political Ethics of Presidents," Undated, PPP, Box 645, HSTL.
[2] Quoted in Clark, Oral History, DDEL.
[3] Quoted in Truman (1956) 332.
[4] See Jervis (1980).
[5] Hopkins to Ross, 29 June 1950, WHCF, Official File, Box 1454, HSTL.

even Truman's most ardent critics, including Senators Robert Taft and William Knowland, spoke favourably of his rapid deployment of troops.[6] Granted a degree of latitude by an electorate and legislature apparently shocked by the violation of international law on the Korean peninsula, a confluence of other pressures all pointed towards a decision to intervene. Whether it was the strategic interest of avoiding Japan's isolation in the region, the lessons of the 1930s regarding the pitfalls of appeasing territorial aggression overseas, or concerns about the credibility of the United States commitment to standing up to Communist forces in the emerging Cold War struggle, the original decision to fight in Korea seems overdetermined.

The emphasis in this chapter, however, is on the *subsequent* decisions regarding military and diplomatic strategy which so profoundly shaped the duration, intensity and scope of the ensuing conflict. Two episodes are explored in particular. First is the escalation of the war in the autumn of 1950, embodied primarily in the authorisation granted to General MacArthur to cross the 38th parallel in pursuit of the full unification of Korea. This decision reflected a fundamental change in war aims and helped trigger a massive Chinese counter-offensive in the weeks that followed. The progress of the armistice talks that accompanied the resulting stalemate constitutes the second episode analysed here.

In both cases, it is argued that the electoral cycle at home placed political constraints on both Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower as Commanders-in-Chief. While convinced of the strategic necessity of keeping the conflict "limited," Truman faced an intensely partisan and belligerent atmosphere in the lead-up to the 1950 midterm elections. With public sentiment whipped up by demagogues in the wake of the "loss" of China, he understood the political price that would be paid at the ballot box if his policies could be presented to voters as "soft" on Communism. As a result, through acts of both commission

[6] See Blomstedt (2016) 38-41; Brands (2016) 114-115; Caridi (1968) 36-37; Foot (1985) 62-63.

and omission, electoral constraints pushed the President to expand the political and military scope of the war, in a powerful example of the *spur* mechanism outlined in chapter I.

Freed from similar political pressures following his withdrawal from the presidential race in March 1952, Truman was for a time able to pursue his preferred diplomatic course of action in the talks at Panmunjom, clinging stubbornly to the principle of "non-forcible repatriation" of POWs. As the campaign heated up, however, Truman found his bargaining leverage significantly curtailed, eventually leading him to support an India-backed U.N. ceasefire resolution which was deemed sub-optimal by a majority of his administration. As President-Elect, General Eisenhower did himself no favours during this "lame duck" phase of the electoral cycle, distancing himself from the incumbent administration's position in ways which ironically only further tied his hands to the Indian resolution when he took office in the New Year. Despite thereby contributing to the *spoiler* effect that an election year can have on negotiations, Eisenhower otherwise benefitted from relatively weak *hangover* constraints, affording him an opportunity to threaten major escalation in a way which likely helped seal the armistice deal of July 1953.

~

While alternative bureaucratic and psychological constraints are explored at the end of this chapter, it suffices to note up front some contextual features of this case which may mediate the explanatory value of the central argument presented here, and in particular those relating to the different beliefs and experience of each of the presidents examined in this chapter.

On one hand, Harry Truman, a well-connected politician with two terms of Senate experience prior to his arrival in the executive branch, was an intensely partisan Commander-in-Chief. While instinctively distrustful of opinion polls as inexact bellwethers of the public mood he remained acutely aware of the need to factor in popular

sentiment when making national policy.[7] As one of his aides recalled, he was "very anxious to know, not only through his press office but through others on his staff, through the cabinet, and through people on the Hill, what the people out in the country were interested in and what they wanted."[8] It follows that Truman may have been predisposed to be particularly sensitive to electoral pressures, but that evidence for how this was manifested may be found through his perceptions of alternative indicators, notably media comment and congressional voices.[9]

By contrast, Dwight Eisenhower enjoyed the non-partisan image of a military hero. Having once been offered Truman's support if he ran for President in 1948, he never really embraced his position as titular head of the Republican party once in the Oval Office, preferring instead to govern in an outwardly apolitical manner through his "hidden-hand" strategy.[10] Though still vulnerable to scrutiny from the politically powerful isolationist group within his own party, Eisenhower could expect to be shielded from the excesses of partisan criticism which had plagued Truman, and was arguably less susceptible to electoral pressures as~~t~~ a result. As for experience, Eisenhower's background as a five-star general surely left him more knowledgeable regarding military affairs than his predecessor, yet it does not follow that Truman was any less interested in the key decisions of the Korean War. In reality, Truman remained constantly informed of all military operations, and personally approved all major steps in the armistice negotiations that followed.[11]

[7] On polling, Truman once amusingly asked, "I wonder how far Moses would have gone if he'd taken a poll in Egypt? What would Jesus Christ have preached if he'd taken a poll in Israel?" "Polls-Public Opinion Leadership," PPP, Box 645, HSTL.
[8] Quoted in Casey (2008) 33.
[9] While mandatory censorship of the press would serve to circumscribe the media's ability to present critical information to the public, this was only instituted after the main military operations of the war had taken place. See Casey (2008) chs. 2, 6.
[10] Eisenhower (1948) 484; Greenstein (1982).
[11] Collins (1969) 120; Truman (1956) 459.

Expanding the War

The decision to cross the 38th parallel and thereby expand the aim of intervention in Korea was made on the eve of the 1950 congressional midterms, a stage of the electoral cycle carrying high political sensitivity. As this section demonstrates, during this period there existed a strong imbalance between President Truman's strategic preference for restraint in fighting a "limited" war, and the competing escalatory pressures from a belligerent public mood. Under such conditions, according to the conceptual framework outlined in chapter I, any salient decision regarding military strategy may be subject to the *spur* mechanism, whereby a proposed course of action is dialled up in intensity and scope in response to the electoral risks of excessive caution. In the following analysis, considerable evidence is adduced to support this hypothesis.

Containing the War

At the time of the outbreak of the Korean War, the underlying grand strategy governing American decision-making was the doctrine of "containment." Starting from the realist assumption that the relative balance of power is the primary driver of change in international politics, this doctrine held that the overriding goal of national security policy should be to maintain a balance favourable to the U.S. It did not dwell on the need to impress the Soviets with unlimited resolve, nor did it contemplate unqualified support for any area facing the threat of Communist subversion. Instead, as articulated by George Kennan, it entailed a firm commitment to defend only those areas of concentrated military-industrial capability which could alter the overall balance of power – namely the U.K., the Rhine Valley, and Japan.[12]

[12] See Gaddis (2005) chs. 2-4.

Though perceived as a Kremlin-supported affront to international peace, the conflict on the Korean peninsula thus fell into the category of a proxy war, an essentially limited action designed to achieve modest Soviet objectives without implying any desire for wider escalation. While overriding political imperatives justifiably compelled an armed response to such a flagrant breach of the border between the North and South, the resulting American action should be carefully measured, so as not to waste valuable blood and treasure on an area of minimal strategic importance.[13] In practice, noted Kennan, that meant pursuing the relatively modest objective of pushing the invading forces back to the 38th parallel, thereby restoring the *status quo ante*.[14]

Importantly, in the minutes of several meetings in the early days of the crisis, there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that President Truman clearly perceived this as the optimal strategy. On 26 June, for instance, in waiving restrictions on naval and air operations in Korea, he was at pains to insist that "no action should be taken north of the 38th parallel." Resisting the urge to commit ground troops at that moment, he urged that his Joint Chiefs remain vigilant, adding, "I don't want to go to war."[15] Two days later, the President resisted calls from military advisers to allow U.S. planes to bomb North Korean bases across the border, flatly saying, "we were not to do it."[16]

On 29 June, with the situation in Korea deteriorating by the hour, Truman reversed this decision, authorising air and sea support to South Korean troops across the parallel. He was, however, even more forceful in his insistence on utmost caution, lest the action lead to direct retaliation by Soviet forces. As the Secretary of Defense began reading out a draft directive implementing his latest decision, Truman interrupted to object to a paragraph

[13] This assessment of the strategic significance of Korea was reflected in a Joint Chiefs of Staff assessment of 1947, as well as Dean Acheson's famous address of January 1950, in which Korea was declared to be outside the defensive perimeter of American interest in the Far East.
[14] Kennan (1973) 24; Kennan (2014) 264.
[15] 26 June 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.
[16] 28 June 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.

which might be interpreted as more aggressive than intended. "I do not want any implication in the letter that we are going to war with Russia," ordered Truman, adding, "We must be damn careful… We want to take any steps we have to to push the North Koreans behind the line, but I don't want to get us over-committed." Overruling concerns from the Joint Chiefs about restrictions on bombing targets, Truman "said that he only wanted to restore order to the 38th parallel; he did not want to do anything north of it except to 'keep the North Koreans from killing the people we are trying to save.'"[17]

When the first U.S. ground units were given a green light to enter the battle the following day, there remained no doubt as to the ultimate objectives of their deployment was intended to achieve. In a speech before the American Newspaper Guild on 29 June, Dean Acheson publicly articulated the aims Truman had repeatedly stated that week, insisting that U.S. action in Korea was taken "solely for the purpose of restoring the Republic of Korea to its status prior to the invasion from the north."[18]

Containing the "Irreconcilables"

By the summer of 1950, a climate of fear and crisis gripped the United States. Following the recent "loss" of China, the Soviet development of atomic weapons and the conviction of communist spy Alger Hiss, the airwaves were filled with bitter invective blaming Truman for each setback. A spirit of bipartisanship in foreign policy had given way to the shrill partisanship of a different generation of Republican senators, who turned against the so-called "me-tooism" approach which had led to electoral defeat for the Republican presidential ticket in 1948. While Truman could still rely on an internationalist wing within the Republican party for some support, he faced criticism from an emerging alliance

[17] 29 June 1950, Elsey Papers, Box 71, HSTL.
[18] Quoted in *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. XXIII, No. 575, 46.

between the increasingly vocal "China bloc" (led by Senators Knowland and Smith) and an influential isolationist faction (led by Senators Taft and Wherry). Coupled with the sensational accusations of Joseph McCarthy's "Red Scare" at home, the opposition party stood primed to pounce on any chance to label the administration's policies as "soft" on communism.[19]

The Korean War was a golden opportunity for these critics. In the first days of the crisis, the President was warned by Acheson that Truman should "prepare for criticism and tough sledding."[20] Indeed, this Republican group, scathingly labelled the "irreconcilables" by the Secretary of State, wasted little time in cultivating an alternative narrative of events in the Far East designed explicitly to reap political gains at the ballot box in November.[21] Writing to a friend in mid-July, Taft explained, "The only way we can beat the Democrats is to go after their mistakes… There is no alternative except to support the war, but we can point out that it has resulted from a bungling of the Democratic administration."[22] Members of the more extreme "conspiracy group" went one step further, attributing the outbreak of conflict to not just fumbled policy, but conspiratorial intent, while the poster boy of the Republican campaign, Senator McCarthy, quickly attributed events in Korea to the actions of "a group of untouchables in the State Department." Later, he underscored the point to his constituents: "If you want more of that, keep them in office."[23]

These critics were also increasingly clear about how the conflict should be dealt with now that it was underway. Rejecting the President's limited goals in Korea, they called on him to take the fight to the enemy. "Why do we not push a more vigorous, positive policy?" asked Senator Ferguson.[24] Lest those in power fail~~ed~~ to hear such pressures, a group of

[19] Caridi (1968) 1-21.
[20] Acheson (1969) 411.
[21] *Ibid*. 416.
[22] Quoted in Blomstedt (2016) 65.
[23] Quoted in Kaufman (1984) 50.
[24] Quoted in Caridi (1986) 71.

legislators – notably internationalist in composition – descended on the State Department in mid-August to make things crystal clear. Warning of "a growing disposition on the part of the American people to support the concept of preventive war," the group stressed that "This growing attitude is aired in fear, and will continue to grow in volume unless some bold alternative course of action is presented by the government."[25]

Such belligerent prescriptions were reflected in leading media publications, too. "You can hear lots of 'preventive war' talk in Washington these days, and everywhere else in the country, too," reported the *New Republic* on 21 August. "The President and his advisers," it scornfully added, "are firmly opposed to any such idea."[26] Other mainstream outlets such as *TIME* openly advocated using the threat of atomic weapons outside Korea's borders, adding that its deterrent effect is the reason "why talk of 'preventive war' by the U.S. against the U.S.S.R. stays on the tongues of the American people."[27]

These congressional and media viewpoints were broadly accurate indicators of the public at large. For instance, following Truman's 19 July speech outlining the steps taken to meet the aggression in Korea, findings from focus groups revealed that "the president was not in advance of the national mood… [and] if anything, the public would evidently have gone along with somewhat stronger language regarding communism." Meanwhile, other polls analysed by the State Department revealed that "the main criticism of the administration's actions since June 25 is that the actions are inadequate." Not only was the public opposed to perceived timidity that Republican politicians had been warning them about, it was remarkably willing to pay the costs of a more forceful policy. One Gallup poll, for instance, indicated that 70 percent of Americans favoured higher taxes to increase the size of the army. "Rarely has the Institute in its fifteen years of measuring public

[25] Quoted in Casey (2008) 85.
[26] "Washington Wire," 21 August 1950, *New Republic*.
[27] 18 September 1950, *TIME*, Vol. LVI, No. 8.

opinion," concluded Gallup, "found such heavy majorities expressing a willingness to pay more taxes for any public purpose."[28]

Importantly, Truman was aware of these sentiments spreading across the nation. Warned in an NSC meeting by the Vice President of "growing uneasiness in the country and the feeling that we might be pushed out of Korea," the President replied that "he was aware of this feeling."[29] He also understood that critical Republican statements like those made by prominent Senators in August referring to Truman's "green light" for the invasion reflected "a purely political move and it is understood that the Republicans have been planning to make the Korean situation their leading issue in this year's congressional elections."[30]

In short, it seems clear that Truman's strategic and electoral interests pointed in opposing directions during this period. Whereas the President perceived a clear strategic danger in excessive escalation, such caution had become firmly set in Republican crosshairs in the midterm campaign. With the conditions of the *spur* mechanism in place, what role did these electoral pressures play in subsequent debates leading Truman to authorise troops to cross the 38th parallel and seek unification by force?

Crossing the 38th Parallel

That public opinion and Republican electioneering would shape internal debates about the decision to expand the Korean War was evident from early on in the deliberations. After Truman requested that a policy recommendation be prepared during a 17 July NSC meeting in the event that U.N. forces reached the dividing marker, the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department quickly put pen to paper. In a series of draft memoranda, a cautious

[28] All quoted in Casey (2008) 76.
[29] 14 July 1950, PSF, Box 188, HSTL.
[30] 14 August 1950, Ayers Papers, Box 21, HSTL.

faction influenced by George Kennan spelled out the severe risks of such an escalatory step. In the first of these papers, a firm recommendation was given to avoid crossing the 38th parallel, since doing so would leave the danger of conflict with Chinese or Soviet forces "greatly increased." Notably, however, the authors also remained acutely conscious that "public and Congressional opinion in the United States might be dissatisfied with any conclusion falling short of what it would consider a 'final' settlement of the problem. Hence, a sentiment might arise favoring a continuation of military action north of the 38th parallel. The development of such a sentiment might create serious problems for the execution of United States policy."[31]

A rival group within the State Department, led by John Allison and Dean Rusk of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, as well as John Foster Dulles, dissented from the conclusion of those in the PPS. Using strikingly similar language to that used by Republican critics in Congress, they authored a series of rebuttals, branding the recommendations "a policy of appeasement… a timid, half-hearted policy designed not to provoke the Soviets to war." Rejecting the significance of the 38th parallel as a meaningful division, Allison felt that the "status quo ante bellum" – the stated goal of the President of the United States – was an unacceptable war outcome. Instead, Allison advocated a policy recognizing that "he who takes the sword will perish by the sword," even if "this may mean war on a global scale."[32] Such language exasperated advisers like Kennan, who had begun to doubt whether the kind of "cool and rational analysis" he favoured still had a place in the administration. "In the somewhat childish and abusive atmosphere of a democratic society already disbalanced by McCarthyism," he concluded, "there was use only for the cruder and the starker concepts."[33]

---

[31] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 344.
[32] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 349. See also Nos. 188, 278, 287 and 295.
[33] Kennan (2014) 261.

Indeed, the tenor of internal debate only moved further towards the hawkish Republican view through late-July and into August. In a meeting to discuss the latest State Department draft, it was concluded that the paragraph mentioning public opinion "will be modified to indicate that U.S. public and Congressional opinion would not now be satisfied with a restoration of the status quo ante."[34] The revised memorandum now noted that "a sentiment favoring a continuation of military action north of the 38th parallel *already is arising*."[35] These amendments met with the approval of advisers like Dulles, though they still considered insufficient a newly revised recommendation to effectively "wait-and-see" what to do about the 38th parallel until circumstances made a decision necessary.[36] Instead, they turned to less equivocal recent draft memoranda prepared in the Department of Defense calling for a decision to push forward in Korea. Even there, however, public pressures loomed large in the calculations. Though a dovish faction might develop, Allison again pointed to "a growing sentiment in the United States favoring a "final" settlement of the Korean problem and disapproving of any settlement which smacks of compromise or a 'deal.'"[37]

In other words, those tasked by the President with advising on the issue of the 38th parallel had expressly concluded that their Commander-in-Chief's strategic preference for containing the war was out of step with the public mood. While Truman was not directly involved in the deliberations at this stage, it is notable that the direction of travel within his administration was bending away from his strategic preference and towards that of more hawkish Republicans like Dulles, who had been brought on board as Consultant to the Secretary of State in no small part thanks to Truman's desire to protect the political flank

[34] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 365.
[35] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 386; emphasis added.
[36] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 385.
[37] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 422.

of his administration.[38] Such a trend seemed to be in keeping with some of the White House's most urgent priorities when thinking about this question; at an NSC meeting of 10 August, the hope was expressed that the studies now underway could be "expedited," and that they "should take into consideration the possible Congressional reaction when the North Koreans have been driven back to the 38th parallel."[39]

In turn, as the midterm elections approached, Republicans in Congress were becoming even more specific in their line of criticism of the administration's apparent timidity in Korea, calling a restoration of the *status quo ante* fundamentally insufficient as the objective of any strategy. "For the invaders merely to move north of the thirty-eighth parallel will not mean a great deal in the final analysis," said Senator Knowland, adding, "if the Republic of Korea, the United States, and the western world are to be living under a gun, in that aggression of the same type might take place three months from now or six months from now, a peace achieved under those circumstances would be a very uneasy one."[40] Senator Taft, perceived by Truman as a would-be candidate for President, now gained support for his belief that U.S./U.N. forces should "march right on over the 38th parallel and at least occupy the southern part of North Korea."[41]

Sensing the way the political winds were blowing, Kennan left government in later August, penning a final note of advice to the Secretary of State in which he pulled no punches. "The course upon which we are today moving is one, as I see it, so little promising and so fraught with danger that I could not honestly urge you to continue to take

---

[38] Justifying the appointment, Truman had apparently said to sceptics, "Look! You fellows don't understand politics… Of course, John Foster Dulles is going to take time out every two years to be a Republican, but between elections we want to work with him if he's willing to work with us." Quoted in Acheson (1969) 161. Truman would go on to accuse Dulles of instigating the "demagogic" charges made in the Republican campaign manifesto that August. 14 and 17 August 1950, Ayers Papers, Box 21, HSTL.

[39] 10 August 1950, PSF, Box 181, HSTL.

[40] Quoted in Caridi (1968) 73.

[41] Quoted in Foot (1985) 69.

responsibility for it," he explained. In truth, and "leaving aside for the moment our domestic political inhibitions," a unified and independent Korea was not in the core strategic interest of the United States. "A period of Russian domination, while undesirable, is preferable to continued U.S. involvement in that unhappy area," and as such a moderate policy of restraint and negotiation should follow. "So much for national interest in the abstract," Kennan nonetheless concluded, noting how "public opinion, aroused by the Korean aggression, and confused by the partisan attacks on the administration, is not prepared for this sort of a policy. I realize that an attempt to proceed along these lines would encounter, as things stand today, violent and outraged opposition both within sectors of the Executive branch and in the Congress. In particular, it would mean pouring oil on the fires already kindled by the Republican opposition in the charge that our Far Eastern policy has been over-lenient to Communism and therefore neglectful of our national security."[42]

It had become an open secret within government by this point that, as the Chief of Staff of the Army later recalled, in planning the next move in Korea, "public opinion and political considerations had to be weighed by the President and his advisers."[43] Though Acheson later claimed that Kennan's 23 August memorandum had offered "good, even if purely negative, advice," there was little that could be done. "In view of public opinion and political pressures in the concrete," he wrote, "ideas such as these could only be kept in mind as warnings not to be drawn into quicksands."[44]

The following month, the die was cast. On 11 September, President Truman approved NSC 81/1, authorising ground operations north of the parallel, provided there was no entry into North Korea of major Soviet or Chinese forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor any threat to counter such operations militarily. This action, it was hoped, would bring

[42] Kennan to Acheson, 23 August 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.
[43] Collins (1969) 148.
[44] Acheson (1969) 446.

about the "complete independence and unity of Korea," a political goal which up to this point had been considered separate from the military mission now being pursued.[45] A directive was duly sent on 27 September by the Joint Chiefs to General MacArthur giving as his new aim "the destruction of the North Korean armed forces."[46] The Rubicon had well and truly been crossed. As General Bradley put it, "NSC-81/1 reflected a drastic change in our concept of the Korean War. Our initial intervention had been launched as an effort to 'save' South Korea. Now we had broadened our war aims to include complete destruction of the North Korean Army and political unification of the country. This was a bold and aggressive step on the Far East stage. I might even say that, it was an extremely dangerous step."[47]

The very day after MacArthur received his orders to cross the 38th parallel, Truman discussed campaign strategy with his cabinet. The recent decision clearly had a pivotal part to play in it, underscoring the extent to which it was viewed through the prism of electoral politics. Eschewing the use of personal attacks on Republicans, the group agreed that the Democratic party was to run on the strength of the Democratic record in fighting communism. Acheson reported that Korea could soon be added to the list of successes, since plans for a commission were being developed to bring about rehabilitation there. "The 38th Parallel will be ignored," he confirmed, meaning Korea could now "be used as a stage

[45] Lay to Truman, 11 September 1950, PSF, Box 181, HSTL.
[46] JCS to MacArthur, 27 September 1950, Whitney Papers, Box 4, MMA.
[47] Bradley and Blair (1983) 561.

It might also be noted that it was in September that NSC-68 was finally approved by Truman, having been initially presented to him back in April. A far more aggressive prescription for American grand strategy in the Cold War than Kennan's "containment" doctrine, the crusading anti-communistic rhetoric it contained fit well with the more belligerent policies now being adopted in Korea. It is highly suggestive that Truman would approve the document at the height of the midterm campaign, after months of fears that the mobilisation measures it called for would encourage public opinion to boil over and push the administration to a more aggressive posture than he thought strategically wise. See Casey (2005); Gaddis (2005) ch. 4.

to prove what Western Democracy can do to help the underprivileged countries of the world."[48]

Since a critic might suggest that this decision was simply an example of "mission creep" following the success of the recent amphibious assault on Inchon, two additional points are worth noting here. First is the timing of Truman's approval of NSC 81/1, which came four days *before* the Battle of Inchon commenced. Second, even if the remarkable success of that operation made an opportunistic gamble to press on with the military advance more likely, it might be speculated that that the authorisation of the plan in the first place was another product of the *spur* mechanism at the operational level. Certainly, this was known to be an enormous risky proposal. The Joint Chiefs had in fact repeatedly warned General MacArthur against a landing at Inchon, with Bradley later calling it "the riskiest military proposal I had ever heard of."[49] Even MacArthur considered it a "5,000 to 1 gamble," while his amphibious warfare expert – the man who would lead the assault, no less – reportedly said at the time that "Though the operation was not impossible… he did not recommend it."[50] Yet MacArthur's plan for Inchon was also precisely the type of bold, aggressive move that the electoral atmosphere of late-1950 called for. It is highly suggestive, then, that Truman appears to have readily embraced the idea. According to Averell Harriman, who had been sent to hear details of the plan in early August, the President insisted that upon his return Harriman should meet immediately with the Secretary of Defense and General Bradley, because, as Truman put it, "I want them to act on it rapidly."[51] By the time Harriman reached General Bradley, the President had already called on his top military advisers to formalise a recommendation for Inchon, which

[48] 29 September 1950, Connelly Papers, Box 2, HSTL.
[49] Bradley and Blair (1983) 544. See also Whitney (1956) 357-358.
[50] MacArthur quoted in Stueck (1995) 85; Doyle quoted in Collins (1969) 123.
[51] Harriman, Oral History, James Interviews, Box 5, MMA.

received his assent the following morning, 10 August. If Inchon helped pave the way for the final orders allowing MacArthur to enter North Korea, then, it nevertheless fit within the broader pattern of steadily increasing hawkishness in Washington in harmony with the rising temperature of the political environment at home.

~

Having made the pivotal move, developments through October should have caused a reconsideration of the course of action now embarked upon. Indications of intended or actual intervention by the Chinese – an explicit condition of NSC 81/1's guidance – were aplenty in this period. Among the more notable warnings sent via the Indian Ambassador to Beijing, K. M. Panikkar, was an explicit threat on 3 October by the Chinese Foreign Minister, Zhou En Lai, that while South Korean presence in North Korea might not precipitate Chinese intervention, if *U.S.* troops crossed the parallel, such aggression would be met with outside force.[52] This seemed to support a report from the week before quoting the Chief of Staff of the Chinese Army as warning that "China would not take such provocations lying down."[53] Having arguably given fair warning, Chairman Mao confirmed his decision to intervene in early-to-mid October, before tens of thousands of Chinese troops began crossing the Yalu on 19 October.[54] Importantly, the U.S. picked up concrete signs of this development through the second half of the month, with a flurry of reports detailing the capture of Chinese soldiers reaching Washington.[55] By 1 November, the CIA Director had heard enough to author a memorandum to Truman telling the President that Chinese intervention had now been "clearly established," and while ultimate objectives were unclear, at least some 15,000 troops were operating in North Korea,

[52] Henderson to Acheson, 4 October 1950, SMOF/KWF, Box 5, HSTL.
[53] 27 September 1950, SMOF/KWF, Box 5, HSTL.
[54] On Chinese decision-making, see Stueck (1995) ch. 3.
[55] See "Daily Korea Situation" reports of 27, 30 and 31 October 1950, SMOF/KWF, Box 5, HSTL.

supported by Soviet air support, with many more stationed in Manchuria.[56] "If ever there was a time for military caution," recalled the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, "it was now."[57]

Instead, Truman doubled down. In the first week of October, the U.S. helped draft and guide through the U.N. a new resolution authorising steps to be taken to ensure stability *throughout* Korea.[58] The following day he approved new orders to MacArthur, authorising him to continue operations in case of major Chinese intervention in North Korea, so long as the commander felt there to be "a reasonable chance of success."[59] Next, when MacArthur issued orders on 24 October waiving all restrictions on the use of non-ROK forces near the borders with Manchuria and the U.S.S.R., Truman remained essentially silent. Though the commander's actions were in direct contradiction of his 27 September directive, and known to raise risks of Chinese retaliation, Truman favoured using "caution and understatement" in questioning MacArthur's actions, approving a brief note from the Joint Chiefs merely noting that the action had been a "matter of concern" in Washington.[60] Finally, on 6 November, Truman permitted a request from MacArthur to bomb the bridges across the Yalu River, on the Korean border with China.[61]

Why, faced with indications of imminent outside intervention in Korea which Truman had earlier sought to avoid with such care, did the President take steps which he knew would make that possibility a reality? The looming elections surely had a key role in this calculation. If the public mood during the summer made a decision to halt at the 38th parallel politically difficult, the subsequent development of hawkish sentiment and increasing

[56] Smith to Truman, 1 November 1950, NSCF, Box 3, HSTL.
[57] Bradley and Blair (1983) 580.
[58] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 640.
[59] JCS to MacArthur, 8 October 1950, WHCF, Confidential File, HSTL.
[60] Bradley and Blair (1983) 579; JCS to MacArthur, 24 October 1950, Whitney Papers, Box 4, MMA.
[61] JCS to MacArthur, 7 November 1950, Radiograms, Box 45, MMA.

proximity of the midterms made any subsequent reconsideration of that order unfathomable.

Among the mass media, even political opposites like conservative *Life* and the liberal *New Republic* agreed that, as the latter put it, "the restoration of the status quo ante [was] no longer a matter of negotiation with the USSR."[62] Editorials in the *New York Times* agreed that the 38th parallel was a pure "fiction" and any anxiety about crossing it was thus "groundless." Reporting "an overwhelming surge of opinion and emotion that favors a free and united Korea," anything less was "to admit defeat and to invite disaster."[63] These sentiments were picked up in a State Department media survey of 3 October, while among the broader public, polling indicated a more than two-to-one majority in favour of the decision to push into North Korea.[64]

Truman, meanwhile, only took steps to box himself in further. On 24 October, the day MacArthur removed restrictions on the use of non-ROK troops, Truman in fact stated that the fighting in Korea was "nearly ended," in a long-planned speech which one White House aide had earlier advised would "permit the president, without the slightest taint of 'politicking,' to emphasize his (and the Democratic Party's) foreign-policy plank for the November elections."[65] Having so publicly praised the efficacy of the recent use of force to achieve political unification in Korea, it is notable that a public statement of reassurance about U.S. intentions vis-à-vis China – planned in response to the late October warning of

---

[62] Kaufman (1984) 84.
[63] "The 38th Parallel," 30 September 1950, *New York Times*; "North of the 38th," 2 October 1950, *New York Times*; "A Plan for Korea," 29 September 1950, *New York Times*.
[64] Casey (2008) 101.
[65] "Address by Mr. Harry S. Truman," United Nations General Assembly, Fifth Session, 24 October 1950. Available online at: https://undocs.org/en/A/PV.295 (accessed 6 August 2019); Bell to Murphy, 14 August 1950, Elsey Papers, Box 47, HSTL.

Chinese intervention – was shelved, at least in part because "did not want to risk a charge from his bitter Republican critics that he was attempting to appease the communists."[66]

~

In sum, the decisions taken in September by Harry Truman appear to have been subjected to electoral pressures on the eve of the 1950 midterm elections. Having established a firm strategic preference for keeping the war "limited," the President nevertheless embarked on an escalatory course of action both he and his advisers understood would severely raise the risks of conflict with China or the Soviet Union. In dialling up the level of military intervention on the Korean peninsula, and opting not to back down when evidence of Chinese intervention became apparent, he was responding to an increasingly belligerent public mood. Sensitive to Republican charges of timidity and "softness" at the height of the congressional election campaign, his actions bear the distinctive characteristics of the *spur* mechanism.

While the strategic environment was undoubtedly transformed by China's massive counter-offensive of late November 1950 – an event which resulted in "an entirely new war," as MacArthur put it – it is nonetheless instructive to note how President Truman relatively swiftly reverted to his original strategic conception of the war in the post-midterm period.[67] Once the Chinese had demonstrated that the price of a unified Korea would be a considerably widened war across Asia, Truman showed little inclination to pay it. Instead, the NSC would within weeks agree to a new policy statement favouring a negotiated ceasefire at or around the 38th parallel.[68] MacArthur's alternative proposals for escalatory steps against China, including the bombing and blockade of the mainland, were quickly left

[66] Quoted in Casey (2008) 118.
[67] MacArthur to JCS, 27 November 1950, Radiograms, Box 45, MMA.
[68] 12 December 1950, PSF, Box 188, HSTL.

by the wayside.[69] In May 1951, NSC 81/1 was formally abandoned and replaced as governing U.S. policy by NSC 48/5, a broader document expressly renouncing the objective of Korean unification by military means and committing instead to a satisfactory termination of hostilities.[70]

In making this retreat to modest objectives in Korea, Truman displayed a newfound indifference to a public mood which if anything had become increasingly hawkish, demonstrating how sensitivity to public opinion is conditional on the stage of the electoral cycle.[71] With two years to run until the next election campaign, the President was able to set the course of military action in Korea relatively free of the constraints which had previously proven to be so acute. For the rest of his term in office, the broad contours of military strategy in the Far East would remain unchanged, as attention shifted to efforts to conclude hostilities through diplomatic means.

Seeking an Armistice

As explained in chapter I, the electoral cycle generates pressures at all stages of a conflict, not simply affecting how it may be fought, but also any subsequent efforts to settle a war peacefully. Under the *spoiler* mechanism, the leverage afforded to the administration to pursue its preferred bargaining position may be eroded by a number of sources, including the president's own political preferences, the strategic calculations of other candidates and negotiating opponents, and the pressures related to the fixed deadline of Election Day.

This section begins by examining early efforts to resolve the Korean conflict, which were affected even by the 1950 midterms, before exploring the relationship between the

---

[69] MacArthur to JCS, 10 January 1951, Whitney Papers, Box 4, MMA; MacArthur to JCS, 30 December 1950, FECOM Records, Box 1, MMA; Foot (1985) 118-130.
[70] 17 May 1951, PSF, Box 188, HSTL.
[71] See McCarthy to Truman, 2 December 1950, WHCF, Official File, Box 1454, HSTL; and "Daily Opinion Summary," 4 December 1950, Elsey Papers, Box 77, HSTL.

1952 campaign and the progress of ongoing armistice talks. It finds that the combination of Truman's "lame duck" status and other states' concerns about possible future escalation under President-elect Eisenhower served to generate the basis of a diplomatic solution to the deadlocked issue of POW repatriation. It concludes by briefly exploring how the "honeymoon" period of Eisenhower's presidency then permitted him sufficient latitude to make a deal stick in July 1953.

"Political Dynamite": Taiwan, China and Missed Opportunities in 1950

The Korean War might never have reached the intensity that it did, were early efforts at mediation by Britain and India seriously explored. In early July, a series of messages reached the State Department seeking to draw the U.S. into discussions over the terms of a possible diplomatic settlement to the crisis. Alluding to promising indications of an appetite for peace expressed by Soviet and Chinese officials, the cables – which included high-level correspondence from the British Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, and the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru – all shared a common theme: the need for a *quid pro quo*, trading a restoration of the *status quo ante* in Korea for concessions in U.S. policy regarding the status of Taiwan and Communist China's bid for a seat on the U.N. Security Council.[72]

The cables also received an equally consistent response from the Truman administration: flat out rejection. The contents of the proposals apparently "disturbed" Truman, who in response approved Acheson's suggestion that he work on "getting the British and the Indians straightened out so that they would not both be attempting to mediate in the Korean situation."[73] Acheson thus drafted a long and forceful rebuttal of any *quid pro quo* in a telegram to Bevin, approved by the President.[74] The firmness of the

[72] See *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII*, Nos. 224, 250, 268, 270, 277.
[73] 10 July 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.
[74] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII*, No. 258.

American response was in fact sufficient to cause a minor diplomatic spat with the British, leaving Bevin "surprised and a little taken aback" by the "vigor" of Acheson's message, remaining "hurt if not offended" for days afterward.[75] As for Nehru, he also received a cable from the American Secretary of State in a similar vein, which read that the Indian request for U.S. movement on the seating of Chinese representative in the U.N. "put us in a very difficult position."[76]

Why did the Truman administration respond so negatively to these efforts? Partly, of course, as Acheson detailed in his correspondence with Bevin and Nehru, there was no desire to "reward" Communist aggressors for abrogating international law by apparently directing the unprovoked invasion of an independent nation. Yet in insisting that Korea must be dealt with on its own merits, rather than tied to other disputes in the region, Acheson revealed sensitivity to domestic political fallout that would result from any appearance of appeasing the Communist world. Connecting Korea to other "hot button" issues in the Far East would only recall Truman's "loss" of China in 1949 and validate the main charges being made by Republican critics in the run-up to the 1950 midterms.

George Kennan's contemporary account of the debate inside the administration certainly points in this direction. Personally inclined to see any seating of Chinese Communists in the U.N. as representing "no new reality of any great significance," he reports being shouted down by State Department officials, notably including John Foster Dulles, on the explicit grounds of "public opinion." Kennan "shuddered at the implications" that "emotional anti-communism" would drive U.S. policy in the Far East, having previously attributed similar arguments, agreed with by Acheson, to "irresponsible and bigoted interference of the China lobby and his friends in Congress."[77]

---

[75] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII*, Nos. 266, 285.
[76] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII*, No. 301.
[77] Kennan (2014) 262-268.

It was also the perception of Foreign Minister Bevin at the time. Reporting on his failure to move U.S. policy, he explained to the British cabinet that the China had become a matter of "bitter controversy" across the Atlantic, adding his view that, "it is precisely because the Far East has become a party political issue that the Administration's policy has been so negative." Speaking in late-August, he was not optimistic that things would improve. "The situation is rendered more acute by the fact that elections for the whole of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate are due in November," he explained. "It may therefore be expected that the temperature on Far Eastern questions will rise rather than fall during the next three months." On the question of seating a Chinese delegation at the U.N., there was little hope for movement by the Americans in response to any British proposal. "No effort is likely to succeed which, just before elections, has the result that the United States Administration appears to have given way to United Kingdom pressure," he concluded.[78] Indeed, so unwelcome were the politically toxic views of the British that repeated efforts to arrange a visit by the Prime Minister were rebuffed, with Truman advising that a pre-election conference would be "inopportune," instead asking Acheson to hold the British off until later in November.[79]

When Bevin nevertheless tried to persuade Acheson that a concession on the China/U.N. issue might not be such a bad idea during meetings in early October, the U.S. Secretary of State apparently confirmed his suspicions about what was driving U.S. policy. "As I expected," Bevin reported to his colleague, "Mr. Acheson found himself unable to modify the attitude of the United States Government because of the forthcoming elections." Crucially, on Taiwan, the U.S. was apparently not opposed to the substantive suggestion to have the issue debated in the U.N. in general, but it could not countenance doing so with

[78] 30 August 1950, CAB 129/41/50, KG.
[79] 5 September 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.

Communist Chinese representatives present in the Security Council. "Their concern over the forthcoming Congressional elections has resulted in their being opposed to any concessions in the Security Council," explained Bevin, reporting he was "not without hope that after the Congressional elections in November, it may be possible to secure a change-over in Chinese representation in the United Nations."[80]

~

After the midterm elections, Bevin's assessment was at least in part borne out by the course of diplomatic activity at the U.N., where the U.S. agreed to delay the introduction of a resolution branding China an "aggressor," despite overwhelming domestic pressure to continue with a hard-line approach.

After the Chinese counter-offensive of late November, it was well understood that any concessions along the lines suggested by the British and Indians earlier that summer remained beyond the pale of political acceptability in the United States. This came up repeatedly during meetings with Clement Attlee in early December, in which the British Prime Minister tried to convince Truman to embrace a more flexible approach. In response, Acheson admitted to sharing many of the underlying assumptions staked out by Attlee, but, having been "bloodied" by critics in the past over the issue, "the question was not whether this was a correct analysis but whether it was possible to act on it." The U.S. administration apparently felt the answer to this was surely no, with Truman adding that "this was quite a political issue in the United States since Chiang had many converts here."[81] Later in the conference, Truman similarly referred to the China issue as "political dynamite in the United States," and with any move to permit their accession to the Security Council likely to cause "a great deal of difficulty with our people," he felt "we could hardly talk about

[80] 6 October 1950, CAB 129/42/21, KG.
[81] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 977.

negotiating the question." As for the suggestion that the U.S. "give up" Taiwan, Truman similarly pointed out that "it was not sound from the political point of view here and that he had to consider the political situation here."[82] In short, it was crystal clear that anything but a continuation of the summer's firm stance on these questions would fly in the face of intense public and congressional sentiment.

It is notable, then, that during the rest of December and into January the U.S. adopted diplomatic positions which, as Acheson put it at the time, "brought ourselves to the verge of destruction domestically."[83] First, just days after the conference with Attlee, Truman agreed to prioritise an Indian-backed resolution calling for a U.N. ceasefire committee to be established to explore possible conditions for a settlement in Korea.[84] Truman surely understood that the red lines he had just outlined at length to the British would be part of these discussions, and yet he bowed to allied pressure, leaving a U.S.-backed resolution condemning China for its intervention to gather dust.

After that effort failed, thanks in part to Chinese intransigence, Truman, advised by Acheson, again decided to defer the introduction of a formal resolution declaring China an "aggressor," in favour of another allied attempt to find grounds for mutually satisfactory ceasefire arrangements. While these, too, ended up going nowhere, what is important to note here is that the Truman administration, faced with what Acheson called a "murderous choice" between alienating allies who feared a further escalation of the war, and risking pouring fuel on the already explosive political atmosphere at home, chose the former course of action. Having refused to even talk to its allies about possible ceasefire terms before the congressional elections, the Truman administration thereafter displayed a notably reduced sensitivity to risks associated with public opinion, much as the conceptual framework

[82] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII*, No. 1002.
[83] *FRUS, 1951, Korea and China, VII (Part I)*, No. 72. See also Barnes (2010).
[84] 12 December 1950, PSF, Box 188, HSTL.

outlined in chapter I predicts. With the aggressor resolution finally passed in February, it would not be until mid-1951 that formal armistice talks were initiated. By that time, it would not be long before electoral politics reared its head once more.

"Not a Point for Bargaining!": The 1952 Campaign and Interregnum

For much of the 1952 campaign season, President Truman was able to pursue his preferred course of action relatively free of electoral constraints. Part of the reason for this has to do with his decision, announced in March of that year, that he would not stand for re-election. This removed the core officeholding incentive which drives much of the logic of electoral accountability. While Truman was undoubtedly keen to support the campaign of Adlai Stevenson, the eventual Democratic nominee he had all but hand-selected, such political incentives were weaker than they might have been had Truman's name been on the ballot. As it was, particularly through the first half of 1952, the President could focus on negotiating a peace on terms which he felt to be in the best interests of the U.S., and perhaps his own legacy in the longer term.

In practice, these circumstances help explain why Truman stubbornly maintained his principled opposition to any solution which would involve the repatriation of POWs against their will. This policy of "non-forcible repatriation" is widely considered to have been the primary obstacle to peace after it became the administration's firm preference in February 1952. It is also known to have been adopted in large part thanks to the President's personal advocacy of the position. While couched in moral terms, Truman knew that the sight of thousands of communist troops deciding not to return home would be a great propaganda victory in the Cold War. As such, he was eager to stick to a hard-line position even as he knew that doing so would make the POW issue "the sole remaining fundamental issue in the Korean armistice negotiations," and therefore one which would be likely seen as

increasingly unacceptable to the U.S. public.[85] As a "lame duck" in the spring of 1952, however, he had both the time and political latitude to stick resolutely to this red line despite such anticipated pressures. "As far as I was concerned," recalled Truman later, "this was not a point for bargaining!"[86]

Truman's leverage was aided, too, by the fact that both Stevenson and Eisenhower entered the race relatively late (the former on account of indecision, the latter thanks to his status as a serving military officer), and neither made Korea a centre-piece of their early campaign strategy. Unlike in 1950, the long-stalemated conflict in the Far East generated few headlines, drifting in and out of public consciousness, with the result that little political capital could be made.[87] Electoral constraints were shaping up to be remarkably mild, then, in what looked set to be, as one scholar has recently put it, a "confirming" campaign.[88]

~

This relatively permissive electoral environment began to change in the closing months of the campaign. First, public ambivalence gave way to renewed interest in Korea as Republican critics in Congress stepped up their partisan sniping ahead of polling day. Speaking favourably of a MacArthur-style military solution to the conflict, the influential Taft wing of the opposition party agreed that the approach Truman was adopting was tantamount to appeasement, then considered a four-letter word in American politics. By sitting down to talk with the Communists, charged such detractors, the administration was simply granting the enemy time to build up their military capability. Notably, the public responded to the restoration of political focus placed upon Korea. Whereas in January 1952

[85] Acheson to Truman, 8 February 1952, PSF, Box 208, HSTL. On this, and for an excellent account of the development of American diplomatic positions in general, see Foot (1990).
[86] Truman (1956) 460.
[87] Young (2010).
[88] Casey (2017).

just 25 percent of Americans felt the war was one of the most important issues facing the country, this figure more than doubled to 52 percent by late-October.[89]

Second, and relatedly, daylight between the candidates and the administration had begun to emerge, with both moving to distance themselves from Truman and his policies. Stevenson's break was more subtle. While defending the decision to intervene and promising no easy solutions, the Democratic candidate nevertheless noted that "mistakes were made" in Korean policy, pointing to the lack of a security guarantee afforded to South Korea and adding that "it might well have been wiser if American forces had not crossed the 38th parallel."[90] In the context of Truman's broader dissatisfaction with how his would-be successor was running his campaign, such comments irked the President. Stevenson had already, after staffing his campaign with men carrying few connections to the White House, sought to muzzle the President's public appearances, much to Truman's anger. "I have come to the conclusion that you are embarrassed by having the President of the United States in your corner in this campaign," wrote Truman in a fiery unsent letter addressed to Stevenson around this time. After being rebuffed in his latest efforts to help the Stevenson campaign with strategy, he resolved to leave the Democratic nominee to it for the rest of the campaign, admitting that, "I can't stand snub after snub by you."[91] In another similar letter, he was even less restrained, advising Stevenson to "take your crackpots, your high socialites with their noses in the air, run your campaign and win if you can."[92]

Eisenhower's rightward turn in the autumn of 1952 was more dramatic. After his initial restraint, the Republican candidate soon embraced his party's campaign strategy, which was explicitly designed to cause voters "to fear for their national security and lives" and

[89] Caridi (1968) 211.
[90] Stevenson (1953) 185.
[91] Truman to Stevenson, [undated], PSF, Box 284, HSTL.
[92] Quoted in Ferrell (1980) 268-269. See also Broadwater (1994) 119; Truman (1956) 498-499.

summarised by the slogan of "K1C2" – Korea, Communism and Corruption.[93] Seeking to foster his image as a military hero uniquely suited to bring the war to an end, Eisenhower increasingly spoke out against the Democratic "record of bungling that has trapped us into the Korean War" in September.[94] For similarly political reasons, Eisenhower cultivated relationships with the hyper-partisan and pro-MacArthur faction of the Republican party, thereby seeming to tacitly endorse their scathing criticisms of Truman's Korean strategy and aggressive prescriptions. In the so-called "surrender at Morningside," for instance, Eisenhower struck a politically expedient deal with Bob Taft, exchanging influence over future foreign and financial policy for the Senator's support in key mid-Western states. He compounded the move by his subsequent failure to denounce Joseph McCarthy, instead endorsing the party's chief demagogue at an October election rally in the red-baiter's home state of Wisconsin. That same month, Eisenhower sought to associate mounting casualties in Korea with Truman's short-sighted decision to enter into negotiations, claiming the President had fallen into a Communist "bear pit," while noting that if fighting was necessary, "that is a job for Koreans."[95] Finally, Eisenhower delivered the coup de grâce on Stevenson's ailing campaign by pledging on 24 October that, if elected, "I shall go to Korea."

In turn, this hostile electoral environment was perceived by the President to have placed constraints on his ability to make progress in the negotiations. Recalling how "shocked and disappointed" he was "to see our foreign policy used as a political football," Truman later lambasted Eisenhower's decision to appropriate Korea for partisan purposes at such a delicate time of negotiation. Of the candidate's pledge to go to the battlefront, in particular, Truman insisted that Eisenhower "must have known that he was weakening our

[93] Quoted in Divine (1974) 43.
[94] Quoted in Greene (1985) 216.
[95] Quoted in Divine (1974) 71-72.

hand in negotiations."[96] Such a view was apparently firmly shared by General Bradley. "He knew very well that he could achieve nothing by going to Korea," he wrote, adding, that "this new element could weaken our hand at the negotiating table."[97]

In practice, it appears that Truman and Acheson blamed Eisenhower's campaign statement for their inability to garner support at the U.N. for a resolution affirming support for the principle of "non-forcible repatriation." "In view of General Eisenhower's imminent trip to Korea and uncertainty in their minds as to whether he will support the position thus far taken by the United States in the armistice negotiations, many of the delegations appear reluctant to proceed with this resolution," Acheson informed Truman on 6 November.[98] In fact, prior to the American election, a number of close allies refused to even come to New York until after polling day in the U.S., including the British and French Foreign Ministers. "We had hoped for quick action on the twenty-one-nation resolution, but it was not to be," regretted Acheson later, "The U.S. election was only eleven days away; my authenticity as a spokesman for the United States was at low ebb, for General Eisenhower's announcement that if elected he would go to Korea indicated that he was committing himself to nothing."[99]

More generally, it appears plausible that the militant electoral atmosphere may also have contributed to the hardening of Truman's position through the second half of 1952.[100] Having adopted a firm commitment to "non-forcible repatriation" expecting public opposition in the event that it remained the key obstacle to peace, the administration now faced a peculiar situation in which their POW position was about the only aspect of Korean policy which garnered broad bipartisan support. Thus somewhat trapped by his earlier commitment, Truman turned to calls from his military advisers to step up ground and air

[96] Truman (1956) 501.
[97] Bradley and Blair (1983) 656.
[98] Acheson to Truman, 6 November 1952, PSF, Box 102, HSTL.
[99] Acheson (1969) 599.
[100] See Foot (1990) ch. 6.

operations in an effort to force the enemy to concede at the negotiating table, authorising the bombing of power installations on the Yalu and a mock amphibious operation near Wonsan.[101]

Most notable, however, was the decision to authorise the U.N. delegation to present an ultimatum to the Communist side, threatening to call an indefinite recess to talks unless they agreed to the U.S.-favoured position on POWs. In the 24 September NSC meeting discussing the proposal, the President repeatedly referred to the upcoming election as a consideration to bear in mind when thinking about how to achieve peace. Rejecting the idea that he would "do anything in the world to get an armistice," he ruled out both compromise on the POW issue – which he knew would be criticised as appeasement – and certain forms of escalation. Building up Chinese Nationalist forces in Taiwan, for instance, was out of the question, said Truman, because "we must take into consideration… the impending election," which along with possible opposition from allies "make[s] it difficult to do this without creating a political situation which might upset the whole apple-cart." Instead, breaking off talks ten days after an ultimatum was issued appeared to offer the best balance between appearing "tough" and sticking to his "principles." In any case, as he prepared to leave on a month-long speaking tour ahead of the election, he "jokingly" told advisers that "during the next thirty days he would not be so interested in military decisions."[102]

~

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of the *spoiler* effect, however, came during the "interregnum" between the election and Eisenhower's inauguration. During this period, the Truman administration, weakened by their "lame duck" status, reluctantly abandoned their efforts to pursue a U.N. resolution affirming the principle of "non-forcible repatriation."

[101] On Truman's "entrapment" on the POW issue, see Stanley (2009).
[102] 24 September 1952, PSF, Box 189, HSTL.

Instead, pressured by Commonwealth countries who feared what the President-elect might do from January, the U.S. supported an Indian-sponsored proposal which contained the basic mechanism for resolving the POW issue which would ultimately be adopted in the 1953 armistice.[103]

As feared by Truman and Acheson before the election, the fact that Commonwealth opposition to the U.S. resolution stemmed from anxiety about Eisenhower's future plans is quite clear from the record. In British cabinet meetings that December, fears that Eisenhower would authorise major military operations against Chinese forces in Korea or unleash Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces on the Chinese mainland were paramount, with Prime Minister Churchill agreeing that "it would be a grave mistake to take any course which would widen the area of conflict in Korea." Support for the Indian resolution against American wishes was therefore essential.[104] The British Ambassador to the U.N. later summed up the British position clearly: "Our immediate interest lay in the take-over of the American Administration by the Republicans – out of office for twenty years." With many within the Republican party "intent on war with Peking," and carrying little experience in foreign affairs, "We did not look forward to this with any great enthusiasm."[105] The American administration understood as much, too. In a 20 November note to the President, Acheson advised that British, Canadian and French support for the Indian resolution stemmed from "grave apprehensions about what the new administration may do regarding Korea," meaning they shared "a desperate anxiety to exhaust all possibilities for an armistice now, however remote."[106]

---

[103] See Barnes (2013) 78-87; and Barnes (2014) 145-174.
[104] 4 December 1952, CAB 128/25/52, and 30 December 1952, CAB 128/25/58, KG.
[105] Jebb (1972) 253.
[106] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Korea, XV (Part I)*, No. 336. See also *ibid*. No. 326.

American opposition to the Indian resolution was no secret to these allies, either. Under the Indian proposals, the fate of POWs not wishing to return home would be decided upon by a repatriation committee, composed of four neutral nations and an "umpire" with a casting vote. Any prisoners remaining in its custody after 90 days would have their final disposition agreed at a later political conference. In a series of meetings with Commonwealth delegations over the winter, Acheson slammed these proposals as both vague and a recipe for indefinite captivity for those prisoners unwilling to return home.[107] Unless the British fell in line with the American viewpoint, threatened Acheson, "there would be no NATO, no Anglo-American friendship."[108] President Truman was kept informed of these developments and in fact authorised Acheson to take a confrontational line in his efforts to sink the Indian proposal.[109]

Thanks to dynamics generated by the American electoral cycle, however, U.S. efforts to coerce its allies failed. The Truman administration could not bully others into supporting its position, for with just weeks left in office, any threats of later punishment for going against the U.S. position carried little credibility. Blaming the tense situation in New York on the "inept" strategy and tactics of the American delegation, Foreign Minister Antony Eden reported to his cabinet that Acheson and others had apparently developed an "irrational dislike of any Indian proposal." The recent election results and history of partisan attacks on the U.S. Secretary of State had apparently induced in him "a mild persecution complex," leading him to adopt an intransigent attitude, apparently feeling it "necessary to be more Royalist than the King." These efforts were futile, Eden recalled, since "General Eisenhower and Mr. Dulles were avoiding committing themselves publicly

[107] See, for instance, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Korea, XV (Part I)*, Nos. 316, 319, 324.
[108] Quoted in Stueck (1995) 299.
[109] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Korea, XV (Part I)*, Nos. 318, 325, 336. See also Acheson (1969) ch. 73.

or privately in support of the United States Government's attitude," meaning "retreat was inevitable."[110]

This latter point was particularly crucial. As Truman understood well, Eisenhower's support for the administration's position at the U.N. was essential to the long-term credibility of the U.S. position. At Acheson's suggestion, the President made repeated attempts to secure a public statement of support from the President-elect. On 6 November, for instance, Truman put the Korean resolution at the top of a list of "really fundamental things pending in the United Nations" which necessitated his input.[111] Eisenhower, however, remained "coy" in his relations with the administration, according to Truman, demurring before finally announcing Henry Cabot Lodge, his erstwhile campaign manager, as liaison to the administration.[112]

When Eisenhower did finally meet with the incumbent President on 18 November, Korea was again the first item on the agenda. After detailing the basis of U.S. opposition to the Indian resolution, Acheson explained that "energetic action" by the U.S. to defeat the proposal was required, since a "show-down" was coming. It would be of the "greatest possible assistance" to such efforts if General Eisenhower could issue a statement in support of the administration's view. Acheson then handed Senator Lodge a draft that the President-elect might wish to use. Eisenhower remained non-committal, promising only to give the matter "careful study," while Truman privately reflected that his advice "went into one ear and out the other."[113]

---

[110] "Korea: Proceedings at the 7th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations," 15 December 1952, CAB 129/57/41, KG.
[111] Truman to Eisenhower, 6 November 1952, AWF, Name Series, Box 33, DDEL.
[112] 15 November 1952, PSF, Box 284, HSTL.
[113] 18 November 1952, AWF, Name Series, Box 33, DDEL; 20 November 1952, PSF, Box 102, HSTL.

Eisenhower's coolness was in fact the product of a hard-nosed political calculation. This much was made clear in an exchange between the President-elect and his Republican adviser, Harold Stassen. Having received advance warning about the Truman administration's desire to obtain Eisenhower's support for its repatriation policy, Stassen warned Ike that agreeing to this would be a "great mistake," since it "would link your first foreign policy decision to the discredited Truman administration." Worse still, adherence to Truman's "clumsy moves" would "reduce the possible range on your future policy decisions."[114] In his response two days later, Eisenhower agreed, assuring Stassen that "I have already warned my representatives in Washington to agree to nothing that sounds like policy."[115]

Eisenhower's success in minimising his ties to the unpopular Truman administration, in turn, helped spell doom for Truman's hopes of pursuing its preferred diplomatic course of action at the U.N. After Soviet denunciation of the Indian Resolution helped paper over the cracks in the relationship between the U.S. and its allies, the U.S. delegation acceded to a series of compromises in the wording of the Indian resolution and was ultimately instructed to support it in a vote of 1 December.[116] By that time, there was no time or appetite for further action of a diplomatic or military nature, as further progress towards peace was left to the Eisenhower administration.

"A Mandate from the American People": Settling the War

During the "honeymoon" phase of the American electoral cycle, newly elected presidents can expect to enjoy relatively permissive conditions at home when making decisions on wartime strategy. Electoral constraints will not be entirely absent, however. Under the

[114] Stassen to Eisenhower, 8 November 1952, Brownell Papers, Box 25, DDEL.
[115] Eisenhower to Stassen, 10 November 1952, Brownell Papers, Box 25, DDEL.
[116] See *FRUS, 1952-1954, Korea, XV (Part I)*, Nos. 346, 347.

hangover mechanism explored in chapter I, we might expect to observe evidence of rhetorical commitments made during the campaign influencing decisions, depending on the size of the new president's winning margin and the specificity of his campaign pledges. The legacy of inherited policies and commitments will of course also help define the range of possible policy options available. This section argues that this blend of a generally favourable electoral environment, combined with mild *hangover* effects from events in 1952, played important roles in affording Eisenhower the opportunity to reach an armistice deal within seven months of taking office.

In assessing the strength of the electoral *hangover* with which Eisenhower had to contend, two key factors worked in his favour. First, his victory over Stevenson in November had been a landslide. Winning every state outside of the South, Eisenhower ended up with 442 Electoral College votes to Stevenson's 89, with a ten-percentage point advantage in the popular vote. Second, his campaign promises regarding Korea were intentionally vague, following Lodge's advice early in the campaign to stick to speeches that dealt in "generalities," referring by way of example to FDR's stirring but ultimately ambiguous one-liner: "we have nothing to fear but fear itself."[117] Eisenhower's famous "I shall go to Korea" pledge fit perfectly into this category. As Emmet Hughes, the person widely credited with the idea for such a statement, later explained, there was a "simple and inexorable" political logic to his 24 October speech: "It rose from the need to say something affirmative on the sharpest issue of the day - *without* engaging in frivolous assurances and *without* binding a future administration to policies or actions fashioned in mid-campaign by any distorting temptations of domestic politics."[118] Combined with Eisenhower's aforementioned efforts to distance himself from the administration during the campaign

[117] Lodge to Eisenhower, [undated], Reel 1, Lodge Papers, DDEL.
[118] Hughes (1963) 33.

and its aftermath, the new president had strenuously sought to keep his hand free for the future.

Campaign promises were explicitly invoked, however, when Eisenhower sought to justify his decision to continue Truman's search a diplomatic solution before considering further escalatory steps. This explains why, during his visit to Korea in late November – itself a fulfilment of a campaign pledge – Eisenhower gave General Mark Clark no time to formally present his extensive plans for obtaining a military victory. "It soon became apparent, in our many conversations," wrote Clark later, "that he would seek an honourable truce."[119] Explaining his decision, Eisenhower apparently told Clark frankly that, "I feel I have a mandate from the American people to stop this fighting."[120] Likewise, while he heard MacArthur out on his proposals, which remained substantially similar to those Truman had repeatedly rejected two years prior, Eisenhower notably did not act on them.[121] Finally, when Dulles, in an NSC meeting of 8 April, proposed ripping up the terms of the emerging armistice deal then on the table and instead pursuing terms more favourable to the U.S. through military escalation, Eisenhower was quick to reject his Secretary of State's proposal. It was "impossible to call off the armistice now and to go to war in Korea.," explained Eisenhower, since "the American people would never stand for such a move."[122] In short, Eisenhower understood that his popularity with the American public "was essential to his ability to exercise influence over other leaders," while he apparently rejected advice to ignore his campaign pledges, considering them his "sacred promises" which he would live up to.[123] In the first months of his administration, he clearly perceived his mandate to mean he should seek an honourable truce in Korea, not a widened war.

---

[119] Clark (1954) 221.
[120] Quoted in Clark, Oral History, DDEL.
[121] 14 December 1952, Dulles Papers, Subject Series, Box 8, DDEL.
[122] 16 April 1953, AWF, NSC Series, Box 4, DDEL.
[123] Greenstein (1982) 99; Clark, Oral History, DDEL. See also Eisenhower (1963) 31; Foot (1990) ch. 7.

In determining the essential basis of this negotiated solution, moreover, Eisenhower found himself effectively wedded to the terms of the Indian resolution which as a candidate he had ironically declined to help defeat. After a proposal from Zhou En Lai of 30 March to exchange sick and wounded prisoners also first signalled Chinese recognition of POW repatriation as an issue to be resolved, it appeared that talks might make rapid progress. In Washington, an alarmed Dulles expressed concern to colleagues about "the armistice agreement that we are being sucked into," before raising his proposal to renege on the deal in the NSC meeting the following day.[124] Instead, during weeks of tentative negotiations at the U.N., the Indian mechanism for resolving the POW issue was embedded in a Brazilian-sponsored resolution and approved unanimously. As the first resolution relating to the war to carry full U.N. support, this procedural agreement went on to set the parameters of the discussions which would take place during renewed armistice negotiations.[125]

This was made clear in a key concession made on 7 May, when China for the first time proposed a solution to the POW issue involving a repatriation commission, time limit and political conference. "It had many similarities to the Indian Resolution," recalled General Clark, who, noting that the U.S. had supported this in December 1952, was instructed to accept the plan "as the starting point for discussion."[126] Indeed, in an 8 May meeting at the White House, Eisenhower decided that the U.S. "should adhere to the provisions of the India Resolution."[127] Again, it seems reasonable to conclude that the U.S. took this position reluctantly. In the minutes of a 9 May meeting between Dulles and several leading congressmen, the general feeling was recorded that "there was no liking of the situation, but a recognition that matters had gone so far through the India Resolution that there was

[124] Dulles and Cutler, 7 April 1953, Dulles Papers, JFD Chronological Series, Box 2, DDEL.
[125] See Barnes (2013) 83-85; Foot (1990) ch. 7.
[126] Clark (1954) 249.
[127] Dulles to Robertson and Johnson, 8 May 1953, Dulles Papers, JFD Chronological Series, Box 3, DDEL.

no practical alternative."[128] A couple of weeks later, instructions came from Washington "to follow generally the terms of the Indian Resolution," in the U.S. counterproposal of 25 May, as Clark recalled.[129] On the same day that the Chinese agreed to the latest iteration of the deal, President Eisenhower told Dulles to inform skeptics like Senator Knowland that their concerns were to some extent shared by the administration. As someone who had recently described Nehru as a "psycho-path" who needed to "shut his mouth," Eisenhower was clearly less than comfortable with following India's prescription for an armistice in Korea.[130] "No one was happy," Ike instructed his Secretary of State to tell Knowland.[131]

Nevertheless, in crafting a diplomatic strategy to achieve gains at the negotiating table, the favourable electoral environment did allow Eisenhower to seriously consider and threaten military escalation. During a series of NSC meetings between February and May, steadily more concrete contingency plans were discussed calling for escalatory steps in the event that armistice talks broke down. Notably, in an early draft of these plans, public opinion was assessed to be engaged yet ultimately malleable. With no strong demand for any particular course of action, the President could receive "predominant public acceptance" for either adopting a more "vigorous" approach or sticking with a more cautious policy.[132] Six military options were placed before Eisenhower for consideration, ranging from a build-up of South Korean forces (Course A) to a large-scale offensive in Korea combined with air and naval attacks against mainland China (Course F).

In the debate that ensued, Eisenhower displayed a clear willingness to consider escalatory options that Truman had repeatedly ruled out. In the first meeting discussing Korea on 11 February, for instance, he advocated the use of tactical nuclear weapons to

[128] 9 May 1953, Dulles Papers, JFD Chronological Series, Box 3, DDEL.
[129] Clark (1954) 252.
[130] Dulles and Eisenhower, 19 February 1953, Dulles Papers, Telephone Conversations Series, Box 10, DDEL.
[131] Dulles and Eisenhower, 8 June 1953, Dulles Papers, JFD Chronological Series, Box 3, DDEL.
[132] Lay to NSC, 2 April 1953, WHO/OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 4, DDEL.

destroy a build-up of enemy capabilities in the Kaesong area, saying that "somehow or other the tabu [sic] which surrounds the use of atomic weapons would have to be destroyed." [133] In a later 31 March meeting, he felt the use of such weapons elsewhere would be "worth the cost" if they could help secure a victory over the enemy and an advance to the "waist" of Korea well above the 38th parallel.[134] Eisenhower again raised the possibility on 6 May, declaring that "he had reached the point of being convinced that we have got to consider the atomic bomb as simply another weapon in our arsenal."[135] Told the following week that the military were "most anxious" to make use of nuclear weapons in any course of action involving operations outside of Korea, even though they were sceptical that suitable targets could be found within Korea, Eisenhower's only real issue appeared to be their excessive caution on target assessment.[136]

Given his apparent proclivity for considering the use of such weapons, perhaps the nature of the Joint Chiefs' recommendations – which Eisenhower approved as the "general guide" to be adopted should conditions arise – should come as no surprise. A combination of NSC 147's three most aggressive options (Courses D, E and F), it entailed a major intensification of efforts, including air and naval attacks on China and Manchuria, an offensive in Korea to capture the "waist" line – and, of course, atomic weapons "on a sufficiently large scale to insure success."[137] Enjoying approval ratings of 70 percent and with four years until his re-election campaign, the apparent insensitivity to warnings of public "hysteria" if atomic weapons were used points towards the role that the permissive domestic political environment played in shaping Eisenhower's strategy.[138]

---

[133] 12 February 1953, AWF, NSC Series, Box 4, DDEL. See also Tannenwald (1999).
[134] 7 April 1953, AWF, NSC Series, Box 4, DDEL.
[135] 7 May 1953, AWF, NSC Series, Box 4, DDEL.
[136] 14 May 1953, AWF, NSC Series, Box 4, DDEL.
[137] 23 May 1953, AWF, NSC Series, Box 4, DDEL; JCS to Lovett, 19 May 1953, WHO/NSCS, Disaster File, Box 60, DDEL.
[138] 7 April 1953, AWF, NSC Series, Box 4, DDEL.

In sum, the electoral cycle had mixed effects on Eisenhower's strategy for ending the Korean War. On one hand, the general's perception of his own "sacred promises" made in 1952 appear to have pushed him towards a negotiated settlement as his preferred exit strategy from the Korean peninsula, while the basis of such a settlement were to a considerable extent forced upon the administration by the lasting influence of the Indian resolution, adopted during the interregnum period. On the other hand, a permissive "honeymoon" period, supported by relatively mild *hangover* effects, thanks to Eisenhower's solid victory and vague pledges, gave him the room required to explore various escalatory contingency policies free of public and congressional constraints which might otherwise have ruled such options out as unacceptable.

Alternative Explanations

Bureaucratic Constraints

The figure of Douglas MacArthur looms large in the decision to escalate the Korean War. It was his soaring oratory which arguably single-handedly made the case for the Inchon operation, with bold claims like, "Inchon will succeed. And it will save 100,000 lives."[139] It was his guidance that apparently convinced the President that the risks of Chinese intervention were "very little," as he put it during their one and only meeting at Wake Island in October.[140] It was MacArthur's opinion, too, that seemed to carry the argument when reports of that intervention came flooding in, with the general warning against "hasty conclusions which might be premature" in early November.[141] It was his unilateral order of 24 October on the use of non-ROK troops, and his alarmist request for permission to bomb the Yalu bridges on 6 November, which helped raise the stakes once Chinese

[139] MacArthur (1964) 350. See also Acheson (1969) 448; Brands (2016) 157.
[140] 15 October 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL. See also Truman (1956) 384
[141] MacArthur to JCS, 4 November 1950, Radiograms, Box 45, MMA.

intervention had begun.[142] In short, there is evidence to substantiate the contemporary charge made by George Kennan that, "by permitting General MacArthur to retain the wide and relatively uncontrolled latitude he has enjoyed in determining our policy in the north Asian and western Pacific areas, we are tolerating a state of affairs in which we do not really have full control over the statements that are being made—and actions taken—in our name."[143]

Yet if MacArthur was undoubtedly an incredibly powerful bureaucratic agent, the source of his influence over the President was political in nature. Truman understood that MacArthur harboured a strong ambition to replace him as Commander-in-Chief. Indeed, having flirted with a bid for the presidency in 1944, the general had actively encouraged a draft movement four years later from his headquarters in Tokyo. In the run-up to the Wisconsin primary during the 1948 race, he maintained regular contact with the head of the national MacArthur-for-President campaign, Lansing Hoyt, regularly forwarding him copies of letters he had written to supporters at home in an apparent attempt to help coordinate the ongoing efforts. In one such letter, typical of many which were notionally sent under an aide's signature but were in fact drafted in MacArthur's own handwriting, a supporter was told the general would "feel a sense of highest honor and distinction were he to be the choice of Wisconsin voters in the Republican primary," and given his "loyalty and devotion" to the state he would "unquestionably accept its mandate."[144] In Washington, it did not go unnoticed that MacArthur failed to publicly withdraw his name from the campaign until after the returns of the subsequent primary in Nebraska indicated his fading prospects. It was not without reason, then, that Truman would later compare MacArthur to

---

[142] MacArthur to JCS, 7 November 1950, Radiograms, Box 45, MMA.
[143] Kennan to Acheson, 23 August 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.
[144] Draft Letter, [c. September/October 1947], Whitney Papers, Box 4, MMA. See also in *ibid*.: MacArthur to Hoyt [c. September/October 1947]; MacArthur to Campbell, 3 December 1947; MacArthur to Hoyt, 6 December 1947; and MacArthur to MacNider, 14 October 1947.

George McClellan, President Lincoln's troublesome general who shared similar political aspirations.[145]

That the relationship between Truman and MacArthur was infused with mutual partisan skepticism and electioneering is further substantiated by reference to their first (and last) meeting at Wake Island in October 1950. The President later justified the trip in part on the grounds that he wanted his general's first-hand appraisal of the chances of Chinese intervention in Korea.[146] Yet MacArthur is quite justified in his view that since such assessments had been covered in detail in his regular dispatches, there must have been another reason.[147] With the midterms just two weeks away, widespread accusations understandably charged Truman with cynically seeking a photo opportunity with a popular general in order to help fellow Democrats ride on the coattails of the so-called "sorcerer of Inchon." MacArthur and his confidants thus variously referred to the entire conference as a "political junket" and "sly political ambush," while Dean Acheson outright refused to attend a meeting which constituted such a "distasteful" idea.[148] Notably, Truman's White House aides, meanwhile, simply saw it as "good election-year stuff."[149]

One revealing facet of Truman's private conversation with MacArthur at Wake concerned the two men's political plans, perhaps the one topic both were interested to hear each other's views on. MacArthur, buoyed by a recent influx of telegrams encouraging *him* to run for president again in 1952, first raised the question, asking whether Truman intended to stand for re-election.[150] The President immediately countered by asking the general if he had any ambitions along the same lines. "None whatsoever," MacArthur replied, adding that "if you have any general running against you, his name will be Eisenhower, not

[145] Truman (1956) 443. See also Bradley and Blair (1983) 541; Brands (2016) 38.
[146] Truman (1956) 363.
[147] MacArthur (1964) 361; Willoughby (1956) 360.
[148] Quoted in Weintraub (2000) 184; Whitney (1956) 395; Acheson (1956) 456.
[149] Quoted in Kaufman (1984) 91.
[150] See various in "Telegrams, June-December 1950," UNC Records, Folder 4, Box 1, MMA.

MacArthur."[151] Truman scribbled down notes which essentially confirm MacArthur's account of the conversation, adding that the general had also noted how "the politicians had made a 'chump' (his word) of him in 1948 and that it would not happen again."[152] There was, of course, little MacArthur could do but deny retaining any political intentions; it would be impertinent if not self-defeating to announce any such intentions to the President in person and in the middle of a war. Coming from a man who had already run against Truman, and had hinted in June at persisting ambitions by telling a journalist, "I am ready to serve at any time, in any capacity, anywhere," the denial was not very credible.[153] In any case, the episode speaks volumes about the pair's inclination to view each other through an electoral lens.

Crucially, it was precisely this perception of MacArthur as a political threat which guaranteed the general's influence over policy in the Korean War, despite the President having given repeated thought to his replacement. Most strikingly, as early as 1 July, less than a week into the crisis, Truman seemed more inclined to fire MacArthur than designate him commander of U.N. forces in Korea. "MacArthur is a supreme egotist, who regarded himself as something of a god," felt Truman, according to contemporary record of a private conversation written by a White House aide. Revealing "little regard or respect" for the general, Truman recounted how John Foster Dulles had advised him earlier that week to relieve MacArthur from his duties. Truman's response makes crystal clear that if MacArthur can be credited with steering decision-making in 1950, that he was in a position to do so had a great deal to do with electoral politics:

> "The President pointed out to him that the General is involved politically in this country – where he has from time to time been mentioned as a possible Republican presidential

[151] MacArthur (1964) 362-363.
[152] 25 November 1950, PSF, Box 283, HSTL.
[153] Quoted in Stueck (1995) 66.

> candidate – and that he could not recall MacArthur without causing a tremendous reaction in this country where he has been built up to heroic stature."[154]

Truman had a second opportunity to dismiss MacArthur in August, when the general issued a statement to the head of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Calling for "aggressive, resolute and dynamic leadership," MacArthur decried the notion that the defense of Taiwan against the Communist-held Chinese mainland would alienate continental Asia as a "threadbare argument" put forward by "those who advocate appeasement and defeatism."[155] Since this appeared to undermine official U.S. policy, which sought to find a political solution to the issue of Taiwan and de-escalate tensions in the region, Truman was furious.[156] The entire episode reflected the reality that the strategic preferences of the President and his commander when it came to Korea and the Far East were fundamentally misaligned; Truman sought to avoid war with China, while MacArthur felt it necessary and perhaps even desirable.

Yet, though Truman apparently gave "serious thought" to replacing MacArthur with General Bradley at this juncture, he decided against it, instead merely ordering the withdrawal of the offending statement. In his memoir, the President attributes the decision to his unwillingness to hurt General MacArthur personally.[157] This is difficult to believe. To be sure, Truman took a keen interest in every facet of the general's wellbeing during the war, once asking Frank Lowe, a mutual acquaintance, to report back extensively on his medical records.[158] Yet the fact that Lowe was in Korea in the first place was indicative of

---

[154] 1 July 1950, Ayers Papers, Box 20, HSTL.
[155] MacArthur to Lewis, 20 August 1950, SCAP Records, Box 59, MMA.
[156] 26 August 1950, Elsey Papers, Box 72, HSTL.
[157] Truman (1956) 355-356.
[158] The President must have been reassured to learn that MacArthur was in good shape. With stable blood pressure and weight, the virtual tee-totaller had last taken sick leave in 1912, according to his personal physician. "His digestion and elimination," meanwhile, "are perfect." Lowe to Truman, 8 August 1950, Lowe Papers, Box 1, MMA.

the level of distrust Truman felt towards MacArthur. He had, of course, once griped about "Mr. Prima Donna, Brass Hat, Five Star MACARTHUR," disparagingly referring to the general as a "stuffed shirt" and "bunco man" in 1945. On the way to Wake, he sarcastically told his cousin he was on the way "to talk to God's righthand man."[159] This was not a man who cared much for the feelings of a "supreme egotist."

Instead, the primary focus of the administration's frustrations with MacArthur's VFW statement appear to be inextricably linked to the congressional election campaign. "Everyone knew that this was going to cause a bad mess at the best," recounted Averell Harriman, in a conversation with Dean Acheson. Harriman, who had been the one to first present Truman with MacArthur's message on 26 August, lamented to the Secretary of State that "the MacArthur statement would plague us through the election."[160] Indeed, in a meeting of advisers to discuss the letter's significance, "It was recognized by all of us that the statement, having already been given to the press, would get into print and that action of any kind would arouse a storm of discussion and controversy, and would provide opponents of the administration with further ammunition for their campaign… MacArthur is regarded as a Republican and seemingly is playing the Republican line in Far Eastern and Asian policy." Lumping the recalcitrant general together with another partisan thorn in the side of the administration, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, the group were well aware of the risks of dismissing both high-profile figures at such a politically sensitive time. "It was pretty well agreed," concluded his advisers, "that nothing can be done before the election."[161] This evidence would appear to corroborate Truman's later recollections of what really influenced his reaction to MacArthur's actions. "That's the day I should have

[159] Ferrell (1980) 46-47, 195-196.
[160] 26 August 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.
[161] 26 August 1950, Ayers Papers, Box 21, HSTL.

fired him," admitted the President, adding that his advisers "talked me out of it. They said it would cause too much of an uproar."[162]

After the midterms, MacArthur's grip on U.S. policy in Korea rapidly diminished. Increasing numbers of restrictions placed on his command led him to publicly complain that orders from Washington provided the enemy with a "sanctuary" and placed "an enormous handicap without precedent in military history" on U.N. forces.[163] In turn, such comments led Truman to issue a gagging order, directed at MacArthur, requiring that all public statements be cleared with Washington prior to their release.[164] Notably, MacArthur had apparently been bitterly complaining to friendly press figures like Robert McCormick and Roy Howard in a similar manner even after the VFW statement.[165] Truman, in turn, having already attributed the "campaign of vilification and lies" in the U.S. to McCormick's newspaper chain, continued to describe his *Washington Times-Herald* as a "sabotage sheet," yet failed to censure MacArthur's correspondence with its owner until after the midterms.[166]

More sensational still was the rebuke MacArthur received from General Collins on 11 November for unauthorized communications with foreign officials. Detailing intercepted reports from Brazilian and Portuguese sources, Collins presented MacArthur with evidence that he had spoken disparagingly about the U.S. President and decried his Wake conference as a gimmick designed to help the Governor of California in the upcoming gubernatorial election. More worryingly, MacArthur had implied far more aggressive intentions than U.S. policy actually held at the time. Insisting on the importance of a united Korea and

---

[162] Quoted in Miller (1974) 291-292.
[163] 30 November 1950, UNC Records, Box 1, MMA. See also MacArthur to Baillie, 1 December 1950, SCAP Records, Box 57, MMA.
[164] Department of the Army to Various Commands, 6 December 1950, Whitney Papers, Box 4, MMA.
[165] McCormick to MacArthur, 29 August 1950, and Howard to MacArthur, 30 August 1950, Personal Correspondence, Box 20, MMA.
[166] 18 January 1952, PSF, Box 284, HSTL.

resolute defense of Taiwan, MacArthur had let slip his view that "it would be better to face a war now than two or three years hence" with the U.S.S.R. Acknowledging that this cable, of 21 October, was but one of many similar instances of leaks by MacArthur's intelligence unit discovered since June, Collins did not offer an explanation as to why it took Truman until four days after the congressional elections, to raise his "great concern" over the matter.[167]

By contrast, when MacArthur committed similar offenses in March 1951, Truman showed no hesitation in finally and infamously dismissing the general over such "rank insubordination."[168] MacArthur had ignored the 6 December "gagging order" by releasing a statement which directly undermined an imminent peace offer the administration had been planning, instead threatening China with an expansion of U.N. military operations which would cause its military collapse. Four days earlier, MacArthur had written a letter he surely knew would be made public to the Minority Leader, Joseph P. Martin, advocating a similarly aggressive policy against the Chinese, insisting that "there is no substitute for victory."[169]

Truman saw these latest efforts as patently political moves by MacArthur. "The situation with regard to the Far Eastern General has become a political one," he confided to his diary on 5 April, adding, "MacArthur has made himself a center of controversy, publicly and privately."[170] Upon learning of the Martin letter the following day, he wrote, "MacArthur shoots another political bomb."[171]

The difference between this episode and the previous instances in which Truman considered firing MacArthur is quite clear. In July and August 1950, dismissing MacArthur

---

[167] Collins to MacArthur, 11 November 1950, Whitney Papers, Box 4, MMA.
[168] 6 April 1951, PSF, Box 234, HSTL.
[169] MacArthur to Martin, 20 March 1951, SCAP Records, Box 37, MMA.
[170] 5 April 1951, PSF, Box 234, HSTL.
[171] 6 April 1951, PSF, Box 234, HSTL. See also 6 April 1951, Ayers Papers, Box 9, HSTL.

would have cost Truman and the Democrats dearly in the upcoming elections. In early 1951, there would still be a political uproar. Indeed, as in the previous summer, a number of advisers and confidants, this time including Secretary Acheson and Speaker Sam Rayburn, warned him of the "political repercussions" that would follow MacArthur's recall, thanks to the general's status as a "popular hero," particularly among the Republican "primitives" who would help generate "the biggest fight of your administration."[172] Yet, now with eighteen months until the next election, with Truman already thinking about not standing for re-election, he could ride out the political storm he had once feared. Receiving "telegrams and letters of abuse by the dozens," Truman put events into context in his diary. "Quite an explosion," he admitted, adding that it "was expected but I had to act."[173] When MacArthur's speech before Congress on 11 April sparked a further frenzy of partisan mudslinging, Truman brushed the furore off as "nothing but a damn bunch of bullshit."[174]

In sum, if the bureaucratic power held by General MacArthur played an important role in the decision to expand the Korean War, the strength of this influence was conditional on the stage of the electoral cycle. Prior to the 1950 midterms, the political risks of countermanding the five-star general appeared to outweigh any concern that his more aggressive conception of optimal military strategy was driving U.S. policy. Deference to MacArthur in this period might reasonably be said to approximate Truman's electoral preference, given the alignment between the commander's views and those of the President's most vocal critics. Only after Truman moved into a less politically sensitive phase of the cycle could he summon up the courage to confront and ultimately dismiss MacArthur.

---

[172] 28 April 1951, PSF, Box 111, HSTL; Bradley and Blair, (1983) 632; Truman (1956) 447.
[173] 10 April 1951, PSF, Box 234, HSTL.
[174] Quoted in Blomstedt (2016) 120. See also Rusk (1990) 172.

Psychological Constraints

Psychological explanations of the courses of action pursued in this period appear to be of mixed utility. On one hand, they offer a compelling account of the possible reason why Truman failed to call a halt to the advance into North Korea after indications of Chinese intervention had become clear, instead allowing MacArthur to proceed with his "end the war" offensive. While misperception of Chinese intentions may be partly attributable to the questionable credibility of Ambassador Panikkar, whom Truman and others felt had been an unreliable intermediary in the past, the subsequent failure to update beliefs about the likelihood of Chinese intervention in the face of clear and obvious evidence to the contrary calls into question any assumption of rational decision-making behaviour.[175] General Bradley later readily admitted that in judging that the Chinese were bluffing in October, "the JCS and everyone else committed one cardinal sin," analyzing subjective assessments of Chinese intentions rather than capabilities and ignoring too many "obvious warning flags."[176]

Analogical reasoning might well have contributed to this profound misperception. To be sure, the failure of appeasement policies in the 1930s appeared repeatedly in early deliberations regarding the crisis in Korea, framing how Truman perceived the threat and prescribing a firm stand against the forces of communism.[177] This lesson remained powerful, invoked explicitly by General MacArthur, for example, as a way of justifying his recommendation to take the fight to the Chinese in the confusion of early November. Reminding his superiors of events at Munich in 1938, he noted how "the weakness of peaceful efforts toward just settlements in the face of determined aggression was

[175] On Panikkar, see Truman (1956) 362. On perceptions of Chinese intentions, see also Foot (1985) 78-87.
[176] Bradley and Blair (1983) 361.
[177] See Foot (1985) 32-33; Truman (1956) 333.

unmistakably demonstrated." So it was then, he suggested, and so it would be now, meaning that "no weakening at this crucial moment" could be tolerated.[178] Of course, especially coming from MacArthur, it is difficult to disentangle how far decision-makers truly believed that the "Munich" analogy captured the fluid situation of late 1950 or whether it was the political power of such a charge weighed on their minds. More generally, of course, the prevalence of the "Who Lost China?" analogy was a centerpiece of the Republican midterm campaign and a constant reminder of the political catastrophe that might follow a similar "loss" in Korea.

It would be wrong to exaggerate this point, in any case, since not all officials misperceived the threat from China. A number of officials in the administration did in fact take its warnings seriously. "I do not feel that we can assume it is entirely bluff," wrote Alexis Johnson of the State Department's Far Eastern Bureau, referring to Zhou En Lai's 3 October threat to intervene if U.S. forces crossed the 38th parallel.[179] O. Edmund Clubb, the Director of Chinese Affairs, similarly feared that the statement meant China was "prepared to risk the danger of World War III."[180] Similar caution and restraint was advised by the Deputy Undersecretary of State, H. Freeman Matthews, in a memorandum of 19 October.[181] If these voices of caution were drowned out by skeptics and advocates of continuing operations, most notably MacArthur, this simply reflects the bureaucratic power afforded to the latter, which was nakedly political in origin, as noted above.

Psychological explanations seem less convincing, meanwhile, when it comes to the original decision to expand the war in September 1950. Prospect theory holds that decision-makers should be risk-acceptant in a domain of losses. To be sure, the decision to cross the

[178] MacArthur to JCS, 9 November 1950, Brower Papers, Box 7, MMA.
[179] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 593.
[180] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 606.
[181] *FRUS, 1950, Korea, VII,* No. 693.

38th parallel was widely acknowledged to likely entail "substantial risk of general war" – the very words of NSC 81/1 made that clear.[182] Yet it is hard to describe Truman in September as occupying a domain of losses; the entire debate was premised on the reality that U.N. forces were successfully advancing towards the border and might be able to obtain greater ultimate objectives than initially anticipated. This was not a case of the U.S. clinging on to recover "sunk losses" but deciding to gamble in pursuit of increased gains. Truman was aware of the *strategic* risks at stake, in other words, yet was more sensitive to risks of a *political* nature. As a result, prospect theory seemingly only describes decision-making in Korea accurately if the reference point focused on is determined by the electoral environment outlined in this study.

Finally, if the acceptance of considerable risks may justifiably be said to have resulted from a sense of overconfidence in the capacity of U.S./U.N. forces to prevail even in case of Chinese intervention, that bias lies mainly with figures such as General MacArthur and the hawkish factions in Washington. The former, for instance, was consistent in advising the administration that while he felt the risk of Chinese retaliation to be low, he felt so comfortable in the capacity of his forces to meet whatever threats followed that he would "welcome" the opportunity to inflict "the bloodiest victory in Far Eastern history" on the Chinese, admitting that he would "pray nightly that they will" come into the war.[183] Subsequent events clearly demonstrate MacArthur to have been under the spell of positive illusions, but, again, it is difficult to establish how such overconfident assumptions made their way into official U.S. policy absent the political power of those who shared and advocated such beliefs.

[182] Lay to Truman, 11 September 1950, PSF, Box 181, HSTL.
[183] 8 August 1950, FECOM Records, MMA; MacArthur quoted in Ridgway (1967) 37-38.

Conclusion

Electoral politics played a pivotal role in shaping American strategy during the Korean War. Committed to the pursuit of the *status quo ante* through limited military means, Truman understood the strategic risks associated with any course of action which threatened to widen the war. However, the spectre of the 1950 midterms magnified the susceptibility of the Truman administration to public and congressional opinion, thereby placing a clear and imminent political price tag on any action which could be seen as timid or "soft." As a result, the President was repeatedly pushed down the escalatory path. In assenting to the bold military gamble at Inchon, approving NSC 81/1, and failing to act when it became clear that the actions of both the Chinese and his own commander in the field jeopardised his vision of a "police action," Truman succumbed to the pressure of the *spur* mechanism of electoral constraint. Only after the midterms were over could Truman renounce the expanded goal of Korean unification and dismiss the recalcitrant general who had helped lead him there.

Having contributed to the expansion of the conflict on the Korean peninsula, the American electoral cycle then placed a series of obstacles in Harry Truman's preferred path to peace during the 1952 campaign. Able, as a "lame duck," to commit to the principle of "non-forcible repatriation," the incumbent soon perceived threats to his bargaining position from other actors with a vested interest in the outcome of the presidential race, providing evidence of the *spoiler* mechanism. By refusing to commit to the administration's position on POWs, Eisenhower's ambiguous pledges and increasing closeness to firebrand anti-communists in the party helped exacerbate fears among Commonwealth allies about future escalation. Taking advantage of the weakness of the U.S. administration during its time as a "lame duck" in the winter of 1952, these allies then forced Truman into support for the Indian resolution at the U.N., which in turn would narrow Eisenhower's room for

manoeuvre during the spring of 1953. Nevertheless, benefitting from a mild electoral *hangover* and taking advantage of the "honeymoon" phase of the electoral cycle, the newly elected president retained the political latitude at home to prepare militant contingency options which he felt would secure a deal at the armistice talks in Panmunjom.

Taken together, the episodes examined here offer solid support for the conceptual framework outlined in chapter I. While the conflict in Korea lasted only three years, it illuminates key phases of the electoral cycle which have been understudied in existing studies of the impact of electoral politics and war – notably relating to midterm campaigns and during a "lame duck" phase. That we can clearly observe evidence here that role of electoral constraints in shaping decisions is broadly as expected should increase confidence in the framework as a whole.

~

In demonstrating that electoral politics mattered to decision-makers in these key episodes, it of course does not follow that such pressures necessarily made a material difference to the course of the conflict. For this reason, it is fruitful to consider some counterfactual scenarios which shed light on the possibility that opportunities to limit the scope and duration of the Korean War were missed thanks to the pressures of the electoral cycle.

Firstly, were it not for the constraints generated by the 1950 midterm election, would there still have been an expansion of the war?

In a calmer and more bipartisan climate, it is not difficult to imagine that Truman would have been able to stick closer to his strategic preference throughout the summer and autumn of 1950. Crossing the 38th parallel was understood to carry grave risks of Soviet or Chinese intervention which went directly against the President's overriding desire to keep the war "limited." In an electoral environment in which he did not have to fear a harsh backlash from Republicans like Taft and McCarthy, it is quite easy to see Truman opting

to follow a more cautious approach in Korea, along the lines that George Kennan had repeatedly advocated. If other bureaucratic agents like Dulles, and, of course, MacArthur, might still have pressed for escalatory policies, their power would be radically diminished in this apolitical counterfactual world. Indeed, as Truman came to regret later, MacArthur's message to the Veterans of Foreign Wars organisation had provided ample opportunity to replace him as commander, which might have permitted cooler heads to prevail in the fateful months of September and October.

In turn, if the 38th parallel had not been crossed, the chances of keeping the war contained would have risen considerably. Chinese leaders were in fact divided on whether to intervene through the month of September, and U.S. aggression surely helped force their hand.[184] Even if events got this far, a directive countermanding MacArthur's order to waive restrictions on non-ROK troops would have given the opportunity to U.S. forces to avoid a rout and hold defensive positions when the Chinese assault began in the North. That, in turn, might have provided a better foundation for fruitful negotiations, or at least sufficient time to prepare for enemy offensives in the spring. In virtually any permutation, the U.S. would have been in a better political and military position than it actually was at the time of the massive Chinese counteroffensive of November 1950.

Secondly, absent the electoral pressures described in this chapter, would an earlier armistice have been reached?

In 1950, if concerns about the reaction of Republican "primitives" to any whiff of a "deal" involving Taiwan or China's accession to the Security Council were reduced, there was at least the possibility of reaching some solution short of the widened war that followed. Even if the bargaining positions remained too far apart for a diplomatic accord to be signed this early, the initiation of a conversation on the prospect would undoubtedly

[184] See Stueck (1985) ch. 3.

have been helpful in facilitating clear channels of communication between the U.S. and China. Since misperception of Chinese intentions played a key role in causing the U.S. to double down on its risky escalation of late 1950, the value of such a forum for dialogue would likely have been non-trivial. By the time the U.S. was prepared to even discuss such options – after the midterms – the military gamble had of course already backfired.[185]

As for the course of formal negotiations that began in 1951, at a minimum, it seems highly plausible to suggest that any deal might at least look substantially different to the terms agreed in July 1953. As discussed earlier, both the genesis of the December 1952 Indian resolution in the U.N. and Commonwealth nations' ability to get it passed despite U.S. opposition owed much to electoral dynamics. Had the Truman administration not been a caretaker government, it would surely have been able to more credibly threaten its Commonwealth allies, who may well have fallen in line, as had been true for the majority of the war.[186] Since it was largely thanks to fear of Eisenhower's future plans that the resolution gained such support in the first place, moreover, it might never have come up as an issue at all. Either way, it seems likely that, absent the 1952 elections, the Truman administration might have been well-positioned to continue with its hard-line policy on "non-forcible repatriation."

Whether this would have generated an earlier peace is debatable. Acheson seemed to believe so. "It would have been better all around if the constitutional calendar had called for an election a year later than at that peculiarly critical moment," he later wrote. "With a longer life-span the existing government would have had a good chance of… convincing the Chinese and North Koreans to bring the Korean war to a close. The virtual interregnum

[185] See *ibid.* 105-106 on Chinese struggles to establish communications with the U.S. and its possible impact.
[186] See Barnes (2014).

of more than a year was costly."[187] More likely, however, in this scenario, was an indefinite continuation of diplomatic stalemate. The Communist delegation hardly seemed on the verge of a concession on POWs on the eve of Truman's withdrawal from the presidential race. Acheson might well have been able to strike down the Indian resolution, then, but all other things being equal, a continuation of the U.S. administration's position on POWs entailed far less chance of progress in the talks.

Relatedly, if it were not for Eisenhower's role during and after the 1952 campaign, it seems reasonable to speculate that the Chinese might not have moved towards the Indian position in the spring of 1953, either. Indeed, Chinese documents reveal that this crucial shift in China's bargaining position was likely a response to fears that Ike would raise the costs of war through military escalation if he became president. Certainly, in the summer of 1952, Zhou En Lai instructed his Foreign Ministry to track Eisenhower's public speeches during the American election campaign. From these statements, it seemed clear to the Chinese that "Eisenhower would be more aggressive in Korea." Of particular note was the Republican candidate's promise of an "honorable peace" though "deeds" rather than "words," which they took to mean a possible amphibious invasion of North Korea.[188] Observing Eisenhower's conferences with General Clark and General MacArthur, both known hawks, Chinese leaders were further convinced that, as Mao anxiously informed Stalin on 17 December, Eisenhower was "currently carrying out preparations for military actions that will take place after he comes to power." That Eisenhower was in fact paying the generals' ideas no more than lip service, was not known to the Chinese at the time, of course. In turn, as Elizabeth Stanley has recently argued, it was this pattern of perceptions

[187] Acheson (1969) 632-633.
[188] Zhang (1992) 132-137; Zhang (1995) 317-318.

which prompted the Chinese to quickly compromise on POWs within days of Stalin's death in March 1953.[189]

On balance, it seems fair to conclude that electoral constraints may actually have *helped* secure an armistice that otherwise might not have been expected, were such pressures not a factor. To be sure, both Truman and Eisenhower wound up with outcomes they felt less than optimal (which is the reason we can still consider their diplomatic strategies to have been *spoiled* by electoral constraints), bound as they were by the terms of the Indian resolution. Yet the counterfactual alternatives did not look promising. In the end, the election of Eisenhower may have been the quickest path to peace, not because of the atomic threats he later lauded, but because it indirectly (via events in the U.N. and independent Chinese concessions) led to a crucial compromise on POWs.[190] While Stalin's death remained a key final ingredient permitting the Chinese to act on their preference to settle, we can nevertheless assess these electorally induced shifts as catalysts to peace.

[189] Stanley (2009) 230-233. Mao's cable in *ibid.* 231.
[190] Eisenhower (1963) 181; *cf.* Foot (1990) ch. 7.

III

Lyndon Johnson and the "Americanization" of the Vietnam War

"I've got to win an election… and then you can make a decision."

Lyndon Johnson (March 1964)[1]

"The closer you get to the elections, the more troubles you have."

Lyndon Johnson (October 1968)[2]

On assuming the presidency in November 1963, Lyndon Johnson inherited an increasingly acute problem in Southeast Asia, a rhetorical commitment to solving it, and yet no sure plan for achieving such a resolution. Since the defeat of French forces at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the United States had steadily increased its share of the burden in supporting the efforts of the South Vietnamese government in combatting an insurgency backed by Hanoi. Framed as a key test of the containment policy which had dominated national security debates since the Korean War, successive presidents had poured more money and materiel into Saigon to prevent it falling into communist hands. Under Johnson, a "gradual escalation" policy resulted in 542,000 troops being stationed in Vietnam, supported by a sustained bombing campaign of the North. It had become "LBJ's war."

The aim of this chapter is not to "explain" American intervention in Vietnam, a task which has already generated something of a historiographical canon.[3] Nor is it the first

[1] Bundy and Johnson, TC, 4 March 1964, LBJL.
[2] 30 October 1968, TJNM, LBJL.
[3] Among the many influential historical accounts are, Berman (1989); Herring (2002); Gelb and Betts (1979); Logevall (1999); Khong (1992); McMaster (1997). Recent studies by Hastings (2018) and VanDeMark (2018) are useful additions.

word, of course, on the role of domestic politics in the Vietnam War.[4] Instead, it seeks to explore how a focus on electoral politics can help illuminate the nature and timing of President Johnson's decisions to "Americanize" the war, drawing on the conceptual framework outlined in chapter I. Specifically, it argues that the pressures of the 1964 election campaign compelled Johnson to *delay* escalating the conflict in Southeast Asia until after the moment of greatest political sensitivity had passed. His concern with the domestic political calendar then further contributed to the form of "gradual escalation" that ensued, with decisions on bombing operations and troop commitments taken with one eye on the upcoming midterm elections of 1966. As the 1968 presidential election approached, finding his strategic and electoral preferences to be irreconcilable, Johnson then chose to put his perception of national interest above political survival, only to find his efforts to sue for peace frustrated by the *spoiler* effect that upcoming elections have on negotiations.

In terms of contextual features which may mediate the influence of the conceptual framework offered in this thesis, Johnson's experience and interests stand out. One of the few Cold War presidents more interested in domestic than foreign policy, Johnson's primary passions were poverty, civil rights and education. Teaching Mexican-American students in Cotulla, Texas "had an enormous impact on him," recalls his Special Advisor, Joseph Califano; "he used to talk about it all the time."[5] Yet, as Senate Majority Leader, he witnessed first-hand how the bitter anti-communist sentiment of the McCarthyist era doomed the progressive agenda of Truman's Fair Deal. Ever since then, Democrats could scarcely get elected without subscribing to the same tough rhetoric which had done so much to discredit similar programs. As he entered the White House with a hugely ambitious vision of a Great Society, Johnson knew what damage partisan division over foreign affairs

[4] See, most recently, Hughes (2015); Small (2005); Johns (2010).
[5] Califano, Interview (2013).

could do. It is possible that this pre-disposed him to be acutely sensitive to the domestic political risks of increased intervention overseas. Equally, his relative inexperience in foreign affairs combined with the unusual circumstances of his accession to the Oval Office may have left him notably prone to defer to advisers – many of whom were holdovers from the Kennedy administration – when assessing strategic considerations.[6]

"Americanizing" the War

The 1964 election acted as a key turning point in the history of American decision-making during the Vietnam War. As this section demonstrates, electoral politics contributed to a stagnation in policy debates in this politically sensitive period between Kennedy's assassination and Johnson's re-election, with decision-making profoundly influenced by the *delay* mechanism. While strategic considerations largely overdetermined the question of *whether* Johnson would increase the pre-existing military commitment to a steadily deteriorating situation, electoral constraints played a crucial role in determining *when* and *how* this escalation would take place. Only under the more politically permissive environment following his re-election did Johnson venture further down the fateful path into the "quagmire" in Southeast Asia.

Strategic Considerations: "We're Losing. So We Need Something New."

Upon assuming office, President Johnson quickly learned of a dire need for a shift in strategy in Vietnam. A steady consensus had emerged in the administration concerning the deteriorating situation in Southeast Asia following the Secretary of Defense's visit in December 1963. McNamara's report warned that "Current trends unless reversed in the

[6] But see Bator (2008) 310-313.

next 2-3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state."[7] The CIA Director agreed, warning that "A continuation of the present nature of GVN and U.S. military and political actions does not appear to me to be enough to reverse current trends toward defeat."[8] In May, McNamara spoke on behalf of his fellow NSC "principals" and the Embassy team, lamenting that "the situation is still going to hell. Nothing we are doing now will win."[9]

Importantly, Johnson appears to have basically agreed with such assessments. After the very first meeting to discuss Vietnam following Kennedy's death, the President gloomily remarked to an aide that "it's going to hell in a hand basket out there," and apparently accepted the Ambassador's advice that "if we don't do something… it'll go under any day."[10] In several phone calls thereafter, he made complaints similar to that which he shared with McNamara in April 1964: "what we've got is what we've had since '54... We're losing. So we need something new."[11]

Through 1964, Johnson had been repeatedly pressed by his advisers, and especially the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to act upon these strategic concerns. A series of studies and planning exercises had been initiated in the State and Defense Departments, at Johnson's personal request.[12] By May the main options were clear: withdrawal, escalation, and a "neutralisation" agreement based on the Laos settlement of 1962. Among these options, Johnson also received a recommendation from his Secretaries of State and Defense that he "make a Presidential decision that the U.S. will use selected and carefully graduated

[7] McNamara to Johnson, 21 December 1963, Warnke Papers, Box 3, LBJL.
[8] 3 March 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. I, No. 68.
[9] 24 May 1964, NSF, NSC History, Box 38, LBJL.
[10] Quoted in VanDeMark (2018) 216.
[11] McNamara and Johnson, TC, 20 April 1964, LBJL. See also Fulbright and Johnson, TC, 2 December 1963, LBJL.
[12] For a flavour, see 22 February 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. I, Nos. 56, 66, 388.

military force against North Vietnam."[13] The escalatory plan they advocated envisaged the use of both air support and ground troops, foreshadowing the policy outcomes of 1965.

Perceiving a clear need to change strategy, the logic of containment and commitment to "domino theory" also pointed clearly towards greater intervention in Vietnam. As George Herring has written, "U.S. involvement in Vietnam was a logical, if not inevitable, outgrowth of a world view and a policy – the policy of containment – that Americans in and out of government accepted without serious question for more than two decades."[14] While it may seem irrational and profoundly mistaken in hindsight, evidence for the existence of this "ironbound and unshakeable dogma" is indeed omnipresent in the documentary record.[15] Littered throughout meeting minutes and recordings of telephone conversations involving the president are statements depicting Vietnam as the first in a row of dominoes. In one typical example, Johnson framed the problem in 1964 as follows: "Of course if you start running from the Communists, they may just chase you right into your own kitchen."[16] The credibility of this commitment before U.S. allies was a corollary to the argument. Johnson would often refer to the legal and moral requirement to fulfil America's international obligations, as he explained to Dick Russell: "We're in here by treaty and our national honour's at stake. And if this treaty's no good [SEATO], none of 'em are any good."[17] To be sure, Johnson's assessment of the chances of success even with increased intervention were hardly rosy, informed more by hope than expectation – "he was very pessimistic about the outcome," thus recalls his Deputy National Security Advisor, Francis

[13] Bundy to Johnson, 25 May 1964, Reference File, Vietnam, Box 2, LBJL.
[14] Herring (2002) xiii.
[15] VanDeMark (1995) xiii.
[16] Bundy and Johnson, TC, 27 May 1964, LBJL.
[17] Russell and Johnson, TC, 11 June 1964, LBJL. See also Logevall (1999); Gelb and Betts (1979) 188-190.

Bator.[18] Yet, facing few good strategic choices, it is clear that the status quo was understood to be sub-optimal.

Yet if this strategic understanding of the situation made a decision to escalate the war likely, there remain important puzzles to explain. If domino theory was an iron-clad belief, why did Johnson wait so long to act, despite being warned of the dire consequences of delay? Likewise, if containment required a firm U.S. response to communist aggression in Vietnam, why not unleash the full power of the American military to achieve those goals with more certainty and efficiency?

Electoral Preference: "Some Peace Demagoguery for the Mothers"

As concerned as Lyndon Johnson was with what was strategically beneficial, he was also acutely aware that he faced an election in November 1964. As McGeorge Bundy put it, Johnson remained deeply concerned "with what the average American voter is going to think about how he did in the ball game of the Cold War. The great Cold War championship gets played in the largest stadium in the United States and he, Lyndon Johnson, is the quarterback, and if he loses, how does he do in the next election? So don't lose… He's living with his own political survival every time he looks at these questions."[19] Johnson himself put it more simply: "I'd hate like hell," he frankly told McNamara just weeks after assuming office, "to be such a statesman that I didn't get elected."[20] As such, he displayed a profound sensitivity to the electoral risks of any course of action placed before him.

On one hand, electoral considerations appeared to push Johnson further away from de-escalatory courses of action. Much as the *dampening* mechanism predicts, an initial screening process based almost exclusively on the "political acceptability" of the options

[18] Bator, Interview (2017); Gelb and Betts (1979) 3; Johnson (2004) 170-171.
[19] Bundy, quoted in VanDeMark (2018) 214.
[20] McNamara and Johnson, TC, 7 December 1963, LBJL.

under consideration appeared to eliminate the prospect of withdrawal or "neutralisation" before any significant review was undertaken. "The one we haven't been taking up for any serious study," Johnson thus admitted to his advisers in June 1964, "is the alternative of pulling out of Southeast Asia."[21] Even when George Ball was tasked with taking up the "devil's advocate" position into the autumn, writing an extensive analysis of the drawbacks of excessive intervention in early October, he was convinced to bury the dissenting view, which remained included in discussions barely as a token.[22] In the political climate of 1960s America, much as in the early 1950s, a failure to stand up to the forces of global communism would invite scathing criticism from prominent hawks, imperilling any Democrat's election prospects. Since Rusk, Bundy, and McNamara all believed the partition of Vietnam would lead to a Communist takeover, the same logic applied to neutralisation. As one aide concluded, "This would have greater political liabilities than our present course. The commitment to preserve Vietnamese independence was not made by Democrats - but we are not free to abandon it**.**"[23]

A call with the Chairman of the *Miami Herald* in February nicely summarises Johnson's thinking on these options:

> "There's one of three things you can do. One is run and let the dominoes start falling over. And God, what they said about us leaving China would just be warming up, compared to what they'd say now. I see Nixon raising hell about it today. Goldwater too. You can run, or you can fight, as we are doing, or you can sit down and agree to neutralize all of it. But nobody is going to neutralize North Vietnam, so that's totally impractical."[24]

Both withdrawal and neutralisation were associated with the "loss" of Vietnam, something which Johnson believed would cause such consternation at home so as to make the "loss"

[21] Rusk, Bundy and Johnson, TC, 2 June 1964, LBJL.
[22] Preston (2006) 158.
[23] Sorensen to Johnson, 13 January 1964, NSF, Country File Vietnam, Box 1, LBJL.
[24] Knight and Johnson, TC, 3 February 1964, LBJL.

of China by Truman mere "chickenshit."[25] The two likely critics he cites are Goldwater – his Republican opponent in the 1964 campaign – and Nixon – who had made his political name in the trial of Communist spy, Alger Hiss, at the height of the McCarthy era. Having failed the "political acceptability" test, there was apparently little electoral incentive for Johnson to revisit options which, in any case, jarred with the thrust of the steady stream of broadly interventionist suggestions he had been receiving from advisers.

Yet if there were electoral risks to de-escalation, so too was there significant political peril associated with getting deeper into war in an election year, especially through highly salient methods of combat troop commitments and bombing campaigns. Indeed, Johnson's entire political campaign was to some degree premised on the idea that he was the cool-headed alternative to the ultra-hawkish Barry Goldwater. Therefore he "tried as far as possible to keep the war out of the political race" and was furious when any campaign surrogates mentioned the conflict in Vietnam.[26] For instance, iInformed of "blabbing" by Hubert Humphrey, the man who would become his running mate in late Augusthis Vice President, for instance, he onceJohnson lamented that Humphrey the future Vice President "just ought to keep his goddamned big mouth shut on foreign affairs, at least until the election is over."[27]

He would often discuss the election campaign with his key national security advisers, moreover, consistently encouraging them to cultivate a public image of peace. Thus Bundy, when consulting on a foreign policy speech, was advised by Johnson that "we want a little peace demagoguery for the mothers," while McNamara was instructed to ensure he associated himself with the diplomatic staff in Saigon, not simply the military, because "if you're going up in the polls now, I don't want you to be a warmonger. I want to have a

[25] Goodwin (1976) 252-53.
[26] Johnson (1971) 68.
[27] Rowe and Johnson, TC, 4 August 1964, LBJL.

peacemaker."[28] As he later told a congressmen in a private telephone conversation, while he may have perceived the need to escalate during 1964, he "held off as long and long as I could, because I knew the people would raise hell. I knew it didn't look good. It didn't have a peace image."[29]

In sum, it may reasonably be inferred that Johnson's perception of the electoral risks of each broad course of action available to him through 1964 both reinforced his desire not to simply cut and run and, perhaps more significantly, threw cold water on his emerging strategic preference for escalation. Under this latter misalignment of preferences, in such a sensitive phase of the electoral cycle, this study's conceptual framework strongly predicts that the *delay* and/or *dampening* mechanisms may be observed in the ensuing decision-making process.

The Path to Gradual Escalation

Having already seen substantial evidence of the first two observable implications of the *delay* mechanism – the perception of a need for change, and the existence of viable opportunities to review the existing strategy – it remains to be shown that there was an electorally-motivated deferral of a decision. The evidence is in fact crystal clear.

Asked why Johnson chose to wait until 1965 before acting on his emergent preference, his Deputy National Security Advisor is adamant: "The '64 election played a very large role in that. He didn't want to engage before the election into starting a new war."[30] The documentary record supports such a claim. When Johnson was presented with a JCS

[28] Bundy and Johnson, TC, 24 March 1964, LBJL; Bundy, McNamara and Johnson, TC, 9 April 1964, LBJL.
[29] Bayh and Johnson, TC, 15 June 1965, LBJL.
[30] Bator, Interview (2017).

programme for selective airpower to be applied in the North, General Taylor's minutes note:

> "The President accepted the need for punishing Hanoi without debate, but pointed to some other practical difficulties, particularly the political ones with which he was faced. It is quite apparent that he does not want to lose South Vietnam before next November nor does he want to get the country into war."[31]

"I've got to win an election," Johnson told Bundy after this meeting, "And then you can make a decision. But in the meantime, let's see if we can't find enough things to do to keep them off base."[32] Bundy later agreed that at this stage Johnson's "pre-emptive concern" was to "win, win, win the election, not the war."[33] McNamara, for his part, was by September well attuned to the President's priority, advising him that, "the odds are we can squeeze through between now and the [election] but it certainly is a weak situation… After the election, we've got a real problem on our hands."[34] Thus U.S. policy remained a holding action. Roughly six months before the election, Johnson's view was clear: "I just can't believe that we can't take fifteen thousand advisers and two hundred thousand [South Vietnamese] people and maintain the status quo for six months."[35] Evidence for the delay effect cannot get much stronger than this.

Even when faced with significant developments on the battlefield which resulted from enemy action, the Johnson administration's preference was to look the other way until the political fallout of such developments could be more easily managed after the election. In July 1964, for instance, the American Consul in Huế reported the capture of two North Vietnamese soldiers, representing the first suspected presence of North Vietnamese units in the South. A week later, a cable came back reprimanding the American official for

[31] 4 March 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. I, No. 70.
[32] Bundy and Johnson, TC, 4 March 1964, LBJL.
[33] Goldstein (2008) 97.
[34] McNamara and Johnson, TC, 21 September 1964, LBJL.
[35] Bundy and Johnson, TC, 2 March 1964, LBJL.

sending telegrams to Washington, insisting that they be cleared in Saigon instead. According to one analyst in the Embassy, "The reason for that was that LBJ and the people around him put out the word that we don't want any surprises. We don't want to see information coming in that suggests that the war might be escalating, because we've got a political campaign going on here… It wasn't because they didn't want to face up to reality. They just didn't want the reality to come to the attention of the American people too soon."[36] As one scholar put it more recently, "Johnson acted like the proverbial ostrich that buries its head in the sand when it sees danger. He wanted to keep Vietnam at arm's length, to delay confronting vexing problems, and to postpone difficult decisions until after the election."[37]

Insofar as there were any new policy outcomes in this period, they were minor, and approved more for their political acceptability than their expected strategic effectiveness, in another clear example of the *dampening* effect. CIA-led covert operations against North Vietnam and several socio-economic programmes were approved on a rolling basis through 1964 as less politically salient substitutes for the increased use of force many now felt necessary. Strikingly, the former were expected to have "little or no effect" by McNamara, and even the CIA Director warned Johnson to expect "no great results" from them.[38] The latter clashed directly with Johnson's own scepticism on "so-called social reforms" stated in his first meeting on Vietnam as President.[39]

Yet both policies were advocated by Ambassador Lodge, who, despite being renowned for his "idiotic" proposals and general incompetence ("He ain't worth a damn…he can't work with *anybody*," remarked Johnson), was nonetheless treated as "Mister God" at

[36] Negroponte, Oral History, 11 February 2000. Transcript obtained via email correspondence with Negroponte.
[37] VanDeMark (2018) 220-221. See also Hastings (2018) 183.
[38] *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. I, Nos. 1, 4.
[39] 24 November 1964, MNF, Box 1, LBJL.

Johnson's direction.[40] Why? Because he was a political threat to Johnson's re-election, subject to a Lodge-for-President write-in campaign. Expecting Lodge's imminent resignation to free the Republican to run against him, Johnson sought to insulate himself from possible future attacks by keeping him close. "I'm not gonna let him have any differences," reasoned Johnson, "I'm gonna agree with every damn thing he does. That's my strategy."[41] Minor programmes in which Johnson had little faith were thus fast-tracked to authorisation because they could either be kept covert, or because they served some other electoral purpose.

On the surface, Johnson's response to the Gulf of Tonkin attack on U.S. naval units in August 1964, entailing tit-for-tat bombing raids in the North, appears to jar with this characterisation of presidential inaction during 1964. Arguably, it fits better with the escalatory dynamic of the *spur* mechanism which Harry Truman had been subject to back in 1950. Perhaps it may even plausibly be presented as an example of diversionary action, whereby a president manufactures a "rally" in public support through the cynical use of force. Yet while Johnson did indeed receive a notable boost in the polls, he hardly needed it at this stage, leading Goldwater on the eve of the incident by 59% to 31%.[42] More generally, this was a reactionary move, not the pre-meditated attack more in keeping with the diversionary thesis. However one categorises the Tonkin incident, it is notable that Johnson's National Security Advisor, looking back, concludes that "what really mattered to Lyndon Johnson in 1964 was the election politics of these events."[43]

---

[40] *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. I, No. 139; Russell and Johnson, TC, 27 May 1964, LBJL; Rusk and Johnson, TC, 2 March 1964, LBJL.
[41] Bundy and Johnson, TC, 14 April 1964, LBJL.
[42] "Gallup Presidential Election Trial Heat Trends." Available online at: https://news.gallup.com/poll/110548/gallup-presidential-election-trial-heat-trends.aspx (accessed 14 September 2019).
[43] Bundy, quoted in VanDeMark (2018) 245.

Ironically, perhaps the most important consequence of Tonkin was that Johnson was given a golden opportunity to breathe life into his policy of delay, which had come under increasing scrutiny by hawks in Congress. Retaliation to an unprovoked attack was almost universally approved, and, indeed, expected, even by those generally opposed to escalation.[44] He could therefore blunt recent charges of weakness and "flaccidity of determination" by key Republican opponents like Ford, while not alienating doves.[45] Robbing the Republicans of their primary campaign issue, retaliation bought Johnson's strategy of delaying a more substantial change of course enough time to get to November. As a bonus, it gave Johnson the opportunity to pass a congressional resolution which effectively gave him a blank cheque on Vietnam in the future, and an invulnerability to further attack by Goldwater in the meantime.

~

To show that a decision was delayed, rather than simply ignored, it must also be possible to find evidence that the same problem was addressed quickly and pro-actively in the aftermath of Election Day. This is indeed plain to see from the documentary record, as obfuscation gave way to an eagerness to take action.

The day after the election, Johnson created an NSC Working Group which formalised the same basic proposals for alternative strategies which had been postponed through 1964. Having kicked the problem into the long grass repeatedly, now the President set underway what the group's chairperson called "the most comprehensive" Vietnam policy review "of any in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations."[46] Three specific courses of action emerged: "Option A," to continue as present; 'Option B," a "hard/fast squeeze" of

[44] 85% of Americans supported Johnson's actions. "Harris Poll," 10 August 1964, WHCF, ND19/CO312, LBJL.
[45] Quoted in Johns (2010) 62.
[46] Bundy, Unpublished Manuscript, ch. 18, 1, Bundy Papers, LBJL.

systematically escalating attacks on North Vietnam; or "Option C," a "slow, controlled squeeze" of gradually escalating aerial bombardment, aiming to bring the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table.[47]

When Johnson met to discuss the recommendations a month later his tone was no longer anguished. "The day of reckoning is coming," he declared, and while willing to give diplomatic and clandestine operations one last shot, "If more of the same, then I'll be talking to you, General," gesturing towards the Chairman of the JCS. A conditional plan entailing a 30-day intensification of existing actions followed by a second stage of increasingly severe air strikes against North Vietnam was authorised two days later.[48] Operation Rolling Thunder, the sustained air bombing campaign authorised in February, was simply phase two of this earlier plan. Thus Rolling Thunder was not solely a reaction to a 7 February attack on U.S. installations at Pleiku. Indeed, on the very day before the attack, Johnson was telling advisers that "he had kept the shotgun over the mantel and the bullets in the basement for a long time now," concluding that "cowardice has gotten us into more wars than response has."[49] Pre-election risk-aversion and delay had given way to risk-acceptance and daring action.

A similar point can be made about the decision to escalate the U.S. ground commitment. Already in December 1964 Johnson told McNamara that "appropriate military strength on the ground" was now necessary, adding, "I am ready to look with great favor on that kind of increased American effort."[50] While aware that the odds of long-term success still looked slim, he was now willing to accept such risks. "The game now is in the fourth quarter, and it's about 78 to nothing," he explained, "We've got to try to rescue

[47] 19 November 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. II, No. 417.
[48] 1 December 1964, MNF, Box 1, LBJL.
[49] 6 February 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. II, No. 77.
[50] 30 December 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. I, No. 477.

something."[51] As such, a series of deployments of Marines were made over the spring of 1965, newly tasked with combat missions, before a July decision to increase troop levels to 125,000 with the promise of additional forces as requested opened the proverbial floodgates of almost unending commitment to Vietnam.

In coming to this position, Johnson enjoyed a relatively mild version of the *hangover* effect that presidents typically face from his previous campaign pledges. In part this was due to the vagueness of his promises on the campaign trail. On one hand, of course, he had sought to engage in the aforementioned "peace demagoguery" with highly suggestive comments famously including his statement that "we are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."[52] On the other hand, as he later recalled, having repeatedly professed a continued commitment to South Vietnam, he could hardly be painted as a "peace-at-any-price" candidate.[53] In one typical interview, he said of the situation: "we must do everything we can, we must be responsible, we must stay there and help them, and that is what we are going to do."[54] Even if he had made more specific pledges, however, the size of his winning margin on Election Day provided sufficient latitude to interpret his mandate largely as he saw fit, having lost only six states in a landslide victory.

This apparent freedom from the constraints of an upcoming election might have caused a reconsideration of the escalatory path to which Johnson was binding himself. Urging Johnson to do just this, the Vice President pointed out that "1965 is the year of minimum political risk for the Johnson Administration," making it more possible to cut losses in Vietnam than ever before.[55] That Johnson appeared to ignore this political opportunity

[51] McNamara and Johnson, TC, 26 February 1965, LBJL.
[52] Quoted in Johns (2010) 73.
[53] Bundy and Johnson, TC, 24 March 1964, LBJL; Johnson (1971) 68.
[54] Quoted in Lerner (1995) 754.
[55] 21 February 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. II, No. 134. See also Logevall (2008) 100-101.

speaks to the contextual feature mentioned at the outset of this chapter, regarding Johnson's overriding interest in domestic priorities. As Bator has argued, "I don't think one can understand Johnson's Vietnam choices in July 1965 without taking into account that on June 30 his rent subsidy bill for needy families was almost defeated, that the voting rights bill and legislation creating Medicare were due for conference at the end of July, that… the entire Great Society agenda—[was] sitting on his desk."[56] So as not to irk hawkish critics on the Hill, and avoid a "guns versus butter" debate that would imperil such domestic priorities, Johnson felt forced to defer to his generals on their escalatory proposals.

Critically, the domestic political calendar added urgency to this calculation, bolstering the case for a "slow squeeze" form of escalation. "He basically thought with the '64 election that he had a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate to ram through the Great Society program," recalls Bator, "he didn't think that that would last through the midterm election in '66."[57] In turn, to retain the benefit of this position, Johnson needed to appease hawks who could hold his domestic programme ransom to escalation in Vietnam.

There is certainly evidence to support Bator's interpretation. Bundy's handwritten notes following the crucial 27 July NSC meeting on the eve of the troops decision are insightful, recording his feeling "that while the President was placing his preference… on international grounds, his unspoken object was to protect his legislative program."[58] More reliable evidence comes from Johnson's own comments to Ball in July 1965, which make his conundrum clear: "The great black beast for us is the right wing. If we don't get the war over soon they'll put enormous heat on us to turn it into an Armageddon and wreck all our other programs."[59] Perhaps most colourfully, he once elaborated on his fear that, unless he

[56] Bator (2008) 313. See also VanDeMark (1995) and McNamara (1995) 173, 205-6.
[57] Bator, Interview (2017).
[58] 27 July 1965, MNF, Box 1, LBJL.
[59] Quoted in LaFeber (1994) 49.

escalated in Vietnam, "they won't be talking about my civil rights bill, or education or beautification. No sir, they'll push Vietnam up my ass every time. Vietnam. Vietnam. Vietnam. Right up my ass."[60] Johnson's constant deference to key hawkish figures is also suggestive of this pandering. He kept Eisenhower close, for instance, allowing him to opine at length on the virtues of expanding bombing in North Vietnam, and appreciated his advice to "do what you have to do."[61] While some scholars have suggested that Johnson's concerns about a right wing backlash were in hindsight exaggerated, this does not change the reality that the President appears to have genuinely perceived such a significant political risk at the time.[62] Here, then, we see domestic politics intersecting with the electoral calendar to create incentives for bold, aggressive outcomes, taking place after the presidential election.

~

In sum, the "Americanization" of the Vietnam War offers strong support for the conceptual framework outlined in chapter I. While Johnson perceived a clear need to do something different to avert disaster early on, the electoral risks of dragging the country deeper into war on the eve of his re-election proved prohibitive. Instead, Johnson chose to bury an emergent if reluctant preference for escalation as the controversial decisions to commit air and ground forces were delayed until after the voters had cast their ballots.

The Pursuit of Peace

For the remainder of Johnson's time in office, the broad underlying strategy of "graduated escalation" would continue, consisting of steady increases in the intensity of bombing and numbers of troops committed to Vietnam, culminating in 1968 being the bloodiest year of the entire war. Throughout, however, Johnson remained engaged in a perpetual struggle to

[60] Quoted in Halberstam (1972) 530.
[61] Eisenhower and Johnson, TC, 2 July 1965, LBJL; Brands (1985).
[62] Logevall (1999). For a powerful critique, see Garofano (2006) 151-152, 165.

reconcile diverging strategic and electoral preferences. This section explores how these pressures ultimately led Johnson to decide in March 1968 that, since a viable balance could no longer be struck, he had to make an unpalatable choice between what he understood to be the diplomatically optimal path to a negotiated settlement and his own political future. Withdrawing from the presidential race, he nevertheless found his bargaining position repeatedly undermined by electoral considerations over which he had little control, much as the *spoiler* mechanism predicts.

Hawks, Doves and the Disappearing Middle Ground

Having committed to the "slow squeeze" strategy of steadily increasing aerial and ground attacks on North Vietnam in 1965, Johnson spent much of the next three years monitoring and trying to adapt his policy to suit his and fellow Democrats' political needs. As the following section shows, this did not prove easy, and resulted in something akin to a Goldilocks approach to policy – neither too hawkish nor too dovish so as to protect his and fellow Democrats' chances in the 1966 and 1968 elections.

The 1965 Christmas bombing pause offers an interesting insight into Johnson's priorities. Already by early December, Johnson was strongly resisting suggestions from his civilian advisers to temporarily halt the bombing in Vietnam as a gesture towards de-escalation. Citing concerns that hawkish sentiment would not tolerate a pause, he made his priorities crystal clear: "We've got a new election here. This is a priority problem. It comes ahead of poverty & education. It's a new ball game. 1966 election."[63] That a 37-day pause ended up being approved over the president's deep political concerns speaks to both the influence of the stage of the electoral cycle, with almost a year until the midterms still to go, and to the equally political justification used by the pause's advocates to bring their

[63] 7 December 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. III, No. 223.

Commander-in-Chief on board. As Bundy explained to Johnson, a pause would establish the political groundwork for further escalation in January, balancing the competing political pressures from dovish and hawkish sentiment. "We are going to have to do these other tough things in January," he wrote on 9 December, and "I think the peace-lovers will support our January actions a whole lot more if there has been a pause beforehand."[64]

Another memorandum to Johnson from his previous Press Secretary at the beginning of 1966 elaborates on the dynamics of this period remarkably well. After noting that policy debates were "being conducted in the tone of a 'hawks' and 'doves' clash," he admitted:

> "The current debate has… limited the Administration's freedom of action. At the present time, the 'doves' are having their innings and therefore the Administration is being presented to the public as a 'hawk.' Somewhere along the line the 'hawks' will come up to bat and at that point the scene will shift and the Administration will look like a 'dove.'"[65]

Opinion in Congress was indeed becoming polarised. Hawks like Karl Mundt began decrying the self-imposed restrictions on bombing North Vietnamese cities, lobbying Johnson to begin "using our strength instead of applying our weakness."[66] On the other side, Senator Fulbright's hearings, fully televised, brought the dovish critique to every home in America. In private, Johnson's mailbox testified to this sentiment. On 21 January, 72 House members called for him to seek peace through a U.N. mediation effort.[67]

As the midterms approached, the problem intensified. "Gradual escalation" was imperilling Democrats in dovish areas, and criticism of excessive military limitations threatened those in hawkish districts. With no clear line of least political resistance, Johnson instead retreated to the status quo. For instance, a proposed bombing pause was

---

[64] Bundy to Johnson, 9 December 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. III, No. 226. See also *ibid*. No. 255.
[65] Reedy to Johnson, 17 February 1966, WHCF, Ex-CO312, LBJL.
[66] Johns (2010) 109.
[67] 21 January 1966, WHCF, Confidential File, PL/ST, LBJL.

deferred, despite the key advisers becoming increasingly convinced of the utility of one and the ineffectiveness of bombing. Rostow thus offered his "amateur political judgment: a 'pause' during the campaign, without solid evidence that a move towards peace will promptly follow, could be quite dangerous during the campaign." In the margin of this memorandum, McNamara scrawled "I am inclined to agree that a 'pause' prior to November would be unwise."[68] Days later he elaborated, telling Johnson "I myself am more and more convinced that we ought definitely to plan on termination of the bombing in the north but not until after the election."[69] A pause would be implemented only in the New Year. If inaction here veered in practice towards continued escalation, this reflected the way in which Johnson perceived his greatest political threat. As he later told Bator, himself a dove on the subject, "The *real* pressures on me are coming from people who want me to go North, mine the harbors, bomb Hanoi, get into a war with the Chinese – they're crazies."[70]

With the congressional elections over, and as public opinion continued to diverge on Vietnam, Johnson doubled down on the Goldilocks strategy through 1967. In one month Johnson was taking renewed interest in a peace feeler.[71] In the next, he would be authorising Rolling Thunder targets.[72] In the end, though, the hawk-dove pressure in Congress and the wider public inhibited any radical departure from the strategy begun in 1965. As polls shifted towards distrust of the administration, Congress reflected the increasing polarisation on Vietnam. Hawks like Ford and Reagan continued to deride gradual escalation, lamenting that "We have the power to wind it up fast, and I think we should use it."[73] Meanwhile,

---

[68] Rostow to Johnson, 15 September 1966, NSF, Rostow File, LBJL.
[69] McNamara and Johnson, TC, 19 September 1966, LBJL.
[70] Quoted in VanDeMark (2018) 390.
[71] See Johnson's interest in the "Sunflower" channel, Rostow to Johnson, 3 January 1967, NSF, Country File Vietnam, LBJL.
[72] *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. IV, Nos. 139, 226.
[73] Quoted in Johns (2010) 156, 161.

doves like Fulbright and Javits condemned the strategy as a "grievous mistake" in private, and the product of "illusions and overoptimistic predictions" in public, calling in varying degrees for immediate ceasefire and withdrawal.[74]

Policy, still broadly under the strategic conception of "gradual escalation," was being consistently adapted in response to the administration's perception of the public mood, which, as one Special Advisor put it, was like a "'Korean whipsaw': On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, we will be the war party; on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, the party of appeasement."[75] Indeed, this dynamic was supported by polling data, which revealed that Americans were deeply split between those favouring escalation (45 percent) and those preferring withdrawal (41 percent).[76] Thus mid-1967 saw further incremental increases in troops alongside a new negotiating position, known as the San Antonio formula, which offered a bombing cessation in return for the commencement of "serious" talks. [77]

With the 1968 presidential election campaign approaching, sensitivity to public opinion increased yet further, as predicted by this study's conceptual framework. While advisers had begun to shift away from advocacy of bombing operations and ever-increasing ground commitments, amid mounting evidence that they were strategically futile, Johnson remained scornful of any proposal which carried excessive electoral risk. Johnson's response to McNamara's bombshell memorandum of 1 November is a good example. In it, the Secretary of Defense called for a policy of "stabilization," comprising a bombing halt and cap on troop numbers, having concluded that "continuing on our present course will

[74] Fulbright to Johnson, 30 June 1967, NSF, Name File, Fulbright, LBJL. Javits quoted in Johns (2010) 140.
[75] Roche to O'Brien, 6 February 1967, NSF, Name File, Roche, LBJL.
[76] VanDeMark (2018) 388.
[77] *Public Papers of the Presidents: Johnson, 1967*, Book II 876–81.

not bring us by the end of 1968 enough closer to success."[78] Before firing McNamara, Johnson penned a response outlining his belief that the proposals would only "encourage extreme doves," lose support from erstwhile "friends" and not gain anything beyond a few "moderate dove" votes.[79] Johnson's advisers were also conscious of such political counter-arguments. Rostow, for instance, feared that Johnson "would be pushed off the middle ground you now hold at home" by McNamara's policy, which would spark "a debate between united Republicans claiming we had gone soft and a Democratic Administration, with the JCS in disagreement if not open revolt."[80] This struck at the heart of the matter. Even if he could be convinced of the strategic necessity of a change in approach, Johnson could not at this stage authorise a major de-escalatory step without opening himself up to a queue of Republican opponents who would capitalise on perceived timidity.

McNamara's position, however, was a harbinger of things to come, as dovish opinion gained traction both in public and in the administration. The President would now increasingly struggle to find a path forward which satisfied his interest in political survival. On authorising new bombing targets weeks after this episode, Johnson emphasised to his national security team that "the clock is ticking… The bombing arouses so much opposition in this country."[81]

Indeed, after the Tet Offensive, the political threat from doves had become just as severe as that from hawks, placing Johnson in a pincer movement of constraints rendering his pursuit of re-election and peace mutually exclusive. Scenes of Vietcong forces ambushing the U.S. Embassy in Saigon shocked the nation, as the number of self-described doves rose from 24 to 42 percent overnight.[82] Leaked news of a 206,000-strong troop

[78] McNamara to Johnson, 1 November 1967, NSF, Country File Vietnam, LBJL.
[79] 18 December 1967~~8~~, NSF, Name File, Rostow File, LBJL.
[80] Rostow to Johnson, 2 November 1967~~8~~, NSF, Name File, Rostow File, LBJL.
[81] 21 November 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. IV, No. 401.
[82] Johns (2010) 190.

request sparked a firestorm of protest. Chants of "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" reached the White House from crowds at the gates, having an "enormous influence" on Johnson, according to Tom Johnson, a close aide.[83] Most concerning for Johnson was that such pressure was being translated into a direct threat to his re-nomination at the Democratic convention, as anti-war candidates gained traction. On 12 March Eugene McCarthy registered a stunning performance in the New Hampshire primary, and on 16 March Bobby Kennedy announced his candidacy for the 1968 election. Ominously, the President had received polling data even *before* Kennedy announced indicating that Johnson would lose the dove vote by a ratio of over two-to-one.[84] The net effect was to rule out further escalation as a viable option, in a demonstration of the *dampening* effect.

By mid-to-late March, Johnson was being pressured instead towards a bombing halt proposal. Redrafting an originally hawkish speech, he admitted to his new Secretary of Defense that "we ought to have some kind of something on peace" in the remarks, "because they're concluding… we are just the Goldwater of '68 and we can't take that." Clifford agreed, replying, "We have a posture now in which Kennedy and McCarthy are the peace candidates and President Johnson is the war candidate. Now we must veer away from that and we can do it."[85] Johnson's previous National Security Advisor was preaching to the converted, then, when he subsequently wrote Johnson:

> "If we get tagged as mindless hawks, we can lose both the election and the war.... You were dead right when you asked me to find a good left hook to go with the military right... the only one that the whole world – and Kennedy and McCarthy too – will call serious is a bombing halt."[86]

[83] Johnson, Email Correspondence (2017).
[84] Panzer to Johnson, 15 March 1968, WHCF, Confidential File, PL/ST, LBJL.
[85] Clifford and Johnson, TC, 20 March 1968, LBJL.
[86] Quoted in Lee (2015) 143.

The problem, of course, was that such a move would open Johnson to criticism from Nixon or Reagan, who had recently demanded that "the war in Vietnam must be fought through to victory."[87] Indeed, by 26 March, Johnson was agonising with his military chiefs about the way forward. "This is complicated by the fact it is an election year," he explained, adding, "We need more money in an election year, more taxes in an election year, more troops in an election year… We have no support for the war."[88] In short, he could no longer prosecute the war as hawks would like amid such dovish electoral pressure.

Facing stalemate in Vietnam and a failing strategy, electoral constraints put Johnson in a Catch-22 position. Escalate, and risk losing the Democratic nomination in August. De-escalate, and risk losing to hawks in November. Johnson concluded that he could not both pursue peace and run for re-election. His decision to sacrifice his political future is a good example of an extreme case of misalignment between a president's preferences.

Monkey Wrenches in Paris

Johnson's withdrawal transformed the electoral period into that of a "lame duck" president. Unencumbered by the need to get re-elected, electoral constraints are predicted to be weaker in this period. A desire to cement a legacy or support a preferred candidate in the election may see a renewed interest in foreign policy, but the personal stakes are not high enough to warrant significant departures from what the president perceives to be strategically optimal. Since Johnson's publicly stated aim in this period was to secure peace primarily through diplomatic means, however, there remains much scope for the *spoiler* mechanism to operate. Typically, this renders any renewed efforts in foreign policy

[87] Quoted in Johns (2010) 185.
[88] 26 March 1968, TJNM, LBJL.

ultimately fruitless. As demonstrated below, these predictions are fully supported by the evidence.

~

Johnson's withdrawal presents an interesting counterfactual which tests the difference running for re-election can have on policymaking. In his speech, Johnson felt that while pursuing peace in Vietnam he should not devote "an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes."[89] Literally overnight, policy deliberations once full of discussion of political context were now almost entirely void of it.[90] If still running, there would surely have been no such change. This is plausible *prima facie* proof of weakened electoral constraints.

Moreover, having made the first move towards peace, Johnson was not pressured into offering further concessions, as he might have been had he been running for re-election. Throughout the summer Johnson assiduously rejected several proposals for "try-it-and-see" total bombing halts. As Clifford subsequently complained to his fellow pause advocates, "You don't realize LBJ's mood. It's: 'I'm God-damned if I'll stop the bombing without something from the other side!'"[91] Or, as Johnson made clear in August, "We are not going to stop the bombing just to give them a chance to step up their bloodbath."[92] Not *needing* a deal for electoral reasons, and if anything wanting to avoid a legacy as a "peace-at-any-price" negotiator, Johnson was freer to base his position on his assessment of policy without regard for the political consequences. Again, the freedom from most electoral constraints is striking.

---

[89] *Public Papers of the Presidents: Johnson, 1968–69*, Book I 469–76.
[90] See *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. VI.
[91] 16 September 1968, *ibid.* Vol. VII, No. 15.
[92] *Public Papers of the Presidents: Johnson, 1968–69*, Book II 896–903.

There is also an abundance of evidence demonstrating the *spoiler* effect in this period, which is best presented in three phases. In the first, lasting all summer, Hanoi calculated that a better deal could be reached closer to the election, when they assumed Johnson would be more willing to stop bombing in an effort to help Humphrey's candidacy and bolster his legacy as a peacemaker. With Johnson tending towards Nixon's hard-line position for the moment, little good could come of precipitous concessions on Hanoi's side.[93] Even though Johnson was not running, this electoral consideration restricted his bargaining position, as he well understood. "They're waiting to see if they can have a better deal with anybody that they select," he explained to Majority Leader Dirsken, adding, "They know that they can't get a better one from me. They know they can't get a better one from Nixon. So they're trying to play this other side."[94]

This dynamic was confirmed on 30 September, when the Democratic candidate publicly offered weaker terms than Johnson's. Pledging to halt the bombing "as an acceptable risk for peace," Humphrey required only "good faith" from the North Vietnamese and *de facto* evidence that they would restore the demilitarized zone between the North and the South.[95] Johnson also required firm commitments from Hanoi to accept South Vietnamese participation in negotiations and refrain from shelling South Vietnamese cities. The President understood that his bargaining leverage was significantly eroded so long as Humphrey had a chance of winning in November, as he explained to Rusk: "If Humphrey's elected, they're in clover. If he's not elected, then they can look and see what they want to do between me and Nixon. So you can just forget everything until then."[96]

---

[93] VanDeMark (2018) 505; Nguyen (2012) 126-128. On the 1968 campaign and Vietnam in general, see Sieg (1996).
[94] Dirksen and Johnson, TC, 27 August 1968, LBJL.
[95] Full text in 1 October 1968, *New York Times*.
[96] Rusk and Johnson, TC, 3 October 1968, LBJL.

Johnson tried his best to preserve his leverage. This can be seen firstly in his attempts to destroy the dovish minority plank at the Democratic convention. In a call to Charlie Murphy, his Counsel who had been working on Humphrey's platform, he made his opposition clear, flatly stating, "We do not favour any words that say 'stop the bombing.' Let's make that clear and repeat it over and over again."[97] In the end Johnson's preferred platform defeated the weaker version. Secondly, throughout the campaign season, Johnson continually called the candidates to censor them on Vietnam. One such hastily arranged conference call was especially striking. Calling for a "minimum of discussion" in public speeches, he stressed that "We can get [peace] only when they understand that our position is a firm one, and we're going to stay by it. And what y'all's position would be when you get to be President, I hope you could announce it then."[98] He then explained the bargaining effect to them in true Johnsonian style:

> "We have really this kind of a situation. If I have a house to sell, and I put a rock bottom price of $40,000 on it, and the prospective purchaser says, 'Well, that's a little high, but let me see.' And he goes—starts to leave to talk to his wife about it, and Lady Bird [Johnson] whispers, 'I would let you have it for $35,000.' And then he gets downstairs, and Lynda Bird [Johnson] says, 'We don't like the old house anyway, you can get it for $30,000.' Well, he's not likely to sign up."[99]

Johnson did not need to be in the race, or even thinking in a remotely partisan manner, in order for his negotiating position to be affected by the U.S. election.

The next phase of the bargaining logic saw Hanoi calculate that a Nixon victory was likely, and conclude that acceding to Johnson's negotiating conditions was therefore opportune. Johnson might give them a better deal now, as a lame-duck wanting to be remembered as a peacemaker, rather than wait until Nixon, considered by Politburo leaders

---

[97] Murphy and Johnson, TC, 26 August 1968, LBJL.
[98] Humphrey, Nixon, Wallace and Johnson, TC, 16 October 1968, LBJL.
[99] *Ibid*.

to be "obstinate," took office.[100] On 11 October, strong indications were therefore sent through secret channels that North Vietnam was ready for talks and willing to agree to Saigon's participation in return for a cessation of bombing, giving Johnson a reciprocal concession which he had insisted on since 31 March.[101] Just over a week later, Hanoi instructed its negotiators to start serious talks on a schedule designed to initiate formal talks just days before the U.S. election – the moment at which Johnson might be peculiarly willing to bend for an electorally convenient deal.[102]

Indeed, Hanoi had good reason to think that the American delegation in Paris would jump at the chance, again for electoral reasons. Lead negotiator Averell Harriman wrote in a personal memo of December 1968 that: "For several years, I have taken the position that Viet-Nam was important in U.S. policy, but that other things were more important. When asked what was more important, I always gave as my first point, not permitting it to elect Nixon as President."[103] The paper trail from his time in Paris seems to substantiate that ranking of priorities. He was in almost daily contact with the Humphrey campaign, admitting to the candidate in late August that "I am torn between staying here in Paris working for a constructive break in these negotiations, and coming home to do what I can with the liberal groups to encourage them to give you their fullest support."[104] Moreover, in several phone calls with Humphrey's advisers he would offer his own advice on campaign strategy, including recommendations for staffing decisions and further promises to come home and confer with Humphrey because "I feel very strongly I can do a lot of good with some of the Kennedy people."[105] Most suggestive, though, were comments such as those shared with George Ball – another close adviser of Humphrey's – that perhaps he

[100] VanDeMark (2018) 505.
[101] 11 October 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968,* Vol. VII, No. 58.
[102] Nguyen (2012) 126-128.
[103] 14 December 1968, Harriman Papers, Box 521, LOC.
[104] Harriman to Humphrey, 31 August 1968, Harriman Papers, Box 458, LOC.
[105] Harriman and Moyers, TC, 31 August 1968, Harriman Papers, Box 458, LOC.

was best placed to help the candidate by staying in Paris because "there was always a chance we might work something out here which would have an effect on the election."[106]

"Harriman was a real partisan," recalls John Negroponte, the American delegation's language officer and liaison with the North Vietnamese at the time, adding, "he was a real Democrat."[107] Most importantly for the present discussion, these electoral considerations appear to have had a material impact on the negotiations: "In October I think the Vietnamese sense that there's political pressure on us to produce some results in the Paris talks for the benefit of the Democratic Party… definitely the pressure of the presidential politics there pushed us to want to reach an agreement on a bombing halt before the election, both in the interest of getting something done, but also with the thought of trying to help Hubert Humphrey."[108]

Yet, though some have argued that this bombing cessation was simply a cynical attempt to swing the election to Humphrey with a bold de-escalatory move, this seems implausible. On a basic level, Johnson did not change his conditions, but rather simply waited until Hanoi moved closer to his. As Johnson put it to Humphrey, "It's not new on our part. It's new on their part."[109]

Furthermore, the personal political incentives for such action in this "lame-duck" phase were simply not sufficiently strong to warrant such a bold move. Johnson, whose waning presidential power precluded the pursuit of new Great Society initiatives in the time left in office, did indeed re-double efforts in 1968 to seek peace in Vietnam as a way to unilaterally bolster his legacy. However, he feared that his legacy would be *weakened* if he was seen to authorise a "cheap political trick," and that was a major argument Johnson cited repeatedly

[106] 14 December 1968, Harriman Papers, Box 521, LOC.
[107] Negroponte, Oral History.
[108] Negroponte, Interview (2018).
[109] Humphrey and Johnson, TC, 31 October 1968, LBJL.

against a bombing halt.[110] Indeed, it took strenuous lobbying by all elements of government and the military, including the head of Tactical Air Command himself, to reassure Johnson that he would be innocent of charges of electoral cynicism.[111] "You and I can't have our reputations ruined the rest of our lives trying to get Humphrey elected," he told Rusk, adding that he would "be damned if I am going to throw a peace for him."[112]

Neither was it the case that the desire to see his Vice President elected in November compelled Johnson in this action. In fact, Clifford's view was that "I happen to *know* LBJ didn't end the bombing on 31 Oct. just to elect Humphrey because I've never believed he wanted Humphrey to win!"[113] Johnson deemed Nixon "more responsible" on Vietnam than Humphrey, who he doubted had the "ability to be President" and repeatedly denigrated as "disloyal" and weak after his September speech breaking with Johnson's policy.[114] On several occasions, Johnson even called Nixon and his campaign surrogates to suggest lines of attack on Humphrey's position, once even sharing classified information to bolster Nixon's case.[115]

If the October bombing halt was the product of the bargaining effect, rather than an enabling effect, then so was its failure to spark meaningful negotiations, in the third phase to be examined. There is reasonable evidence to suggest the Nixon campaign sabotaged the peace process to gain electoral advantage. Anna Chennault had been acting as an interlocutor between the Nixon campaign and Saigon's Ambassador, Bui Diem. FBI wiretaps at the South Vietnamese Embassy revealed that in one call between the two,

---

[110] 14 October 1968, TJNM, LBJL.
[111] 27 October 1968, TJNM, LBJL. On the Momyer meeting, see 23 October 1968, NSF, Country File Vietnam, LBJL.
[112] Rusk and Johnson, TC, 23 October 1968, LBJL.
[113] 17 November 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, Vol. VII, No. 223.
[114] 24 July 1968, TJNM, LBJL; Clifford (1991) 563-71.
[115] Nixon and Johnson, TC, 30 September 1968, and Dirksen and Johnson, TC, 1 October 1968, LBJL.

Chennault offered the following message from her "boss": "hold on, we are gonna win."[116] In other words, Saigon should not participate in the Paris peace talks, which had been agreed upon by Washington and Hanoi as part of the bombing halt, because they would get a better deal from Nixon if they waited until he was elected – a clear example of the *spoiler* effect.

Recently, evidence has been found that implicates Nixon himself, who had appointed Chennault his "sole representative" to Saigon in a July meeting. According to notes of a phone call, he authorised a "monkey wrench" of the talks, having ordered his team days earlier to "Keep Anna Chennault working on SVN [South Vietnam]."[117] Proving Nixon's culpability in what one of Johnson's allies still refers to as "treason" is less important here, however, than substantiating the claim that South Vietnam acted with the U.S. election in mind.[118] When the U.S. lead negotiator, Harriman, was informed about the allegations involving Nixon a couple of months later, he wrote in a personal memorandum that "this explains what I had thought – that the Saigon Government was motivated in withholding approval of a bombing halt to attempt to avoid the election of Humphrey."[119] Framed this way, any skulduggery by Nixon would have only reinforced the logical calculation to be made by any rational South Vietnamese leader. Though hardly an impartial source, Anna Chennault's recollection that Thieu informed her that he "would much prefer to have the peace talks after [Nixon's] election" remains a quite plausible reflection of the South Vietnamese leader's view, since Nixon's record of hard-line commitment to the war surely indicated that he would be kinder to Saigon in negotiations than Johnson.[120] Just as Hanoi had calculated a better deal was more likely before the election, so Saigon deduced that

[116] Quoted in Hughes (2014) 45-51.
[117] 3 January 2017, *New York Times.*
[118] Johnson, Email Correspondence (2017).
[119] 10 December 1968, Harriman Papers, Box 562, LOC. See also VanDeMark (2018) 511.
[120] Chennault (1980) 186.

waiting would better serve their interests. Or as Thieu reportedly told his private secretary after rejecting the prospect of talks, "This is nice. Now at least we have bought ourselves some time."[121]

While his "lame duck" status undoubtedly afforded Johnson the political space required to pursue a diplomatic solution to the conflict, having been previously bound to a course of steadily increasing military pressure, he learned that the American electoral cycle presents serious constraints on a president's room for manoeuvre, even when the incumbent is not running for re-election. With Johnson's hopes to have secured peace in Vietnam thus thwarted by the *spoiler* effect, it would be up to his successor to find a way out of war.

Alternative Explanations

Bureaucratic Constraints

Though bureaucratic politics among and between the Johnson national security team clearly played a role in the events described above, several key components of Allison's model do not perfectly stack up in practice. Where you stood often did *not* depend on where you sat, for instance; a point exemplified by Clifford's dovish tendencies as Secretary of Defense in 1968 and Rusk's consistently hawkish views despite his position as head of the State Department. In addition, while there may have been lobbying and gatekeeping, there are actually few examples of interagency horse-trading. In truth, there was a majority consensus behind gradual escalation in the administration from mid-1964 to 1967. Far from a compromise between agencies, it was the perfect policy in Johnson's mind for delicately balancing domestic pressures. Likewise, the October 1968 bombing halt gained near-unanimity even among the military. Others, meanwhile, have countered that such intense focus on advisers approaches a fool's errand anyway, because Johnson was ultimately in

[121] Quoted in VanDeMark (2018) 517.

charge of his own ship. To argue that he was outgunned by the "Harvards" around him is "just plain silly," for Bator.[122] Indeed, even McMaster's famous study of the poor performance of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in this episode seems to support Krasner's classic critique – that the President is the "king" of his bureaucracy. Noting that inter-service rivalries and personal relationships did shape the military advice they gave to the President, he concludes that this typically manifested in the form of excessive acquiescence to Johnson's often ill-advised preferences.[123]

Additional studies more fruitfully focus on the structure of the bureaucratic environment and flow of information to the President. On one hand, the quantity of information reaching Johnson may not have been so problematic as once thought. As one scholar recently put it, recent studies reveal that there is "more than adequate evidence to deflate the argument that Johnson heard only the views of a closed 'Tuesday lunch' group. Arguments about groupthink or bureaucratic or organizational roadblocks do not stand up to the archival evidence."[124] On the other hand, the President's interpretation of this often ambiguous information may well have been skewed by the way it was presented to him. Andrew Preston makes this kind of argument in outlining McGeorge Bundy's outsized role as "gatekeeper," limiting Johnson's receptivity to dissenting views. In one infamous example, Bundy presented Johnson in January 1965 with a memorandum declaring that the U.S. had reached a "fork in the road," with the only viable options on the table being two different forms of escalation.[125] Dissenting voices, like those of George Ball, were given tokenistic acknowledgement at best.

---

[122] Bator (2008) 312.
[123] McMaster (1997). See also Herring (1994) 181.
[124] Garofano (2006) 157. See also Barrett (1993); Johnson (2004) 142-144, 166-169.
[125] Preston (2006) 166-167.

Yet if it is true that sceptics were shut out of the inner-circle of decision-making, that too reflected the bureaucratic environment which the President sought, prioritising loyalty above all. Indeed, Bundy himself was not without sympathy for Ball, on the grounds that "You can't organize against Lyndon Johnson without getting bombed before breakfast, because in his view that's the final and ultimate conspiracy."[126] Relatedly, if Bundy's infamous "fork in the road" memorandum of January 1965 was as instrumental as is sometimes held, the timing and intent of this memorandum points clearly to the underlying electoral dynamics explored in this chapter. Coming just two months after the election, Bundy later admitted that he hoped "to push President Johnson out of the zone of indecision that had characterized the 1964 campaign year."[127]

Psychological Constraints

More convincing are explanations drawing from the psychology literature on heuristics and cognitive biases. Yuen Foong Khong's account of the role played by analogical reasoning is particularly compelling.[128] For him, the Korean analogy was critical in determining the form and fact of U.S. intervention in 1965, defining the problem and prescribing a policy solution analogous to that of fifteen years prior. The Korean reference (supported by the equally significant lessons of the flaws of "Munich"-style appeasement) precluded withdrawal and rated the stakes of the issue as high and morally just. More significantly, it warned of the risks of Chinese intervention should U.S. intervention be too aggressive. In turn, this biased Johnson towards "Option C," a "slow squeeze" approach of gradually increasing military pressure, rather than the sharp escalation entailed in "Option B." Private references to the Korean situation abound in the documentary record, substantiating

[126] Quoted in Logevall (1999) 394.
[127] Goldstein (2008) 153.
[128] Khong (1992).

Khong's argument. In a crucial 22 July meeting on troops, for example, Johnson asked repeatedly, "Are you concerned about Chinese forces moving into NVN?" When the Joint Chiefs replied negatively, he recalled the lesson from history, "MacArthur didn't think they would come in either."[129]

The idea that Johnson was overconfident in his decision-making in Vietnam seems more difficult to believe, given the consistently pessimistic prognosis shared in private by Johnson with virtually anyone willing to listen. In the days after taking office, he admitted to Senator Fulbright that, "I'll be goddamned if I don't think it's hopeless… I think the whole general situation is against us, as far as real victory goes."[130] A few short weeks after authorising Rolling Thunder, meanwhile, he told his mentor, Senator Dick Russell, how, "airplanes aren't worth a *damn*… Bombing anything… that's the damndest thing I ever saw. The biggest fraud."[131] If that pointed towards the logic of committing ground troops, Johnson held similarly low expectations for that form of escalation, too, lamenting to McNamara that he saw "no program from either Defense or State that gives me much hope of doing anything, except just praying and gasping to hold on during monsoon and hope they'll quit. I don't believe they're *ever* going to quit."[132] The fact that the President ploughed ahead in hope if not expectation of success may still point to operation of positive illusions, of course. After all, if Johnson did truly believe that victory was out of reach, his determination to escalate displays the lack of rational thought that characterises overconfident decision-making.[133]

Prospect theory offers a generally satisfying account of why Johnson ventured deeper into the conflict in Vietnam. As notably outlined by Jeffrey Taliaferro, the pervasive fear

[129] 22 July 1965, MNF, Box 1, LBJL.
[130] Fulbright and Johnson, TC, 2 December 1963, LBJL.
[131] Russell and Johnson, TC, 6 March 1965, LBJL.
[132] McNamara and Johnson, TC, 21 June 1965, LBJL.
[133] Johnson (2004) ch. 6 and especially 170-171.

of incurring territorial or reputational losses under the containment policy led Johnson to accept great risks in escalating the war in the periphery.[134] Having already committed by deed and word to the survival of an independent Saigon, the influence of "loss aversion" thus pushed the administration to seek to recover costs already "sunk" and remain engaged despite clear signs of likely failure in the hope of avoid further setbacks. Assuming that the reference point may be considered the "status quo," as is often held, the following statement by Johnson on the eve of his July decision on ground troops offers powerful support to this interpretation:

> "Now, we don't say that putting these people in is going to win, but we say if you don't put them in, you're going to lose substantially what you have. This is… a holding action… Now, not a damn human thinks that fifty thousand or a hundred thousand or a hundred and fifty thousand are going to end that war… And we're not getting out. But we're trying to hold what we got. And… we're losing, at the rate we're going.'[135]

These explanations are not wrong, then, so much as incomplete. First, there is no easy way to predict which analogy will be relevant to policymakers. It so happened that Johnson's analogy of choice was Korea, but others existed in the administration, such as the Dien Bien Phu analogy, which gave diametrically opposed policy prescriptions.[136] Similarly, while all these explanations are generally convincing as explanations of the "gradual escalation" strategy, they are relatively silent on the important corollary question of why Johnson opted for this policy when he did. Why were analogies, overconfidence or "loss aversion" important in 1965 but did not lead to intervention in 1964? If the lesson from the Korean analogy was that Chinese intervention should be avoided, it should follow that U.S. escalation should occur when that risk was lowest. Intelligence reports suggest that in fact the risk of such a reaction was the same if not higher in 1965 than in the previous

[134] Taliaferro (2004).
[135] McNamara and Johnson, TC, 10 June 1965, LBJL.
[136] Khong (1992).

year.[137] If Johnson interpreted these reports at least in some way under the influence of positive illusions, were these illusions simply stronger in 1965? Johnson's continued gloomy comments of early 1965 suggest not. If "loss aversion" was clearly on display in 1965, why was Johnson happy to accept what he understood to be a significantly deteriorating situation through 1964? Relatedly, if Johnson was so invested in recovering sunk costs, what caused his apparent change of heart in March 1968?

A focus on the influence of the electoral cycle therefore offers much to support these alternative explanations. The lessons drawn from Korea, for instance, very well may have been more powerful than other analogies thanks to their political significance. As we have already seen, Johnson's invocation of his predecessor's plight in the Far East was often premised on the electoral costs that Truman had incurred for his miscalculation of Chinese intentions, while the "who lost China?" debate loomed large behind the purely strategic lessons of MacArthur's ill-fated gamble on the Korean peninsula. If Johnson's implicit or explicit optimism about the odds of success in Vietnam can be attributed to non-rational behaviours, moreover, there were very good political reasons for holding these excessively optimistic beliefs. As he reportedly told advisers while mulling a potential bombing pause in late 1967, "no one can carry an election if he does not show hope of victory to his people."[138] Finally, if Johnson was worried about territorial or strategic losses, key changes in his *aversion* to them may have been brought about by variation in sensitivity to *electoral* costs, which naturally corresponded with the electoral cycle and Johnson's own candidacy in the presidential race. It seems reasonable to contend that there is a previously unaccounted-for interaction effect between these explanations and the electoral one offered

[137] 25 May 1964, NSF, Country File Vietnam, LBJL; 11 February 1965, *FRUS 1964-1968,* Vol. II, No. 111.
[138] 12 September 1967, MNF, Box 2, LBJL.

here. Their explanatory value seems to depend on the stage of the electoral cycle, and thus which electoral effects are in operation.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the role of electoral politics in determining the key decisions behind Lyndon Johnson's escalation and belated de-escalation of the war in Vietnam was considerable. Further, it has demonstrated the utility of the electoral cycle framework, which is consistent with the documentary record, particularly after adjusting for the contextual factors outlined at the outset. Powerful evidence of the *delay* and *spoiler* mechanisms have been adduced to help explain both the escalation of the war and Johnson's ultimately fruitless efforts to sue for peace.

Specifically, during 1964, the upcoming presidential election introduced caution and delay into the policymaking process, as Johnson sought to sweep politically toxic issues under the carpet, despite increasingly strong calls for a decision to change course. As expected, this delay resulted in an aggressive set of policy outcomes once these pressures were lifted in 1965, as Johnson sought to take advantage of the greater latitude afforded to him by his stunning electoral victory. Such a move towards a pro-active policy was also emboldened by Johnson's predisposition to protect his domestic priorities from hawks in Congress. After trying and failing to balance his strategic and electoral preferences before an increasingly frayed coalition of congressional and public support, Johnson belatedly sought to sacrifice his personal political survival in the hope of securing peace. Thus freed from most constraints as a "lame duck," Johnson discovered that the American electoral

cycle can hamstring a president's room for manoeuvre in negotiations, even if the incumbent is not running, as the *spoiler* effect predicts.

~

Absent the presence of electoral constraints, would the course of American intervention in Vietnam under Lyndon Johnson have looked materially different?

At a minimum, it seems reasonable to conclude that a decision to change course would have come in 1964 rather than in 1965. Without the need to pass the test of political acceptability, the withdrawal and neutralisation options would have at least been more seriously considered, and, just possibly, approved. Yet even if this push towards greater intervention was partly overdetermined by prior structural factors, or propelled by bureaucratic or psychological biases, the electorally-driven delay in implementing that decision allowed the infiltration of North Vietnamese men and materiel across the border to continue unchecked. In the long-term, this made the American job harder and probably lengthened the war. Relatedly, if Johnson had not feared that the upcoming midterm campaign set a time-limit on his ability to "ram through" the Great Society legislation he favoured, perhaps too there may have been less pandering to congressional hawks in 1965. Electoral politics therefore had a strong impact on the timing of policy decisions, and a plausible effect on the nature and ultimate utility of those policies.

To evaluate the impact of electoral politics in 1968, we might consider two further counterfactual questions. First, if Johnson was running for re-election, would U.S. policy have been any different? The evidence above suggests that 31 March was a crucial turning point, where constraints were lifted almost overnight. It seems likely that if Johnson were still running, spring 1968 would have seen more of the Goldilocks policy of gradual escalation that characterised the previous three years. As the conventions approached, Johnson might have considered a dove-friendly move to lock-up the nomination, before

being pressured to issue further concessions to Hanoi in a bid to secure peace for his own benefit in November.

The second counterfactual is more fundamental: absent a U.S. election in 1968, would there have been peace in Vietnam? The evidence above indicates that both the opportunity to bring Hanoi to the table and the futility of doing so given Saigon's desire to stay away from Paris were determined by electoral calculations on the part of seemingly everyone but the President. Johnson did not need to be a candidate to have his bargaining position affected by the election. At a minimum, we can conclude that Johnson might have been able to bring about serious negotiations earlier had the *spoiler* effect not been in operation. Though a settlement would remain distant, at least getting all sides to the negotiating table would have offered a glimmer of hope. As it was, with South Vietnam continuing to stall, it was quite literally the shape of the table itself that was under debate as Johnson left office.

IV

Richard Nixon and the "Vietnamization" of the War

> "It seems vitally important to me at this time that we increase as much as we possibly can the military pressure on the enemy in South Vietnam."
>
> Richard Nixon (February 1969)[1]

> "I'm afraid we have too many chips on South Vietnam. And if my re-election is important, let's remember, I've got to get this off our plate."
>
> Richard Nixon (March 1971)[2]

Richard Nixon assumed office in 1969 expecting to secure "peace with honour" in Vietnam within months, yet it took until 1973 to reach a settlement. This chapter argues that a reset button had been pressed on Inauguration Day. What followed was another four years of policy shaped by similar electoral pressures to those which affected Johnson during the "Americanization" of the war. Nixon's strategy to end a war that Johnson began was still subject to a remarkably similar rhythm of the electoral cycle.

In the opening phase of Nixon's presidency, a series of bombing raids launched in Laos and Cambodia reflected the increased latitude typically afforded to new presidents in shaping military strategy during a war. Essentially unrestricted by his campaign pledges, which were intentionally vague in nature, the new Commander in Chief acted on his strategic preference to escalate the war in pursuit of a military victory which had defied his predecessor. Limitations on his freedom of action would increase, however, as the electoral cycle progressed. As the first president since 1848 to face a Congress controlled fully by

[1] Nixon to Kissinger, 1 February 1969, NSCF, Vietnam Subject File, RNL.
[2] Kissinger and Nixon, 10 March 1971, WHT, RNL.

the opposition party, Nixon understood that he could not ride roughshod over their views, particularly given the increasingly soured public perception of the utility of prolonged fighting in Southeast Asia. From late 1969 into 1970, then, these aggressive strategies were tempered by the realities of the electoral environment, either cloaked in a veil of secrecy or quickly aborted following public backlash.

It is after the congressional elections of 1970 that the significance of electoral considerations went into overdrive, however, giving the strongest support imaginable to the claim of this thesis that the importance of electoral constraints increases as a president's re-election campaign approaches. Together with his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, Nixon carefully calibrated a "decent interval" strategy, which was premised on the reality that the president's personal political future had begun to overtake strategic preferences in the balancing act of decision-making regarding the war. Having become fatalistic about the utility of his "Vietnamization" plan to turn over security responsibility to local forces, Nixon nonetheless doubled down on it, manufacturing a series of staggered troop withdrawals which would defer the collapse of South Vietnam until after Election Day 1972. In the meantime, Kissinger would be dispatched to pursue the diplomatic side of this electorally motivated plan, signalling to Hanoi, Moscow and Beijing that the American president was prepared to sacrifice Saigon's future to his personal political survival. When the North Vietnamese threatened this overarching plan in their Easter Offensive of 1972, Nixon's response – a massive bombing and mining operation codenamed "Linebacker" – was designed above all to protect his electoral prospects; any support it gave to Saigon was of secondary importance.

As 1972 drew to a close, meanwhile, attempts to finally bring the Paris peace talks to a successful conclusion were again scuppered by the *spoiler* effect. In a re-run of 1968, no sooner had Hanoi and Washington agreed terms in another "October surprise," than Saigon

again baulked. Only after the election could a peace agreement be reached, though not so soon as to prevent Nixon from launching a blistering final rally of bombing raids, which had been explicitly *delayed* until after Election Day when the president would be free of any restrictions on such action. The terms finally agreed to in early 1973, essentially the same as those on the table in the weeks prior to the presidential election, brought the Vietnam War to a conclusion which, absent electoral pressures, could well have been achieved months if not years earlier.

Seeking Victory

In the first period of a first term, the conceptual framework outlined in chapter I suggests that electoral constraints will generally be weakest. Depending on the size of his margin of victory and the specificity of his campaign pledges, a newly-elected president may have to contend with the *hangover* effects of the commitments made the previous year. Yet, by and large, it is here that the strategic preference is most likely to win out in the continual balancing act against the electoral considerations the Commander-in-Chief must contend with.

That Nixon's strategic preference, at least until late 1970, was to escalate the war in order to achieve the victory on the battlefield is made plainly apparent by the president's own words to Kissinger less than two weeks after assuming office. "It seems vitally important to me at this time," he explained, "that we increase as much as we possibly can the military pressure on the enemy in South Vietnam."[3] "I call it the Madman Theory, Bob," he later confided to his Chief of Staff, explaining, "I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word

[3] Nixon to Kissinger, 1 February 1969, NSCF, Vietnam Subject File, RNL.

to them that, 'for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about communism. We can't restrain him when he's angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button' and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace."[4]

Electorally, of course, this strategic preference flew directly against the spirit if not letter of his earlier pledge to end the war in Vietnam. Yet Nixon benefitted from a particularly weak *hangover* effect at this stage of the electoral cycle, reducing his susceptibility to these constraints. While his margin of victory over Hubert Humphrey had been slim in the popular vote, his was an overwhelming victory in the terms that mattered. Winning 301 Electoral College votes to Humphrey's 191, Nixon's success in 1968 fundamentally realigned the electoral map in favour of the Republican party for a generation. In his path to the presidency, moreover, Nixon had been careful not to lock himself into any specific policy positions on the war. Knowing that the hawkish vote was safe in Republican hands – as it had been since his time as Vice President under Eisenhower – he instead focused on a series of vague promises to secure "peace with honour". He even implied he had some unspecified "secret plan" which would achieve this outcome.[5]

Indeed, a series of actions Nixon took in his first year demonstrate how little Nixon felt he needed to pay attention to the divided public opinion at home in pursuit of his overarching objective of seeking victory through escalatory means. The bombing of Cambodian sanctuaries, authorized in March 1969 in Operation MENU, was a perfect example of this emboldened type of policy. To be clear, this was not a purely defensive reaction to February's North Vietnamese offensive, as Nixon later claimed.[6] The record reveals that Nixon and Kissinger approved a contingency plan by the military to launch

[4] Haldeman (1978) 122. See also Schmitz (2014).
[5] Johns (2010) 196-236.
[6] Nixon (1978) 380.

"covert, 'accidental'" B-52 raids on Vietcong bases inside Cambodia three days before the North Vietnamese offensive even began.[7]

Similar aggressiveness characterised a series of military threats issued by Nixon in this period, in a coercive form of the "linkage" diplomacy for which Nixon and Kissinger became so renowned. Convinced that the U.S.S.R. was capable of pressuring Hanoi into settling, Nixon dispatched Kissinger to issue an ultimatum to the Soviets. Having already threatened North Vietnamese negotiators with "measures of the greatest consequences" if no progress was made by 1 November, he warned Ambassador Dobyrnin that "the train had just left the station and was now headed down the track."[8] Kissinger suggested that American cooperation on arms control negotiations and efforts to broker a settlement in the Middle East following the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict was dependent on Soviet help in Vietnam. Plans for a massive bombing and mining operation, code-named Duck Hook, were duly prepared by the military at Nixon's direction.[9]

While public opinion remained intensely divided over the war – the Moratorium protest of mid-October drew massive support at home and abroad – Nixon's actions seemed free from concern about such matters. As this thesis argues, Nixon's relative freedom from such constraints was a product of where he was in the electoral cycle. Two days after the Moratorium protests, the records indicate that Nixon understood this dynamic quite well, too. "The enemy," he told his advisers, "had caught him in the beginning of his term with three years more to run."[10] Thus the President proceeded to initiate a secret nuclear alert, ordering the military to increase the operational readiness of the American nuclear arsenal

[7] Kissinger to Nixon, 19 February 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, Vol. VI, No. 22.
[8] Kissinger to Nixon, 6 August 1969, NSCF, RNL; Dobrynin and Kissinger, 27 September 1969, HAKTC, RNL.
[9] On Duck Hook, see Kissinger to Nixon, 2 October 1969, NSCF, Vietnam Subject File, RNL.
[10] 17 October 1969, *FRUS 1969-1976*, Vol. VI, No. 137.

so as to be detected by Communist intelligence but not by the general U.S. public.[11] While, of course, the threat was never acted on, the fact that Nixon was prepared to send such costly signals in the face of rising public discontent reinforces the idea that the new president felt relatively unrestricted at this stage.

To the extent that Nixon felt compelled to reckon with the state of public opinion at all, he had a convenient strategy for dealing with the legacy of dissent which threatened to restrict his room for manoeuvre: "Vietnamization". The term was shorthand for the transfer of combat duties in Vietnam from U.S. troops to South Vietnamese forces. The underlying idea was consistent with the Nixon Doctrine, announced in July, which declared that problems like Vietnam "will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves."[12] Yet Vietnamization was not part of Nixon's preferred plan to win the war. Far from it. The national security apparatus unanimously concluded that "The RVNAF alone cannot now, or in the foreseeable future, stand up to both the VC and sizable North Vietnamese forces."[13] Instead, the troop withdrawals were his PR plan, the "salted peanuts" which partially satiated the public's appetite for at least the appearance that the end of the war was drawing in.[14] "We buy time with troop withdrawals," Nixon reassured General Abrams, who was keen to press on with military escalation more in tune with Nixon's conception of the path to victory.[15]

With the PR plan in place, Nixon did indeed press on with escalation, ~~renewing carpet bombing of Cambodia in spring of 1970~~launching a joint U.S.-South Vietnam ground campaign in the spring of 1970. Like the ongoing secret bombing of that country, ~~of~~ begun in 1969, it was not a purely defensive move. Nixon claimed it was a response to a coup

[11] See Sagan and Suri (2003).
[12] *Public Papers of the Presidents: Nixon, 1969*, 544-556.
[13] 22 March 1969, NSCF, NSC Institutional Files, NSSM Files, RNL.
[14] Kissinger (1979) 1480-82.
[15] 12 September 1969, NSCF, NSC Institutional Files, NSC Minutes, RNL.

which threatened to bring communists to power in Cambodia. Yet three months *before* the coup, he had already ordered the JCS to implement "a plan where every goddamn thing that can fly goes into Cambodia and hits every target that is open."[16] The invasion was thus simply the next logical step in increasing military pressure in Cambodia. Also like Operation MENU, it was implemented with great aggression and enthusiasm. "We are going to kick the shit out of them," he told Kissinger, "everything short of nuclear weapons."[17] On the eve of decision, even Kissinger, who had been advocating Duck Hook only months ago, was now "very worried… that P[resident] is moving too rashly."[18]

The opening stage of Nixon's first term thus leaves a clear record of predominantly bold and aggressive policy outcomes, indicative of the permissiveness granted by this electoral phase. Clearly, Nixon's strategic preference was dominant in this phase of the electoral cycle, with "Vietnamization" pursued as a sideshow strategy designed to maximise Nixon's freedom from the constraints of a divided public opinion inherited from his predecessor. To the extent that his earlier pledge to bring peace had a moderating influence on policy, this point should not be exaggerated, for secretly carpet bombing a neutral country combined with token troop withdrawals cannot be considered a particularly strong example of the effects of electoral accountability.

~

No decisions of major military or diplomatic significance were taken in the period between the second bombing campaign over Cambodia and the 1970 midterms in the United States. It suffices here to mention briefly that the public backlash to that action, particularly as expressed through Congress, did seem to begin to limit Nixon's ability to pursue such escalatory courses of action with disregard for the consequences on public opinion.

---

[16] Nixon and Kissinger, 9 December 1970, HAKTC, RNL.
[17] Nixon and Kissinger, 20 March 1970, HAKTC, RNL.
[18] 24 April 1970, HD, RNL.

Though Nixon disparagingly referred to the thousands of anti-war protestors as "the hysterical people," he was in private deeply affected by unrest in the aftermath of the Cambodian invasion.[19] After four student protestors were shot dead in Kent State by the National Guard, Nixon became "very disturbed," according to H. R. Haldeman, and was "afraid his decision set it off."[20]

Self-doubt was not usually something which affected Nixon, and it seems reasonable to speculate that it was in fact congressional articulation of this public mood that materially affected Nixon's strategy. The president understood early on how precarious his support in the legislative branch was. "In 1969 I still had a congressional majority on war-related votes and questions," he later recalled, "but it was a bare one at best."[21] In the aftermath of Cambodia, Congress now began to exercise its oversight over presidential war powers, swiftly acting to try to cut off all funding to the Cambodian campaign by passing the Cooper-Church Amendment in the Senate.

While the amendment failed in the House, this unprecedented flexing of congressional war powers in the aftermath of Cambodia did in effect force Nixon to limit the campaign to a duration of sixty days, and precluded any further efforts to apply serious military pressure across the border. Besides the moral condemnation any action would spark, Nixon could not expect this Congress to give him the necessary funds. When the Commander-in-Chief of Pacific forces requested an additional supplemental budget to support the re-supply of arms to non-Communist forces in Cambodia, he was told "the White House has decided to delay it until after the election."[22] In other words, with congressional pressures beginning to bite, Nixon looked forward to the opportunity to regain congressional support

[19] Nixon and Kissinger, 11 May 1970, HAKTC, RNL.
[20] 4 May 1970, HD, RNL.
[21] Nixon (1978) 350.
[22] 28 July 1970, *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. VII, No. 1.

in the November elections, avoiding the types of strategies in Vietnam that had aroused such opposition in the meantime. As we shall see, however, when the Democrats held their Senate majority in those elections – and picked up twelve seats in the House – Nixon proceeded to engage in a more fundamental rethink of strategy, with the 1972 presidential election front and centre of his mind.

Seeking Re-Election

It is in the second half of a president's term that we might expect the relative importance of electoral pressures to rise in the wartime decision-making process. As will be demonstrated, the case of Nixon and Vietnam is a perfect illustration of these dynamics. Having become pessimistic about the viability of continued engagement in Southeast Asia, electoral considerations increasingly permeated all discussion of strategy, as Nixon prioritised his own political survival over concerns related to strategic optimality. At the broadest level, this profoundly shaped the so-called "decent interval" strategy that he and Kissinger now adopted, which sought extrication from Vietnam on an electorally-friendly timetable, whatever the cost to South Vietnam. After exploring the development of this cynical strategy, this section goes on to argue that decision-making around major bombing offensives – Linebacker I and II – were subject to the *spur* and *delay* mechanisms predicted by the conceptual framework in chapter I. It also examines how the *spoiler* mechanism further frustrated any remaining hope the kind of "peace with honour" which Nixon had once promised.

The "Decent Interval" Strategy

The key event which altered Nixon's strategic preference in Vietnam was the abject failure of the South Vietnamese-led ground invasion of Laos in April 1971. Framed as a test of the

"Vietnamization" policy which neither Nixon nor Kissinger really placed any hope in to begin with, the outcome of the operation was a chaotic retreat by the South Vietnamese armed forces (AVRN), which endured a nearly 50 percent casualty rate. "Henry, I have become completely fatalistic about the goddamn thing," Nixon lamented in the aftermath, "I don't think they're up to it." Though "we've given them a hell of a chance," the fact of the matter was that the South Vietnamese "aren't as good as we thought." Skating over the assessments mentioned above which declared this to be the case from the outset, Nixon nonetheless was aware that Congress would no longer give him the funds to allow U.S. forces to make up for the South Vietnamese lack of capabilities as before. The president thus concluded that "we've been heroes long enough."[23]

Abandoning his previous preference for victory on the battlefield, the new route forward was clear: "we're going to get the hell out and hope and pray that nothing happens before 1972." Nixon turned to his National Security Advisor, who laid out the perfect plan. The pair agreed to look to settle with a deal entailing a ceasefire and the release of American POWs in return for an American unilateral withdrawal timed to keep South Vietnam on life support until November 1972. Why that date? "Above all," explained Kissinger, "your re-election is really important."[24] If there was a precise moment when the balance between strategic and electoral preferences shifted in favour of the latter, this conversation was very likely it.

Kissinger, in fact, had been thinking along these lines pretty much ever since the midterm elections. According to H. R. Haldeman's December 1970 account:

> "He thinks that any pull-out next year would be a serious mistake, because the adverse reaction to it could set in well before the '72 elections. He favours, instead, a continued winding down and then a pull-out right at the fall of '72, so that if any bad results follow, they'll be too late to affect the election."[25]

---

[23] Kissinger and Nixon, 10 March 1971, WHT, RNL.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] 15 December 1970, HD, RNL.

Kissinger had already hinted to Hanoi at the formula which might be employed to achieve his preferred outcome. To North Vietnamese negotiators in September 1970, he hypothesised that "If we withdraw our troops unconditionally and quickly what happens in Saigon is *your* problem."[26] To Dobrynin in January 1971 he was more explicit, suggesting that, as U.S. troops left, "the North Vietnamese should undertake to respect a ceasefire during the U.S. withdrawal plus a certain period of time, not too long, after the U.S. withdrawal," and "if thereafter, war breaks out again between North and South Vietnam, that conflict will no longer be an American affair."[27]

This, in effect, was the so-called "decent interval" strategy, whereby the U.S. would agree to withdraw unilaterally in return for a promise from Hanoi not to overrun South Vietnam until a sufficient time after the U.S. 1972 election. This would enable Nixon to declare he had won "peace with honour," guaranteeing his election, and make plausible the claim that Saigon's inevitable fall did not occur on his watch. A week after Nixon had warmed to the idea, he repeated it to Kissinger in another private conversation. In a recording of their discussion, Nixon relished the day when he could "announce the whole damn thing. And that's that. And then the war's dead as an issue. [Snaps his fingers.] Like that. Out!" Kissinger agreed, adding only that the President needed to factor in the decent interval part of the plan, too, because "if we get out after all the suffering we've gone through… we can't have it knocked over-brutally, to put it brutally – before the election." Nixon agreed, "That's why this strategy works pretty well, doesn't it?"[28]

A month after these discussions, the "decent interval" was made a realistic prospect by Kissinger in the ongoing peace talks in Paris. Dropping his long-held demand for mutual withdrawal, Kissinger effectively signalled that the U.S. would unilaterally withdraw. In

[26] 7 September 1970, NSCF, RNL.
[27] Loi and Vu (1996) 165-66.
[28] Kissinger and Nixon, 19 March 1971, WHT, RNL.

return, a ceasefire-in-place, which allowed Vietcong forces to remain in South Vietnam, would simply mortgage Saigon's future for a short-term truce. "That's important, because we don't want South Vietnam to fall," Nixon clarified in a briefing with Kissinger two days prior. At least not before November, anyway, since "our major goal is to get our ground forces the hell out of there long before the elections."[29] Kissinger subsequently clarified the purpose of the deal:

> Kissinger: So we get through '72. I'm being perfectly cynical about this, Mr. President.
>
> Nixon: Christ, yes.
>
> Kissinger: If we can, in October '72, go around the country saying, 'We ended the war and the Democrats wanted to turn it over to the Communists'-
>
> Nixon: That's right.
>
> Kissinger: —then we're in great shape.

After the election, Saigon's survival was less critical:

> Kissinger: If it's got to go to the Communists, it'd be better to have it happen in the first six months of the new term than have it go on and on.[30]

This is not merely straw-in-the-wind evidence; similar remarks can be found on at least four other occasions in this period.[31] Throughout these conversations, there is precious little mention of the need to guarantee the survival of President Thieu in Saigon's government, which Nixon later and Kissinger still to this day claims was a red line.[32] Indeed, Nixon insisted that Kissinger needed only to "get them to consider a POW/ceasefire/withdrawal agreement. That's all. Those three things."[33] Nor was there any mention by Kissinger of

[29] Kissinger and Nixon, 29 May 1971, WHT, RNL.
[30] Kissinger and Nixon, 31 May 1971, WHT, RNL.
[31] Kissinger and Nixon, 21 April 1971, WHT, RNL; Haig and Nixon, 29 April 1971, WHT, RNL; Kissinger and Nixon, 23 June 1971, WHT, RNL; Kissinger to Nixon, 18 September 1971, NSCF, RNL.
[32] Nixon (1978) 348; Kissinger (2016).
[33] Kissinger and Nixon, 29 May 1971, RNL.

his previously-held and publicly-declared belief that a ceasefire-in-place was tantamount to surrender.[34]

Kissinger went on to broach the subject formally with Beijing and Moscow. According to minutes of Kissinger's July 1971 meetings with Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai, the 31 May "POW/ceasefire/withdrawal" deal was outlined and guarantees given that the U.S. would not re-intervene should the South Vietnamese regime "be subverted by an outside force" after a "transition period."[35] "If it is overthrown after we withdraw," Kissinger promised, "we will not intervene." Kissinger's handwritten comments on his briefing document read: "We want a decent interval. You have our assurance."[36] Though Kissinger has since distanced himself from supposedly inconsequential scribbles, his adviser, John Negroponte, recalls distinctly a moment after a meeting with Zhou Enlai when Kissinger leaned across the table and said, "we do not want to be reading battlefield reports in the morning after the next election."[37] The following year, Beijing passed the repeated request for a 'reasonable interval' onto Hanoi.[38] In the meantime, Kissinger had also asked Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko to lobby Hanoi, admitting, "We will not leave in such a way that a Communist victory is guaranteed. However, we are prepared to leave so that a Communist victory is not excluded."[39]

Of course, this engagement with Beijing and Moscow raises the important point that Vietnam was not the only thing Nixon had on his plate at this time. His policy choices in Vietnam may plausibly be seen as one piece in a broader jigsaw at the international level, inseparable from parallel efforts to achieve détente with Moscow and Beijing. Each action

[34] Kissinger (1969).
[35] 9 July 1971, NSCF, RNL; 10 July 1971, *ibid.*
[36] 'Indochina' Section, Briefing Book, POLO I, NSCF, RNL.
[37] Negroponte, Interview (2018).
[38] Hughes (2015) 78-80.
[39] 27 May 1972, HAKOF, RNL.

was a "carrot" or "stick" designed to send a message to the communist superpowers, as Vietnam became a chip in Kissinger's "linkage" politics.[40] We have indeed seen how threats of military force in 1969 were interconnected with U.S.-Soviet cooperation on arms control negotiations and peace talks in the Middle East. Similarly, the extent to which Kissinger's negotiating positions were channelled via the Chinese and Russians through 1971 is striking, at a time when rapprochement with those states was being sought. What might make little strategic sense in the war could still have been considered strategically beneficial in this broader perspective. In short, the point is well-taken that, as Nixon said, "we're playing a much bigger game. We're playing a Russian game, a Chinese game, an election game."[41] Yet even if this is to some extent true, the specificity of the evidence for the latter "game" dominating discussions of strategy in Vietnam is so remarkable that it requires further explanation, and cannot solely be reduced to some grand strategic design.

In any case, with the "decent interval" strategy now in-play, Nixon sought to carefully calibrate a complementary troop withdrawal schedule. Being able to declare "peace with honour" necessitated a domestic signal of total disengagement by November 1972. Since total withdrawal also spelled doom for South Vietnam, it could not occur too early for fear that Saigon's collapse would occur too close to the election. The net result was a series of staggered drawdowns. Three announcements between April 1971 and January 1972 saw troop numbers incrementally drop to 69,000 by May 1972. Though he publicly stated that AVRN improvements made these drawdowns viable, privately Nixon knew the opposite was true. Indeed, as mentioned above, he concluded that the South Vietnamese forces were not up to scratch as early as March 1971, after the botched invasion of Laos, which itself was, according to the second-in-command in Vietnam, an "unmitigated disaster" motivated

[40] Logevall and Preston (2008); Kimball (1998).
[41] Kissinger and Nixon, 3 April 1972, WHT, RNL.

by Nixon's desire to give superficial credibility to the "Vietnamization" plan and was questioned even by the South Vietnamese.[42] American withdrawal was a question of "when", not "if"; "without question we are gonna get out – cut off this fucker [Thieu]," he reiterated in June.[43] When it came to the issue of timing, of course, "everything has to be played in terms of how we [i.e. Nixon] survive."[44] Which, in accordance with the "decent interval" plan, meant a protracted delay until November 1972.

As Chief of Staff of the Army under Nixon, and with the experience of having commanded all US forces in Vietnam until 1968, General William Westmoreland is well-placed to assess whether this withdrawal schedule was, as per standard military practices, conditions-based, and therefore strategically optimal. His view is clear: "They withdrew on a straight-line basis, regardless of the justification. I mean it was just a withdrawal, a planned withdrawal regardless of other factors. It was all tied into the forthcoming elections. In other words, over a 4-year period they were going 'to get the hell out of there.' It was just that simple... it was all politics."[45]

In effect, Nixon's electorally timed withdrawal schedule gave a steadily deflating lifebuoy to a drowning man. Saigon's long-term future was mortgaged to the short-term goal of Nixon's re-election, as the President sought to delay South Vietnam's expected fall. Alexander Butterfield, his Deputy Chief of Staff, acknowledges this, recalling rumours "that we were biding our time to end the war the last week before the election or two weeks before the election… Yeah, we were aware that that was the case. It *was* the case… and as we dragged our heels on this thing, more and more people were being killed. Needlessly, you could say."[46]

---

[42] Weyand, Oral History, AMHI.
[43] Kissinger, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Nixon, 23 June 1971, WHT, RNL.
[44] Kissinger and Nixon, 21 April 1971, WHT, RNL.
[45] Westmoreland, Oral History, AMHI.
[46] Butterfield, Interview (2016).

While the precise timings of Nixon's strategy would be the matter of further debate throughout 1972, as explored below, the evidence presented here demonstrates that already by early 1971, Nixon's decision-making on Vietnam had become driven almost entirely by his electoral preference. This clearly supports this study's claim that electoral politics do not only matter in an election year. Further, it offers a powerful example of a case when the balancing process between strategic and electoral preferences yields no satisfactory course of action, forcing the president to choose between incompatible priorities. In Nixon's case, he chose to sacrifice the future of South Vietnam at the altar of electoral expediency.

Operation Linebacker I

Consistent with this "decent interval" strategy was Nixon's May 1972 decision to authorise a resumption of sustained bombing of the North and the mining of Haiphong harbour. Charitably, we might grant Nixon the notion that Operations Linebacker and Pocket Money were simply responses to Hanoi's Easter Offensive, which threatened South Vietnam's survival. Yet the main reason Nixon wanted to avoid Saigon's collapse was due to the anticipated political fallout. A particularly telling exchange in April makes this point clear:

> Kissinger: If the ARVN collapses, we've done everything we can, Mr. President—
>
> Nixon: We lose if the ARVN collapses. Don't say—that's just a, that's a—that's a question that we can't even think about. If the ARVN collapses a lot of other things will collapse around here. If they were going to collapse, they had to do it a year ago. We can't do it this year, Henry.
>
> …

> Nixon: Yeah, that's fine with regard to this, but we're playing a much bigger game. We're playing a Russian game, a Chinese game, an election game.[47]

Any notion that Nixon was genuinely concerned for South Vietnam's long-term future is dispelled by Nixon's comments to Kissinger three days prior, when he admitted, "You see, if we could survive past the election, Henry, and then Vietnam goes down the tubes, it really doesn't make any difference."[48] For electoral reasons, then, Nixon could not see the Easter Offensive succeed, and hence authorised the resumption of bombing, all as part of the "decent interval" plan.

A close reading of the evidence, moreover, demonstrates that this action was not just electorally motivated in this general sense, but was reflective of the *spur* mechanism. At outlined in chapter I, this is where a president, fearful of the electoral consequences of perceived timidity, proceeds to dial up the belligerence of a proposed course of action.

It is highly plausible indeed that Nixon did not think the bombing and mining operation was strategically optimal. First, bombing the North was of little use in combatting the invasion in the South. Linebacker was an interdiction campaign, designed to cut off materiel re-supply across the border, but the more pressing danger was that thirteen of the fourteen active North Vietnamese army divisions were already across the border. As General Abrams, who at the time resisted the order, later put it, Nixon sent the B-52s "away hunting rabbits while the backyard filled with lions."[49] Nixon knew that bombing the North was of limited utility, anyway. A handwritten memorandum to Kissinger, found recently among boxes of papers taken home by Butterfield, reveals Nixon's thoughts on the matter: "We have had 10 years of *total* control of the air in Laos and V.Nam. The result=Zilch."[50]

---

[47] Kissinger and Nixon, 3 April 1972, WHT, RNL.
[48] Kissinger and Nixon, 5 May 1972, WHT, RNL.
[49] Quoted in Hughes (2015) 58.
[50] Woodward (2015) 116.

A series of studies in the NSC and Defense Department came to the same conclusion.[51] Why, then, were the raids authorised?

Butterfield provides helpful context here. Bombing, he explains, "had been, over the years, ineffective… there was never any great breakthrough or victory and the bombing was not helping and certainly didn't ever stem the tide of things coming down the Ho Chi Minh trail. And what does he do? He doubles down." Asked why Nixon ignored the advice of his national security team, or indeed his own intuition, Butterfield is clear: "No, the only thing that affected him, really, was the popularity polls. You know, he was thinking of the election."[52] In other words, electoral preferences outweighed strategic considerations in the president's mind at this stage.

The evidence substantiates such claims. Despite having witnessed years of anti-war protests, the president was influenced not by the concerns of the "hysterical people" whom he would never convince to vote for him, but instead by the "silent majority" who might be expect bold responses to flagrant enemy aggression. Hence, when Kissinger suggested postponing the bombing raids, Nixon refused, insisting, "we'll lose public opinion if we delay the raids. It's the raids that they want, not the talks."[53] In fact, Nixon had ordered existing bombing levels to be increased to 1000 sorties a day, not because his advisers felt it militarily necessary, but "for American public opinion."[54] Reinforcing the notion that his new-found interest in public opinion was tied to the electoral picture, he explained the stakes to his NSC just hours before the raids, saying "if South Vietnam goes, as far as the political situation is concerned we are done. What is on the line is an election."[55]

---

[51] See 1 May 1972, *FRUS, 1969-1976,* Vol. VIII, Nos. 106, 108.
[52] Butterfield, Interview (2016).
[53] 1 May 1972, HD, RNL.
[54] 29 April 1972 HD, RNL.
[55] 8 May 1972, NSCF, Haig Chronological Files, RNL.

A plausible case could be made, moreover, that this action was not merely a product of electoral constraints, but also the product of latent diversionary impulses by the president – in other words, that Nixon acted as he did not just to avert an electoral backlash, but to generate an electoral "rally". In the President's desk was a 1969 RNC-commissioned poll reporting that 66 percent of American people favoured an end to the war brought about by a six-month bombing and blockade campaign of the North's harbours.[56] Already by June 1971 Nixon was contemplating when to implement that action, telling Kissinger, "you've got to knock 'em off in the spring… We'll do that. We can commit to that."[57] He then advised his NSC in February to implement a "contingency plan" as soon as the next enemy offensive began: "Be ready that when there's a window you can give them a hell of a sock. Then get in, get out, and then say it's over."[58] While it would be a stretch to claim that Nixon had been waiting for three years to initiate diversionary action, this evidence certainly points to Nixon's anticipation of a positive public reaction to what he otherwise may well have assumed to be strategically questionable.

When the Easter Offensive began in late March, Nixon sprang into action. He gleefully reported to Kissinger that "this gives us one hell of an opportunity, an opportunity to really clobber them, something we've been wanting to do—and now, by God, they have walked into it!"[59] Repeatedly referring to the mining operation as a "blockade," Nixon then ordered Kissinger's deputy to re-draft plans for the poll-tested campaign on 6 April. "The president ruled that this plan would go into effect May 8 if AVRN showed signs of breaking under the enemy invasion," recalled Haig.[60] Nixon could not know that 8 May was the date the AVRN would need support a whole month in advance. Instead it was apparently picked

[56] Derge to Nixon, 11 August 1969, PPF, EOB Office Desk, RNL.
[57] Bunker, Kissinger and Nixon, 16 June 1971, WHT, RNL.
[58] 2 February 1972, WHT, RNL.
[59] Kissinger and Nixon, 4 April 1972, WHT, RNL.
[60] Haig (1992) 282.

because it was almost exactly six months from the election. Just days after ordering Haig to prepare the plans, Nixon told Kissinger that he thought "we must right now do things there for public opinion. It will be there, if we act strongly."[61] The next day he concluded, "the main thing is to rally the people."[62] Aware of the public disillusionment with the war, Nixon was convinced that these *specific* actions, avoiding the use of American ground troops or a full-scale invasion, would be PR assets, not liabilities. Nixon was perhaps using the opportunity of the Easter Offensive to order bold action to generate a rally effect, carefully timed to serve his electoral prospects.

Though CIA estimates calculated that Hanoi could still generate a surplus of war supplies for another two years if the U.S. bombing levels were maintained, Abrams' efforts in the South enabled Nixon to present the bombing as a success as the Easter Offensive was repelled.[63] As a result, the electoral gamble paid off. While riding high in the polls in mid-October, Kissinger congratulated him for the action: "I think you won the election on May 8th."[64]

Déjà vu? Politics and the Paris Peace Talks

This electoral period also contains a prime example of the *spoiler* effect, where the president's diplomatic strategy and leverage in negotiations was affected by electoral considerations. We can distil the complex negotiations in Paris into three such calculations.

First, until October 1972, Nixon figured a better deal might be possible *after* the election. A diary entry reveals his logic:

[61] Nixon and Kissinger, 8 April 1972, HAKTC, RNL.
[62] Nixon and Kissinger, 9 April 1972, HAKTC, RNL.
[63] 11 August 1972, *FRUS, 1969-76*, Vol. VIII, No. 236.
[64] Kissinger and Nixon, 16 October 1972, WHT, RNL.

> "I am inclined to think that the better bargaining time for us would be immediately after the election rather than before. Before the election the enemy can still figure there is an outside chance their man [McGovern] can win or at least that he could come closer and that we, therefore, would be under pressure to have a settlement.
>
> Immediately after the election we will have an enormous mandate, we hope, for bringing the war to a successful conclusion, and the enemy then either has to settle or face the consequences of what we could do to them."[65]

Just as important was Nixon's calculation that he did not *need* a deal before the election; his polling levels, and the success of the staggered troop withdrawals had convinced the electorate that "peace with honour" was nigh. "We don't need it. We're going to win without it, and very heavily," he confidently told Kissinger.[66] The net effect of Nixon's reasoning was that he instructed Kissinger in August in effect to "sit tight" in Paris, refuse to grant further concessions, and generally "put the whole negotiating process on ice until after the election."[67] A series of meetings in Paris beginning in June 1972 did indeed result in successive impasses.

The second key calculation was Hanoi's. In autumn, their chief negotiators requested permission from the Politburo to take a "reasonable position" in Paris, owing to their judgement that "we should not pin too much hope on McGovern," who was offering much softer terms than Nixon, but also hopelessly lagging in the polls.[68] Hanoi agreed, having gauged Nixon's game-plan with remarkable accuracy:

> "We should endeavour to end the war before the U.S. election, to foil Nixon's scheme to prolong the negotiations and to win the election, to continue Vietnamization, and to negotiate from a position of strength."[69]

---

[65] Nixon (1978) 700-01.
[66] Kissinger and Nixon, 15 October, WHT, RNL.
[67] Kissinger (1979) 1317.
[68] Loi and Vu (1996) 276-77.
[69] *Ibid*. 302-03.

Losing faith in McGovern, just as they did with Humphrey in 1968, Hanoi apparently made a tactical decision to capitulate in Paris, agreeing to a ceasefire and cessation of further infiltration of the South in return for U.S. withdrawal, while dropping demands for a change of administration in Saigon. As Kissinger recalled, this was in essence "the basic program we had offered and insisted was essential since May 1971."[70] Aware of the American desire for a "decent interval," the North Vietnamese were comfortable with a deal to get the Americans out for now, confident "that after some time the hostilities will resume" and they could achieve their war aims without American intervention.[71] "They wanted to give us something in October," recalls Negroponte wryly, who was by that point the Vietnam Director on Kissinger's NSC and a leading member of the U.S. delegation, "and it's an interesting coincidence, coming in the context of our upcoming elections."[72] Indeed, in his recollection, the North Vietnamese lead negotiator, Le Duc Tho, matter-of-factly came to the October meeting, following four years of deadlock, and "with our election obviously in mind" handed over the terms they knew would appeal, adding, "You are in a hurry aren't you… If you are, here it is."[73]

The third critical electoral calculation came after South Vietnam signalled great discomfort with the deal brokered in Paris, before rejecting it altogether on 22 October, in a re-run of 1968. This altered Nixon's calculus. Though he still did not *need* a pre-election deal for his own political benefit, he did not want to take a PR hit should Hanoi go public with the fact that he was wriggling away from conditions he had offered. More fundamentally, he could not afford a public fallout with Saigon. He feared that a pre-election settlement with a resistant Thieu was "going to be messy," and in electoral terms

[70] Kissinger (1979) 1345.
[71] Loi and Vu (1996) 276-77.
[72] Negroponte, Interview (2018).
[73] Negroponte, Oral History.

"it couldn't help, it could only hurt."[74] In practical terms, the policy outcome of these considerations was that successive envoys would be sent to Thieu, armed with the deal and letters from Nixon, to "cram it down his throat."[75] Failing that, Nixon ordered Kissinger to continue to stall in Paris, hoping that the inevitable break with Saigon could come after his victory was assured. Haldeman recorded Nixon's impressions on 12 October; "Real basic problem is to sell Thieu, & if he doesn't buy, have to flush him, 'cause we can't TD [turn down] the offer."[76] Or, in Nixon's words, "the more we can stagger past the election the better. I don't want it before the election with a Thieu blowup, it's going to hurt us very badly."[77] As Negroponte recalls it, Nixon sent instructions to Kissinger to avoid travelling to Hanoi to wrap up the deal without Saigon's blessing, as he had been planning: "Nixon said no, you better come home. You can't go on to Hanoi now. We can't be seen to be jamming Thieu just before our election because it'll be interpreted as us sacrificing Saigon in order to get elected."[78] This, of course, was precisely what Nixon had been doing for two years with his broader strategy, but the repercussions of that becoming public knowledge now would be far too damaging.

The unspoken reality contained in this calculation, which made a consensual agreement with Thieu impossible, was what Haig later called the "self-evident truth that Thieu's regime could not survive" under the terms of the deal, which left hundreds of thousands of Communists troops in the South.[79] Kissinger recounted Thieu's opposition to Nixon, saying, "these proposals keep him going, but somewhere down the road he'll have no choice except to commit suicide. And he's probably right… our terms will

[74] Haig and Nixon, 23 October 1972, WHT, RNL.
[75] Nixon, 4 October 1972, *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. VIII, No. 279.
[76] 12 October 1972, HD, RNL.
[77] Kissinger and Nixon, 6 October 1972, WHT, RNL.
[78] Negroponte, (Interview) 2018.
[79] Haig (1992) 299.

eventually destroy him."[80] This much Nixon knew; the 31 May terms, upon which the October deal was based, was designed to secure a "decent interval", *not* South Vietnam's future. "We don't care about Thieu," he confirmed on 26 October, "nobody cares about that."[81] Indeed, by this point Nixon and his adviser were already considering a bilateral agreement with Hanoi.[82] Ironically, then, the deal that Nixon had successfully crafted to get him re-elected was so obviously rotten for Saigon that he needed to push it beyond Election Day before abandoning Thieu. Kissinger tactfully manufactured several scheduling delays to bring the required delay about.[83]

The progress of the talks in Paris through 1972 were driven to a significant degree by the electoral environment in the U.S. On seemingly all sides – Washington, Hanoi and Saigon – negotiating positions were altered in light of the expected outcome of the presidential election, with the net effect being a continued impasse on the eve of Election Day.

"School's Out": Operation Linebacker II

Just over two months after the election, the Paris Peace Accords would be signed, but not before Nixon had chance to reprise his "madman" strategy of intense military pressure, unleashing a fierce final bombing campaign over North Vietnam which had been explicitly *delayed* until the president found himself free of the electoral constraints which otherwise inhibited such escalation.

---

[80] Kissinger and Nixon, 6 October 1972, WHT, RNL.
[81] Nixon and Kissinger, 27 October 1972, HAKTC, RNL.
[82] Kissinger to Nixon, 22 October 1972, *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. IX, No. 43.
[83] *Ibid*. Nos. 40-70.

That Nixon both intended to launch such an operation and that he deferred it for electoral reasons is straightforward to prove. Nixon said as much on a number of occasions. As early as a whole year before the presidential election, it was on his mind:

> "If we win the election, the day after, we say, "All right, we give you 30 days."… I really would. I'd finish off the goddamn place. Bomb Haiphong. You know, the whole thing. I would put a crippling blow on it. Go on for 60 days of bombing. Just knock the shit out of them."[84]

The thought remained with him through August of 1972:

> "If we win, after November 7, school's out. We're going to take out the heart of the installations in Hanoi. We're going to take out the whole goddamn dock area, ships or no ships."[85]

That such a course of action would be electorally unpalatable was self-evident, after years of growing disillusionment with the war. Unlike the spring bombing raids, this would be a belligerent strategy launched without major military provocation, which even the "silent majority" would surely find hard to stomach. Indeed, on the eve of the election, Kissinger had declared in a press conference that "peace is at hand," raising expectations of a deal, not a renewed aerial assault.

Yet Nixon deemed it the best way to convince Hanoi to finally accede to the terms on the table. Though these terms were essentially the same as those previously agreed, there was some need to convince Hanoi to accept a series of additional amendments which had been designed to reassure President Thieu in the South. Safely re-elected, by a historic landslide – losing only one state in the 1972 election – Nixon was now newly released from electoral restraints. Consciously buoyed by this position, he unleashed 20,000 tons of bombs on Hanoi to bring them round, reasoning, "Well, the election is over… [so] we must not stop bombing the North until we get a settlement." Repeatedly he intervened in military

[84] Kissinger and Nixon, 20 November 1971, WHT, RNL.
[85] Kissinger and Nixon, 2 August 1972, WHT, RNL.

operations to ensure they were sufficiently strong, at one point fuming that he had been unable to get the message through the JCS Chairman's "goddamn thick head" after he had presented him "some half-ass little thing."[86]

Critics have understandably characterised this campaign as nothing more than an attempt to improve the optics of the "decent interval" plan, making it appear more like a military victory by distracting the public from the hollowness of the agreement.[87] This bombing campaign would simply be the way to retain American "honour". Kissinger reassured Nixon that he had a mandate to do this: "they didn't vote for you as a bleeding heart."[88] For Negroponte, it was reflective of Nixon's desire to get Vietnam off his plate as he began his second term: "he was fed up, didn't want to have anything more to do with this damn war and sort of said, 'let's get it over with before the second inauguration."[89] Whatever the real reason, it seems quite clear that this final military episode in the war was profoundly shaped by the *delay* mechanism, whereby Nixon's strategic preference for escalation, barbaric and bloody as it was, had been rendered politically unacceptable until after his re-election.

Alternative Explanations

Bureaucratic Constraints

To some extent, the role of the Secretaries of State and Defense had a moderating effect on the early belligerence of U.S. policy favoured by Nixon. Both William Rogers and Mel Laird successfully opposed the Duck Hook operation of 1969, for instance, and the latter often stood in the way of requests to expand the number, nature and scope of bombing

[86] Haig and Nixon, 12 December 1972, WHT, RNL.
[87] Hughes (2015) 150-58.
[88] Nixon and Kissinger, 17 December 1972, HAKTC, RNL.
[89] Negroponte, Interview (2018).

operations, instead pressing for more a deliberate path towards troop withdrawals.[90] Yet it should not be inferred that they held responsibility for directing U.S. policy anywhere beyond the margins. Indeed, the fact that the pair learnt about Duck Hook from a newspaper report illustrates well the limits of their bureaucratic influence.[91]

Indeed, by and large, all major decisions in this period were largely taken in a closed environment by Nixon and Kissinger. Orders were repeatedly issued with instructions to inform key Cabinet officials after the decision had been made. On authorising Operation MENU in 1969, for instance, Nixon ordered that "State should be notified only after the point of no return," adding that "he will let them know who is boss around here."[92] As for the Secretary of Defense, Nixon considered him "a procurement officer – that's what he is and not another goddamn thing."[93] NSC meetings, meanwhile, were less decision-making forums than set-piece theatre, where Nixon simply rehearsed the reasons for a decision he had already made.[94] Even the argument that the flow of information to Nixon may have been biased towards certain policy outcomes, as with Johnson, is limited by the fact that access to Nixon was so highly restricted. Butterfield, who managed that access, recalls that "of the top guys, only Haldeman and Henry spent much time with the President… we didn't accommodate those senior people very well."[95]

Psychological Constraints

Analogical reasoning certainly played a part in Nixon's decision-making during this period. He often applied the analogy of World War Two to Vietnam, for instance, and concluded

[90] Lebovic (2019) 54.
[91] Dallek (2007) 155.
[92] Nixon and Kissinger, 15 March 1969, HAKTC, RNL.
[93] Moorer, Kissinger and Nixon, 3 April 1972, WHT, RNL.
[94] Kissinger (1979) 490-92.
[95] Butterfield, Interview (2016).

the solution to his troubles was the "Churchillian" proclivity for strategic bombing and aggressive doctrine modelled on Patton's example.[96] His response to the Easter Offensive drew inspiration from one of the bloodiest episodes of that war: "the Air Force has got to take some goddamn risks, just like the Air Force took some risks in World War II in the Battle of the Bulge because we were under serious attack."[97] Causality is hard to prove, but it seems plausible to deduce that Nixon's recourse to heavy bombing may have been encouraged by this type of analogical reasoning.

Overconfidence and "loss aversion", meanwhile, appear to offer partially compelling explanations of the initial pursuit of victory through continued escalation and the subsequent bombing offensives of 1972. Strategic bombing had shown little sign of forcing Hanoi into concessions during the previous four years, meaning a degree of wishful thinking was likely present in Nixon's calculations. Indeed, one of the often-underappreciated aspects of the "madman theory," so often alluded to by commentators to this day, is the simple reality that it did not work. Nixon underestimated the resolve of Hanoi to withstand increasing military pressure, exaggerated the extent to which North Vietnamese leaders could be influenced by their communist patrons in Beijing and Moscow, and thus held vastly outsized estimations of his own ability to influence enemy actions through coercive pressure. Having committed to continued intervention at the outset of his administration, moreover, the staggered pace of the drawdown that followed may be attributable to a desire to recover sunk costs of continued intervention in Vietnam.

On the other hand, and as with Johnson, there is plenty of seemingly contradictory evidence suggesting that Nixon was not so optimistic as he might have sought to portray in contemporary and retrospective public accounts of his Vietnam policy. Most notably, he

[96] Kissinger and Nixon, 5 February 1972, WHT, RNL.
[97] Moorer, Kissinger and Nixon, 3 April 1972, WHT, RNL.

rarely appeared to be under any illusions that "Vietnamization" would actually work in the long-term, while the "decent interval" strategy was premised on the reality that "South Vietnam is probably never gonna survive anyway."[98] Whatever hope he once had, after the Laos catastrophe he had become "completely fatalistic about the goddamn thing."[99] If "loss aversion" encouraged Nixon's persistence in the face of such an apparently hopeless situation, it was not the loss of South Vietnam that appeared to matter, per se, but the domestic political effects of such a setback. Hence, on the eve of authorising Operation Linebacker, Nixon was quite clear about his primary concern being that "we will lose the country if we lose the war."[100]

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter offers strong support for the electoral framework laid out in chapter I. In 1969, Nixon escalated the war in Cambodia and issued secret threats in pursuit of military victory, as strategic preferences outweighed electoral considerations in the earliest electoral phase. After the midterms, a changed evaluation of the strategic realities on the battlefield and the looming prospect of Nixon's re-election campaign forced the president to look to alternative strategies for achieving "peace with honour." Settling on the "decent interval" plan, the last segment of his first term saw electoral political considerations take on seismic importance in the decision-making process. Operation Linebacker was at least consistent with Nixon's electoral strategy, and represents an example of the *spur* mechanism, perhaps even in diversionary form. The negotiations through to Election Day 1972, meanwhile, were dominated by calculations wholly representative of the *spoiler* effect. Once re-elected, Nixon again abused his electoral

[98] Quoted in Lebovic (2019) 56.
[99] Kissinger and Nixon, 10 March 1971, WHT, RNL.
[100] Nixon, 4 May 1972, HD, RNL.

mandate to reprise his early escalatory strategy and finally settle on terms Hanoi had in essence already agreed to.

~

Absent the election process, would things have followed the same course? It seems not. First, having decided that there was no path to victory through military pressure or Vietnamization, it is likely that Nixon would have opted for the "bug-out" option he toyed with in spring 1971. The only reason he did not announce a full U.S. withdrawal then was because Kissinger managed to convince him of the damage it would do to his electoral prospects. If Nixon did not have to fear for his political future, he could arguably have accepted this public policy failure. He did, after all, sign a deal which broadly reflected terms he had offered in May 1971. A little spin from Haldeman's PR team would have enabled him to overcome concerns about American credibility at a time when even the most ardent hawks were losing enthusiasm for such arguments.[101]

If Nixon had announced this option, the Easter Offensive would surely not have occurred; Hanoi could have simply waited until the Americans left before moving in. Even if they had, Nixon's response might have been different. With no need to manufacture a rally effect, it is likely Nixon would have gone with the broad consensus of his national security team; airpower resources would be sent to support the counter-offensive in the South, rather than diverted North for bombing raids which Nixon knew to be ineffective. *If* the war still had not ended by October, Nixon would surely have taken a deal after Hanoi acceded to terms. The only reason he did not was because of the electoral consequences of "flushing" Thieu. Absent an election, those concerns disappear. In short, without electoral constraints, U.S. involvement in Vietnam could have ended on at least two earlier occasions and thousands of civilians in Hanoi and Haiphong would have been spared.

[101] Johns (2010) 295-7.

On signing the accords on 27 January 19733~~2~~, Kissinger was jubilant, telling the President that "it's the greatest diplomatic feat that is in American history." "Well," replied Nixon, "we'll see how long it works." The answer? 823 days. The "decent interval" having lapsed, on 30 April 1975 North Vietnamese troops overran Saigon, storming the U.S. embassy and bringing America's long entanglement in Vietnam to an ignoble end.

V

George W. Bush and the "Surge" in Iraq

> "A U.S. president must face public opinion and the consequences that come with elections… these were practical checks we all needed to keep in mind."
>
> Donald Rumsfeld[1]

George W. Bush was an unlikely wartime president. By all accounts, he had little interest in foreign policy, and even less expertise. "I don't have any idea about foreign affairs," he once admitted to Condoleezza Rice in the run up to his first campaign.[2] Running instead on a platform to reduce the size of the federal government, Bush rarely spoke of foreign lands or leaders whose names he found notoriously difficult to pronounce. To the extent that he did signal any strong preference when it came to foreign policy, it boiled down to an aversion to "nation-building," reacting to the perceived excesses of President Clinton's interventions in Somalia and Haiti. "If we don't stop extending our troops all around the world, and nation-building missions, then we're going to have a serious problem coming down the road," Bush explained in one 2000 campaign debate. He made his views clear: "I'm going to prevent that."[3]

The events of 11 September 2001 changed all this. "You can't understand anything about Iraq without understanding 9/11. That was Bush's presidential moment," says Jim Jeffrey, a career diplomat who would play a leading role in shaping strategy in Iraq.[4] Indeed, the terror attacks fundamentally shifted the threat perception of the Bush

[1] Rumsfeld (2011) 424.
[2] Quoted in Woodward (2006) 3.
[3] "The 2000 Campaign," 4 October 2000, *New York Times*.
[4] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).

administration, setting it on a collision course with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. After first intervening in Afghanistan, the long-standing problem of regime change in Iraq acquired greater urgency and was subsumed into the broader project of the Global War on Terror. "It was the soul of his presidency," as Jeffrey puts it, "a transcendental project to change the nature of a Middle East that had produced 9/11."[5]

The decision to invade Iraq has generated much debate. Many of the popular explanations focus on intelligence failures and allegations regarding the manipulation of information concerning the suspected development of weapons of mass destruction.[6] Rationalist accounts attempt to explain the failure to reach a pre-war bargain as a product of information asymmetry and commitment problems.[7] Others find such assumptions of rational behaviour insufficient, and instead point to the role of several psychological biases which led the Bush administration to underestimate the full costs of intervention and misperceive Iraqi intentions and capabilities.[8] These miscalculations, in turn, may have been exacerbated by "group-think" and other bureaucratic factors which blocked dissenting voices.[9] The role played by key individuals sharing a common history and worldview, premised on an optimistic view of the efficacy and benign nature of American power, forms another important line of argument.[10] Finally, the failure of the so-called "marketplace of ideas," whereby elite opinion-leaders and the media in a democracy are supposed to weed out "bad" ideas, may have contributed to the permissive conditions that prevailed after 9/11.[11] In sum, we are not short of plausible explanations for the initial decision to enter into conflict in Iraq in 2003.

---

[5] *Ibid*.
[6] Isikoff and Corn (2007); Pillar (2014).
[7] Debs and Monteiro (2014).
[8] Lake (2010); Rapport (2013); Lebovic (2019); Mazaar (2019).
[9] Badie (2010); Mitchell and Massoud (2009).
[10] Mann (2004); Flibbert (2006); Dyson (2009).
[11] Kaufmann (2004).

This chapter instead examines the subsequent escalation of the war, an issue which has received comparatively less scholarly attention.[12] This is a significant gap, since it was during Bush's second term in office that arguably the biggest strategic shift took place, whereby 30,000 additional troops were sent to Iraq under a new population-centric counterinsurgency strategy, traditionally known as the "surge." While Bush's commitment to the conflict in Iraq was clear, it does not sufficiently explain the nature or timing of his decision to double down in 2007, nor does it account for the reality that within two further years Bush had committed to a withdrawal timetable. Instead, it is shown here that decision-making behind the "surge" and its aftermath was profoundly conditioned by constraints of the electoral cycle.

More specifically, this chapter demonstrates that while Bush and his administration understood that the existing strategy in Iraq was failing by early 2006, the political pressures associated with the upcoming midterm campaign led the President to kick the problem into the long grass, despite several opportunities to launch a course correction. In an excellent example of the *delay* mechanism, the congressional elections then acted as a critical turning point, releasing President Bush to very quickly opt for a bold policy which he knew went against the grain of public opinion.

With respect to the subsequent drawdown of the "surge" troops and the negotiation of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), this case provides an opportunity to test the conceptual framework's claims regarding second-term dynamics. Here we see evidence that the electoral cycle inherently constrains the president even when he is a "lame duck." Eager to bolster his legacy as the change in administration approached, Bush carefully managed the pace of the drawdown of troops through 2007 and 2008, watering down the strategically optimal conditions-based schedule so as to hedge against a Democratic

[12] Feaver (2011); Marsh (2012); Biddle, Friedman and Shapiro (2012).

successor. Finally, Bush's leverage with the Iraqis to sign a SOFA which would "lock in" his strategy was profoundly conditioned by the deadline of Bush's term limit and subject to the *spoiler* effect.

~

The Iraq War differs in a number of ways to the other cases explored in this thesis. At a structural level, conditions of unipolarity created a permissiveness which had been distinctly lacking in the earlier bipolar Cold War era. Having committed to the intervention in 2003, there was of course a natural desire to remain committed in order to recover the sunk costs, as we will see in this chapter's discussion of psychological constraints. The perceived contagion effect of international terrorism was alluded to as a justification for the initial intervention in Iraq, but there was no twenty-first century equivalent to "domino theory," nor any looming presence of superpower tensions forcing the U.S. to follow any certain course in the conflict. By 2006, moreover, most erstwhile coalition partners had already embarked on or completed scheduled withdrawals from the war, leaving President Bush particularly unrestrained by any formal pressure from allies.

Yet if these several features of the international environment suggest that Bush had greater freedom in selecting wartime policies, it should also be remembered that Iraq was of course not the only conflict to which U.S. forces were committed; the war in Afghanistan was into its sixth year at the time Bush decided to "surge" in Iraq. In an era of professional armed forces and with an emphasis on precision-technology over sheer manpower, the finite nature of military resources may have been an additional contextual factor with which Bush had to contend. Indeed, it was a major concern for senior military figures who, as will be shown, were set against any major increased commitment to Iraq on precisely these grounds. "I thought it would do worse than exacerbate the Afghanistan problem," says General Cartwright, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, adding that "it would actually

lead to a significant delay in progress," by sucking away critical Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities.[13] Both the broader international picture and the wider force structure of U.S. armed forces at the time, then, are important elements of context which will be usefully borne in mind when assessing Bush's decision to escalate the war in Iraq.

The "Surge"

In a primetime televised address of 10 January 2007, President Bush announced the most significant shift in strategy of the Iraq War, officially named "The New Way Forward."[14] The revised plan would see an additional 30,000 troops head to the Middle East in an attempt to boost security amidst spiraling sectarian violence. Whereas the existing strategy sought to transition security responsibility to Iraqi forces, the "surge" instead shifted the focus to a more population-centric counterinsurgency strategy with Americans in the lead.

The decision was a long time coming. Indeed, the following discussion demonstrates that the overwhelming strategic preference was to change a strategy that was widely perceived to be failing. Yet admitting that the existing strategy was failing was politically unwise. More troublingly, switching to a casualty-intensive alternative at a time of growing public disillusionment with the war was even less electorally preferable. As a result, a much-needed course correction was deferred. It was only after the midterm elections that a decision was quickly reached, with Bush at the forefront of the discussions, in a classic illustration of the *delay* effect.

[13] Cartwright, Interview (2018).
[14] "President's Address to the Nation," 10 January 2006. Available online at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html (accessed 20 September 2019).

The Need for Change: "It's Hell, Mr President"

The evidence is abundant that a steadily growing consensus emerged in the Bush administration on the need for a change in strategy from as early as the winter of 2004, substantiating the first observable implication of the delay mechanism. A series of advisers in the national security team, as well as the president himself, understood that the status quo was strategically sub-optimal.

Some of the first observers to perceive the need for a rethink of strategy were senior officials in the State Department. As State Department Counselor in this period, Philip Zelikow had a ringside seat to observe the gathering clouds of worry. His own concerns began when he concluded after a fact-finding mission in February 2005 that despite dozens of binders and annexes being made available to him by the military command, "there really was no strategy."[15] The Campaign Plan was at best a micro-level route-map which would get Iraqi forces trained sufficiently so that American troops could leave, yet at the macro-level of overall strategy, there was a distinct lack of operational objectives for the military on the ground. As a result, there was a huge inconsistency of military activity in Iraq, with subordinate commanders running their own zones of conflict in markedly different ways. The entire situation was the source of great consternation in Washington: "By the summer of '05 and certainly into the fall of '05, the whole circle around the Secretary of State were *seething* with frustration about the Iraq situation. We could feel it killing the administration." Not only was there no real strategy, but in the view of key State Department officials, there was no-one in the military prepared to vocalize anything resembling one. "There just wasn't even a story," regrets Zelikow, "forget whether or not the story is true."[16]

[15] Zelikow, Oral History Interview, 24 March 2015. Transcript obtained by author from Zelikow.
[16] Zelikow, Interview (2018).

While Chargé D'Affaires in Baghdad in 2004, Jim Jeffrey sensed a growing pessimism from Condoleezza Rice. "By the fall of 2004," he explains, "Rice was growing far more skeptical about the Iraq adventure. We would paint pretty grim pictures… despite all of the money, and all of the committees we had in Washington and at the Embassy, and the military running around, not a lot was getting done." By the time Jeffrey returned to Washington in 2005, "she was probably the most skeptical of any of the officials." From here, matters only deteriorated further. "There was a tremendous frustration behind the scenes that things weren't working," recounts Jeffrey, who at this point had been made Secretary Rice's Iraq Coordinator. "Things by the spring of 2006 were pretty grim."[17] Secretary Rice admitted as much in her memoir: "It was becoming painfully obvious that we had neither the right military strategy in Iraq nor enough forces to carry out the flawed one that we were pursuing… Maintaining the status quo was not an option."[18]

Among the National Security Council staff, concerns arose during the process of writing the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq in late 2005. Intended as an articulation of the "story" on the war, more than a policy review, it nonetheless revealed problems with the administration's understanding of its own strategy. "During that effort it became clear that there were large disagreements within the administration about what the strategy should be and what the strategy was," recalls Meghan O'Sullivan, Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan, adding, "that whole effort made me uncomfortable about exactly where we were." After the bombing of the Samarra mosque in February 2006, those initial niggling concerns had transformed into concern about the fundamentals of the course of action the U.S. was engaged in in Iraq. "I went out to Iraq in early spring," recalls O'Sullivan, "and it became very obvious to me that our strategy and

[17] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[18] Rice (2011) 465, 507.

the realities on the ground were totally out of line with one another."[19] O'Sullivan's colleague on the NSC, Peter Feaver, similarly recounts that "over 2006 the Iraqi situation slowly deteriorated to the point where it came to correspond to the seemingly hopeless situation that critics had long claimed it to be… Senior civilians on the National Security Council (NSC) staff (myself included) believed the situation warranted launching a top-to-bottom reassessment of the strategy by late May 2006."[20] On her return to Washington, O'Sullivan and like-minded colleagues began seeking to bring about precisely that outcome, beginning with a memorandum to her boss, Stephen Hadley, in which O'Sullivan all but begged for a strategy review, concluding in bold text, "we are executing a plan based on assumptions that are no longer valid."[21] When the President pulled her aside after a meeting and asked what it was like on the ground, meanwhile, O'Sullivan did not sugar coat her assessment, replying, "It's hell, Mr. President."[22]

The intelligence community was soon issuing similarly dark forecasts. As Director of National Intelligence, John Negroponte pulled no punches in his summary report offered to President Bush in June 2006. Noting the ever-growing violence, which was now at an all-time high, it pointed out that vast swathes of disaffected Sunnis were siding with Al Qaeda in Iraq "not because they find the message appealing, but because they feel that AQI can protect them against Shia militias and the Iraqi Security Forces."[23] The disturbing implication was that the existing transition strategy was arming and equipping Iraqi forces which were in many cases complicit in the violence. Looking back, Negroponte confirms the gravity of the problems he saw in 2006. "It had plunged into a very severe situation… we were losing it."[24] With CIA analysts believing Iraq to be in a state of civil war, Bush

[19] O'Sullivan, Interview (2018).
[20] Feaver (2011) 101.
[21] Woodward (2008) 69.
[22] Bush (2010) 364.
[23] 12 June 2006, Box 114, Casey Papers, NDU.
[24] Negroponte, Interview (2018).

received a 20 July intelligence update reading, "The deteriorating security situation is outpacing the Iraqi government's ability to respond… Violence has acquired a momentum of its own and is now self-sustaining."[25] Not without reason, then, the CIA Director reports telling the President that "your signature foreign policy thrust is going really, really badly. The hand we were playing wasn't winning."[26]

Among the uniformed military, there was also skepticism. "We all knew it wasn't going well," admits Mike Mullen, Chief of Naval Operations, speaking of the Joint Chiefs' views, "quite frankly, there was no strategy. That's what drove us crazy."[27] This concern ultimately led to the establishment of the so-called "Council of Colonels," a closely held review group convened in October by the Chairman, Pete Pace. Even the commanding general in Iraq, George Casey, understood the nature and scale of the challenge before him fundamentally changed during 2006. "The sectarian violence really began in April or May of '05," he later recalled, yet "after Samarra it was a fundamentally different tone."[28]

To the already formidable body of opinion presented here, a whole host of additional skeptics could be added, including outside experts, politically minded insiders like Karl Rove and Dick Cheney, and even the Iraqi Prime Minister.[29] Suffice to say, there was an overwhelming sense from virtually all corners of the national security team that the transition strategy was in dire need of change. As Zelikow puts it, the "slow slide [into] violent chaos… was already pretty intense by the fall of 2005, and then became so extreme no one could ignore it by the middle of 2006."[30]

---

[25] Woodward, (2008) 72-73.
[26] Hayden (2016) 211.
[27] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[28] 9 March 2008, Box 104, Casey Papers, NDU.
[29] Keane to Petraeus, 6 October 2007, Box 62, Petraeus Papers, NDU; Cheney (2011) 438; Rove (2010) 472; Khalilzad (2016) 264.
[30] Zelikow, Oral History.

Most importantly of all, the President was aware of the need for change, and by the spring of 2006 began to count himself among the doubters. While a model of sunny optimism in public, in private "the president became very depressed about it", according to Negroponte.[31] "This is a daily conversation in the White House," adds O'Sullivan, "it was very clear that he was concerned about the situation, worried that it was going in the wrong direction."[32] Her colleague, Peter Feaver, similarly recalls that "over 2006 the Iraqi situation slowly deteriorated to the point where it came to correspond to the seemingly hopeless situation that critics had long claimed it to be. More important, the senior civilian leadership of the Bush administration, *including the president*, came to see Iraq in this same light."[33] Indeed, Bush tells us as much in his own words: "In the months after the Samarra bombing, I had started to question whether our approach matched the reality on the ground," he recalled in his memoir. By spring, he had come to a conclusion, telling his National Security Adviser, Stephen Hadley, "This is not working… We need to take another look at the whole strategy. I need to see some new options."[34] Looking back, Bush admits that "the summer of 2006 was the worst period of my presidency."[35]

At this stage of the analysis, then, we can rule out the alternative argument that Bush did not make a decision sooner in 2006 because he or his national security team were not aware of the need for a change in strategy. The strategic preference through 2006 was clearly to change the status quo; a clear body of opinion in the administration felt events were spiraling out of control and something different was needed.

~

[31] Negroponte, Interview (2018).
[32] O'Sullivan, Interview (2018).
[33] Feaver (2011) 101.
[34] Bush (2010) 363.
[35] *Ibid.* 367.

While a firm determination of precisely what strategy should replace the current one required a full review, there are several signs suggesting that the balance of opinion in the administration, and most importantly for the President, pointed towards greater intervention.

At the State Department, as Jeffrey recalls, by late 2005 there was a sense that "you should actually do a goddamn counterinsurgency. That is, you do something like the surge."[36] This view can be substantiated by pointing to a series of efforts to spark thinking within the administration about such a plan, beginning with the articulation of a strategy of "clear, hold and build" in the fall of 2005, perceived by its authors as "the first big effort to tear up and change the strategy." Into 2006, sensing a new appetite for a fresh look by NSC staffers like O'Sullivan, Secretary Rice asked Zelikow and Jeffrey to put pen to paper on a new proposal for a full military campaign plan. The recommended "selective counterinsurgency" strategy outlined in a 5 June memorandum called for a focus on securing and holding several key areas in Iraq, necessitating "some additional infusion of American forces in the short term."[37]

This aligned with work being done in Baghdad, too. Having himself concluded ~~that~~ that "our strategies to date had not worked," the new Ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, commissioned a Red Team study in Iraq, which concluded that General Casey's plan was badly off course. Instead, the report advocated the adoption of an "ink-spot" strategy, based on classic population-centric counterinsurgency principles. Around the same time, in November 2005, the Iraqi National Security Adviser wrote to the American team in Baghdad calling for essentially the same type of strategy, backing the view of experts that

[36] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[37] Woodward (2008) 54-56.

the military should shift its focus "away from hunting down and killing insurgents, emphasizing instead an effort to better protect the population."[38]

In military circles, there were a series of strategic thinkers inclined to a similar position. Down in Fort Leavenworth, for instance, General Petraeus was busy shaping revisions to the Army's counterinsurgency manual in ways that foreshadowed the "surge" strategy. While designed for much broader application, the manual's lead author admits that "Petraeus saw this as a tool for Iraq… It was very obvious to me by the time we got to the late summer that this was going to Iraq and he was going to use it in Iraq, and that's what he was shaping it for."[39] The manual in essence called for a standardization of the strategy employed by HR McMaster in Tal Afar – the same operation used as a model for the State Department's "clear, hold and build" formulation – and included a specific force ratio requirement for such counterinsurgency practices which was insisted on by Petraeus "because it was the justification for the troops for the surge."[40] Outside of the chain of command, meanwhile, retired General Jack Keane had begun leading a "cabal" aiming to trigger a shift towards a similar more troop-intensive counterinsurgency strategy, briefing the Secretary of Defense – and indeed anyone that would listen – on the need to send another five brigades in support of a revised plan.[41]

President Bush, while crucially stopping short of authorising any action on such proposals, seemed intellectually sympathetic to their nature. He kept a "close eye" on Petraeus' proposals, using their troop-intensive logic to query whether Casey could carry out a "clear, hold and build" strategy, and telling key aides to read the manual as soon as it was ready, in a "sign of where the president's thinking was."[42] Over the summer he read a

[38] Al-Rubaie to Casey and Khalilzad, 6 November 2005, Box 113, Casey Papers, NDU.
[39] Crane, Interview (2018).
[40] *Ibid*.; Crane et al. (2006). See also Crane (2016).
[41] Ricks (2009) 79-93.
[42] Bush (2010) 365, 367; Rove (2010) 476. See also Dyson (2010) 573.

series of articles from colonels and one-star generals whose perspective jarred with those of Casey and Abizaid, noting that, "many of those closest to the fight thought we needed more troops."[43] Whether or not Bush actually understood the intricacies of counterinsurgency doctrine as much as he later implied, he does appear to have perceived that more troops were preferable than fewer. In this respect, it is instructive to note General Casey's perception from weekly interactions with Bush: "I did have a sense all along that the President had a more conventional focus to what we were doing, and the more firepower he applied, the more successful he'd be."[44]

Indeed, even earlier, when his doubts about the existing strategy emerged in the spring of 2006, Bush's instinctive diagnosis had been that the "sectarian violence had not erupted because our footprint was too big," which in turn pointed to an escalatory prescription, since "with the Iraqis struggling to stand up, it didn't seem possible for us to stand down."[45] More explicit were his subsequent comments in a 17 August meeting in which he began to vocalize his concerns with the existing strategy. In Bush's recollection, he tried to send a "signal" to his team that he was thinking differently. "We must succeed," he reports having said, adding, "If [the Iraqis] can't do it, we will. If the bicycle teeters, we're going to put the hand back on. We have to make damn sure we do not fail."[46]

If Bush's strategic preference alone drove his decision-making on Iraq during this period, then, we should expect to have seen a change in strategy to rescue a deteriorating situation by the spring or summer of 2006 at the latest, and very likely one which doubled down on the commitment to the war through further escalation. Instead, the decision to "surge" would be taken in the New Year, after a protracted delay in the initiation of a

[43] Bush (2010) 364.
[44] Casey, Interview (2018).
[45] Bush (2010) 363.
[46] Bush, (2010) 371.

strategy review. As the next section argues, the reason for this delay owes much to the President's electoral preference, which pointed to the excessive political risks that such a course presented prior to the midterms.

Electoral Risks: "The Most Unpopular Decision of My Presidency"

From an electoral perspective, the 2006 congressional midterms looked set to be a referendum on Bush's handling of the Iraq War. As such, there was intense political sensitivity associated with any potential course correction, and indeed much evidence to suggest that the public mood was set firmly against the kind of escalatory steps Bush seemed to be moving towards.

After Jack Murtha's powerful demand for an immediate withdrawal in late 2005, the center of gravity in the Democratic party was by the following summer firmly in favor of a scaling down of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, with a dozen senior figures writing a scathing open letter to Bush on 30 July calling for a shift towards a "more limited mission focused on counterterrorism, training and logistical support of Iraqi security forces."[47] Even senior Republicans, including the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee in the Senate, John Warner, were busy writing anxious memoranda outlying their concerns with any hint in the rumor mill that additional forces were being readied for deployment.[48] In September, meanwhile, Mitch McConnell pleaded with the President to withdraw some troops from Iraq at least as a political token, such were the concerns about the increasingly de-escalatory preferences of the electorate ahead of the midterms.

Among the public at large, appetite for something like the "surge" was in fact vanishingly small. In June 2006, just 6% of Americans favored an increase in troops. While

[47] "Fast Withdrawal of G.I.'s Is Urged by Key Democrat," 18 November 2005, *New York Times*; "Democratic Leaders Ask Bush to Redeploy Troops in Iraq," 1 August 2006, *New York Times*.
[48] Warner to Pace, Abizaid and Casey, 25 October 2006, Box 115, Casey Papers, NDU.

the public disagreed on the speed with which troops should return from Iraq – some favoring an immediate or timeline-based withdrawal and others preferring a conditions-based drawdown – the overwhelming public demand, representing some 89% of Americans, was for fewer troops, not more. These figures would remain remarkably stable throughout the remainder of 2006, indicating that any concerns about the electoral risks of escalating would be fully valid.[49]

Indeed, the administration privately understood that any possible escalation would arouse such a firestorm of public criticism. Bush himself had his eyes fully open to this reality. "Increasing our troop level would be deeply unpopular at home," he recalled, adding that he understood that "The fighting would be tough, and casualties could be high."[50] In response to McConnell's plea, meanwhile, he later admitted that it was quite apparent that opting to increase, not decrease, troop levels would be "the most unpopular decision of my presidency."[51] Meghan O'Sullivan, one of the chief advocates of the "surge" in Bush's inner circle, acknowledges the situation as follows: "Initial opposition to the idea of the "surge" was virtually uniform. With a few notable exceptions, such as John McCain, members of Congress from both parties argued strongly against it. Public opinion was firmly in the camp of bringing troops home. Even many senior members of President Bush's own administration were, throughout much of the process, arguing against the surge."[52] As far away as Baghdad, the constraints the political leadership were under could be sensed, with one of the commander's aides later recalling that, "I guess the read of

[49] CNN Poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation. June 8-11, 2006. Available online at: http://pollingreport.com/iraq11.htm (accessed 20 September 2019).
[50] Bush (2010) 375.
[51] *Ibid.* 355.
[52] O'Sullivan, Email Correspondence (2019).

domestic public opinion at the time, or even looking back on it, I don't thin[k] the people would have supported an increase in forces, it had to wait until after the election."[53]

Not only would the initial decision to escalate have been unpopular, however, but such a strategy was only going to make things worse, from a political perspective, before it got better. The population-centric counterinsurgency approach which caught Bush's eye through the summer of 2006 was almost by definition a casualty-intensive military strategy.[54] "We understood the inherent violence in a counterinsurgency," notes Crane, the lead author of the Army's doctrinal manual, adding "we use the word kill like 70 times; we're talking about all kinds of nasty stuff."[55] If the experts could guarantee the president that he'd be taking more casualties in an election year, what they could not do was offer any real hope that conclusive results would be seen in the short term. "We were pretty honest in the manual, it was going to take a lot of killing, a lot of violence, it's going to take a lot of time," says Crane.[56]

At a phase of the electoral cycle in which a President is likely to be casualty-sensitive and time-poor, then, the emerging strategic preference was known to carry a high cost, both in human and temporal terms. With the midterms looming, how did George Bush respond to the imbalance between his strategic and electoral concerns?

"It was a Bust": Missed Opportunities to Course-Correct

If the lack of a change in strategy through most of 2006 was not for want of an awareness of the need for one, this section shows that neither was it down to a shortage of attempts to spark such a process. In fact, a series of largely independent efforts were launched in the

[53] 9 March 2008, Box 104, Casey Papers, NDU.
[54] Bush, (2010) 367; Rove (2010) 476; Dyson (2011) 573.
[55] Crane, Interview (2018).
[56] *Ibid*.

year leading up to November 2006, each of which fizzled out in the face of presidential inaction, providing plenty of evidence for the second observable implication of the *delay* mechanism.

First, the State Department's "clear, hold and build" approach of late 2005, intended by its authors as "the first big effort to tear up and change the strategy," failed to go any further than a public relations effort to repackage the existing strategy. The so-called "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," was considered ultimately insufficient for achieving the real change the State Department were seeking. "Except for at the level of rhetoric," regrets Zelikow, "it's a bust."[57]

As for State's later proposal for a "selective counterinsurgency," there had been greater hopes for substantive change, since it had been fed into planning for a "war council" summit held at Camp David in June, widely expected to be a warts and all review of strategy, where the President and his advisers were "really going to have the blunt, all-out conversation that they have long needed to have so this strategy can be pulled up and thoroughly re-examined," as Zelikow puts it.[58] Again, though, "that turned out to be a bust."[59] Indeed, President Bush left halfway through the set of scheduled meetings, using the get-together as a cover for a secret trip to Iraq for a photo opportunity with Prime Minister Maliki. "What I thought would have started a zero-base review of the strategy miscarries back into debates about implementation on the margins," recalled Feaver.[60] Similarly, O'Sullivan called it a "PR session… [which] didn't tackle any of the pressing issues of the moment."[61]

---

[57] Zelikow, Interview (2018).
[58] Zelikow, Oral History.
[59] Zelikow, Interview (2018).
[60] Quoted in Baker (2013) 467.
[61] Quoted in *ibid.* 467.

By August, as we have seen, Bush had begun vocalising his concerns internally. Yet if he held an emerging preference for escalation, he still held it so closely to his chest at that stage so as to inhibit any actual follow-up by those leading the military mission in Iraq. Indeed, it seems that Bush's memory may have embellished the strength of the signal he sent in the 17 August meeting. General Casey, for instance, still felt that he had the support of the President, which was reasonable to think given that he had been asked to stay on for another year in Iraq a few months prior, and following Camp David, where Casey's update on the existing strategy was approved.[62] "And then I read in President Bush's book that August was the worst month of his presidency," the general recalls, "and I'm going, *what?*"[63] The August meeting was "weird," admits Zelikow, who was there representing the Secretary of State. While he sensed the ice beginning to break, he concedes that he may have picked up on Bush's signals because he was already thinking along those lines. "What Bush says is true," he explains, "but to be fair to Casey, it's not like anyone at this meeting triple underscored the point."[64]

Between this August meeting and the November elections, the number of closely-held studies looking at Iraq strategy proliferated among the various skeptical groups, and yet the establishment of a full interagency review, which was critical in actually bringing about change, was yet again deferred. Had each of these disparate studies been formally brought together earlier, it seems fair to conclude that a full airing of views may have led to a change in strategy much earlier than it did. In a normal interagency review process, explains Zelikow, "The first thing you do is run a subcabinet process that elicits papers and arguments about strategy from State, Defense, JCS, maybe convened under the Deputies

[62] Casey, Interview (2018); 12 June 2006, Box 114, Casey Papers, NDU; MNF-I Staff Notes Excerpts, May-Sep 2006, CENTCOM Papers, AMHI.
[63] Casey, Interview (2018).
[64] Zelikow, Interview (2018).

and JD Crouch. JD Crouch *never* ran such a meeting until like the end of November. *Not one*."[65] Instead, the pockets of dissatisfaction with the existing strategy were allowed to continue in their own silos, without constructive interagency analysis and input which would help move the concerns towards a solution. Before November, adds Zelikow, "That just simply never happened. These papers don't exist. At *no* point before the end of November of 2006 did I ever see a paper and an interagency process in which DoD or the command are being forced to engage in the arguments about their strategy."[66] The net effect of the failure by the White House to trigger a formal strategy review, then, was the deferral of any real decision on a new strategy. "Everything that happened then could have happened more than a year earlier, or two years earlier," regrets Zelikow.[67]

The persistent failure of the Bush administration to launch a full strategy review despite all the strong indications of a need for one and efforts by senior officials to instigate such a process points is fully consistent with the second observable implication of the delay mechanism. We can therefore rule out the alternative explanation that the failure to make a decision to change strategy through 2006 was the result of a lack of viable opportunities to establish a normal interagency review process. There was clearly something else pressuring the White House not to act upon its strategic preference to instigate a change in strategy.

"I Decided to Wait"

Some of the best evidence for the influence that the aforementioned electoral pressures had on Bush's decision-making in this period is in fact hiding in plain sight: Bush signals as much in his own memoir. In a key passage explaining his thinking in the autumn of 2006,

---

[65] Zelikow, Interview (2018).
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] *Ibid.*

the President wrote, "I decided a change in strategy was needed. To be credible to the American people, it would have to be accompanied by changes in personnel… [But] with the 2006 midterm elections approaching, the rhetoric on Iraq was hot… *I decided to wait until after the elections to announce any policy or personnel changes*. I didn't want the American people to think I was making national security decisions for political reasons."[68] Putting aside the somewhat troubling assertion that timing critical decisions on strategy based on the domestic political calendar was somehow an example of keeping national security policy *free* of political considerations, this statement alone is smoking gun evidence for the delay effect.

Condoleezza Rice, meanwhile, though convinced of the need to change track, reportedly said at the time that she was not willing "to do anything that would be above the radar screen in the heavy political breathing of the November elections," since the last thing the administration needed was "a hothouse story" that revealed that things were so bad in Iraq that the administration was looking for alternative approaches.[69] Hadley agreed with the Secretary of State, telling her in October that the NSC-State review set up then had to remain informal: "We've got to do it under the radar screen because the electoral season is so hot."[70] On a separate occasion earlier that summer, Hadley reportedly elaborated on his thinking: "I've got to help this President get through what is going to be a really rugged three years. And if the Democrats take over the House and the Senate it's going to be unbelievable after 2006." If there was a "raging debate" over Bush's war record with people arguing "we have no choice but to throw the Republicans out and bring the troops home… this is really going to be awful."[71]

---

[68] Bush (2010) 372.
[69] Quoted in Woodward (2008) 84-85.
[70] Quoted in *ibid.* 175.
[71] Quoted in Woodward (2006) 491.

Col. Peter Mansoor, meanwhile, a member of the Council of Colonels, writes of his similar view of the reason why the several informal reviews were not linked up: "With the midterm elections less than three months away… any hint that the administration was having second doubts about Iraq was politically radioactive." Fearing the explosive fallout of any leaks from a full review, "serious debate on changing course would have to wait until the voters had had their say."[72]

This was certainly a perception that others in the uniformed military had, too. In Baghdad, for instance, there was apparently a sense that requests for additional troops during an election season would be unwelcome in Washington. In an after-action review, General Casey played devil's advocate and asked his advisers if he should have changed strategy and asked for more troops over the summer of 2006. Ed Donnelly, the chief of Casey's internal think tank in Baghdad at the time, pointed out that "domestic public opinion at that time was all focused on the elections, and at least our read of it from OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] was 'get the numbers down so that we can show progress.'" Another staffer similarly concluded that in retrospect, the tacit approval of MNF-I's plans which masked underlying concerns were likely caused by electoral constraints: "diplomats and politicians, especially when they're not mobilized for war, are not going to lay out hard decisions… They wouldn't say yes and they wouldn't say no. Silence was consent."[73]

~

Instead of actively pursuing alternative approaches, the administration acted precisely as we might expect in the lead up to an election by diverting a greater attention towards the minimisation of casualties associated with the existing plan. This, indeed, is one of the

[72] Mansoor (2014) 46.
[73] 9 March 2008, Box 104, Casey Papers, NDU.

aspects General Casey sensed in his interactions with Washington. In handwritten notes of a one such call, the commander listed a series of questions he had been asked: "Can we shift weight away from activities that cause casualties?" "What are the risks of going to a lower visibility posture now/6mos/12mos?" "Less troops = less casualties?"[74] The Secretary of Defense had, of course, always believed in pushing the responsibility for security onto the Iraqis, yet in the summer of 2006 his concerns seem notably driven by concerns about congressional reaction to the continued exposure of American troops to violence in Iraq. Hence, when General Casey reluctantly decided to extend the tours of the 172nd Stryker Brigade in order to shore up security in the short-term, Rumsfeld fired across a note lamenting the move as "unfortunate" since the administration was now "facing some difficulties in Alaska and Congress because of it."[75]

The impact of casualties on other senior officials' concerns was also significant. Looking back at 2006, Rice remembers how "Each morning I opened the *Washington Post* to 'Faces of the Fallen.' The *Post* had begun the series in 2003 to memorialize Americans killed in the war. I made myself look at every one of the photos - a harsh reminder of the costs of the war."[76] Explaining why she began to get cold feet over her earlier proposals for a better-resourced counterinsurgency plan during the summer, she notes that her concern was that putting more troops in harm's way "would only result in more casualties."[77] Her new proposal – threatening to withdraw American support – might not work, she admitted,

[74] Handwritten Notes, May 2006, Box 114, Casey Papers, NDU. There was also notable email traffic between the DoD and the White House on casualty levels at this time; see, for instance, Rumsfeld to Hadley, 8 May 2006, Rumsfeld Papers. See also 11 June 2006 entry in MNF-I Staff Notes Excerpts, May-Sep 2006, CENTCOM Papers, AMHI.
[75] Rumsfeld to Casey, 2 August 2006, Box 115, Casey Papers, NDU.
[76] Rice (2017) 313.
[77] Rice (2011) 507.

but "at least this way, fewer Americans would die."[78] As Casey himself later recalled, "over time, casualties and violence became the de facto measure of strategic progress in Iraq."[79]

Such heightened casualty-sensitivity during an election season is exactly what theories of democratic constraint predict, as the administration seeks to minimise the prospect of public backlash on the eve of Election Day. Indeed, insomuch as we see evidence of the administration attempting to alter the existing strategy purely to minimise the political "noisiness" associated with it, it may be possible to consider this behaviour as consistent with the *dampening* mechanism.

Opening the Windows

The argument that the electoral calendar had a substantive effect on decision-making will be fortified if it is also possible to demonstrate that Election Day acted as a turning point, when temporization gave way to decisive and bold decision-making behavior by the president, as the final observable implication of the delay mechanism suggests. In the case of the "surge", this is incontrovertible. Though the decision was announced in early January, the record indicates that a decision had effectively been made by the time Bush visited the chiefs on 13 December, just five weeks after the congressional elections.

On 10 November, three days on from the midterms, and two days after firing Donald Rumsfeld, Bush appointed JD Crouch to lead a full review of strategy in Iraq. A flurry of interagency meetings subsequently took place, finally bringing together several of the informal efforts and injecting them with a sense of urgency not hitherto seen – Bush wanted a report in only sixteen days. "Basically the day after the election… it's as if all of a sudden the windows had been opened and fresh air is coming in," recalls Zelikow.[80] Having been

[78] *Ibid*. 540.
[79] Casey (2012) 168.
[80] Zelikow, Interview (2018).

largely deferential on questions of military strategy up to this point, Bush was suddenly front and centre of the deliberations. During the initial stages of the review, this was manifested through Hadley, who, at Bush's behest, intervened on one of the very first meetings to instruct the participants that, whatever their own proposals were, "You have got to give the president the option of a surge in forces. He will want to see it, and he'll want to know what it means. You all can take your positions for or against or in between, but you have to present him that as an option."[81]

By the time the review made it to the level of the Principals, the key follow-up meeting minutes reveal a president eager to push ahead with bold steps. On 8 December, for instance, Crouch had barely begun his presentation on the propositions under discussion before Bush challenged his suggestions, asking "What is different from now? Don't see anything different?"[82] Rejecting the State Department's new plan to step back and let the violence burn itself out as an abdication of responsibility at best, Bush turned to Casey, who reiterated the intention to press on with the transition of security responsibilities to Iraqis, as agreed with the Iraqi Prime Minister and foreshadowing key tenets of the "Accelerated Transition" plan he was due to formally brief a few days later.[83] "So six months more of the same stuff?" asked a seemingly incredulous Bush, before showing his own hand by asking "Does this argue for more US forces as a bridge?"[84] Casey later conceded that at his Baghdad headquarters, "our life changed after those elections… it was clear to me that the President was out of patience with the Iraqis to do anything, and we needed to focus on securing Baghdad." Though he briefed his Baghdad commander to think creatively on strategy, it soon became clear that the President "was already doing it."[85]

---

[81] Woodward (2008) 234-235; see also Bush (2010) 376.
[82] 8 December 2006, Box 116, Casey Papers, NDU.
[83] 12 December 2006, Box 117, Casey Papers, NDU.
[84] 8 December 2006, Box 116, Casey Papers, NDU.
[85] 9 March 2008, Box 104, Casey Papers, NDU.

The following day, Bush was in an even more pro-active mood. Referencing the recent report of the Iraq Study Group, which effectively supported the central tenets of the existing strategy, Bush now spoke of the "radical action we will take [to] achieve victory," imploring his team to "understand that Baker-Hamilton [is] not setting orders. I am running this show."[86] Then, over Casey's objections, the Commander-in-Chief questioned whether the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) could be capable enough to assume responsibility as early as proposed. "If forces [are] unreliable to protect Baghdad," he said, it would amount to "a lot of wasted effort." Instead, he thought aloud, it "seems [we] should move more resources into Baghdad… Do we need more troops?" Bush made plain his state of mind: "People concerned US not engaged. Think about symbols. Show muscle… Most important is put us in position where can win. Want to win. No mistake. Victory. Surge important."

It was not just the speed or decisiveness with which Bush reached a decision that is notable, but also the bold and risky nature of the "surge" option, which was selected over an overwhelming level of opposition. Having now passed the moment of greatest political sensitivity, there was no reason to resort to half-hearted measures. "It's a Hail Mary pass," says Zelikow, "because he's throwing the ball at a time where he doesn't really have a play, where he's got the receiver in mind… it was really up to Petraeus and Odierno to figure out how to deal with it and make it work."[87] Yet Petraeus' Executive Officer, Peter Mansoor, admits, "we did not know whether the surge would work; indeed, the odds were stacked against us."[88] Even the architects of the new counterinsurgency doctrine

[86] 9 December 2006, Box 116, Casey Papers, NDU. The Iraq Study Group Report contained only one sentence referring to a "surge"-like option, buried deep within other recommendations; see Baker and Hamilton (2006) 73.
[87] Zelikow, Interview (2018).
[88] Mansoor, (2014) 56.

underpinning the "surge" had their doubts. "Baghdad was a mess," admits Conrad Crane, adding, "I thought you had to consider the possibility of failure."[89]

This is arguably what explains the determination to go with a five-brigade option, rather than the two which the chiefs said was the most they could accommodate. Lute, who originally was at the forefront of those arguments against a large injection of troops, later discussed the logic as follows: "We're going to get one shot at this. It's going to be politically tough in any case, so we're not going to get multiple bites at this apple. Do it properly: send in five."[90] Or, as Crouch reportedly told Hadley at the time, "We've decided to be a bear… so let's be a grizzly bear."[91] This dynamic also explains the clean sweep of personnel over the winter of 2006. It was not just a new strategy that was decided on, but an entirely new team was brought in to deliver the bold new vision for Iraq. By the time the "surge" units had made it to Iraq, the Secretary of Defense, CENTCOM commander, MNF-I commander and Ambassador had all been replaced.

In choosing the "all-in", full-throated gamble that the "surge" represented, Bush also demonstrated a new-found willingness to overrule virtually his entire national security team, in another sign that the lifting of electoral constraints had a real impact on his decision-making behavior.[92] In addition to the aforementioned opposition from the chiefs and the State Department, it was clear that the combatant commander was briefing a plan diametrically opposed that which Bush had in mind. During his meeting with the President on 12 December, Casey made clear that additional U.S. troops would at best have "a temporary, local effect" in reducing violence, would not be decisive absent progress on political reconciliation on the part of the Iraqis, and in the meantime would result in

[89] Crane, Interview (2018).
[90] Lute, Interview (2018).
[91] Quoted in Baker (2013) 523.
[92] See Woodward (2008) 233-251.

additional casualties and extend the time it took to pass on security responsibilities. In short, he was "adamantly opposed" to the plan favored by the president.[93] Furthermore, the record shows that Don Rumsfeld was fully in tune with Casey at the time of the formal strategy review. In a videoconference with his commander, the Secretary of Defense addressed the prospect of sending more troops, simply stating, "Doesn't help. Feeding alligator. They will just want more. We do not want to give more troops."[94]

Bush's overruling of the State Department is perhaps even more striking. At Foggy Bottom, concerns about the deteriorating state of public support for the war by this point had actually led key figures to retreat altogether from their earlier advocacy of a better resourced counterinsurgency plan. "My concern, which led me and others around Rice to become sceptical of our own recommendations," recalls Jeffrey, "was based on rapidly fading domestic support… We were all growing skeptical that we would have the public support for anything."[95] Indeed, for this reason, Rice defended a proposal which contemplated the withdrawal American troops to the outskirts of the cities in Iraq and intervention only in cases of uncontrollable, near-genocidal violence. Why? Because "we lost the US people when we got into a one thousand year blood feud. They understood going after al Qaeda; understood Sadaa[m]ists; understood all of that. Do not understand this blood feud. Must… realize our limitations."[96] The reality that Bush would now reject such a plan, breaking openly with his loyal Secretary of State in so doing, points decisively to the President's new-found freedom from the constraints of public opinion in this final electoral stage.

---

[93] Casey (2012) 141-144.
[94] 16 November 2006, Box 115. See also Rumsfeld to Bush, 8 December 2006, Rumsfeld Papers.
[95] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[96] 8 December 2006, Box 116, Casey Papers, NDU.

Finally, there is even some question as to whether the Prime Minister of Iraq wanted the "surge." Bush tells us that he secured Maliki's blessing during a 30 November meeting in Amman, Jordan.[97] Yet the main subject of these discussions was a new Baghdad Security Plan, a strategic concept created by the Iraqis which would see the ISF take over increasing security functions from the Americans. Maliki's response to Bush's offer of additional troops was negative. "I don't need your forces," he said, "We can do it ourselves. We should do it ourselves."[98] The record shows that the Iraqis had been eager for an American withdrawal to begin as soon as possible, with rough timetables being proposed already by August 2006.[99] In truth, it seems that Bush was determined to drag along Maliki kicking and screaming if necessary, as the minutes of Bush's mid-December NSC meetings show. Told of Maliki's reservations about the "surge", Bush grew frustrated, saying "he needs to do this with some speed… [we] cannot let Maliki decide if we surge."[100] Bush demanded that the Iraqi Prime Minister publicly call for additional U.S. troops, and if he continued to stall, Bush was apparently even willing to consider his removal, at one point saying, "If he's not [the] guy, then we've got to make [a] change."[101] Just as Bush would impose the "surge" on his own national security team, he was perfectly prepared to impose it on Iraq's, too.

~

The election was thus a key turning point in the decision-making process on Iraq. Yet it was not the case that Bush was now inclined to simply reflect the concerns of the electorate, who had signaled their dissatisfaction with the President's war record by handing Democrats sweeping gains in the midterms. If keen to respond to public wishes in this way,

[97] Bush (2010) 374.
[98] Woodward (2008) 264.
[99] Unnamed Author [Likely Maliki or Rubaie], August 2006, Box 115, Casey Papers, NDU.
[100] 12 December 2006, Box 117, Casey Papers, NDU.
[101] 11 December 2006, Box 116, Casey Papers, NDU.

Bush would presumably have opted to embrace some elements of the Baker-Hamilton report, which enjoyed solid and bipartisan public support.[102] He certainly would not have embraced something like the "surge", given that public appetite in December remained dead-set against it, with just 12% favoring sending more troops, versus a 52% majority in favor of a fixed withdrawal timeline.[103] On the contrary, the real significance of the election as a turning point lay in the reality that neither Bush nor his party had to face the verdict of voters again. Only at this stage of the electoral cycle, newly freed of electoral constraints, could this "lame duck" president make what he understood to be "the most unpopular decision of my presidency."[104]

Indeed, much evidence exists to suggest that Bush's bold gamble of January 2007 was further propelled by concerns about his own legacy, as he entered the final two years of his presidency. In Casey's notes of a 15 December meeting, for instance, the President stressed the need to "make sure [the] next administration cannot undo" the strategy being put in place.[105] Similarly, in Peter Feaver's insider account of deliberations, the "surge" – or the "bridge," as it was notably referred to internally – was explicitly designed with the presidential calendar in mind. From the moment he and others in the NSC began to think about a "surge", "it was painfully obvious to everyone involved that the only decisive outcome that could be achieved during President Bush's tenure was the triumph of our enemies, America's withdrawal, and Iraq's descent into a hellish chaos as yet undreamed of… The challenge, therefore, was to develop and implement a workable strategy that could be handed over to Bush's successor."[106] This, in turn, gives credence to General Casey's

[102] Newsweek Poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. Dec. 6-7, 2006. Available online at: http://pollingreport.com/iraq9.htm (accessed 20 September 2019).
[103] Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg Poll. Dec. 8-11, 2006. Available online at: http://pollingreport.com/iraq9.htm (accessed 20 September 2019).
[104] Bush (2010) 355.
[105] 15 December 2006, Box 116, Casey Papers, NDU.
[106] Feaver (2008).

hypothesis that "once they lost both houses, he was faced with the possibility of losing the White House in two more years to save his legacy and set the Republicans up for the next election, and the only question that had never been answered was 'do we have enough troops?'… If you're a political guy, your horizons are a year, not ten years. I don't mean to be crude, but it's always someone else's problem."[107]

Bush's legacy was, after all, intertwined with Iraq. It was, as Jim Jeffrey put it, "the soul of his presidency."[108] Faced with the prospect of failure, Bush knew his place in the history books depended on turning things around. "The Iraq War is the giant millstone," Zelikow notes, "it's the giant thing, like Vietnam is for the legacy of LBJ."[109] That Bush would allow the mess in Iraq to drag on for months through 2006 despite such consciousness of the stakes only serves to underline how powerful an effect electoral constraints had on presidential decision-making in war up to this point.

Two Clocks and a SOFA

Having escalated the war despite overwhelming political opposition, President Bush now faced the challenge of managing the aftermath of the "surge" in such a way to "lock in" its perceived strategic gains. This section demonstrates that Bush's status as a "lame duck" did not entirely free him from electoral constraints, but instead added both urgency and political risk to his decision-making process. No longer incentivised by re-election but by legacy concerns, a series of decisions regarding the pace of troop withdrawals were profoundly shaped by the domestic political calendar at the expense of strategic desirability. In turn, Bush's efforts to tie his successor's hands to his preferred strategic vision for a continued engagement in Iraq were hamstrung by anticipation of the 2008

[107] Casey, Interview (2018).
[108] Jeffrey, Interview (2018). See also Rice (2018) 317.
[109] Zelikow, Interview (2018).

election. As such, this section offers strong evidence that even incumbents who do not have to face voters again are still required to balance competing strategic and electoral preferences. Further, by exploring how the upcoming 2008 election eroded Bush's leverage during negotiations over a Status of Forces Agreement, this section offers support for the claim that the *spoiler* mechanism can still constrain presidential decision-making even when the incumbent is not running for re-election.

Clock-Watching: The Drawdown of the "Surge"

From a strictly military perspective, a conditions-based drawdown of troops in Iraq was widely perceived to be strategically optimal. Inherent in the original decision to "surge" was the idea that improvements in security were a pre-requisite for political reconciliation. This causal relationship, taken "almost as a matter of faith" among proponents of the new strategy, implied that troops should be withdrawn as violence metrics declined, acting as a "return on success."[110] How exactly "success" would be measured Bush would leave up to Petraeus, but it was quite clear that his strategic preference did not include any fixed or politically pre-determined schedule for redeployments. As he later put it, "we were keeping as many troops in Iraq as our commanders needed, for as long as they needed them."[111]

In turn, Petraeus understood that establishing a minimum level of security in what had essentially become a civil war would take time, and as such was evidently geared towards a long-term commitment towards Iraq. According to Stephen Biddle, an external adviser during this period, "Petraeus is not remotely interested in drawdowns during 2007. He knows he's in the fight of his life, this is all hanging in the balance, and he wants every soldier he can get… Petraeus' understanding of the situation was that U.S. troops were

[110] Rapp, Interview (2018); Bush (2010) 385.
[111] Bush (2010) 385.

helping not hurting, were the solution not the problem."[112] A series of eighteen benchmarks were established by which progress could be assessed and recommendations about withdrawal made, but there was no illusion that Jeffersonian democracy would suddenly emerge out of the ashes of violent sectarian conflict, having failed to do so for the past four years.

From an electoral perspective, by contrast, Bush was keenly aware that the domestic political landscape placed limits on his ability to pursue a conditions-based drawdown. In the short term, the results of the previous midterm elections had elevated to power a vocal group of sceptical Democrats, who threatened to use their newly-won control of both houses to mandate a fixed and early withdrawal.

In the longer term, meanwhile, there was a real possibility that such an atmosphere would lead Democrats to nominate a rigidly anti-war candidate for the 2008 election campaign. Since it was understood that the deep-rooted challenges in Iraq would not be resolved quickly, Bush needed some way to ensure a degree of continuity in strategy after his term in office ended. Or, in the words of Jim Jeffrey, who served as Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan during this period: "Bush knew that we had the 2008 elections coming up, and by this time it was obvious from the polls and everything else that we weren't going to convince the American public of this, and he was afraid that the Democrats would run against the war and win. He didn't want the Democrats to win because he figured they would just screw it all up. So how do you save your project?"[113]

The challenge presented by this imbalance between Bush's strategic and electoral preferences was conceptualised at the time by a metaphor involving two clocks. While the President himself recalls being struck by Petraeus' comment that "the Washington clock is

[112] Biddle, Interview (2018).
[113] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).

ticking a lot faster than the Baghdad clock," the clearest articulation of the task ahead comes from the Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates:

> "My enemy was time. There was a Washington 'clock' and a Baghdad 'clock,' and the two moved at very different speeds. Our forces needed time to make the surge and our broader plan work, and the Iraqis needed time for political reconciliation, but much of Congress, most of the media, and a growing majority of Americans had lost patience with the war in Iraq… My role was to figure out how to buy time, how to slow down the Washington clock, and how to speed up the Baghdad clock."[114]

In other words, what the administration needed to do was temper the desire to pursue the strategically optimal plan of a slow, conditions-based drawdown, with a politically pragmatic approach which protected the strategy from the electoral ramifications of the "bug out" fever so prevalent in Congress and among the wider voting public.

~

There were two ways to speed up the Baghdad clock and thus ameliorate the political bind.

First, President Bush quietly allowed the goalposts of what "success" looked like to be moved. Embracing the recommendations of Petraeus' Joint Strategic Assessment Team in the spring of 2007, the goal of "victory," which the administration had been so publicly asserting for years, was quietly replaced with a more modest term recognizing the constraints under which the war effort was now operating. As one of Petraeus' aides puts it, "Gone were visions of a Jeffersonian democracy; they were replaced by the concept of 'sustainable stability,' which failed as a bumper sticker but which nevertheless better reflected the possible outcome that could be achieved before the clock on U.S. involvement in the war ran out."[115] While Bush would have likely recoiled at the very idea of such a downsized objective early on in his tenure, his willingness to accept what officials referred

[114] Gates (2014) 49. See also Bush (2010) 382.
[115] Mansoor (2014) 104.

to as “Iraqi OK” as the goal may be taken as another reflection of his appreciation of the electoral realities now facing him.

The second method for managing the electoral realities was to use the looming temporal constraints as leverage on the Iraqis. From a top-down perspective, a good example of this came in December 2007, when Bob Gates invoked Bush’s situation to pressure Prime Minister Maliki to make progress on a backlog of legislation which needed to be passed to hit a number of Petraeus’ eighteen benchmarks. “I told Maliki there is no longer a Baghdad clock or a Washington clock,” recalled Gates, “there is only a George Bush clock. You need to move and get things done while your best friend is still in the White House.”[116]

A similar strategy was employed from the bottom-up, too, as U.S. Marines began warning Sunni leaders that the departure of U.S. forces would leave them exposed to Al Qaeda and Iranian-backed Shia militias, from whom they had hitherto been protected. As such, it was in their interests to work with U.S. forces while they were still there to counter these threats, while brokering a series of local political agreements. “We are leaving,” the Americans would reportedly say to Sunni sheikhs, “we don’t know when we are leaving, but we don’t have much time, so you better get after this.”[117] In this way, the strategic use of electorally imposed constraints at home provides a plausible explanation for the so-called “Awakening” movement, which played a key role in improving security conditions not just in the West but even into Baghdad. The very same groups who had been hitherto been shooting at U.S. forces would now, thanks in part to the American electoral cycle, switch sides, cutting deals to protect their interests while they still could. As Colin Kahl, then adviser to Barack Obama’s presidential campaign, puts it, “the threat of abandonment

[116] Quoted in Mansoor (2014) 225.
[117] John Allen, quoted in Kahl and Odom (2008). Smith and MacFarland, (2008).

by an uncontrollable political process - Congress or an election - gives you a moment to make a credible threat of abandonment."[118]

~

In order to slow down the Washington "clock," meanwhile, the President adopted an approach to troop withdrawals which carefully calibrated the desire for a long-term presence in Iraq with the electoral realities at home. Though Bush publicly maintained that all decisions regarding the pace of the drawdown were based purely on the guidance of the commander in the field, this obscures the reality that those recommendations were in turn subject to repeated direct and indirect pressures from Washington to remain sensitive to the domestic political calendar.

The basic problem was framed well by Bob Gates in a meeting with the President on 30 March 2007, in which the Secretary of Defense recalls explaining to Bush how he "needed to get the issue of Iraq off the front burner politically by the presidential primaries in February 2008 so that the Democratic candidates did not lock themselves into public positions that might preclude their later support for sustaining a sizeable military presence in Iraq for 'years to come.'"[119] Prior to General Petraeus' scheduled testimony before Congress in September, Gates sought to stave off these risks by repeatedly hinting that the public could expect the commander to recommend withdrawing units sooner rather than later, while pressuring the general behind closed doors to deliver a politically realistic plan. As violence in Iraq continued to spike despite the earlier influx of troops, Petraeus reluctantly stomached the operational costs of strategically premature redeployments. Shortly after May, the bloodiest month of the entire war, he outlined a programme which would bring a brigade home roughly every six weeks starting that autumn, with an ambition

[118] Kahl, Interview (2018).
[119] Gates (2014) 57.

to have all "surge" units out of Iraq by the summer of 2008, conveniently just as the presidential campaign would reach its peak.[120]

By September, with violence metrics in Iraq finally beginning to fall and Petraeus' appearance on Capitol Hill having punctured the Democrats' efforts to defund the war, the administration redoubled its efforts to finesse a drawdown schedule so as to avoid precipitate withdrawal. Again, Gates articulates the challenge clearly, writing that the key objective "was to make the continuing reduction in our combat forces in Iraq unmistakable, in an attempt to keep Iraq from being a central issue in the presidential election. It would also provide the new president with political cover for a longer troop presence and a sustainable U.S. role in Iraq's future for the long term."[121] Importantly, he recalls explaining his logic to a receptive President in a meeting of 29 January 2008. While noting that the timeline he had in mind "may be too aggressive," he stressed that any decision to keep troops on for longer, however strategically desirable, "could have a potentially significant impact on the campaign debate in the United States and decisions after January 20, 2009… no additional drawdowns would make it more likely that troop levels would fall off a cliff on January 20 if a Democrat was elected."[122] The net effect of another series of meetings and video-conferences including Bush and Petraeus was indeed an electorally-friendly programme involving the redeployment of two further brigades before Bush's last day in office, with the promise of a further shortly after Inauguration Day.

Importantly, it is possible to triangulate Gates' account with additional secondary sources and interview material to verify its credibility. According to his colleagues and closest associates in this period, it is clear that General Petraeus himself did indeed align his thinking with Gates, however reluctantly. "Petraeus understood that there was political

[120] *Ibid.* 49-79.
[121] *Ibid.* 227. See also *ibid.* 234.
[122] *Ibid.* 229.

pressure to bring troops home, and didn't want to bring troops home," notes Stephen Biddle, adding that, "to an unusual degree, Petraeus was trying to be attentive to Washington politics… he was willing to send more troops home than he thought was a good idea, because that seemed like the alternative to having them all pulled out. Left to his own devices, I suspected he would have left them there a lot longer if not indefinitely. But he felt pulled by Washington and made concessions as necessary."[123] Colonel Rapp, one of Petraeus' top two aides in Baghdad, admitted that, "while General Petraeus never would have pulled out a unit unless he absolutely thought 'I can still make this happen,' there was probably pressure on him to do so."[124] His other top aide, Colonel Peter Mansoor, likewise admits that "the interface of politics and military operations was never far from General Petraeus's mind."[125] In short, according to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, it is clear whose account was correct on this episode: "Gates'. Gates'. No question. I think it was manifested exactly as Gates described it."[126]

Relatedly, if indeed Gates did play such a leading role, to what extent was Bush engaged in the process? In describing some criticism of his May 2007 Senate appearance, in which he indicated the possibility of further troop reductions, Bob Gates revealingly notes that "this was what the president, Condi, Steve Hadley, Pace, I, and the commanders had been working on for weeks… Most outside observers and 'military experts'—even the vice president—seemed to have no idea of how thin a thread the entire operation hung by in Congress through the spring and summer. George W. Bush understood."[127] Indeed, the fact that Bush would no longer be in office after January 2009 had a "dramatic impact" on the atmosphere in the White House, with amenability to Gates' approach the result of the

[123] Biddle, Interview (2018).
[124] Rapp, Interview (2018).
[125] Mansoor (2014) 113.
[126] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[127] Gates, (2014) 64.

fact that "all eyes were now on legacy, history, and unfinished business, above all, on Iraq."[128] Indeed, further reporting has since confirmed that leaked stories regarding the White House's consideration of quicker withdrawal plans originated from the National Security Advisor, under direct orders from the President.[129]

~

In short, it seems fair to conclude that the decisions made regarding the drawdown of U.S. forces after the "surge" reflected a compromise between the militarily optimal strategy (one based on conditions in Iraq), and one which carried least electoral risk (one based on perceptions of the political landscape at home). Notably, however, the object here was not to protect the incumbent's electoral prospects per se. Instead, the conscious objective was to find some way to preserve Bush's preferred strategy beyond the lifetime of his administration, and thus protect his legacy. Even as a "lame duck", the American electoral cycle exerted a strong influence on the nature and timing of military strategy in Iraq.

Deadlines and Red Lines: The 2008 Status of Forces Agreement

With the military strategy in place and finally starting to show signs of progress, the final task for the outgoing administration was finding a way to secure the legal basis for the continued presence of U.S. troops in Iraq. Up to now, the United National Security Council had provided cover for the occupation through year-to-year resolutions which granted such authority. In 2007, however, Iraqi leaders, anxious to reassert their own sovereignty, had made clear that any subsequent provisions would only be agreed through a bilateral agreement between the United States and Iraq. The negotiation the 2008 SOFA, then, is the final episode this chapter analyses.

---

[128] *Ibid.* 93.
[129] Baker (2010) 540, 556-557.

Coming in an election year, we would expect the negotiation to be subject to the *spoiler* effect, whereby the presence of an upcoming election erodes the leverage afforded to the incumbent. As this section shows, this was undoubtedly the case. Even though Bush was not running for re-election, the political calendar at home set a fixed deadline which limited his ability to secure the terms of a flexible yet enduring strategic partnership agreement with Iraq. After initially adopting a hardline stance with the Iraqis, the necessity of striking a deal before Bush left office compelled the administration to make concession after concession as November approached. The end result was a deal which adhered far closer to the preferences of Prime Minister Maliki and Barack Obama than those of President Bush.

~

At the broadest level, President Bush clearly understood the SOFA to be a mechanism for protecting his preferred vision of the future relationship between Iraq and the United States, and thereby bolstering his legacy as a president who brought not just war but stability to a post-Saddam Iraq. Acutely aware that his successor might choose instead to rapidly disengage, the underlying purpose of a deal was to tie the hands of whoever took over from him. According to Meghan O'Sullivan, whom Bush drafted back into the administration to work on the negotiations, the President's limited time left in office was a "big driver" of the process, adding that, "whether it was Obama or McCain – though obviously we were more worried about Obama – we wanted to put this relationship on some kind of track that could be continued. We didn't want to leave all these big open questions."[130] Similarly, Doug Lute, whom Bush appointed "war czar" on the NSC, readily acknowledges that, "it was pretty clear that broader politics, no matter who was to be elected, would push the president towards eventually leaving Iraq." In the meantime, therefore, "Bush effectively

[130] O'Sullivan, Interview (2018).

read the politics and said 'Look, the surge seems to be having an effect. How could one cement the results of the surge, and provide some degree of predictability across this presidential transition?'"[131] In short, if Iraqi public opinion and concerns about sovereignty compelled the original legal need for a bilateral agreement, it was nevertheless viewed in the White House overwhelmingly as a means by which Bush could manage the electoral realities at home in this twilight phase of his term.

To hammer out the details of a deal, Bush appeared initially content to let a team of professional SOFA negotiators led by Bob Loftis pursue a traditional long-term basing agreement deemed to carry optimal diplomatic characteristics. Among the red lines expected to provoke tension were the insistence that the United States retain legal jurisdiction over any American personnel in Iraq, and that there was to be no taxation of U.S. activity in the country. Further, any discussion of a quid pro quo involving a fixed timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops, something long considered anathema by President Bush, at least in public, was not on the table.[132]

Before long, advisers close to Bush grew anxious about the approach Loftis was taking. "Our original document was really long," admits Loftis, adding, "that actually caused certain people to think that I was trying to sabotage the agreement by making it too complicated."[133] Indeed, some administration officials began questioning whether the agreement could be quickly put together in the form of a three-to-four page "diplomatic note". This irked Loftis, who insisted that such an agreement "doesn't cover 80% of what you need it to cover if you were going to be there on a permanent basis," adding frankly that, "we have 60 years of experience doing this stuff - we *know* this."[134]

---

[131] Lute, Interview (2018).
[132] Unless otherwise stated, the following account draws from: Loftis, Interview (2018); Lute, Interview (2018); O'Sullivan, Interview (2018); and Negroponte, Interview (2018).
[133] Loftis, Interview (2018).
[134] Loftis, Interview (2018).

By early spring, progress in the talks themselves began to stall. While the Iraqi Prime Minister privately indicated much interest in a deal – which of course should theoretically have been far easier to reach than any of the other negotiations considered so far in this thesis, since this was a negotiation among allies with broadly shared perceptions of their mutual security interests – Iraqi public opinion nevertheless made this difficult. Eager to exert their sovereignty after years of American occupation, several groups, notably including many of the Shia community in Maliki's political coalition, pressed the Prime Minister to take a harder line, particularly if the deal was expected to be ratified in the Iraqi Parliament. "Extending the presence of US forces was existential for Maliki," explains Doug Lute. "He knew he was in no position with his forces to in 2008 to just say goodbye to the Americans. He couldn't have controlled the situation. So he knew he needed us. But politically – as the first Shia majority leader of Iraq, which is struggling to find its feet in a true Parliamentary system and with a key partner in Iran – he couldn't admit that."[135]

Propelled by his own domestic politics, Maliki demanded movement on two of the American red lines. First, he insisted that Iraqi courts should command jurisdiction over American forces, and personally intervened when his negotiators did not get their way. Loftis would not budge, however, on his most important red line. The U.S. would not accept any proposal which gave Iraqi courts authority to rule over American personnel. Maliki's second demand was arguably even more fundamental. He wanted a firm commitment detailing when U.S. forces would leave Iraq.

Crucially for this thesis, the response of the Bush administration to this impasse reflected its perception that while Loftis' approach might well be optimal in strictly diplomatic terms, it did not align with the electoral situation in which the Bush administration found itself. The key players in fact tell us as much in their own words. "We

[135] Lute, Interview (2018).

spent some weeks, maybe even a couple of months trying to, just approaching this in a classic way," regrets Lute, adding, "it became pretty obvious that this wasn't going to go anywhere, and it was not going to produce on the timeline that we had, which was the November election… It was an *absolute* deadline." Taking a hard line in negotiations, trying to extract every single concession possible to favour the United States might work well in other cases. But what Loftis failed to recognize, argues Lute, was that "we were not in the strongest bargaining position."[136] Loftis' laundry list of demands would not play well with an Iraqi leadership keen to exert their own sovereignty, "and it especially didn't play so well given the deadline of the election."

Bush, feeling the heat from the electoral clock, was thus more sympathetic to Maliki's concerns than Loftis had been, telling his top advisers that "this SOFA is not like the others" and that it was important to give the Iraqis a "win".[137] In fact, Bush gave his counterpart several "wins" in quick succession. First, Loftis was replaced as lead negotiator by Brett McGurk and David Satterfield, two men who had been advocates of the "fast" option of a "diplomatic note" agreement. Second, on jurisdictions, the United States would no longer insist on legal immunities for private contractors. Third, and crucially, the Americans were willing to discuss timelines for an American withdrawal, albeit in vague terms such as "time horizons" and "aspirational goals".[138] Bush told Maliki that any drawdown must be conditions-based, as he had long insisted, but by placing withdrawal on the table, Pandora's box had been opened.

Already by May 2008, then, the *spoiler* mechanism appears to have been in operation. The president's desire to forestall a precipitate withdrawal under his successor had combined with the temporal constraints generated by the fixed date of the U.S. election to

[136] Lute, Interview (2018).
[137] Gordon and Trainor (2012) 528.
[138] *Ibid.* 530.

push Bush and his advisers away from two critical red lines. As the presidential campaign entered prime time, it was a marker of things to come.

~

A second observable implication of the *spoiler* effect concerns the role played by other candidates and negotiating opponents in exacerbating the pressures generated by the electoral cycle. In the case of the SOFA, there is strong evidence to suggest that both Barack Obama and Maliki – knowingly or otherwise – acted in ways which further eroded the President's ability to pursue a robust, long-term commitment which he felt diplomatically optimal.

Shortly after Bush's concessions mentioned above, for instance, Maliki conducted an interview with the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, in which he effectively endorsed a key campaign pledge recently made by Obama, then the newly-crowned Democratic nominee. "U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama talks about 16 months," noted Maliki, referring to the drawdown plan recently touted by the candidate, before affirming it to be "the right timeframe for a withdrawal."[139] Notably, this was just two days after the VTC with Bush in which he signed up to the incumbent's conditions-based, "aspirational" terminology. If Maliki's strategy was slammed by General Petraeus in a private letter to the Secretary of Defense as "clearly improper" and "an intrusion into domestic US politics," it also made perfect sense in the context of the campaign.[140] With Obama's opponent Republican nominee John McCain still avowedly opposed to any such timetable, it was sensible to use Obama's position as leverage with Bush, rather than risk ending up dealing with McCain into 2009. Indeed, while Bush recalls how the Iraqi Prime Minister's "endless horse trading

[139] "Interview with Iraqi Leader Nouri al-Maliki," *Der Spiegel*, 19 July 2008. available online at http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/spiegel-interview-with-iraqi-leader-nouri-al-maliki-the-tenure-of-coalition-troops-in-iraq-should-be-limited-a-566852-2.html (accessed 19 September 2019).
[140] Quoted in Gordon and Trainor, (2012) 531.

was frustrating," he also hints that understood that the electoral environment was encouraging it, regretting how, "in the middle of a presidential campaign, Democratic candidates denounced the SOFA as a scheme to keep our troops in Iraq forever."[141]

In the meantime, Obama's camp was reportedly making direct overtures to the Iraqi leadership in ways which further eroded Bush's leverage. During Obama's visit to Baghdad, coming just two days after Maliki's *Spiegel* interview of 19 July, the candidate discussed the situation with the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari. According to Zebari, Obama "asked why we were not prepared to delay an agreement until after the US elections and the formation of a new administration in Washington."[142] This tactic was right out of the Nixon playbook from 1968, as discussed in Chapter IV.

A key difference in 2008, however, was that Maliki had more time to use Obama's position as a wedge to extract further concessions for the incumbent U.S. president, which is precisely what he did. Before the month of July was over, Maliki debated the question of timelines further with President Bush, with the latter reluctantly conceding further ground. American troops would be out of Iraqi towns and cities by mid-2009, they agreed, with the end of 2011 settled as the goal for a full withdrawal of forces. The 2011 date was a compromise between the mid-2010 target Maliki had wanted and the 2015 "aspiration" Bush was initially prepared to offer.

Over the following month, the U.S. would hold the line on jurisdictions and steered clear of naming a specific withdrawal date, still insisting on a conditions-based drawdown, but the steady march towards folding on consecutive elements of the negotiation proceeded unabated, in lock-step with the electoral cycle in the United States. Among the American military leadership in Baghdad, there was growing uneasiness about the trend towards

---

[141] Bush, (2010) 390.
[142] Quoted in "Obama Tried to Stall GIS' Iraq Withdrawal," *New York Post*, 15 September 2008.

capitulation. So keen to secure his legacy before the election was Bush, they thought, that there was a real chance negotiators would "give away the farm," endangering the entire mission.[143]

"Giving Away the Farm"

After a brief recess in late August to reassess the negotiating strategy for the home stretch, McGurk and Satterfield returned to Baghdad armed with the first of two major concessions. To overcome the ongoing impasse over jurisdictions, the American side would propose a mechanism whereby the Iraqis would be given the illusion of judicial authority. In reality, however, the U.S. military would retain custody of any soldier accused of impropriety, and, says Doug Lute, "if [Odierno] feared the outcome of the jurisdiction conversation, he would just put this guy on a C130 and get him out of Iraq."[144] Possession being nine tenths of the law, the military could cope with the ambiguity on paper. As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs recalls, "the real risk was relatively low, and it was also done in a way that for each of those specifics that potentially put our troops in jeopardy, it was very clear to the Iraqi government that we would not tolerate that in any way, shape or form."[145]

The mechanism may well have worked in keeping *de facto* control as the Americans wanted, but from a broader diplomatic perspective, it was short-sighted move reflecting the reality that a bad deal was fast becoming preferable to no deal in the precious little time remaining in 2008. Crucially, it lacked forethought when considering the overall ambition to establish a long-term strategic partnership with Iraq which the administration wanted. As Emma Sky notes, the Americans came up with this fudge believing it to be a stepping stone to a more comprehensive and permanent agreement in future. "They believed that

[143] Sky (2015) 262.
[144] Lute, Interview (2018).
[145] Mullen, Interview (2018).

this is all we can get now, for political reasons, but the Iraqis will renegotiate to keep us there. They were all absolutely 100% convinced that the Iraqis would negotiate to extend this."[146] That being the case, dangling the illusion of control now only set up a fight over every single issue that arose and encouraged the Iraqis to want the jurisdictional authorities for real when any prospective renewal came about. "My view on negotiations is you don't borrow trouble in advance," concludes Loftis, "and this is exactly what we were doing."[147]

Why would the Americans sign up to such a short-term deal? Again, the domestic political calendar has a lot to do with matters. Explains Doug Lute, "as you get into the fall, and now it becomes clear that Obama is an increasingly promising Democratic candidate, and McCain as someone who was associated with Iraq, and defended it during the campaign, that the political winds here are just not blowing in a positive direction. So the deadline of the election and the transition… was leverage on us."[148] Indeed, the level of urgency and interest from the White House picked up exponentially. According to Emma Sky, General Odierno's representative in the talks, "Every week, even every day Washington wanted to know, 'are we nearly there yet?' It was *constantly* going back and forth."[149]

The biggest concessions of all would come in the final days preceding the election. The Iraqi delegation, timing its demands expertly, first secured an agreement from Bush to include the words "withdrawal" and "temporary presence" in the title of the SOFA. During the NSC meeting at which this change was discussed, the President's political counsellor literally stood up in protest, exclaiming "this is a surrender document!" only for the president to quickly shut him down. "Sit down, Ed," he motioned. Bush, as a lame duck

[146] Sky, Interview (2015).
[147] Loftis, Interview (2018).
[148] Lute, Interview (2018).
[149] Sky, Interview (2018).

was less concerned with the impact of the specific terms of SOFA on the election than the need to get any sort of deal by that time. "That was a signal that we *need* this agreement," confirms Lute, adding that "here is a case where he really did have a strategic horizon that was timeline-based. He knew what the milestones were in the calendar, and he drove us."[150]

A few days later, Maliki informed the American Ambassador, Ryan Crocker, that he would agree to a deal only if a specific date for the final American departure was contained in the document. Lute took the request to the President, explaining how this crossed one of Bush's final red lines. A date would mean "it's not going to look conditions based," said Lute, "There is going to be a date and we've said all along that we are not going to put the commanders on a timeline."[151] By this point, Bush was aware of the views of General Odierno, who would later formalize his appraisal of the timeline being proposed as "achievable but the risk is high."[152] Bush knew it was sub-optimal himself, later recalling how "for years, I had refused to set an arbitrary timetable for leaving Iraq [and] I was still hesitant to commit to a date."[153]

Yet Bush was also acutely aware of the electoral realities facing him. "The president ultimately agreed to a 2011 withdrawal date," recalls Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, "because he was concerned that if Mrs Clinton or Mr Obama got elected, they might end our presence in Iraq sooner. He wanted to influence the actions of the successor government [and] was guarding against the advent of a Democratic president committed to complete withdrawal earlier. Definitely, I mean he told me that."[154] "He knew that 2011 would be around another election," agrees Admiral Mullen, "the reason he picked 2011 was he wanted to give the next president, whoever it was going to be, time to really look at

[150] Lute, Interview (2018).
[151] Quoted in Gordon and Trainor (2012) 555.
[152] Odierno to Mullen, 6 December 2008, Box 23, Casey Papers, NDU.
[153] Bush (2010) 390.
[154] Negroponte, (2018).

it and make a decision about what happens after 2011."[155] So, believing a specific date to be diplomatically and militarily sub-optimal, Bush nonetheless gave the green light to a 31 December 2011 deadline, thanks largely to the pressures of the American electoral cycle. "If this is what we need to get an agreement," Bush told Lute, "this is what we'll do."[156] Much to the incredulity of Lute and Crocker, the withdrawal of U.S. troops was thus enshrined in the text of the diplomatic accord. This, along with no less than 120 further Iraqi amendments, were agreed by Bush on 3 November, the day before the 2008 presidential election. "To 'buy' a SOFA," admits Jim Jeffrey, "we needed to give a 'leave by' date."[157] Once more, then, it was a case of a bad deal over no deal, given the electoral bind in which Bush found himself.

It was not just a worse deal. These concessions, made necessary by the pressures of the electoral calendar, changed the entire *nature* of the deal. At the beginning of this process, notes Loftis, "there was a genuine thought that Iraq would become this Western bastion," with talk of permanent basing arrangement akin to the U.S. presence in Korea or post-war Germany. "But as the negotiations wore on," he continues, "as we became closer and closer to the election… it became clear that wasn't going to happen." By the time the deal was signed, it was something fundamentally different. John Negroponte, the Deputy Secretary of State whose office had started the entire negotiation process back in late 2008, is quite clear on what Bush ended up with: "it's a withdrawal agreement."[158] "The entire purpose had changed," agreed Loftis, affirming that "the reality was that the 2008 agreement was an agreement for the withdrawal of American forces, totally."[159]

~

[155] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[156] Quoted in Gordon and Trainor (2012) 555.
[157] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[158] Negroponte, Interview (2018).
[159] Loftis, Interview (2018).

The Iraqis still had to agree to the final deal, of course, and this final stage in the negotiating process was perhaps the only moment when the American electoral cycle actually enhanced Bush's leverage. Amidst the drumbeat of concessions through the fall, the president began attempting to use his lame duck status as leverage with the Iraqis. Key NSC staffers recall how Bush, in his weekly VTCs with Maliki, would drop into conversations about the SOFA veiled threats, such as, "Look, here are my politics. The number of VTCs you're going to have with me is numbered, in absolute terms… don't assume you're going to get a better deal from Obama."[160] In Bush's own telling, one time he flat out told his counterpart, "Mr. Prime Minister, I only have a few months left in office. I need to know whether you want these agreements. If not, I have better things to do."[161] Adds Lute, "up until the election, it was probably a question of unpredictability… you could take a bird in the hand, you can take what's written here, what you and I have carefully negotiated, or you can throw everything up to chance."

In turn, the election of the most anti-Iraq War candidate on the ticket was another signal of the appetite in the United States for a deal. "After the November election," continues Lute, "it becomes pretty clear. Obama campaigned on good war, bad war. And Maliki wasn't on the right side of good war, bad war. He was on the losing side of that equation… So that's huge leverage… I don't think it's a coincidence that the deal was agreed and then later ratified within 30 days of the US election… The election served as a real catalyst to get this deal closed."[162]

Whether or not this strategy worked, there was no longer any major electoral incentive for the Iraqis to wait much longer after the election. With the Bush administration having capitulated on virtually all the key demands the Iraqis made, the deal now also looked much

[160] Lute, Interview (2018).
[161] Bush, (2010) 390.
[162] Lute, Interview (2018).

more like what Obama had been offering through the summer, a mechanism for an orderly drawdown. As such, the Democrat's campaign stayed relatively silent on the matter in October and November, figuring that, in the words of Obama's Iraq adviser, Colin Kahl, "the SOFA as such would probably be ok, it would include a timeline for our departure, which creates co-ownership so that, in essence, Obama's not on the political hook." Advising the campaign to essentially "keep our powder dry" in a memorandum at the time, Kahl cautioned against "a hard line trashing the SOFA."[163] Unlike in July, when Maliki took advantage of the distance between the Bush and Obama positions to extract more concessions from the incumbent, by the time Obama was elected, there was in fact surprisingly little daylight between the two camps, making further delay in sending the deal for ratification in Baghdad largely pointless. The deal was duly agreed upon by Maliki's cabinet on 16 November, before final ratification in parliament on 27 November.

~

From start to finish, then, the negotiation of the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement was clearly subject to the *spoiler* effect outlined in chapter I. Though President Bush was not running in the upcoming presidential election, his ability to forge a diplomatic agreement, even with an ally, was severely limited by electoral constraints. A "lame duck," keen to secure his legacy and lock in his preferred vision of a continued American presence in Iraq, Bush hoped to sign a deal which codified a long-term, strategic partnership between the two countries. Instead, compelled by a ticking clock, and Maliki's interventions in the American political race, Bush rowed back on virtually every red line he and his diplomats had once asserted, most notably on the matters of jurisdictions and timelines.

"The role of public opinion and domestic politics is quite clear in the SOFA decision," argues Doug Lute. "With election politics breathing down, I think it was absolutely

[163] Kahl, Interview (2018).

dominant. [Bush] was not in a rush in '07 to sign a SOFA. He was in 2008. What's different?" Along with the "surge," he concludes, "these are your classic example of vignettes, case studies, of the impact of public opinion and domestic politics. Without question."[164]

Alternative Explanations

Bureaucratic Constraints

To what extent was the delay in authorising the "surge" simply a product of bureaucratic politics? There were undoubtedly actors within the administration determined to stand in the way of escalation, perhaps none more influential thant the Secretary of Defense. For Jim Jeffrey, Donald Rumsfeld was "the eight-hundred-pound gorilla" who blocked all efforts to change strategy, on the basis of his view that "shit happens. Chill out. We've got a plan, which is to build up the Iraqi army [and] get out of there."[165] When challenges were posed of the commanders working on Iraq at weekly videoconferences, Rumsfeld would stand in the way of attempts to elicit a full discussion of views, on one occasion even writing a follow up memorandum threatening that "If NSC meetings are going to have the tone of the last one, I am going to have Abizaid and Casey not on the meetings."[166] For good reason, then, when the State Department was developing its own proposal, Zelikow recalls admitting to Rice, "The strategy we have in mind, we will not be able to execute this with Don Rumsfeld as the Secretary of Defense. You understand this. It's just not going to happen."[167]

---

[164] Lute, Interview (2018).
[165] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[166] Rumsfeld to Hadley, 30 May 2006, Box 121, Casey Papers, NDU.
[167] Zelikow, Oral History.

Yet if Rumsfeld alone was the cause of the bureaucratic bottleneck, Bush had a number of opportunities to remove him, but waited until the very day after the midterm elections to dismiss him, suggesting political timing was wholly interrelated in the matter. "He had been skeptical for [the] better part of a year," notes Jim Jeffrey, "but [he was] not willing until after [the] elections to take on Rumsfeld and Cheney."[168] Rumsfeld had offered to resign on a number of occasions before this time, including March 2006, a month after the Samarra bombing in Iraq. With political guru Karl Rove advising that firing Rumsfeld would place an albatross around GOP necks in the congressional election campaigns, the politically safer thing to do was to wait it out, thereby lengthening Rumsfeld's grip on Iraq strategy.[169] As emphatic as Jeffrey is about the detrimental role that Rumsfeld played in this decision-making process, he concludes: "This all broke because of the election. The election was a seminal event."[170]

Rumsfeld was not the only opponent of the "surge," of course. Many of the senior military officials around him, to whom Bush had previously deferred on questions of strategy, were additional obstacles to overcome. With his vantage point at the NSC, Feaver independently speculates that the delay may well have been down to a "respect or fear" of opposing General Casey, or concerns about a "revolt of the generals" among the Joint Chiefs. If Bush was going to overrule the chiefs, Feaver comments, it would have to be done "gradually, cajolingly." This was why Bush turned to studies by the likes of Keane, outside the formal military channels, using the ideas contained therein "as stalking horses to elicit JCS views gradually," rather than confronting the set of four-star generals with his own views outright.[171]

---

[168] Jeffrey, Email Correspondence, (2018).
[169] Rove, (2010) 466.
[170] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[171] Feaver (2011) 102.

Yet, again, this explanation cannot be disentangled from the electoral context. Admiral Mullen, then Chief of Naval Operations, is quite clear that the source of any concerns about countermanding the military were political in nature: "As powerful as presidents can be, they can't make these big moves without getting the military aboard, because politically they get crucified from the other side… they had to pull us through the knothole to get the chiefs support without the chiefs laying across the track and saying 'we're not doing that,' which would have been tough on them."[172] Under such circumstances, it was logical for the President to have waited until after the period of heightened political sensitivity – during election season – before going up against the grain of military opinion. As Harry Truman found out after firing General MacArthur in 1951, having a vocal critic with a litany of stars on his shoulder as you enter a campaign season did not make for an easy ride.

Bureaucratic politics is not simply about policy disagreement between actors, however, but the conflicting preferences of those actors based on Miles' Law ("where you stand depends on where you sit"). In turn, the reasons for the opposition of Rumsfeld and especially the military may plausibly have had a lot to do with parochialism regarding resources, much as Allison's classic model predicts. As suggested at the outset of this chapter, the constraints on military resources given the requirements of the war in Afghanistan were undoubtedly a serious factor, and they explain much of the opposition to the "surge." The official in charge of resource planning among the Joint Staff readily admitted to Zelikow in mid-2006 that there was no prospect for a troop increase because, frankly, "we're out of Schlitz" – there simply were no further brigades available for deployment, unless they wanted to "break the force" and damage the ability of the United States to respond to any other threats in the world.[173] Mike Mullen, then Chief of Naval

[172] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[173] Lute, Interview (2018).

Operations, recalls that, as part of the Chiefs' own determinations, "we thought, just from a readiness standpoint, the shape the Army was in, that two [brigades] was about max."[174] For these reasons, if the decision were left to the military, the "surge" was, according the John Sattler, the J-5, "not the top option, nor even in the top half."[175]

Yet if Bush appeared to tacitly accept such bureaucratic arguments through 2006, how can we explain why he suddenly rejected these arguments so forcefully in November and December of the same year? When confronted by the Chiefs in a crucial 13 December meeting with such complaints, President Bush pre-empted the challenge by offering to significantly expand the size of the armed forces with new funding. The pledge to pump resources into the depleted forces did not only placate the chiefs, who were responsible for allocating those resources, but it also served to further mollify the opposition of the commanding general. When Casey drafted a memorandum stating his objections to the "surge" strategy being proposed for the President, John Abizaid, the CENTCOM commander, advised him to scrap the letter, explaining that it was a done deal. "Look, this is all tied to decisions about increasing the size of the Army and the Marine Corps," Abizaid told Casey, "It's done, get out of the way."[176] In turn, according to Sattler, "had we decided to grow the Army and the Marine Corps earlier, then [the "surge"] may have been a more viable option earlier than it was."[177] In other words, there was a plausible route to overcome the military objections made on the grounds of resource limitations much earlier than December 2006. That Bush waited until after Election Day points again to political considerations determining the timing of this decision, not resource constraints.

[174] Mullen, Interview (2018). See also Woodward (2008) 243, 250-251.
[175] Sattler, Interview (2018).
[176] Casey, Interview (2018).
[177] Sattler, Interview (2018).

Indeed, the narrative of a slow, gentle process of consensus-building among the military by Bush does not fit with the recollection of either the combatant commander of the chiefs of this decision-making process. Having been excluded from all of the informal reviews, General Casey identified the November elections as a crucial turning point in Bush's appetite for something new. "It was the first videotelecon we did after the midterms. It was noticeable because he was always very ebullient. And he wasn't. He was just very direct and matter of fact. That was when I first kind of said, 'ok, there's something up here.' It was November, right in that early part of November... I honestly didn't perceive any change in his attitude until after that midterm election."[178] The five-brigade option that was eventually chosen, meanwhile, came from outside the military chain of command, and was "180 degrees out of sync with the uniformed military's view of things," recalls Doug Lute, adding, "it was imposed."[179] This was not a story of a president gently bringing his chiefs on board, but rather a president confronting them with a fait accompli after waiting until a politically sensitive context had passed after the election.

In explaining the pace of the drawdown in 2007 and 2008, the pressures of these resource constraints of course make much more logical sense on the surface, yet do not seem to accurately tell the whole story. For instance, while it remained true that the Joint Chiefs remained fully concerned with the stresses placed on the armed forces by sustained presence in Iraq, their concerns were less about getting total troops numbers down than decreasing the length of combat tour duties, which had been increased to fifteen months to help enable the "surge." General Casey, now Chief of Staff of the Army and still intellectually aligned to the value of handing over security responsibilities to the Iraqis, nonetheless admits that "the priority wasn't necessarily the brigades, it was getting off of

[178] Casey, Interview (2018).
[179] Lute, Interview (2018).

the 15 months deployment." In fact, on his first visit back to Iraq since leaving his position as commander, Casey told Petraeus that "we were going to be able to keep these brigades there longer than we had originally planned. I wanted him to know that before he came back for his testimony."[180] Besides, even if others among the Chiefs were in Petraeus' ear about the matter, Bush intervened on at least one occasion to tell Petraeus to ignore any pressure from the Chiefs regarding resource constraints.[181]

Psychological Constraints

Analogical reasoning does not appear to have been a key driver of Bush's decision to "surge." To be sure, others may have been guided by the availability of familiar events in the past. General Casey recalls how his experience in Bosnia in the 1990s shaped his thinking around the transition strategy, for instance. Consistent with Rumsfeld's belief that the U.S. should take its hand "off the bicycle seat," the central idea was that increased U.S. support would only prolong Iraqi dependence on American forces, and therefore it would be preferable to shift the responsibility to the Iraqis as soon as possible.[182] This kind of lesson was presented to Bush by others during 2006, too, with one outside adviser in June recalling T. E. Lawrence's guidance that it was "better the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not win it for them."[183] Indeed, it had been transcribed almost word-for-word into the February 2005 Joint Mission Statement governing U.S. strategy through 2006, which read in part: "Iraq's destiny belongs to Iraqis; they want to control it; and the more they do for themselves, the more they will value the results."[184] Yet while this would on the surface offer some explanation for the persistence

[180] Casey, Interview (2018).
[181] Gordon and Trainor (2012) 426.
[182] Casey, Interview (2018); Rumsfeld (2011) 679.
[183] Vickers to Bush, 12 June 2006, Box 121, Casey Papers, NDU.
[184] 7 February 2005, Box 117, Casey Papers, NDU.

with such a strategy through 2006, Bush does not appear to have personally bought into this analogy with any great vigour. Neither this, nor his critics' analogy of choice – Vietnam – appeared prevalent in any of the documents available from 2006. This, of course, does not necessarily mean such historical lessons did not shape Bush's thinking, but it is a striking comparison with Johnson's decision-making of 1965, for example, where evidence of the "Korea" analogy is abundant.

"Loss aversion," by contrast, offers a highly plausible alternative explanation for decision-making during this period, in general terms at least. That Bush in 2006 was in a domain of losses is fairly clear from the record presented above; he understood that things were going south in Iraq, and that therefore, as Doug Lute put it: "everything was on the line for him… he was deeply convinced of the efficacy of the struggle, and he saw that whole thing at risk."[185] According to prospect theory, individuals in this kind of a situation will be prone to taking excessive risks in order to avoid incurring losses. Since the "surge" was equally well understood to be a gamble, Bush's behaviour seems to correlate well with these dynamics.[186] Relatedly, having committed so many lives, time and reputation to the fight, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Bush was acting to recover sunk costs rather than go down in history as the president who "lost" a war. Bush confirms as much in his memoir, for instance, citing several letters he received at the time sharing a "common sentiment: Finish the job," as well as advice from his religious pastors that "we do not quit or give up." Bush approvingly concluded, "I couldn't let Iraq fail."[187] Perhaps for rhetorical flourish, but nonetheless consistent with all the available evidence in its thrust, he describes

[185] Lute, Interview (2018).
[186] See Dyson (2011).
[187] Bush (2010) 368-369.

being profoundly affected at this time by Edmund Burke's having written, "The only thing needed for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."[188]

Overconfidence, specifically about the efficacy of American military power, appears to have been a factor in Bush's behaviour, as it had been since the very start of the planning process for the invasion.[189] Just as his predecessors held unrealistic hopes about the ability of conventional forces to provide security against a flourishing insurgency in Vietnam, so too Bush seems to have concluded that a greater application of force could ultimately bring peace to Iraq. If, to be fair, Bush's selection of General Petraeus and his embrace of the strategic doctrine contained in the Army's new field manual reflected a wiser move towards traditional counterinsurgency practices, he still retained a rosy assumption that all that was needed for political progress was additional security. Yet while this may have been a necessary ingredient, critics of the "surge" reasonably point out that no amount of American military force could spark reconciliation between the deeply divided socio-political groups now in power in Iraq, without which lasting sectarian tension was bound to persist.

The main problem with these accounts, however, rests on the issue of timing. The record above suggests that the president's awareness of impending losses and optimistic preference for escalation emerged through early-to-mid 2006. Why, then, did he wait until November to act on this new understanding? If sunk costs were so critical to his decision-making process, what explains his willingness to watch them mount through 2006 without calling for the radical action he knew was needed? This chapter has argued that it is no coincidence that this shift in behavior took place precisely around early November, when the midterms took place. Again, the impact of psychological factors seems to have been

[188] *Ibid.* 368.
[189] Johnson (2004) ch. 8.

conditional on the phase of the electoral cycle. Prior to November 2006, Bush bottled up his doubts about the strategy; after the midterms, his risk-acceptance was permitted by his "lame duck" status.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated, first, that President Bush's response to a declining situation in Iraq was strongly conditioned by the *delay* effect. While conscious of the need to change strategy from early 2006, he instead chose to defer a full consideration of alternatives until after the congressional elections, whereupon he suddenly sprang into action, forcefully pushing a bold and risky counterinsurgency plan against overwhelming opposition. Then, in orchestrating a drawdown schedule of this increase in troops, he followed a plan devised by his Secretary of Defense which repeatedly tempered the conditions-based preference of his commander in favour of a plan which better reflected electoral realities, mitigating against the possibility of a Democratic platform which might consign Bush's signature foreign policy shift of his second term to the dustbin of history. Finally, the *spoiler* effect has been demonstrated to have been in full force in the negotiation of the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement, whereby Bush's leverage steadily eroded as the November elections drew closer, pushing the president away from a diplomatically optimal deal with strong terms on jurisdictions and condition-based drawdown timelines, and towards a withdrawal agreement that looked far more like the preferences of Prime Minister Maliki and Barack Obama.

~

Absent the presence of the 2006 midterms, it seems fair to speculate that President Bush might have opted to launch a strategy review at least six months before he did, and perhaps as early as the fall of 2005, when the State Department began seriously vocalizing their

concerns with the transition strategy in place, a Red Team had challenged fundamental aspects of Casey's approach, and a series of additional outside experts grew doubtful. An interagency consensus could have been established between the NSC and State Department, which may in turn have elicited alliances with the doubters in the intelligence community and the uniformed military. Even if the bureaucracy remained ambivalent, the decisiveness that Bush showed after the election, and indeed his willingness to overrule a firm majority of dissenters, could well have resulted in a decision to shift towards a population-centric counterinsurgency plan much earlier than was the case.

While the jury is still out on the true impact that the "surge" had on the turnaround in security in 2007, the general consensus is that it worked, at least militarily, bringing violence metrics down to manageable levels by the fall of 2007, enabling the development and spread of the so-called "Awakening," and opening up space for political reconciliation to occur.[190] Without discrediting much essential groundwork for such success being completed by General Petraeus' predecessors, an earlier influx of troops and change of mission might have resulted in similar progress much sooner. Critics of the "surge" point out that improved security is an insufficient ingredient for political stability, but it might reasonably be countered that it is at least necessary.[191] By waiting to make the change in strategy, then, Bush "clearly made a bad situation worse," notes Jim Jeffrey, pointing to the "further discombobulation of Iraq" that took place especially after February 2006.[192] An earlier decision, unencumbered by electoral pressures, therefore at least have saved countless Iraqi and American lives, and may ultimately have shortened the war.

On the pace of the drawdown, it seems likely that Bush may have given General Petraeus greater latitude to keep a full complement of forces in Iraq for longer. Given that

[190] See Biddle et al. (2012); Lebovic (2019) 97-104.
[191] See Casey (2012); Gentile (2013); and further commentary in the conclusion of this thesis.
[192] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).

violence metrics did indeed fall dramatically from late 2007 through 2008, it seems reasonable to conclude that additional troops were not essential by this stage; the missing piece of the puzzle was now political in nature, and political reconciliation in Baghdad was unlikely to be significantly affected by an additional one or two brigades. What might well have happened, however, was what Gates had in fact been warning against: without throwing a bone to the "bug-out" fever at home, the Democrats may well have ended up with a much more dovish platform on Iraq which could have forced a precipitate withdrawal. Whether one agrees with the wisdom of a continued U.S. presence in Iraq or not, the administration's electorally-informed approach in this closing phase of the Bush presidency seems in fact to have been a rational one, given the President's interest in forestalling a radical departure in military strategy in the Middle East.

As for the Status of Forces Agreement, given the unpredictable and fractious nature of Iraqi politics at this time, it would be foolish to place too much faith in any counterfactual deal. Bush would likely have held out for longer on jurisdictions and a withdrawal timeline, closer to the preferences of the expert diplomats who began this process. "He would have rather not agreed anything," agrees Negroponte, adding, "he would have rather strung out the negotiation."[193] Yet, against this, one must admit the possibility that the Iraqis may just as likely have walked away from such a deal, with untold consequences for security and political stability. It suffices to note, however, that the SOFA was a critical juncture in signaling the beginning of the end of formal American intervention in Iraq, and, absent the electoral pressures discussed here, it seems likely the both the negotiation process and the deal itself would have looked very different indeed.

[193] Negroponte, Interview (2018).

VI

Barack Obama and the Endgame in Iraq

> "Throughout this process [Obama] was weighing a number of factors and considerations, not just in terms of security requirements, but also some of those political dimensions, as it got closer to the elections."
>
> John Brennan[1]

By the time Barack Obama took office in 2009, the American intervention in Iraq had already been set on a path towards de-escalation. Following the "surge" of 2007, George W. Bush bequeathed to his successor a conflict in which a degree of stability had finally been reached. Almost six years after Saddam Hussein's removal from power, a sovereign Iraq could now look forward to the departure of U.S. troops by the end of 2011, under the terms of a SOFA signed in the final days of the Bush administration. As senior Obama advisers therefore understood, both the range of possible courses of action open to the forty-fourth president were significantly circumscribed. "President Bush had already put us on a withdrawal timeline by having reached an agreement to withdraw US forces by the end of 2011," explains Tony Blinken, National Security Advisor to the Vice President, "so the question really was the pace and means of that drawdown."[2] "Because the *fundamental* shift of strategy had already happened under Bush's watch," clarifies Michèle Flournoy, Obama's Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, "it was really a question, for Obama, of do I continue on this path, do I tweak it in some way, or do I abandon it?"[3]

Obama's decisions regarding the pace and finality of the drawdown in Iraq is the object of analysis in this chapter. Specifically, it first explores the development of Obama's

[1] Brennan, Interview (2018).
[2] Blinken, Interview (2018).
[3] Flournoy, Interview (2018).

"Responsible Plan to End the War," announced in February 2009, which put U.S. forces on an expedited withdrawal timetable. Secondly, it examines the subsequent debate over the size of a residual force which was widely expected to remain in Iraq after the 2008 SOFA expired, culminating instead in an October 2011 decision to pull the plug on American involvement altogether.

This episode serves as a relatively "hard" case for the overall claim that presidential decision-making is constrained by electoral pressures, partly due to the nature of Obama's inheritance. With the major muscle movements of the war having already taken place, Obama's decisions concerning troop commitments may be considered relatively minor adjustments to military strategy. As such, amid growing concerns about the onset of a global recession, the salience of Obama's choices in Iraq were relatively low. Furthermore, unlike Eisenhower and Nixon, President Obama had consistently opposed American intervention in the war he now inherited, and as such was arguably less susceptible to domestic political punishment for its outcome. Having argued against the so-called "dumb war" in his 2002 Senate campaign, his anti-war credentials were the centrepiece of his political rise thereafter, becoming a wedge issue with Hilary Clinton, who had voted for the war, and a further point of contrast with John McCain, an unreconstructed "surgionista."[4] Of course, as this chapter will demonstrate, Obama would be held accountable for delivering on his promise of a "responsible" exit from the war, yet the potential audience costs he faced in handling a war everyone knew he considered wrong-headed from the outset were surely lower than those of his forebears, who had variously promised the more challenging goal of "peace" in ongoing conflicts in Korea and Vietnam.

Iraq was not the only policy challenge facing President Obama. On the campaign trail, he made no secret of his greater interest in what he called "nation-building at home." This

[4] See Jacobson (2010).

orientation towards domestic issues has been associated by both friends and critics of the administration with a much more modest conception of the efficacy of American military power.[5] To the extent that Obama was interested in the ongoing conflicts in the wider Middle East region, it was the fight against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan – the "good" war – which in his view should benefit from a rebalancing of resources. Both of these contextual points are significant in framing the analysis that follows, for they arguably pre-disposed Obama towards a quicker and more final extraction from Iraq. Indeed, as Flournoy put it, Obama's Iraq review in early 2009 was all about "interpreting the requirements of phased transition [i.e. withdrawal] with much finer detail, in the context of another likely competing mission. After 2003, Iraq became the resourcing priority, Afghanistan was economy of force. This is now almost going to flip."[6]

Nevertheless, this chapter still offers significant support for a number of theoretical claims made in this thesis. At a general level, the strength of electoral pressures is shown clearly to vary across the electoral calendar in a non-linear pattern. Early on, if Obama's strategic preference made a decision to expedite the withdrawal of U.S. forces likely, his relative freedom from electoral constraints at this stage of the cycle is wholly anticipated during this "honeymoon" phase. Later, however, both as the midterms approached and as the 2012 presidential race loomed, the influence of electoral considerations rose significantly, again as predicted by this study's conceptual framework.

At a more specific level, this chapter also offers striking evidence for a number of causal mechanisms outlined earlier in this thesis. First, the extent to which the nature of Obama's "responsible" plan was shaped by the specific pledges Obama made on the campaign trail is highly suggestive of the *hangover* mechanism. Second, in deferring

[5] Friends include: Chollet (2016); Rhodes (2018). Critics include: Gerges (2012); Dueck (2015).
[6] Flournoy, Interview (2018).

consideration of a prospective follow-on force so as not to have Iraq be a "political football" in the congressional elections, the *delay* mechanism can be observed. Finally, and most importantly, in steadily eroding proposals for that residual force, we see clear evidence of the *dampening* mechanism. As this chapter concludes, the net effect of these electoral pressures served to push Obama towards the ultimate abandonment of Iraq in late 2011, with serious consequences for the future stability of the country.

A Responsible Plan to End the War

On 27 February 2009, just five weeks after becoming President, Barack Obama announced the results of a 30-day strategic review of the war in Iraq. The withdrawal of U.S. troops was to be placed on an expedited timetable, he said, with all "combat" forces out by 31 August 2010, to be followed by all those remaining by the end of 2011.[7] Promising to bring the war to an end "responsibly," the Iraqis would once more pick up the burden of providing security in their own country, as the new administration sought to shift the nature and depth of U.S. engagement in the Middle East.

According to the conceptual framework outlined in chapter I, electoral constraints should operate weakly in the period following a president's election, with decisions broadly reflecting their strategic preference. To the extent that constraints exert any influence, it is likely to be limited to the *hangover* mechanism, whereby a president must contend with the confines of his earlier campaign commitments, depending on their specificity and the size of his margin of victory. In Obama's case, both points can be substantiated. While the acceleration of the troop drawdown may largely be predicted by the President's prior

[7] "Remarks of President Barack Obama - Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq," 27 February 2009. Available online at: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-ndash-responsibly-ending-war-iraq (accessed 20 September 2019).

beliefs about the utility of a continued presence in Iraq, it is nonetheless striking how far the internal debate was conducted *explicitly* in terms of Obama's campaign promise.

Promises to Keep? The Search for a "Sweet Spot"

Obama's opposition to the Iraq War was well-known by the time he assumed office. During the campaign, however, he elaborated on exactly how he would manage the closing stages of the conflict. In a *New York Times* article published in July 2008, he advocated a 16-month withdrawal timetable for U.S. combat troops, a schedule which would free up at least two brigades to be sent to Afghanistan.[8] Compared to Eisenhower's pledge to simply "go to Korea," or Nixon's "secret plan" in Vietnam, his was a highly specific programme. While his margin of victory was comfortable, winning 365 Electoral College votes to McCain's 173, his call for a "responsible" end to the war established a tangible and unambiguous pledge for which he could be held accountable.

Even before Obama's inauguration, the President-elect learned that the military were sceptical of his proposed timeline. Believing that even the original deadline of December 2011 was "achievable but the risk is high," the commander in the field prepared an options paper for the incoming President in which the 16-month timeline was said to carry an "extremely high" level of risk.[9] Noting the fragility of Iraqi institutions and ongoing security challenges, General Odierno recommended that if Obama was set on expediting Bush' timetable, the fastest pace he could recommend was a 23-month drawdown. Fearing that Obama's support for a linear staircase reduction of a brigade a month was also more drastic than conditions could permit, he pressed for authority to stagger the pace of the withdrawal, so as to keep as many troops in Iraq for as long as feasible.

---

[8] Obama, "My Plan for Iraq," 14 July 2008, *New York Times*.
[9] Odierno to Mullen, 6 December 2008, Box 23, Casey Papers, NDU; Gordon and Trainor (2012) 560-580.

When Obama called the Joint Chiefs to the White House on his first day in office (as, indeed, he had also promised to do on the campaign trail), the bureaucratic positions were therefore clear. The objective of the 30-day review, Obama told his advisers, was to find a "sweet spot" between his campaign pledge and the recommendations of the commander in the field.[10] Not facing voters again for another four years, there might be some flexibility to adapt his campaign promise to assuage the military's concerns, yet this was understood to be temporally bound. As Biden had reportedly told the generals on a trip to Baghdad during the transition, "the incoming administration had about a year to show progress before the far left in the Democratic party called for the soldiers to be withdrawn."[11]

Squaring the Political Circle

If the parameters of this decision-making process were defined explicitly in terms of Obama's campaign commitments, we should also expect to observe evidence that this electoral *hangover* materially affected the proposed course of action and was not simply discarded in the face of countervailing advice. According to the testimony of senior officials involved in the review process, this was indeed the case, as the nature, pace and finality of the proposed drawdown plan was massaged explicitly to suit Obama's pledge.

The first key concessions to the military's plan entailed some semantic sleight of hand. Noticing that Obama's speeches during the campaign had left more "rhetorical wiggle room" than had been anticipated, the campaign's Iraq specialist, Colin Kahl, wrote an anonymous memorandum to the transition team, setting out ways the plan could be repackaged to assuage the military's concerns. Most notably, every time Obama spoke about getting troops out, he mentioned "combat" troops. He had also on occasion spoken

[10] Quoted in Gordon and Trainor (2012) 560.
[11] Sky (2015) 272.

on the possible need to leave behind a follow-on force of unspecified size, who would be tasked with a series of "residual missions", including training and small-scale counterterrorism operations. "That gives you some space", argued Kahl, who would shortly assume duties as the Pentagon's working lead on the strategic review, explaining that "the only thing that had to change was the 'combat' modifier". To ease things further, Kahl noted that Obama had offered a caveat during 2008, that he would retain an openness to listening to the commanders in the field and making any necessary adjustments as appropriate within the overall objective of withdrawing "responsibly".[12]

Over the next couple of weeks, the idea of introducing an additional milestone into the Iraq drawdown process was debated and adopted. A mid-point – serving as "a political marker" – between the start of the drawdown and the December 2011 SOFA-mandated deadline for total withdrawal would be set, whereby the "combat phase" of the American military's commitment to Iraq would end. After this point, all remaining troops would be given new "advise and assist" missions. The composition of these forces would be notionally altered, with a few more engineers, training specialists and civil affairs personnel, but, importantly, these would be additional to the existing standard brigade combat team. As Odierno's Political Advisor approvingly notes, "it's the same soldiers. Same guys, different mission."[13] In other words, what looked like a significant strategic shift in the military mission – it would even get a shiny new name: Operation *New Dawn* – was in fact a mostly a rhetorical fudge which said more about the Obama administration's desire to deliver on its promises than to implement the long-held strategic preference of the president.

[12] Kahl, Interview (2018).
[13] Sky, Interview (2018).

Exactly when the "combat" phase would end was in theory more problematic, since the 16-month promise was both explicit and oft-repeated. Again, however, there was some "rhetorical wiggle room" Obama could take advantage of. Namely, on the campaign website, the 16-month pledge was not given a specific start date. Of course, the natural assumption would be that this meant 16 months from Obama's inauguration. Yet the White House press team could simply say he meant 16 months from the date on which the strategy review was concluded, giving an additional month to play with. If the military's 23-month recommendation remained a stretch, Bob Gates' compromise suggestion of 19-months – selected apparently for no other reason than it was halfway between the campaign commitment and the military's preference – was quickly embraced. "I'm okay with that," Obama told Gates, adding, "It's also good politically."[14] As Derek Chollet, a senior national security aide, recalled, "Obama accepted this counsel, settling on a compromise that allowed him to stay true to his campaign commitments."[15] By the time the month-long strategy review was completed, the 19 would become 18, and that could be – and was – skated over very quickly in Obama's speech.

As for the pace of the drawdown within this concept, the Obama administration displayed a further willingness to bend. Not only could the military keep hold of much of their resources beyond the 16-month timeframe, but Washington would let the commanders on the ground decide how to get to this new milestone. More interested in massaging the nuances of the headline commitment to leave Iraq – the main headline that voters cared about – Obama was less wedded to his original idea of a linear staircase reduction in troops as the means to do it. When pressed, those on the campaign bus admitted that not much rigorous analysis had been put into the question of the constituent pace of the drawdown,

[14] Quoted in Gates (2014) 325.
[15] Chollet (2016) 75.

anyway. Doug Lute, retained as "war czar" by the incoming administration, quizzed Obama's top foreign policy adviser, Mark Lippert, on the thinking behind the figure. "Well, that came from the campaign," he admitted, "we figured logistically you do a brigade a month, and we thought there would be 15 brigades," giving an additional month to complete the strategy review. "So we knew we were starting from a political aspiration, more than anything like what the conditions would tolerate, or what was logistically doable," recalls Lute. "It was a very soft opening premise."[16] As it was, General Odierno requested and received authority to retain the majority of his forces until after the Iraqi elections of spring 2010, a period he assessed in a memo to be the "window of highest risk", before a sharp drawdown leading up to the change of mission.[17]

The final piece of the puzzle was the size of the residual force which would remain after the change of mission. Odierno's paper had originally proposed a figure of 50,000-55,000, but allowed for a bare-bones option of 35,000. Any lower would be a "red line" for Odierno, who would prefer to cut losses and withdraw virtually all troops than to go any lower.[18] Much to the surprise of the military, Obama seemed to accept the higher figure in the final deliberations, announcing an intention to leave a follow-on force of between 35,000 and 50,000 troops after the end of the "combat" phase. While this still upset Obama's Democratic supporters in Congress, his flexibility again suggests a relative lack of vulnerability to such political pressure at this stage of the electoral cycle.

~

In this opening phase of Obama's presidency, then, the President's electoral promises offered relatively mild constraints which were manipulated to satisfy concerns about strategic optimality. "What this set of compromises allowed us to do," recalls Kahl, "was

[16] Lute, Interview (2018).
[17] Quoted in Gordon and Trainor (2012) 573.
[18] *Ibid.* 567-574.

essentially take Obama's campaign pledge to be all out over the course of 16 months, to reducing from 14 brigades to 6 with a different mission over 18 months. And it could be argued that it wasn't a violation of anything he said during the campaign, because he said there would be a residual force, they would have these missions, and he'd listen to his commanders. So that seemed to kind of square the political circle."[19]

"Going to Zero"

On 15 December 2011, a military ceremony was held in Baghdad bringing the formal U.S. mission in Iraq to a close. Though technically the Americans were fulfilling the terms of President Bush's SOFA, it did not have to be this way. In fact, between late 2010 and October 2011 there was an intense debate within the Obama administration about how many troops would be left in Iraq on residual missions of training the Iraqi Security Forces and counterterrorism operations. That Obama would "go to zero" in October was not by any means foreordained. "I always thought it was going to be a question of how much or how little would remain," recalls John Brennan, adding, "I was, frankly, surprised, when it went from a discussion of how many troops to just pulling out. I didn't see that coming."[20]

Drawing on the insights of those directly involved, this section demonstrates how the electoral cycle played a key role in conditioning the Obama administration's willingness to leave a residual force and negotiate a renewed SOFA. Having *delayed* taking up the issue until after the 2010 midterms, the White House belatedly picked up the question of a follow-on force over the winter. Then, as the 2012 campaign season drew nearer, the political optics of leaving troops in theatre began to outweigh the perceived benefits to the administration. As such, a series of proposals related to the size of the follow-on force were

[19] Kahl, Interview (2018).
[20] Brennan, Interview (2018).

rejected, in an iterated process typical of the *dampening* effect. The administration's appetite for retaining "boots on the ground" diminished over time until finally, and against the preferences of a strong majority of national security officials, Obama decided the effort of pushing through even a small residual force was not worth the political backlash it might engender considering he had, after all, promised a full withdrawal from Iraq.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Throughout this period, there was broad consensus within the Obama administration that the strategically optimal course of action entailed the retention of a significant component of troops in Iraq after December 2011. As we will see, some, including General Odierno and Admiral Mullen, were more bullish than others on exactly how many troops would be required. Yet even those with more modest recommendations were clear that "going to zero" was sub-optimal. For the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, for instance, even in a downsized capacity, the role of special forces, air support and intelligence was deemed critical as an "enabler" for local security forces. While many took issue with his top-line figures and manner of briefing them, there was little debate about the importance of retaining at least these functions; "I got really no pushback on the tailoring side of this question," recalls Cartwright.[21] The president's chief counterterrorism adviser similarly cautioned against a full withdrawal: "I was a supporter of maintaining a presence, mainly to enable the Iraqi forces to be able to transition to full time and complete responsibility on the counterterrorism front," recalls Brennan, "I was in favour of the train and advise/assist mission continuing."[22]

[21] Cartwright, Interview (2018).
[22] Brennan, Interview (2018).

To these voices one might add both of the Secretaries of Defense who served in this period, as well as their deputy responsible for policy planning. Gates records his belief, for instance, that "a substantial U.S. military presence was needed post-2011 to help keep Iraq stabilized, to continue training and supporting their security forces, and to signal our friends in the region—and Iran—that we weren't abandoning the field."[23] His successor, Leon Panetta, advocated a similar position, believing that "withdrawing all our forces would endanger the fragile stability then barely holding Iraq together."[24] Below their level, Michèle Flournoy worked similarly hard behind closed doors on proposals to shape a follow-on force because "I thought it was going to be very critical to our ability to continue to have leverage to shape Iraqi politics."[25]

Importantly, the White House seemed to agree that some sort of residual ground commitment was strategically optimal. "I thought that he was open to a follow-on agreement and leaving a residual force," recalls Flournoy.[26] Indeed, according to those closest to the White House, such as Tony Blinken, "the President really was open to this smaller footprint in terms of a follow-on force." As National Security Advisor to the Vice President, who had been delegated responsibility for Iraq policy by Obama, he is certain on what the administration saw as the strategic necessity: "making sure that we continued to have some forces on the ground that could work with the Iraqis, to continue to train them, to prosecute the counterterrorism mission."[27] Perhaps even stronger proof in hindsight is the fact that, as explored below, Obama himself eventually chaired a series of NSC meetings through the spring of 2011, the net result of which was an approval on 19 May of a provisional plan to leave 10,000 troops in Iraq.

---

[23] Gates (2014) 553.
[24] Panetta (2014) 393.
[25] Flournoy, Interview (2018).
[26] Flournoy, Interview (2018).
[27] Blinken, Interview (2018).

From an electoral perspective, however, there was a clear political risk associated with such a course of action. Having pledged to extricate U.S. forces in Iraq in his 2008 campaign, and having already compromised on the pace of the drawdown, Obama understood that he would be held accountable by voters for any failure to abide by his earlier promise. Indeed, looking back, some former administration officials feel that the strength of Obama's electoral preference was transparent from the start. "Look at what he said in the campaign," argues Lute, who was retained as "war czar" on the NSC by Obama, noting that "presidents tend to do what they said."[28] For Admiral Mullen, similarly, "it was very clear; you go back to his campaign promise, and it was going to be zero, it's just this question of how we were going to get there."[29] The campaign pledge to end the war in Iraq served, as Brennan puts it, as "a backdrop against anything that his administration might decide to do."[30]

Faced with such a clear imbalance between strategic and electoral preferences, how did Obama respond? Given that the political pressure pointed towards disengagement, whereas the logic of strategic necessity pointed towards continued engagement, this dissertation's conceptual framework predicts that *delay* or *dampening* mechanisms may be present. The next two sections show this to have been the case, as the weight accorded to Obama's electoral preference rose and fell depending on the stage of the electoral cycle.

Phase One: Kicking the "Political Football" Down the Road

When faced with a clear need to take a politically controversial decision, a President is likely to defer incurring the associated audience costs until a less politically sensitive phase of the electoral cycle. In mid-2010, when the military and Department of Defense pressed

[28] Lute, Interview (2018).
[29] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[30] Brennan, Interview (2018).

the administration to engage in a discussion regarding an extension of American intervention in Iraq, something which flew against Obama's electoral preference, the decision was indeed kicked into the long grass until after the midterm campaign, in a classic example of the *delay* mechanism.

The first observable implication of this mechanism – evidence that a decision was deemed necessary – is simple enough to demonstrate. Given the existing December 2011 deadline, a decision regarding what came after was time-sensitive, as the uniformed military understood. If they were really headed for a full withdrawal, then the final decisions about closing up bases and processing redeployments were needed well in advance of the that deadline. "If the military's going to get out," agrees Flournoy, "it's a major, major operation."[31] For this reason, then, as Kahl acknowledges, "the real deadline was the fall of 2011."[32] Even more time-sensitive, however, was the diplomatic side of the coin. If troops were to remain, a new SOFA would need to be negotiated with the Iraqi government. As seen in the previous chapter, it took almost two years to agree the last one, and with Iraqi public opinion increasingly agitated about the continued presence of U.S. troops, it was likely to be a complicated process once more. A decision on the post-2011 U.S. commitment to Iraq was necessary because of the ultimate 2011 deadline, then, and for reasons of military logistics and diplomatic process it was a case of the sooner the better.

Secondly, that attempts were made to spark this discussion is also apparent. "It was very clear to us," recalls Kahl, "we were having quiet conversations about what a follow-on force would look like in 2010. Every time I went to Iraq, I would sit down with General Austin, we talked about these things."[33] Flournoy, Kahl's boss, agrees, admitting that the combatant commanders in Iraq "put this on the table pretty early on" – as soon as the

[31] Flournoy, Interview (2018).
[32] Kahl, Interview (2018).
[33] Kahl, Interview (2018).

"combat" troops left in August 2010, and even before, Generals Odierno and Austin repeatedly stressed that "we're going to have to start thinking about this, we're going to have to start deciding."[34] Any failure to take up the debate in late 2010 was not caused by a lack of understanding of the criticality of making a decision.

First-hand testimony explicitly states that the reason why the White House deferred active discussion through much of 2010 was electoral in nature. "It was very clear that the system was to have no discussions of a follow-on force until the Iraqi government was formed and we got past the midterm elections, our own midterm elections, so that politics didn't enter into the equation," recalls Kahl, adding, "we didn't want this to become a political football in the midterm elections and [therefore] we weren't going to talk about it right on the eve of our midterm elections."[35] This is consistent with the recollection of Flournoy, who agrees that "it took a while to get folks really focused and engaged," and that until that point, "this was *not* a major public discussion" outside of the Pentagon.[36] It also aligns temporally with the recollection of three of the members of the Joint Chiefs, who agree that it was only in the weeks after the midterms that concrete proposals could be sent to the White House.[37]

Finally, it also makes logical political sense. At a time when reports of ongoing violence was making Iraq front-page news again, after months on the political back-burner, any hint that the U.S. was planning on sticking around in Iraq was hardly likely to go down well with a majority of voters.[38] Indeed, in this respect it is instructive to note that to the

---

[34] Flournoy, Interview (2018).
[35] Kahl, Interview (2018).
[36] Flournoy, Interview (2018); Interview (2018).
[37] Mullen, Interview (2018); Cartwright, Interview (2018); Casey, Interview (2018).
[38] "War in Iraq Defies U.S. Timetable for End of Combat," 3 July 2010, *New York Times*. Prior to this point, Iraq had been tracking lowly in polls, with just two percent considering it the biggest challenge facing the country: USA Today/Gallup Poll, June 11-13, 2010. Available online at: https://news.gallup.com/poll/141275/economy-dominates-nation-important-problem.aspx (accessed 21 September 2019).

extent that the administration did take an active interest in Iraq through 2010, it was in a further effort to reduce the salience of the conflict as a political issue by brokering a solution to the impasse that followed the Iraqi elections of March.[39] Again interested in a quick solution rather than an optimal one, Biden reportedly told the military command in a 4 July meeting that Obama had told him, "I need a government in place before our mid-term elections in November… which meant that the easiest way, the quickest way, would be maintaining the status quo."[40] "The way things worked, if you're six months out from an election, everything is a possible threat," says Jim Jeffrey, who would soon be appointed Ambassador, adding, "there are two dozen things you worry about and your job is to worry about them and take care of them. So, I'm sure, to check that box, it was to form a government."[41] It was at this point that a senior military official began to ask himself, "is this going to be all about politics?"[42]

Electoral pressures, then, created something of a moratorium on discussions concerning a matter all agreed was time-sensitive, and a broader bias towards preserving the status quo in Iraq. By delaying the real start of the interagency discussion about a future military presence until the New Year, "we were already on the clock," admits Kahl, who acknowledges that the electorally-induced delay made everything that followed harder to achieve from the outset.[43]

Phase Two: Withdrawal by a Thousand Cuts

After the midterms, the administration could finally begin discussions of the politically sensitive issue of whether to keep troops on in Iraq. Unlike Bush, however, who entered a

[39] For detailed accounts of this issue, see Sky (2015); Hill (2014); Gordon and Trainor (2012).
[40] Sky, Interview (2018).
[41] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[42] Interview (2018).
[43] Kahl, Interview (2018).

"lame duck" period after the 2006 midterms, Obama still had to face the voters in a re-election campaign in two years' time, so electoral constraints did not simply dissipate. Instead, the reference point changed. Now looking ahead to the 2012 presidential race, Obama needed to approach the decision at hand with a keen eye on minimising the electoral risk of any proposed course of action. In practice, this manifested in a waning appetite for a follow-on force as the 2012 campaign approached, substantiating both the claim that the influence of electoral pressures increases as an election approaches and, more specifically, the *dampening* mechanism.

~

That Obama was now willing to engage in a discussion of the post-2011 commitment is on one level reflective of the release of electoral constraints which had suppressed such a dialogue in 2010. Now looking ahead, a follow-on force initially had some appeal, acting as an insurance policy against Iraq collapsing into conflict in the lead up to the 2012 race. As Jim Jeffrey explains:

> "You're president, ok, it's late 2010, you're going to be running for re-election in 2012. That's all you can fucking think about then. The main way you think about it is not what great things you can do for the American people – [but] what can screw this thing up, where can I trip up and fall? And that's foreign policy. That's Harry Truman in 1952. That's LBJ in 1968… Foreign policy really can blow up your presidency. Knowing that… he was like, 'I don't want anything to go wrong that I can be blamed for having been the cause of it. Iraq seems to be going well. Why not try to keep troops on, so that the troops might be able to fix something that starts going wrong?"[44]

Yet if Obama, a president whose political career rested in large part on opposition to the Iraq War, was now willing to accept some troop presence after 2011, he was not about to write a blank cheque to the military. Indeed, in the year that followed the November

[44] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).

2010 elections, proposals would be screened for their political acceptability, with troop numbers repeatedly cut in a manner correlating well with the increasing proximity of the 2012 campaign and resurgent political sensitivity that came with it.

When the military first briefed concrete proposals in December 2010, for instance, they rang alarm bells among the more politically aware civilian leadership. General Lloyd Austin, commander of all U.S. forces in Iraq, recommended a 20,000-24,000 strong residual force. Pentagon officials, conscious of the likely reaction of the White House, tried to head such higher numbers off as soon as they were proposed. In Kahl's telling, as soon as General Austin mentioned the headline figure, his boss intervened and said words to the effect of: "'Lloyd, this isn't going to work. A president who campaigned on not leaving a Korea style presence in perpetuity in Iraq is not going to leave a Korea style presence in Iraq. That's not going to happen. This is dead on arrival and it's actually going to hurt you in the White House.'"[45] Indeed, Flournoy recalls that "it was just not even in the ballpark from a White House perspective… The initial number that CENTCOM put forward was way beyond what they were expecting, so DoD was asked to go back to the drawing board and massage the tasks and the role of a follow-on force, and redo the troop to task analysis, to try to come up with something that was more modest but would still fulfil the mission objectives."[46] The military's first proposal, then, had categorically failed the screening test of political acceptability before even reaching the President's desk, as the *dampening* effect would suggest, and the search for ever lower numbers began in earnest.

When Austin came back, he brought with him a broader range of options, with a preference for 19,000, a minimum acceptable option of 16,000, and a bare bones proposal of 10,000. The reaction in the White House, however, was sticker shock. Within a few

[45] Kahl, Interview (2018).
[46] Flournoy, Interview (2018).

weeks, the proposals on the table had shrunken again to options going as low as 8,000, with a ceiling of 16,000.[47] The apparent allergy to the military's recommendations prompted Admiral Mullen to author a rare memorandum laying out his concerns with pursuing several critical missions with a threadbare force. The Chairman was, as he recalls, squarely behind his combatant commander's prior assessment: "basically the ten [thousand] was equal to zero. You can put the ten thousand there, but we can't accomplish the mission with that. That was the floor. This was an important part of the process: each time the number got smaller, I pushed hard to say ok, you've got to tell me what the mission is here, because if it is twenty-eight or twenty-five, that mission is different from fifteen or sixteen, and basically from ten on down, the mission assigned could not be achieved. It's a physics problem at that point, pure and simple. And it would have been irresponsible, if in fact dangerous, for me not to say so."[48] The memorandum was as unwelcome as Austin's own recommendations, landing at the Oval Office with "a thud; they didn't want to hear it."[49] In Gordon and Trainor's account, the President's National Security Advisor, Tom Donilon, felt "the military was boxing in the White House and creating a potentially political liability. Imagine if it leaked!... The White House did not like it when the military delivered PowerPoint briefs with 'high risk' stamped in red on the low troop options, and Donilon liked Mullen's letter even less."[50]

Fortunately for Donilon and his colleagues, there was a black sheep among the military prepared to speak up for the politically appealing lower figures the White House was hoping for. General Cartwright wrote a dissent from Mullen's letter and proceeded to, in a series of briefings with White House representatives, including the Vice President, explore

[47] Gordon and Trainor (2012) 656.
[48] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[49] *Ibid*. See also Rayburn and Sobchak (2019) Vol. 2, 541-542.
[50] Gordon and Trainor (2012) 657.

several options which went down as low as 3,000, or even 1,000 with additional forces just outside theatre in Kuwait. This idea of a rapid reaction force based just across the border captivated Donilon, ever conscious of the political realities, even though it was later denigrated by Mullen as a "half-baked idea" which was "blind to reality."[51] Indeed, according to Cartwright himself, "my position was not well received by the military… it was just heresy, and remained so."[52] Still, the headline figures were lower, and as such Cartwright's proposals got traction among the political types. Having a four-star general endorse smaller force structures was critical in legitimating the White House's embrace of numbers lower than the rest of the military was comfortable with. In a 19 May meeting, President Obama signaled he was happy to proceed with a proposal of up to 10,000 troops.

With several American delegations now finally authorized to begin discussions with the Iraqis about a renewed SOFA, important figures in both the U.S. and Iraq remained convinced of the strategic logic of a sizeable residual force. During the spring and summer, the Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Army and Commanding General of Iraqi Special Operations Forces publicly spoke of the need for continued American presence, even until as late as 2020.[53] Senior civilian figures, including the Iraqi Foreign Minister, had also relayed to the U.S. Ambassador that they had been clear with the Prime Minister that Iraq "needs the United States to stay," and that, in turn, Maliki had responded, "of course we need them to stay."[54] Similarly convinced of the necessity of such a contingency, General Austin intentionally delayed the beginning of the drawdown, holding onto almost 50,000 troops until as late as August so as to provide "flexibility" for the prospect of a bigger follow-on force.[55] The need to stick at least to the latest iteration of the plan was underscored in an

[51] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[52] Cartwright, Interview (2018).
[53] Rayburn and Sobchak (2019) Vol. 2, 543.
[54] "United States Forces-Iraq Quarterly Command Report, 2d Quarter (1 January - 31 March 2011), FY11," 1 May 2011, CENTCOM Papers, AMHI.
[55] *Ibid*.

American military report of July which noted that the previous quarter ended with the highest number of combat deaths in three years, concluding, "that the conflict in Iraq is not yet over and that it remains a dangerous place."[56]

Yet back home the continued financial cost of war soon began to cause the administration to become uncomfortable with the 10,000-figure. This comes through in Leon Panetta's memoir, where he laments how war-weary Democrats and small-government Tea Party Republicans united on the desire to reduce the "staggering investment" of men and materiel in Iraq as a way to make overall budgetary savings. "In a town where the two parties agreed on almost nothing," regrets the Secretary of Defense, "they suddenly settled on the consensus that we could dramatically cut defense spending during wartime."[57] It was in this context that Tony Blinken and Denis McDonough took a tour of Iraq, meeting various generals on the ground and exploring different options for alternative force commitments. According to Blinken, "we came back with the conclusion that the initial footprint that we were looking at was probably larger than the Iraqis could digest, and we wanted to get to yes with them."[58] The U.S. Ambassador accepts that on one level, this is fair (notwithstanding the important point that privately "the Iraqis didn't give a shit about the numbers" and were prepared to have as many as 20,000 if they could get it through their Parliament). All the same, for Jim Jeffrey, "they were the skeptics… these guys, along with Ben Rhodes, didn't like it", and, faced with the task of justifying lower numbers to the majority of the uniformed military who were opposed to them, they were only really in Iraq "looking for reasons."[59] Perhaps unsurprisingly, they found them. By scaling back military footprint around checkpoints in the North, Blinken and McDonough

[56] "United States Forces-Iraq Quarterly Command Report, 3rd Quarter, FY11 (1 April - 30 June 2011)," CENTCOM Papers, AMHI.
[57] Panetta (2014) 370.
[58] Blinken, Interview (2018).
[59] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).

argued that the residual troops presence could go as low as 3,500, with an additional rotating component of 1,500. Obama endorsed these proposals in a meeting of 13 August.

~

It was not simply iterative screening of proposals for political acceptability which marked this decision-making process, however. In another sign that the *dampening* mechanism was in operation, it seems that Obama's willingness to water down the proposals for a follow-on force may also have been facilitated by his belief that drones might be able to substitute for "boots on the ground" when it came to conducting the counterterrorism missions he contemplated in Iraq.

Turning away from counterinsurgency strategy, which had become something of a doctrinal zeitgeist since the "surge," Obama's pivot towards counterterrorism in Iraq and the wider Middle East was reflective of a greater sensitivity to incurring casualties. "By definition counterterrorism involves less commitment of resources, personnel on the ground, a real presence, than a counterinsurgency," explains John Brennan, Obama's chief counterterrorism adviser at the time, adding that this "was in keeping with what President Obama campaigned for, in terms of reducing our engagement in these foreign wars and trying to extricate ourselves."[60] Indeed, in the years to come, both Obama and Brennan would publicly speak of the comparative benefits of counterterrorism and the use of drones in ways which align well with the logic of electoral accountability. Drones were a less costly alternative to "boots on the ground," explained Obama, pointing out that using U.S. forces would entail "more U.S. deaths, more Black Hawks down."[61] That speech tallied with Brennan's earlier address in which he described drones as a "wise" alternative "tool"

[60] Brennan, Interview (2018).
[61] "Remarks by the President at the National Defense University," 23 May 2013. Available online at: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university (accessed 21 September 2019).

for counterterrorism operations "because they dramatically reduce the danger to U.S. personnel, even eliminating the danger altogether."[62]

While these public statements came after Obama's decision-making on Iraq, amid pressure to reduce the secrecy around targeted killings, they are nonetheless instructive signs of how the President assessed the utility of apparently substitutable "tools" for counterterrorism missions, such as those he was beginning to contemplate moving towards in Iraq after 2011. Much as Bush sought to move to less casualty-intensive strategies in the lead up to the 2006, or Lyndon Johnson sought to embrace covert operations to keep any aggressive actions away from voters in 1964, so Obama felt the use of drones could offset the strategic costs of the politically important decision to extricate U.S. forces from Iraq.

Most importantly, according to the architect of Obama's drone programme, it may well have been the case that the faith placed in such technology created permissive conditions for Obama's embrace of ever-lower numbers when it came to proposals for a follow-on force beyond 2011. "I think that was certainly in the minds of many who were concerned about the risk to U.S. forces and deaths and casualties that we suffered in Iraq," says Brennan, admitting that some senior officials "had an inflated view about the ability to replace an on the ground presence with a more technical capability, such as drones."[63]

~

On 21 October 2011, Obama and Prime Minister Maliki concluded that negotiations over a renewed SOFA were at a dead end, and since the Pentagon's lawyers deemed it essential to have a Parliamentary approved agreement, the formal American military commitment to Iraq would cease at the end of the year. For some administration officials, it was indeed the

[62] "Text of John Brennan's Speech on Drone Strikes," 30 April 2012. Available online at: https://www.lawfareblog.com/text-john-brennans-speech-drone-strikes-today-wilson-center (accessed 21 September 2019).
[63] Brennan, Interview (2018).

political climate in Iraq that ultimately settled the question which had dragged on throughout 2011. Blinken argues that "the President really was open to this smaller footprint in terms of a follow-on force… but the caveat was that this had to be something that the Iraqis embraced politically, because we didn't want to put our forces where there really weren't welcome."[64] With Maliki insisting that he would not be able to get American demands on legal immunities through his Parliament, Blinken saw this as indicative of a broader sense among Iraqi public opinion that a continued American presence was unwelcome. Doug Lute, who was instrumental in negotiating the original SOFA, paraphrased the Iraqi view in blunter terms as akin to saying, "you know, we can argue about this, but you guys need to start packing your stuff."[65] For Cartwright, with ISR resources still top of mind, the issue was similarly plain: "The Iraqis don't want it. Why would you then try to force something that you're critically short of into a place where they just don't seem to understand the value of it, and therefore would never be able to leverage it?"[66]

Yet if Obama really did want a deal that badly, there were other ways to achieve it without parliamentary approval, which was, after all, an American demand. Maliki, for instance, was willing to consider signing an executive memorandum of understanding governing the U.S. troops presence, something supported by a senior member of the American delegation, Brett McGurk, as well as other former officials involved in the original SOFA.[67] As Flournoy recalls, while the lawyers had valid points, "it's hard to count the number of places where we've accepted a degree of ambiguity or just a complete absence of an agreement to do what we thought was necessary for our mission."[68] One of

[64] Blinken, Interview (2018).
[65] Lute, Interview (2018).
[66] Cartwright, Interview (2018).
[67] O'Sullivan (2011).
[68] Flournoy, Interview (2018).

those places, of course, is in fact Iraq, where thousands of troops have been stationed without formal legal protections since being sent back by Obama to confront ISIS in 2014. "What I came to believe," continues Flournoy, "when 25,000 was too much, 20,000 was too much, 15,000 was too much, 10,000 was too much – was to realize that the President had made up his mind and he didn't want to have any U.S. troops remain in Iraq. And though I certainly believe that it's critical for US forces to have legal protections anywhere we are, we have had many, many exceptions to that rule, where we have deployed forces without a SOFA in place. So that ended up being an excuse, or a public explanation, for what I believe was a policy choice."[69]

In truth, it seems that the decision to "go to zero" in October 2011 was simply the final point of a process which sought to balance the strategic benefit of a residual presence with the electoral risk of doing so. By late 2011, things in Iraq looked more or less stable. Indeed, in assessments provided by the intelligence community at the time, Obama was advised that Iraq was unlikely to descend back into 2006-style violence anytime soon, absent some exogenous shock or significant sectarian shift in Baghdad.[70] In this context, with the 2012 campaign about to enter prime time, the cost of the insurance premium seemed to outweigh the benefits of maintaining the policy. In other words, while remaining in Iraq even in small numbers past 2011 *was* a sure-fire way to rile the Democratic base, there was some reason to believe that Iraq would now be ok without U.S. troops, even if the military and the Pentagon remained highly skeptical of the intelligence community's assessment. As such, forcing through a renewed SOFA was therefore not worth the political capital at such an increasingly sensitive time in the electoral cycle. In this sense, the electoral calculus had changed. In the winter of 2010-11, the risk of things "going south" and distance to the 2012

[69] Flournoy, Interview (2018).
[70] Kahl, Interview (2018). Both contingencies did in fact occur.

elections permitted some modest appetite for a follow-on force. By October, "they were nine months closer to the election [and] they didn't need as much of an insurance policy with Iraq."[71] Instead, the political damage that leaving troops could do to Obama's re-election campaign was now the more potent risk to be mitigated against, which in turn led Obama to "go to zero."

Perhaps most telling in this respect was Obama's public comments during the third presidential debate of the 2012 campaign, when he denied ever having tried to attempt such a negotiation in the first place. When Mitt Romney agreed with the President's earlier ambition of a reaching an agreement on a renewed SOFA, Obama quickly intervened, saying, "that is not true… what I would not have done is left 10,000 troops in Iraq that would tie us down. That certainly would not help us in the Middle East."[72] In fact, as we have seen, this was precisely the policy Obama pursued between May and August of 2011. Walking back from this position in 2012 would seem to validate the view that as the 2012 election drew closer, the idea of remaining in Iraq became a political liability as the candidate ran on a platform which reified his extrication of American forces from Iraq.

~

In both the decision to "go to zero," then, and the manner of reaching that decision in such an iterative fashion, electoral pressures loom large. John Brennan articulates a central argument made in this thesis by describing this decision-making pattern as a "balancing process" on the part of the president, throughout which "he was weighing a number of factors and considerations, not just in terms of security requirements, but also some of those political dimensions, as it got closer to the elections."[73]

---

[71] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[72] "The Third Presidential Debate," 23 October 2012, *New York Times*.
[73] Brennan, Interview (2018).

Alternative Explanations

Bureaucratic Constraints

Bureaucratic politics, especially between the White House and the military, provides a compelling account for some aspects of decision-making during this period. On the 2009 timetable, in particular, this is highly plausible. In reconciling the 16-month proposal with General Odierno's 23-month plan for the drawdown in Iraq, for instance, the selection of a 19-month middle option was as explicit a compromise between two bureaucratic views as one could imagine. With the two positions not in truth that far apart, as Doug Lute recalls, "it did seem to me that we were really measuring bureaucratic manhood here."[74] In turn, the military's opening position was apparently perceived more an opening premise in the bureaucratic game than a red line, with Kahl observing that "the military always basically give you the one big option they want and they tell you that that has moderate risk, and if you do anything else it triggers nuclear war."[75] Yet even if the image of bureaucratic "turf wars" characterised this episode well, it is of course still worth noting that one half of the debate was explicitly informed by the confines of Obama's campaign pledge.

The 2011 decision to "go to zero" is more complex. On one hand, the iterated nature of that process might owe more to the administration's desire to avoid a sharp split with the generals. "The problem was they were being squeezed by the military," notes Jeffrey, adding that "the Chairman wanted to keep troops on, and they did not want to take on the military."[76] As a result, the periodic reassessments of troop numbers, fashioned through discussions with Cartwright and trips to Iraq, arguably reflected the classic pushing and hauling of Allison's bureaucratic bargaining model. Having lost out in the turf wars over the Afghanistan "surge" decision in 2009, the White House was arguably fighting this

[74] Lute, Interview (2018).
[75] Kahl, Interview (2018).
[76] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).

bureaucratic battle with the military through salami slicing tactics, steadily cutting proposals until there was nothing left.

Yet the bargaining approach has some significant flaws here. On a theoretical level, for instance, the outcome was not the lowest common denominator compromise which fully satisfied no-one, as the bureaucratic politics approach predicts, but precisely the outcome which, in the end, fully satisfied Obama's electoral preference. This, in turn, suggests that if Obama's path to "zero" may have been conditioned to some extent by bureaucratic tussle with the military, the point should not be overstated, for the President ultimately ruled his own bureaucracy. In this respect it is instructive to note Kahl's recollection that "the Obama administration was all up in the Pentagon's knickers on Iraq," while his boss, Bob Gates, goes as far as to claim that Obama's White House was "by far the most centralized and controlling in national security of any I had seen since Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger ruled the roost."[77]

Secondly, the 2011 example breaks the assumption of single individuals acting on behalf of their bureaucracy. Throughout 2011 the military did not speak with one voice, primarily because the Chairman and Vice Chairman held a toxic relationship in which the latter routinely went around the chain of command to brief ideas to the White House which were entirely at odds with the former's view. "It was typical Cartwright," says Mullen, "he bypassed me and he bypassed Gates."[78] It was in fact precisely this internal division in the military that encouraged Obama to finally assert his views over any bureaucratic resistance, according to Kahl: "they weren't speaking with one voice, so, in a White House that was inclined not to want to leave a lot of troops there, the military's position gave them some wiggle room to do that."[79]

---

[77] Kahl, Interview (2018); Gates (2014) 585-586.
[78] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[79] Kahl, Interview (2018).

Even at a more general level, while clearly bureaucratic conflict played some part in the story of Obama's decision-making process, it is hard to disentangle the civil-military quarrels from the political fallout they threatened to generate. If there was any hesitation to overrule the military during the 2011 process, the reason for it was utterly interrelated with the electoral consequences of doing so. "I understand why they didn't just say it's zero, give us a plan," thus admits Mullen, "because they'd have got killed politically… just like Bush, they needed the military aboard."[80]

Psychological Constraints

The role of analogical reasoning in Obama's decision-making process seems far less persuasive than for any other president assessed so far. Solid accounts already exist demonstrating that Obama did not consider himself just post-Vietnam, in the sense that his professional experience was not shaped by the war in Southeast Asia in any substantive way, but he was *post*-post-Vietnam.[81] That is, he felt no need to engage with any real discussion of the so-called "Vietnam syndrome," because it was a relic of the past, no longer relevant to today's challenges in the Middle East. As Denis McDonough recalled, "There's a generational issue. The president's conception of power is not founded on Vietnam."[82] Indeed, whenever Obama *did* mention Vietnam in relation to the wars he oversaw, it was typically to explicitly bury the notion of its applicability.[83] For outside observers, of course, especially those who had served in the earlier conflict as junior officers, "Vietnam was clearly the war of choice for analogy," as General Cartwright

[80] Mullen, Interview (2018).
[81] Mann (2012) 129-141.
[82] *Ibid*. 132.
[83] See, for instance, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan," 1 December 2009. Available online at: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan (accessed 21 September 2019).

recalls. But there remains little evidence in the public domain to suggest that it drove high level-decision making on strategy.[84]

On one hand, overconfidence appears similarly inappropriate as a significant factor driving Obama's decision-making in this period. The primary lesson he took from the Iraq War under Bush seems to have related to the fundamentally bounded efficacy of American military power to achieve transformative effects overseas.[85] Unlike his predecessor, few could argue that Obama had an exaggerated belief about the prospects for democratisation at the barrel of an American gun, with the much more prevalent critique being that he was far too pessimistic and cautious.[86]

On the other hand, one might plausibly ascribe Obama's belief that Iraq would remain stable after American disengagement to a degree of wishful thinking. While some intelligence assessments did indeed suggest that Iraq could become self-sufficient in providing security for its population, these were disputed by both military and civilian officials in the administration. At a minimum, it seems likely that Obama's faith in drones as a substitutable counterterrorism "tool" may have been the result of positive illusions about that technology as a panacea which negated the need for *any* follow-on force. "It's not just a drone in a box," explains Brennan, adding that "there is a tremendous, *tremendous* upstream capability you need," meaning "a US military presence on the ground was critically important in order to be able to have the infrastructure, the hardware, and the capabilities that are necessary." Among the senior level of officials in the administration, there was a considerable "disconnect" between what was feasible and what was desirable. Arguably, then, Obama succumbed to the latter over the former in his switch to an under-resourced counterterrorism approach in the Middle East.

---

[84] Cartwright, Interview (2018).
[85] See Goldberg (2016).
[86] Gerges (2012); Dueck (2016).

Prospect theory, meanwhile, does not appear to apply well in this case. President Obama showed little hesitation in writing off the sunk costs of past intervention in Iraq, and was ahead of most of his advisers in pursuing a policy of disengagement to its final logical end of full withdrawal. To the extent that we may conceive of "loss aversion" operating, we might instead look not to the strategic parameters of decision-making as informing Obama's reference point, but his political reputation. Having built his political career on opposition to the Iraq War, and having made clear his intentions to bring troops home during the campaign, to row back on this commitment would surely entail considerable reputational loss, with profound associated electoral risks for 2012. An aversion to incurring such losses may well have pushed Obama by late 2011 to accept the risk of future instability in Iraq as the price for being seen to keep his promises before the electorate.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how a focus on the American electoral cycle can enrich our understanding of Obama's decisions which brought the Iraq War to a close. While several contextual features make this a "hard" case for the claim that electoral politics "matter," the analysis presented here offers support for key aspects of the conceptual framework of this thesis, shedding light on both the nature and timing of Obama's decision to eventually "go to zero" in late 2011.

This episode captures well both the balancing process between a president's strategic and electoral preferences and the non-linear nature of sensitivity to electoral pressures. The decision-making process behind the expedited drawdown schedule announced in early 2009 shows that electoral considerations may play a mild role early in a president's term. An electorally preferable course of action would have entailed the fulfilment of Obama's

16-month linear drawdown plan, as articulated in the campaign. In the event, however, the White House seems to have accepted the advice of its military advisers and adapted the plan to suit a plan which offset the strategic risks of the campaign's proposal. In the decision to abandon plans for a follow-on force after 2011, we find support instead for the idea that electoral constraints begin to bite as the electoral cycle wears on. Though never a supporter of the war in Iraq, Obama did signal a clear willingness to retain troops after 2011, in line with the overwhelming majority view of his advisers. The electoral costs of doing so, however, would have been significant. With the 2012 campaign around the corner, the electoral preference eventually won out, pulling the President away from efforts to keep any troops in Iraq at all.

More specifically, three electoral mechanisms can be observed in this case. Early on, the *hangover* effect resulting from a highly specific campaign pledge to withdraw in 16-months presented the administration with a tangible political obstacle to overcome in shaping an expedited drawdown schedule. Coming in the "honeymoon" phase of Obama's first term, it did not present an overwhelming roadblock to compromise, as expected, but it did contribute directly to the opening position taken in the strategic review of 2009 and the compromise position that resulted. More significant were the *delay* and *dampening* mechanisms which constrained decision-making concerning the prospect of continued military intervention in Iraq after 2011. Despite a clear need to engage in internal conversations about the size of a follow-on force and external negotiations about a new SOFA, the issue was first deferred so as not to harm Democrats' electoral chances in the 2010 midterms. Then, through 2011, proposals were repeatedly screened for their political acceptability, in a search for ever lower numbers concurrent with the approach of the 2012 campaign season, while a reliance on less politically "noisy" counterterrorism "tools" such as drones created permissive conditions for the final decision to "go to zero" in October.

~

Since Obama's inheritance and his own broader beliefs about the wisdom of the Iraq War already pointed towards a policy of disengagement, it may be reasonable to ask whether electoral considerations made any *real* difference to U.S. policy in Iraq during this period. The remainder of this section argues that if electoral constraints had only marginal substantive influence in this period, in the long run it was arguably the margins that mattered to the long-term stability of Iraq.

Had Obama not been bound at least in part by his own campaign pledge to withdraw in 16 months of his election, for instance, it seems reasonable to speculate that the pace of the drawdown in Iraq could have been much more driven by conditions on the ground. According to the vast majority of the uniformed military, such a course of action presented much lower risk, since it avoided advertising intentions to opponents who might simply wait until the Americans had left before stepping up their activities. Even if you had some internal deadlines, regretted General Casey, the Chief of Staff of the Army, "you definitely don't have to go out and make it a public statement of policy."[87] Indeed, for him, the military logic was simply not driving the thinking; "it's a political timeline, as the Democrats are pressing for."[88] In retrospect, of course, security in Iraq did not significantly diminish during this period, and the compromise struck with General Odierno on the non-linear nature of the drawdown mitigated much of the risk he had identified. Still, the political commitments Obama had to contend with did arguably create more risk in military terms.

The "what if" of the 2011 decision to "go to zero" is arguably more significant, in light of the subsequent spread of the Islamic State across the border between Iraq and Syria from

[87] Casey, Interview (2018).
[88] *Ibid*.

2014. While it is hard to imagine Obama opting to embrace the open-ended commitment of 24,000 troops favoured initially by General Austin, given his long-standing opposition to the war, it *is* certainly plausible to think that he may have opted for one of the in-between options discussed above, be it 10,000 or even the 3,500 agreed upon in August. Absent the pressures of the political spotlight, we have already seen that mechanisms were available, in the shape of an executive memorandum of understanding, and private willingness in Baghdad was sufficient to allow for such an option to be pursued. Moreover, a re-designed force structure focused on limited missions – as had been fleshed out extensively by the Pentagon – was fully consistent with Obama's broader shift towards a counterterrorism strategy in the Middle East.

A sceptic might argue that the capacity of a few thousand U.S. troops to forestall the expansion of such a complex and diffuse threat was significantly limited. While this is to some extent true, it misses the broader military and political utility of a continued troop presence. On the former, it is important to note that the carefully tailored make-up of the residual force was designed to function as an enabler for the Iraqi Security Forces to stand up on its own, not as an alternative to those Iraqi units. Rather than simply additional "boots on the ground", the remaining troops would comprise special forces, intelligence units and air support, three areas in which the ISF were sorely lacking in capability. If the Pentagon-approved 10,000-strong force had been approved, according to Flournoy, "that was a force that could do real things."[89] Even with smaller numbers, a counterterrorism cell could be maintained in Iraq, providing the expertise and logistical infrastructure which Brennan explains was key in pursuing an effective counterterrorism strategy. Though he argues that the American departure was one of many factors behind the explosive spread of IS in 2014,

[89] Flournoy, Interview (2018).

he admits that a residual force "could have slowed some of the growth of ISIS."[90] If the difference electoral constraints made was in ensuring that zero troops would be left behind rather than a few thousand, it stands to reason that this margin might just have been the critical component in foreclosing a path to a more stable future in Iraq.

On the political side of the ledger, a continued U.S. troop presence still provided leverage over the Iraqi government, or at least gave Maliki a security blanket. So long as the Iraqi Prime Minister was convinced that the Americans would underwrite his government, he would continue to pay at least lip service to the calls for him to run a government of national unity and refrain from the increased sectarian excess which characterised his administration after 2011. An illustrative example of this dynamic comes from the immediate aftermath of American withdrawal, when Maliki, apparently paranoid about a coup, made repeated calls to the newly-established Office of Security Cooperation, asking for personal protection from U.S. forces, only to be told that no resources could be made available. Many senior officials and commentators mark this as the moment when Maliki lurched towards consolidation of his Shia base, to the exclusion and resentment of the Sunni community. For Flournoy, "I do think that that had a very real impact, and had we had 10,000 or 12,000 troop there that turning point for Maliki might not have been there. And then you might not have had the re-marginalization of the Sunnis, and then you might not have had Anbar and Mosul become fertile ground for ISIS, and and and and and and…"[91] The Ambassador at the time agrees with this point: "One of the reasons for why Iraq went downhill after 2012 was, it really *was* the withdrawal of troops. But not because they could have intervened, or overthrown Maliki, or anything like it. It was because they provided Maliki with a security blanket. Now he had to rely on an army he didn't trust, that

[90] Brennan, Interview (2018).
[91] Flournoy, Interview (2018).

still had many senior Sunni commanders, and more importantly, most of the senior Shia commanders were also former Baathists, they had been generals in the Saddamist army. So he was very very suspicious about them."[92] Other figures are less circumspect. Asked about the consequences of the 2011 decision, Admiral Mullen is clear: "We're living with it. Look at where Iraq is."[93]

[92] Jeffrey, Interview (2018).
[93] Mullen, Interview (2018).

Conclusion

Drawing on the logic of democratic accountability, this thesis has argued that electoral politics acts as an important constraint on presidential decision-making in war. When considering paths of escalation or de-escalation during a conflict, an American president must weigh the strategic utility of any proposed policy alongside the risks it poses to his political survival. When these preferences misalign, electoral pressures may push and pull the president away from a course of action he deems to carry optimal strategic characteristics. Even when the president is not running for re-election, presidential campaigns can often place severe limitations on his ability to pursue his conception of the national interest in any given conflict.

Further, this dissertation argued that exactly how, why and when electoral politics matters can be analysed with reference to five mechanisms. An upcoming election may encourage the president to *delay* making a controversial decision, *dampen* its "noisier" aspects, or act as a *spur* to dial up the aggressiveness of a proposed course of action. In addition, a president may have to contend with the *hangover* effects of commitment made in a previous campaign, and will face an erosion of leverage in bargaining situations thanks to the *spoiler* effect that an election can have on negotiations. Which of these mechanisms operate in any given case was argued to depend on the relative alignment between a president's strategic and electoral preference, the salience of the issue in question, and the phase of the electoral cycle. Taken together, they can be mapped across the four-year political calendar, yielding a new conceptual framework which summarises the systematic influence that electoral considerations have on wartime decision-making.

In making these arguments, this thesis has gone beyond the existing literature's focus on cases of conflict initiation, showing how electoral pressures continue to shape how a

war is fought after the Rubicon has been crossed. With rich historical case studies of key decisions made during the wars in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq, it has brought a much-needed qualitative approach to a problem which has so far been addressed primarily using quantitative methods. In so doing, it offers a far more nuanced account of the ways in which electoral considerations influence decision-making in a non-linear fashion across the domestic political calendar, avoiding the existing myopia centring on presidential election years. Further, it has identified a series of opportunities to limit the costs of war, sue for peace, or gain advantage on the battlefield which were missed thanks to the prevailing attention paid by presidents to the exigencies of the electoral cycle. In short, this thesis has made several important contributions of a conceptual, methodological and empirical nature.

The remainder of this concluding chapter draws together the main findings of the case studies, comparing the extent to which they offer support for the study's conceptual framework. It then reflects on some wider theoretical and normative implications for the study of democracy and war, before concluding with suggestions for future research.

Reviewing the Evidence

In the first year following a successful campaign, a newly-elected president was expected to enjoy a "honeymoon" phase, in which he could make decisions about military and diplomatic strategy broadly unaffected by electoral pressures. To the extent that electoral concerns restrict a new president's freedom of manoeuvre when crafting policy, it was expected to be limited to considerations relating to the statements made in the *previous* campaign. In turn, these *hangover* constraints were anticipated to be stronger in cases where campaign pledges were highly specific and a president's winning margin relatively small.

The empirical chapters offered solid support for these claims. On one hand, the vague promises to "go to Korea" and win "peace with honour" made respectively by Eisenhower and Nixon, before both won landslide victories at the polls, granted each president a large degree of latitude in selecting their strategies for ending hostilities. While Nixon would interpret his mandate somewhat more broadly, taking another four years to sign a peace agreement after initial spasms of escalatory bombing, even Eisenhower felt free to seriously consider the use of atomic weapons to bring about an armistice. By contrast, having offered a detailed 16-month plan for a drawdown in Iraq, Barack Obama's strategic review of 2009 was explicitly shaped around the confines of his statements made on the campaign trail. If the *hangover* mechanism can therefore be seen operating broadly as expected, so too can we observe that at this stage of the cycle, it was the president's strategic preference which tended to win out in the balancing act with such electoral considerations. It was, after all, in the immediate aftermath of an election that some of the most substantively significant and electorally risky decisions were made, including most notably the "Americanization" of the war in Vietnam in 1965.

As congressional elections approach in year two of the electoral cycle, the relative weight afforded to a president's electoral preference is expected to rise. In a situation where the Commander-in-Chief favours an escalatory course of action but fears that a political backlash will result, this is likely to lead to a *delay* in the selection of such a controversial strategy. This was observed most notably with Bush's determination to stick with a sub-optimal transition strategy in Iraq until the 2006 midterms, before swiftly announcing the "surge," which he well understood would be the most unpopular decision of his presidency. By contrast, in circumstances where the president's perception of what is strategically necessary is more cautious than the political environment might permit, it was suggested that he may choose to dial up the aggressiveness of a proposed course of action, per the

spur mechanism. A good example of this was Harry Truman's expansion of the Korean War in 1950, where fierce anti-communism and hawkish sentiment among key Republican political threats encouraged the president to seek full unification of the Korean peninsula by force. In cases where the proposed course of action carried weaker salience among the voting public, these constraints were observed in more mild form, for instance with Obama's *delay* in considering whether to keep troops in Iraq beyond 2011 until after the 2010 midterms. In short, there is a wealth of empirical evidence to suggest that congressional elections generate important constraints on decision-making, a point which is often missed in existing studies which focus only on presidential races.

Given that the president's interest in political survival is more directly at stake in a presidential election contest, it is in this final phase of the cycle that electoral constraints were naturally expected to be strongest. Importantly, however, it was argued in chapter I that the *anticipation* of a campaign may be almost as significant as being in the midst of one. Indeed, in the cases, this has been repeatedly demonstrated. Already by the spring of 1971, for instance, Richard Nixon had devised the so-called "decent interval" approach which effectively made his re-election, not the stability of South Vietnam, the primary object of strategy. In 2011, moreover, it was the *future* optics of reneging on a campaign pledge as the 2012 election season approached which in part led Obama to "go to zero" in Iraq. Even when not running for re-election, meanwhile, George Bush and his advisers felt pressured in 2007 by the following year's Democratic primaries to hasten the pace of the drawdown of the "surge" brigades. Again, these findings add further weight to the importance of looking across the entire cycle for evidence of electoral constraints materially affecting wartime decision-making.

In an election year itself, the *delay*, *dampening*, and *spur* mechanisms are likely to operate most strongly, as a president's attention turns increasingly towards managing the

electoral risks of any proposed course of action. Arguably the classic illustration of these dynamics came with Lyndon Johnson's explicit deferral of a decision to increase the American commitment to Vietnam until after the 1964 election. While he evidently perceived a clear need to change strategy as early as the spring, the major decisions to initiate a sustained bombing programme and commit tens of thousands of combat troops to Southeast Asia would come only after his re-election was secured. Eight years later, in 1972, President Nixon's approach to bombing operations in Vietnam also reflected his increased sensitivity to electoral politics, albeit in different ways. In spring, for instance, he welcomed the opportunity to unleash a barrage of aerial bombardment upon the North, figuring that voters might reward an aggressive response to the enemy's Easter Offensive, even as he and several advisers began to doubt the utility of such bombing operations.

In other ways, however, the tension between a president's strategic and electoral preferences was perceived to be irreconcilable, forcing the incumbent to sacrifice one for the other. Accepting the need to cut losses and withdraw from Vietnam, for instance, Nixon instead chose to prioritise his own political career in 1972, keeping Saigon afloat until his re-election was secure through staggered troop withdrawals and periodic bombing offensives which he knew to be strategically ineffective. In almost equal and opposite manner, Lyndon Johnson had four years earlier concluded that his vision of a negotiated peace could not be pursued while remaining a candidate for re-election, choosing to announce his own withdrawal and a peace overture to Hanoi in the very same speech of March 1968.

"Lame ducks" were treated as a special case in this study's conceptual framework. Theoretically separated from the logic of electoral accountability by virtue of their ineligibility for re-election, such presidents were suggested to experience relative freedom from most of the mechanisms of electoral constraint explored in this thesis. There is a good

degree of support for this in the three cases studied here. Certainly, Truman's refusal to take the gloves off in Korea in 1952 – at least to the extent that his Republican critics demanded – suggests a relative insensitivity to public opinion, at least compared with his earlier decision to expand the war in late 1950. More directly, both Lyndon Johnson and George Bush implemented major shifts in their wartime strategy, one towards de-escalation and the other towards escalation, at almost the precise moment at which they entered the twilight phase of their terms.

Instead of the typical electoral constraints observed elsewhere, concerns about legacy do appear to have shaped how these "lame duck" presidents sought to implement their preferred strategies. Hence, while both wanted to reach a deal to end hostilities in Korea and Vietnam respectively, Truman and Johnson stuck stubbornly to their "red lines" in negotiations concerning POWs and ceasefire conditions, apparently believing that no deal was better than a bad deal which might mark them as "peace at any price" presidents in the history books. Interestingly, and perhaps because his successor was more clearly dovish on the war than Eisenhower or Nixon had been, George Bush proved more willing to compromise on his strategic preference of a conditions-based drawdown so as to ensure that he could "lock in" his vision of continued engagement in Iraq before his time in office expired.

Finally, as expected, the *spoiler* effect was shown to play an important role in eroding the president's bargaining position during negotiations to de-escalate and conclude a war, in three main ways. First, the political survival incentive was shown to encourage presidents who were still up for re-election to grant concessions in pursuit of a deal which would boost his electoral fortunes. Nixon's desire for a "decent interval" and disregard for South Vietnam's future during the peace talks in Paris through 1972 serve as particularly explicit evidence for this.

Second, even if the incumbent was not running, the actions of other candidates and negotiating opponents were shown to repeatedly undermine the president's leverage. Vietnam is again the classic example here, with the progress of talks in both 1968 and 1972 subject to breakthroughs and ultimately impasses resulting from each party's assessment of the likely results of the upcoming presidential election. In Iraq, however, the interventions of Prime Minister Maliki and Barack Obama in the summer of 2008 appear to have also restricted Bush's room for manoeuvre in the SOFA negotiations, while Harry Truman was not without reason in lamenting Eisenhower's criticism of his administration's policy and subsequent refusal to wholeheartedly support it during the transition.

Finally, and relatedly, the fixed nature of the electoral calendar undoubtedly created constraints which made it difficult for the incumbents to strike agreements on their preferred terms. In Korea, the Truman administration's "lame duck" status, particularly during the interregnum, created conditions in which it became difficult to resist pressure from allies to support an Indian-backed U.N. resolution, which would ultimately help define the formula upon which an armistice agreement would be reached. In Iraq, there is credible evidence to suggest that the ticking clock associated with Bush's final months in office led the administration to row back with increasing speed on a series of "red lines" regarding a SOFA, notably ending up with a most unexpected decision to agree to a final withdrawal date.

In sum, the cases offered broad support for the conceptual framework offered in this thesis. For all the contextual variation among cases, there does seem to be an identifiable pattern to the operation of electoral constraints and their impact on wartime decision-making. The logic of democratic accountability has been shown to apply beyond the point of conflict initiation, with presidential decisions to escalate and de-escalate an ongoing war subject to pressures generated by the electoral cycle. These pressures do not act in a simple

or linear manner, but instead push and pull presidents in different directions at varying stages of the electoral cycle. Neither inherently a force for aggression nor an inducement to caution, the relationship between electoral politics and wartime decision-making is best understood with due attention paid to this "rhythm" of the electoral cycle.

Democracy and War

Beyond the conceptual, methodological and empirical contributions addressed in the preceding sections, the findings of this thesis also carry wider implications for the study of democracy and war. This section explores these through two key questions:

Are Democracies Good at Fighting Wars?

Drawing on the liberal tradition in international relations theory, many scholars identify electoral accountability as a critical explanation of the superior war records held by democracies.[1] Since they can be more easily removed from office than their nondemocratic counterparts, elected leaders are acutely sensitive to the domestic political costs associated with defeat. As a result, they tend to enter into wars only when highly confident of victory, and go on to commit more resources to a conflict once engaged to avoid losing, typically resulting in relatively short wars.[2] In doing so, democratic decision-makers also benefit from a series of other sources of comparative advantage in war, including superior information; better prospects for joining powerful coalitions; and better morale, initiative and leadership among their armed forces.[3]

[1] Reiter and Stam (2002); Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003).
[2] On selection effects, see Reiter and Stam (2002); Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003). On the extraction of wealth and resources, see Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003); Fordham and Walker (2005). On war duration, see Bennett and Stam (1998); Slantchev (2004).
[3] On information and the marketplace of ideas, see Reiter and Stam (2002). On coalitions, see Lake (1992). On the attributes of forces, see Reiter and Stam (2002).

The cases and evidence presented in this thesis appear to challenge such accounts of democratic exceptionalism in war. Instead, the American experience in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq lends support for an equally strongly held belief among strategic thinkers that powerful democracies are peculiarly bad at fighting small wars.[4] American participation in these "limited" conflicts has been characterised by long, protracted struggles which sap morale and ultimately result in a draw at best, if not outright defeat. The reasons for such surprisingly poor military performance are no secret. When engaged in asymmetrical conflicts, wealthy and industrialised democracies too often rely on firepower and technological superiority to overcome weak opponents, who often employ unconventional tactics to frustrate their more powerful foe.[5] Surprisingly, democratic leaders often appear to select these ill-suited strategies consciously, and fail to adapt or learn from such mistakes over time.[6]

This presents a puzzle. If democratic leaders are structurally incentivised to fight hard to avoid politically costly defeat, why would they not choose courses of action with the best prospect of ultimate success? Indeed, if war outcomes are so intimately tied with an elected leader's political survival, why would presidents systematically select policies they often *know* to be sub-optimal? By excluding or downplaying these deviant cases from the study of democracy and war, many scholars have failed to address why some of the most significant conflicts of the twentieth century appear not to adhere to these theoretical expectations.[7]

This study helps resolve this issue by refocusing studies of democratic success in war towards the operation of electoral accountability *during* a war itself. While it is undoubtedly

[4] Mack (1975); Rosen (1982); Sullivan (2007); Record (2007); Caverley (2009); Downes (2009).
[5] Arreguin-Toft (2001); Nagl (2005).
[6] Caverley (2009); Downes (2009).
[7] On the impact of Reiter and Stam's questionable decision to exclude draws and conflicts not initiated by a democracy, see Downes (2009).

true that war outcomes matter for a democratic leader's political survival, this study demonstrates that it is not just winning or losing that matters, but *how* a president chooses to fight. Unless a war can be concluded relatively quickly – and this is unlikely in the types of war considered here, since the brutality required to do so is often prohibited by the likely moral outrage it would spark – it is highly likely that voters will cast their ballots based not only on the ultimate chances of success, but on their assessment of how an ongoing war is being conducted.[8] Knowing this, presidents are incentivised to remain acutely sensitive to the likely reaction of voters to major decisions, especially those which significantly escalate or de-escalate a conflict, as this thesis has shown. Since winning a war might require the adoption of some politically controversial courses of action, it follows that electoral considerations during a war may in the short-term incentivise sub-optimal strategies which make victory harder to achieve in the long-run, however essential that victory might be to a president's eventual political fortunes.

Further, the nature of these wars makes presidents peculiarly susceptible to electoral pressures. First, they tend to last a long time, with recent estimates suggesting that the average counterinsurgency campaign takes over eleven years.[9] Second, the type of strategies most experts deem to be effective tend to be very troop-intensive, and involve a great deal of violence. Given the temporal constraints of the four-year electoral cycle in the United States, and the still-prevalent belief that the voting public are casualty-averse, presidents are far more likely to embrace alternative strategies prioritising firepower over manpower, even as these are precisely the courses criticised by strategic thinkers as sub-optimal.[10] Third, because these are non-existential "wars of choice," public tolerance for

[8] On brutality in war, see Merom (2003). On public attitudes towards war, see Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler (2009) and chapter I of this thesis.
[9] Johnston and Urlacher (2012). This line of analysis applies most naturally to the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, given the presence of insurgencies in both, yet it might also be applied to conventional "proxy" wars like Korea, in which interest asymmetry may leave opponents with greater resolve.
[10] See Record (2007); Caverley (2009).

poor performance or unpopular strategies is likely to be much weaker than in "wars of necessity," where a public might give a leader more slack with which to conduct a war as he or she saw fit. Victory still matters politically for the incumbent, but since defeat will probably not change the life of the average voter, the electorate may be less forgiving when it comes to how a small war is fought.

While electoral accountability may partially account for overall democratic success in war, then, this study demonstrates that when viewed through the prism of the American electoral cycle, these political pressures can often cause presidents, both through acts of commission and omission, to consciously pursue strategies which they perceive to be sub-optimal. In turn, electoral constraints on wartime decision-making help explain~~s~~ why democracies find it more difficult to win small wars than their preponderant capabilities would suggest, adding nuance to a central claim of liberal theories of international relations.

Is Electoral Accountability Bad?

While the primary aim of this thesis was to explore *how* electoral politics affect wartime decision-making, the evidence adduced raises a related question: *should* it?

At first glance, the findings of this thesis should raise alarm bells regarding the strategic cost of electoral accountability. If the pressures generated by the electoral cycle systematically push presidents away from strategies which they deem to be optimal, such apparent deviations from the national interest may be reasonably considered highly damaging. On one hand, recurrent patterns of cost-aversion and excessive caution witnessed during sensitive phases of the political calendar have contributed directly to the selection and persistence of flawed strategies and missed opportunities on the battlefield. On the other hand, electoral pressures resulting in futile or needlessly risky operations may well have caused incalculable bloodshed and courted strategic disaster in the name of

electoral expedience. Either way, there is plenty of evidence to support the traditional view held by many realists and policymakers alike that the influence of public opinion on foreign policy is a wholly regrettable if unavoidable feature of the democratic system.[11] "That the four-year election process has a pernicious influence on foreign policy is evident," Zbigniew Brzezinski once aptly noted, "but it is also clear that this structural handicap is not likely to be undone."[12]

This study stops short of endorsing such a blanket assertion, however. Putting to one side the normative argument that a leader's responsiveness to the preferences of the electorate upholds a key principle of democracy, there are two more pragmatic reasons why the influence of electoral politics on decision-making may not be uniformly detrimental.

First, to make such a claim assumes that, absent the pressure of electoral constraints, the president's pursuit of his strategic preference would align with the objective national interest. Yet since the strategic preference refers to the president's *perception* of the option which carries optimal characteristics, it does not necessarily follow that this assessment will always be accurate. To be sure, we have seen a series of powerful examples where the president's deviation from his strategic preference have incurred major opportunity costs and needless bloodshed. Yet in the broader perspective, alternative options not favoured by the president might in truth have been more advantageous. The "surge" offers a plausible example of this dynamic. Had Bush not needed to worry about the "hot" political environment in the lead-up to the mid-terms, he may well have changed strategy and very likely escalated the military commitment to Iraq sooner than he did. This plausibly may have led far more quickly to the improvements in security which were seen through 2007 and 2008, saving untold scores of lives. Nevertheless, in hindsight, it could equally be

[11] See Nincic (1992) 5-15; Foyle (1999).
[12] Quoted in Quandt (1986) 830.

argued that escalating in Iraq was ultimately futile, because the idea that improved security would inevitably lead to political reconciliation was a fallacy. The truth may have been that no amount of American military force could resolve the deep sectarian tensions splitting Iraq apart, in which case the transition concept advocated by General Casey might well have been in the broader American interest after all. Viewed in this light, it might be said that the influence of electoral constraints was somewhat beneficial, since it pushed the president to continue with a policy which while still undoubtedly costly in the short term, might in the long-term have been better from an American perspective than going deeper into the conflict.

Second, there may also be cases in which the broader national interest is actually best served by compromising a president's strategic preference for the sake of protecting his electoral prospects. If the incumbent really does have better ideas on how to handle an ongoing war than other rival candidates, it may be reasonable to adopt some electorally friendly yet strategically sub-optimal policy in order to guarantee his re-election, rather than risk having to hand over to a less experienced Commander-in-Chief. As disastrous as Lyndon Johnson's management of the Vietnam War was, for instance, it might plausibly be considered the lesser of two evils, when one thinks of an alternative world in which the ultra-hawkish Barry Goldwater was left to decide how far to escalate in Vietnam. Even more controversially, one might see at least some rationality in Richard Nixon's apparent belief that his election was more important than the future of South Vietnam, since his ability to achieve a rapprochement with China and détente in the Cold War more generally was conditional on his victory in 1972, and that these undoubtedly important outcomes might not have been witnessed under a President Humphrey. These counterfactuals are necessarily speculative, and it would be difficult to weigh up the moral value inherent in

the trade-offs they imply, but they do nevertheless point out that some consideration of electoral risks might in some cases not just be rational but desirable.

Future Research

While this thesis made no strong claim of generalisability beyond the American wartime experience, its findings are nevertheless suggestive of the influence that electoral politics might have on foreign policy more broadly. As such, future research might build on this study through three potentially fruitful avenues.

First, since the underlying logic of electoral accountability is of course not exclusive to the United States, additional studies might usefully explore the impact of electoral politics on wartime decision-making in other states. Building on recent efforts to examine how public opinion affects foreign policy differently across democracies, this might shed light on how variation in institutional structure may leave decision-makers more or less susceptible to electoral pressures.[13] Parliamentary systems of course vary in myriad ways to presidential systems, and it stands to reason that the diversity seen in the relationship between the executive and legislative branches, term limits and election timing might all affect the way in which electoral constraints operate.[14] Anecdotally, one needs only point to Margaret Thatcher's handling of the dispute over the Falkland Islands in 1982 to illustrate how a prime minister's ability to call a snap election at a time of her choosing may leave her less constrained and more prone to diversionary action. Even among presidential systems, the length of a campaign might mediate the influence that electoral politics has on decision-makers. For example, might the fact that French presidential campaigns are legally limited to a duration of two weeks mean that electoral considerations

[13] Multi-state studies of democratic constraint include Huth and Allee (2002); Reiter and Tillman (2002); Clark and Nordstrom (2005); Baum and Potter (2015).
[14] See Williams (2013).

matter less to incumbents there compared to those in United States, where campaign length is both unregulated and exceptionally long?[15] It is not without reason that some have written of a "permanent campaign" in the U.S., and some comparative analysis may indeed mark it out as an important yet exceptional case.[16]

Relatedly, one might reasonably expect there to be a spectrum of sensitivity to electoral constraints depending not simply on what *type* of democracy a state is, but just *how* democratic it is. For instance, the size and nature of the franchise and the relative freedom afforded to the press in a state might be hugely significant, especially since we know that leaders who require the support from fewer individuals to remain in power are more insulated from the constraints of public opinion, as are those who have greater control of the information made available to voters.[17] Interesting comparisons might also be made with authoritarian states in which elections of questionable impartiality are held. To what extent do "sham" elections still incentivise certain types of behaviour from autocrats wishing to bolster their own legitimacy?[18] Even autocracies without an electoral process might help illuminate electoral accountability by way of comparison. For example, would it be reasonable to expect democratic "lame ducks" to behave in similar ways to these autocratic leaders during a war?

Secondly, future studies might examine the extent to which electoral constraints might operate in other areas of policy. Issues involving the use of force tend to be the traditional

---

[15] "Why Are U.S. Elections So Much Longer Than Other Countries?" 21 October 2015, *NPR*. Available online at: https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/10/21/450238156/canadas-11-week-campaign-reminds-us-that-american-elections-are-much-longer (accessed 28 September 2019).

[16] Ornstein and Mann (2000). Applied to Iraq, see McClellan (2008).

[17] The former statement derives from "selectorate theory" – whereby the size of an incumbent's "winning margin" (i.e., the group of people a leader needs support from in order to stay in power) relative to the "selectorate" (i.e. the set of people with a say in choosing leaders) determines his or her sensitivity to democratic constraints. See Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003). On press freedom, see Baum and Potter (2015).

[18] See Schedler (2006).

focus of related examinations of the influence of public opinion on decision-making, primarily because it is only when the costs of foreign policy are brought vividly home to voters that their attention is "activated," and there is little comparable to the image of body bags mounting to focus the mind of the average voter.[19] It follows that many other issues like trade or aid policy might not be sufficiently salient to generate any real electoral risks for decision-makers. Recent events suggest that this may not be universally true, however, with President Trump having been peculiarly effective at articulating the alleged costs of supposed trade imbalances between the United States and China to his political base. Perhaps trade policy and economic negotiations stand susceptible to electoral pressures as 2020 approaches, much as arms control treaties and summit meetings with the U.S.S.R. have been shown to have been in the past.[20]

Finally, additional work might explore in more depth what opportunities for strategic interaction between belligerent states may be generated by the patterns observed in this thesis. While the *spoiler* mechanism here emphasised the impact of electoral politics on a U.S. president's bargaining position, there was much to suggest that other states consciousness of the pressures generated by the American electoral cycle may have led to shifts in *their* diplomatic strategy, too. This applies not only to adversaries, but also allies, to whom the United States has time and again proven to be an unreliable coalition partner, prone to abandonment when its own domestic political conditions suit. A multi-state analysis might yield important additional insights into how both friends and foes are affected by and respond to the patterns of American behaviour shaped by the U.S. electoral cycle. Going beyond negotiations, moreover, if it can be demonstrated that democracies tend to be more cautious or belligerent at certain points of the electoral cycle, how might

[19] Powlick and Katz (1995).
[20] Nincic (1990); Morrow (1991).

this affect the conflict behaviour of their opponents? Certainly, during the Vietnam War, it appears to have been the case that Hanoi timed its Tet Offensive of January 1968 calculating that the Johnson administration's election-year sensitivity to public opinion might work to its advantage.[21] Just as potential victims of diversionary behaviour have been shown to be able to identify troubling conditions and conciliate a would-be aggressor, so too may it be the case that the "rhythm" of the electoral cycle gives enemies of the United States a guide for when and how to confront it by force.[22] Ominously, then, it may not simply be of scholarly interest to appreciate the full implications of the reality that when it comes to wartime decision-making, as Richard Nixon admitted almost fifty years ago, "winning an election is terribly important."[23]

[21] Asselin (2018) 153-154.
[22] On strategic interaction and the diversionary use of force, see Smith (1996); Clark (2003, 2011).
[23] Kissinger and Nixon, 3 August 1972, WHT, RNL.

Bibliography

For the reader's convenience, this bibliography is divided into four sections. The first lists all secondary sources referenced in the theoretical parts of this thesis. The following three sections cover materials used for of the three case studies, sub-divided by source type. Each manuscript collection is accompanied by an associated acronym used in the footnotes.

Theory

Aldrich, John H., John L. Sullivan, and Eugene Borgida. "Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting: Do Presidential Candidates 'Waltz before a Blind Audience?'" *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (1989): 123–141.

Aldrich, John H. Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, Jason Reifler, and Kristin Thompson Sharp. "Foreign Policy and the Electoral Connection." *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 9 (2006): 477–502.

Allison, Graham. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Boston: Little Brown, 1971.

Altman, Daniel. "The Strategist's Curse: A Theory of False Optimism as a Cause of War." *Security Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2015): 284–315.

Armacost, Michael H. *Ballots, Bullets, and Bargains: American Foreign Policy and Presidential Elections*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Arreguin-Toft, Ivan. "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict." *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2001): 93–128.

Auerswald, David P. *Disarmed Democracies: Domestic Institutions and the Use of Force*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Baum, Matthew A. "The Constituent Foundations of the Rally-Round-the-Flag Phenomenon." *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2002): 263–298.

Baum, Matthew A., and Tim Groeling. "Reality Asserts Itself: Public Opinion on Iraq and the Elasticity of Reality." *International Organization*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (2010): 443–479.

Baum, Matthew A., and Philip B. K. Potter. "The Relationships between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis." *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11 (2008): 39–65.

Baum, Matthew A., and Philip B. K. Potter. *War and Democratic Constraint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Bendor, Jonathan, and Thomas H. Hammond. "Rethinking Allison's Models." *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (1992): 301–322.

Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Bennett, Scott D., and Allan C. Stam III. "The Declining Advantages of Democracy: A Combined Model of War Outcomes and Duration." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1998): 344–366.

Berinsky, Adam J. "Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict." *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (2007): 975–997.

Berinsky, Adam J. *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Bernstein, Jonathan. "Campaign Promises." *Washington Monthly* (January/February 2012). Available online at: https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/janfeb-2012/campaign-promises/ (accessed 8 September 2019).

Bernstein, Jonathan. "Has Trump Kept His Promises?" *New York Times*, (22 August 2019). Available online at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/opinion/trump-promises-campaign-2016.html (accessed 8 September 2019).

Biddle, Tami Davis. *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914–1945*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Brody, Richard. *Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

Bueno De Mesquita, Bruce, and David Lalman. *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Bueno De Mesquita, Bruce, James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alastair Smith. "An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace." *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (1999): 791–807.

Bueno De Mesquita, Bruce and James L. Ray. "The National Interest versus Individual Political Ambition," in Paul F. Diehl, ed., *The Scourge of War: New Extensions on an Old Problem*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Bueno De Mesquita, Bruce, and Randolph M. Siverson. "War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability." *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89 (1995): 841–855.

Bueno De Mesquita, Bruce, and Alastair Smith. "Domestic Explanations of International Relations." *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 15 (2012): 161–181.

Bueno De Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow. *The Logic of Political Survival*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.

Byman, Daniel L., and Kenneth M. Pollack. "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back in." *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2001): 107–146.

Campbell, Kurt M., and James B. Steinberg. *Difficult Transitions: Foreign Policy Troubles at the Outset of Presidential Power*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2009.

Canes-Wrone, Brandice. *Who Leads Whom?: Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Carlsnaes, Walter, and Stefano Guzzini. *Foreign Policy Analysis*. London: Sage, 2011.

Carter, Jeff, and Timothy Nordstrom. "Term Limits, Leader Preferences, and Interstate Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (2017): 721–735.

Casey, Steven. *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Casey, Steven. *When Soldiers Fall: How Americans Have Confronted Combat Losses from World War I to Afghanistan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Caverley, Jonathan D. "The Myth of Military Myopia: Democracy, Small Wars, and Vietnam." *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2009): 119–157.

Caverley, Jonathan D. *Democratic Militarism: Voting, Wealth, and War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Chiozza, Giacomo. "Presidents on the Cycle: Elections, Audience Costs, and Coercive Diplomacy." *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2017): 3–26.

Chiozza, Giacomo, and Hein E. Goemans. “Peace through Insecurity: Tenure and International Conflict.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (2003): 443–467.

Clark, David H. “Can Strategic Interaction Divert Diversionary Behavior? A Model of US Conflict Propensity.” *The Journal of Politics* Vol. 65, No. 4 (2003): 1013–1039.

Clark, David H., Benjamin O. Fordham, and Timothy Nordstrom. “Preying on the Misfortune of Others: When Do States Exploit Their Opponents’ Domestic Troubles?” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (2011): 248–264.

Clark, David H., and Timothy Nordstrom. “Democratic Variants and Democratic Variance: How Domestic Constraints Shape Interstate Conflict.” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (2005): 250–270.

Cohen, Bernard C. *The Public’s Impact on Foreign Policy*. Boston: Little Brown, 1973.

Conconi, Paola, Nicolas Sahuguet, and Maurizio Zanardi. “Democratic Peace and Electoral Accountability.” *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2014): 997-1028.

Cormac, Rory, and Richard J. Aldrich. “Grey Is the New Black: Covert Action and Implausible Deniability.” *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 3 (2018): 477–494.

Croco, Sarah E. “The Decider’s Dilemma: Leader Culpability, War Outcomes, and Domestic Punishment.” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3 (2011): 457–477.

Dill, Janina. Legitimate Targets? Social Construction, International Law and US Bombing. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*, 2015.

Divine, Robert A. *Foreign Policy and US Presidential Elections*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1974.

Doyle, Michael W. “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1983a): 205–235.

Doyle, Michael W. “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1983b): 323–353.

Downes, Alexander B. “How Smart and Tough Are Democracies? Reassessing Theories of Democratic Victory in War.” *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2009): 9–51.

Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper, 1957.

Downs, George W., and David M. Rocke. “Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War.” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1994): 362–380.

Druckman, James N., and Lawrence R. Jacobs. “Lumpers and Splitters: The Public Opinion Information That Politicians Collect and Use.” *International Journal of Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (2006): 453–476.

Dunn, David Hastings. “‘Quacking Like a Duck’? Bush II and Presidential Power in the Second Term.” *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (2006): 95–120.

Edwards, George C. *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

Farnham, Barbara. “Impact of the Political Context on Foreign Policy Decision-Making.” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2004): 441–463.

Fearon, James D. “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes.” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (1994): 577–592.

Fearon, James D. “Rationalist Explanations for War.” *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1995): 379-414.

Fiorina, Morris P. “Economic Retrospective Voting in American National Elections: A Micro-Analysis.” *American Journal of Political Science* (1978): 426–443.

Fishel, Jeff. Presidents and Promises: From Campaign Pledge to Presidential Performance. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1985.

Flores-Macías, Gustavo A., and Sarah E. Kreps. “Borrowing Support for War: The Effect of War Finance on Public Attitudes toward Conflict.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 61, No. 5 (2017): 997-1020.

Fordham, Benjamin O., and Thomas C. Walker. “Kantian Liberalism, Regime Type, and Military Resource Allocation: Do Democracies Spend Less?” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (2005): 141–157.

Foyle, Douglas C. “Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Elite Beliefs as a Mediating Variable.” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1997): 141–169.

Foyle, Douglas C. *Counting the Public In: Presidents, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Foyle, Douglas, and Douglas Van Belle. “Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Analysis: Public Opinion, Elections, Interest Groups, and the Media,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Fuller, Christopher J. *See It/Shoot It: The Secret History of the CIA’s Lethal Drone Program*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

Gartner, Scott Sigmund. “The Multiple Effects of Casualties on Public Support for War: An Experimental Approach.” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (2008): 95–106.

Gartner, Scott Sigmund, and Gary M. Segura. “All Politics Are Still Local: The Iraq War and the 2006 Midterm Elections.” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2008): 95–100.

Gartner, Scott Sigmund, and Randolph M. Siverson. “War Expansion and War Outcome.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1996): 4–15.

Gaubatz, Kurt Taylor. “Election Cycles and War.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1991): 212–244.

Gaubatz, Kurt Taylor. *Elections and War: The Electoral Incentive in the Democratic Politics of War and Peace*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Gelpi, Christopher, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler. “Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq.” *International Security* 30, No. 3 (2006): 7–46.

Gelpi, Christopher, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler. *Paying the Human Costs of War: American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

George, Alexander L. “The ‘Operational Code’: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making.” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1969): 190–222.

George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Boston: MIT Press, 2005.

Gerring, John. “Case Selection for Case-Study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques,” in Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Geys, Benny. “Wars, Presidents, and Popularity: The Political Cost (S) of War Re-examined.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (2010): 357–374.

Golby, Jim and Peter Feaver, "Thank You for Your Lip Service? Social Pressure to Support the Troops." *War on the Rocks* (August 2019), Available Online At: https://warontherocks.com/2019/08/thank-you-for-your-lip-service-social-pressure-to-support-the-troops/ (accessed 17 September 2019).

Goldgeier, James, and Elizabeth N. Saunders. "The Unconstrained Presidency: Checks and Balances Eroded Long before Trump." *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 97 (2018): 144.

Gowa, Joanne. "Politics at the Water's Edge: Parties, Voters, and the Use of Force Abroad." *International Organization,* Vol. 52, No. 2 (1998): 307–324.

Graham, Thomas Wallace. "The Politics of Failure: Strategic Nuclear Arms Control, Public Opinion, and Domestic Politics in the United States: 1945–1980." PhD Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989.

Hanhimäki, Jussi M. "Global Visions and Parochial Politics: The Persistent Dilemma of the 'American Century.'" *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 27, No. 4 (2003): 423–447.

Haynes, Kyle. "Lame Ducks and Coercive Diplomacy: Do Executive Term Limits Reduce the Effectiveness of Democratic Threats?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 56, No. 5 (2012): 771–798.

Hess, Gregory D., and Athanasios Orphanides. "War Politics: An Economic, Rational-Voter Framework." *The American Economic Review* (1995): 828–846.

Hill, Christopher. *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Hinckley, Ronald H. *People, Polls and Policy Makers: American Public Opinion and National Security*. New York: Free Press, 1992.

Hollis, Martin, and Steve Smith. "Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision Making." *British Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1986): 269–286.

Holsti, Ole R. *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Horowitz, Michael C., Allan C. Stam, and Cali M. Ellis. *Why Leaders Fight*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Howell, William G. "Presidential Power in War." *Annual Review of Political Science,* Vol. 14 (2011): 89–105.

Howell, William G., and Jon C. Pevehouse. “Presidents, Congress, and the Use of Force.” *International Organization*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (2005): 209–232.

Howell, William G., and Jon C. Pevehouse. *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Hudson, Valerie M. “Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations.” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2005): 1–30.

Huth, Paul K., and Todd L. Allee. “Domestic Political Accountability and the Escalation and Settlement of International Disputes.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 46, No. 6 (2002): 754–790.

Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Robert Y. Shapiro. *Politicians Don’t Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Jacobson, Gary C. “George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the Election of Barack Obama.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2010): 207–224.

Jentleson, Bruce W. “The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force.” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (1992): 49–74.

Jervis, Robert. “Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?” *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2013): 153–179.

Jervis, Robert. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. 2nd edn. Princeton University Press, (2017a).

Jervis, Robert. *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, (2017b).

Johnson, Dominic D. P., and Dominic Tierney. *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Johnson, Dominic D. P. *Overconfidence and War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Johnston, Patrick B., and Brian R. Urlacher. *Explaining the Duration of Counterinsurgency Campaigns*. Arlington: RAND Corporation, 2012.

Johnstone, Andrew, and Andrew Priest. *US Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017.

Jones, Christopher M. "Bureaucratic Politics and Organizational Process Models," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. 2010. Available online at oxfordre.com (accessed 9 October 2019).

Kaag, John, and Sarah Kreps. *Drone Warfare*. Cambridge: Polity, 2014.

Kaarbo, Juliet. "A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory." *International Studies Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2015): 189–216.

Kagan Frederick, W. *Finding the Target*. New York: Encounter, 2006.

Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Macmillan, 2011.

Kahneman, Daniel and Jonathan Renshon. "Why Hawks Win." *Foreign Policy* (October 2009). Available Online At: https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/13/why-hawks-win/ (accessed 17 September 2019).

Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Indianiapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983 [1796].

Karol, David, and Edward Miguel. "The Electoral Cost of War: Iraq Casualties and the 2004 US Presidential Election." *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (2007): 633–648.

Katz, Andrew Z. "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The Nixon Administration and the Pursuit of Peace with Honor in Vietnam." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1997): 496–513.

Khong, Yuen Foong. *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Kello, Lucas. "The Meaning of the Cyber Revolution: Perils to Theory and Statecraft." *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2013): 7–40.

Key, V. O. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Knopf, 1961.

Klein, Ezra. "Presidents Keep Their Campaign Promises." Washington Post (20 January 2012). Available Online At: https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-

klein/post/presidents-keep-their-campaign-promises/2011/08/25/gIQAwCA9DQ_blog.html (accessed 8 September 2019).

Knecht, Thomas, and M. Stephen Weatherford. "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The Stages of Presidential Decision Making." *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2006): 705–727.

Krasner, Stephen D. "Are Bureaucracies Important? (or Allison Wonderland)." *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 7 (1972): 159–179.

Kreps, Sarah. *Taxing Wars: The American Way of War Finance and the Decline of Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Kriner, Douglas L. *After the Rubicon: Congress, Presidents, and the Politics of Waging War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Kull, Steven, I. M. Destler, and Clay Ramsay. *The Foreign Policy Gap: How Policymakers Misread the Public. Program on International Policy Attitudes*. College Park: Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, 1997.

Kull, Steven, and Clay Ramsay. "How Policymakers Misperceive US Public Opinion on Foreign Policy," in Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook, and Benjamin I. Page, eds. *Navigating Public Opinion–Polls, Policy and the Future of American Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Kupchan, Charles A., and Peter L. Trubowitz. "Dead Center: The Demise of Liberal Internationalism in the United States." *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2007): 7–44.

Lake, David A. "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War." *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (1992): 24–37.

Larson, Deborah Welch. "Sources and Methods in Cold War History: The Need for a New Theory-Based Archival Approach," in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds. *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001.

Larson, Eric Victor. *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for US Military Operations.* Santa Monica: RAND, 1996.

Lee, Carrie, "Operation TORCH at 75: FDR and the Domestic Politics of the North African Invasion." *War on the Rocks* (November 2019). Available Online At: https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/16075/ (accessed 25 September 2019).

Levy, Jack S. “Domestic Politics and War.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1988): 653–673.

Levy, Jack S. “Diversionary War Theory: A Critique,” in Manus I. Midlarsky I, ed. *Handbook of War Studies*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

Levy, Jack S. “Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations.” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1997): 87–112.

Levy, Jack S. “Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2008): 1–18.

Levy, Jack S. “Psychology and Foreign Policy Decision-Making,” in David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Lian, Bradley, and John R. Oneal. “Presidents, the Use of Military Force, and Public Opinion.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (1993): 277–300.

Lobell, Steven E., Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Logevall, Fredrik. “Politics and Foreign Relations.” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (2009): 1074–1078.

Mack, Andrew. “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict.” *World Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1975): 175–200.

Marsh, Kevin P., and Christopher M. Jones. “Breaking Miles’ Law: The Curious Case of Hillary Clinton the Hawk.” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2017): 541–560.

May, Ernest R. *“Lessons” of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.

McDermott, Rose. *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001.

Meernik, James. “Presidential Decision Making and the Political Use of Military Force.” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (1994): 121–138.

Meernik, James. “Domestic Politics and the Political Use of Military Force by the United States.” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (2001): 889–904.

Meernik, James. *The Political Use of Military Force in US Foreign Policy*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2004.

Meernik, James, and Peter Waterman. "The Myth of the Diversionary Use of Force by American Presidents." *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1996): 573–590.

Meibauer, Gustav. "Searching for Consensus: Elections, Foreign Policy, and the Rhetoric of No-Fly Zones." *Politics*, Forthcoming.

Mercer, Jonathan. "Prospect Theory and Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 8 (2005): 1–21.

Merom, Gil. *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Milner, Helen V., and Dustin Tingley. *Sailing the Water's Edge: The Domestic Politics of American Foreign Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Mintz, Alex. "How Do Leaders Make Decisions? A Poliheuristic Perspective." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2004): 3–13.

Moore, Will H., and David J. Lanoue. "Domestic Politics and US Foreign Policy: A Study of Cold War Conflict Behavior." *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2003): 376–396.

Morrow, James D. "Electoral and Congressional Incentives and Arms Control." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1991): 245–265.

Mosher, Frederick C., W. David Clinton, and Daniel George Lang. *Presidential Transitions and Foreign Affairs.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

Most, Benjamin A., and Harvey Starr. "International Relations Theory, Foreign Policy Substitutability, and "Nice" Laws." *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (1984): 383–406.

Mueller, John E. *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. New York: Wiley, 1973.

Nagl, John A. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Nincic, Miroslav. "US Soviet Policy and the Electoral Connection." *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1990): 370–396.

Nincic, Miroslav. *Democracy and Foreign Policy: The Fallacy of Political Realism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Oneal, John R., and Anna Lillian Bryan. "The Rally 'Round the Flag Effect in US Foreign Policy Crises, 1950–1985." *Political Behavior*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1995): 379–401.

Oppermann, Kai. "Delineating the Scope Conditions of the Poliheuristic Theory of Foreign Policy Decision Making: The Noncompensatory Principle and the Domestic Salience of Foreign Policy." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2014): 23–41.

Ornstein, Norman J., and Thomas E. Mann. *The Permanent Campaign and Its Future*. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2000.

Ostrom, Charles W., and Brian L. Job. "The President and the Political Use of Force." *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (1986): 541–566.

Pape, Robert A. *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Potter, Philip BK. "Does Experience Matter? American Presidential Experience, Age, and International Conflict." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (2007): 351–378.

Potter, Philip BK. "Electoral Margins and American Foreign Policy." *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (2013): 505–518.

Potter, Philip B. K. "Lame-Duck Foreign Policy." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 4, December 2016, 849–67.

Powlick, Philip J. "The Attitudinal Bases for Responsiveness to Public Opinion among American Foreign Policy Officials." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (1991): 611–641.

Powlick, Philip J. "The Sources of Public Opinion for American Foreign Policy Officials." *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1995): 427–451.

Powlick, Philip J., and Andrew Z. Katz. "Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus." *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (1998): 29–61.

Preston, Andrew, "Beyond the Water's Edge: Foreign Policy and Electoral Politics." In Gareth Davies and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *America at the Ballot Box*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015: 219–37.

Putnam, Robert D. “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games.” *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1988): 427–460.

Quandt, William B. “The Electoral Cycle and the Conduct of Foreign Policy.” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 101, No. 5 (1986): 825–837.

Ray, James Lee. *Democracy and International Conflict*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.

Record, Jeffrey. “The American Way of War: Cultural Barriers to Successful Counterinsurgency.” *Cato Institute* No. 577 (2006): 1–20.

Record, Jeffrey. *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win*. Dulles: Potomac Books, 2007.

Reiter, Dan, and Allan C. Stam. *Democracies at War.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Reiter, Dan, and Erik R. Tillman. “Public, Legislative, and Executive Constraints on the Democratic Initiation of Conflict.” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (2002): 810–826.

Ripsman, Norrin M., Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Rose, Gideon. “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy.” *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (1998): 144–172.

Rosen, Stephen Peter. “Vietnam and the American Theory of Limited War.” *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1982): 83–113.

Russett, Bruce M. Controlling the Sword: *The Democratic Governance of National Security.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Russett, Bruce M. and John R. Oneal *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations.* New York: Norton, 2001.

Saunders, Elizabeth N. *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions.* New York: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Scahill, Jeremy. *Dirty Wars: The World Is a Battlefield*. London: Hachette, 2013.

Schedler, Andreas. “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism.,” in Andreas Schedler, ed. *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2006.

Schwartz, Thomas Alan. "'Henry,… Winning an Election Is Terribly Important': Partisan Politics in the History of US Foreign Relations." *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2009): 173–190.

Schweller, Randall L. "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing." *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2004): 159–201.

Shapiro, R., and L. Jacobs. "Who Leads and Who Follows?" in Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Pierangelo Isernia, eds. *Decision making in a Glass House: Mass Media, Public Opinion, and American and European Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Shapiro, Robert Y. and Lawrence R. Jacobs, "Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, and Democracy: How Presidents Use Public Opinion" in Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook, and Benjamin I. Page, eds. *Navigating Public Opinion: Polls, Policy, and the Future of American democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Shogan, Colleen J. "The Contemporary Presidency: The Sixth Year Curse." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2006): 89–101.

Sil, Rudra, and Peter J. Katzenstein. "Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics: Reconfiguring Problems and Mechanisms across Research Traditions." *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2010): 411–431.

Singer, Peter W. *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Siverson, Randolph M. "Democracies and War Participation: In Defense of the Institutional Constraints Argument." *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1995): 481–489.

Slantchev, Branislav L. "How Initiators End Their Wars: The Duration of Warfare and the Terms of Peace." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2004): 813–829.

Small, Melvin. *Democracy and Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics in US Foreign Policy*, 1789–1994. Baltimore: JHU Press, 1996.

Smith, Alastair. "Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems." *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1996): 133–153.

Sobel, Richard. *Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy since Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Stoll, Richard J. “The Guns of November: Presidential Reelections and the Use of Force, 1947–1982.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1984): 231–246.

Sullivan, Patricia L. “War Aims and War Outcomes: Why Powerful States Lose Limited Wars.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (2007): 496–524.

Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Tarar, Ahmer. “Diversionary Incentives and the Bargaining Approach to War.” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2006): 169–188.

Thies, Cameron G., ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Trachtenberg, Marc. *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Trubowitz, Peter. *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Tsebelis, George. *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Valentino, Benjamin A., Paul K. Huth, and Sarah E. Croco. “Bear Any Burden? How Democracies Minimize the Costs of War.” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (2010): 528–544.

Walt, Stephen, “Wishful Thinking.” *Foreign Policy* (April 2011). Available Online At: https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/04/29/wishful-thinking/ (accessed 17 September 2019).

Waltz, Kenneth N. “International Politics Is Not Foreign Policy.” *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1996): 54–57.

Wildavsky, Aaron. “The Two Presidencies.” *Trans-Action*, Vol. 4 (1966): 7–14.

Williams, Laron K. “Flexible Election Timing and International Conflict.” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (2013): 449–461.

Zaller, John R. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Zeigler, Sean, Jan H. Pierskalla, and Sandeep Mazumder. “War and the Reelection Motive: Examining the Effect of Term Limits.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (2014): 658–684.

Zelizer, Julian E. *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security–from World War II to the War on Terrorism.* New York: Basic Books, 2010.

Korea

Manuscript Collections

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas (DDEL)

Brownell, Herbert, Jr., Papers
Clark, Mark W. Papers
Collins, J. Lawton, Papers
Dulles, John Foster, Papers
Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President (Ann Whitman File) (AWF)
Dwight D. Eisenhower, Pre Presidential Papers
Hagerty, James C. Papers
Harlow, Bryce, Papers
Humphreys, Robert, Papers
Jackson, C. D. Papers
Lodge, Henry Cabot, Papers
Republican National Committee: Office of the Chairman Records (RNC/OCR)
Schaefer, Early J. Papers
White House Central File (WHCF)
White House Office: National Security Council Staff Papers (WHO/NSCS)
White House Office: Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (WHO/OSANSA)
White House Office: Office of the Staff Secretary (WHO/OSS)

Oral History Transcripts
- Briggs, Ellis
- Brownell, Herbert, Jr.
- Clark, Mark W.
- Eisenhower, Dwight D.
- Hagerty, James C.
- Kendall, David
- Murphy, Robert
- Robertson, Walter
- Sherrod, Robert L.
- Stassen, Harold E.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (LOC)

Vandenburg, Hoyt S., Papers

Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archive, Norfolk, Virginia (MMA)

RG-5 Records of General Headquarters, SCAP, 1945-1951
RG-6: Records of Headquarters, FECOM, 1947-1951
RG-7: Records of General Headquarters, UNC, 1950-1951
RG-9: Collection of Messages (Radiograms), 1945-1951
RG-10: General Douglas MacArthur's Private Correspondence, 1848-1964
RG-16a: Papers of Major General Courtney Whitney
RG-32: Oral History Collection
RG-37: Papers of Major General Frank E. Lowe, 1950-1951
RG-45: Papers of Colonel Laurence Elliot Bunker
RG-49: James Interviews
RG-50: Papers of Philip M. Brower

Public Records Office, Kew Gardens, London (KG)

Cabinet Office Files
    CAB 128
    CAB 129

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri (HSTL)

Acheson, Dean, Papers
Anderson, Vernice E., Papers
Ayers, Eben A., Papers
Bond, Niles W., Papers
Connelly, Matthew J., Papers
Dennison, Robert L., Papers
Elsey, George M., Papers
Hechler, Kenneth, Papers
Lloyd, David D., Papers
Murphy, Charles S., Papers
National Security Council File (NSCF)
Staff Member and Office Files: Korean War File (SMOF/KWF)
Post Presidential Papers (PPP)
President's Secretary's Files (PSF)
Tannenwald, Theodore J., Jr., Papers
White House Central File (WHCF)

U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Ridgway, Matthew B., Papers

Published Documentary Collections

United States Department of State. *Department of State Bulletin,* Vol. XXIII, No. 575, (10 July 1950). Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950

Ferrell, Robert H. ed. *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*. New York: Harper and Row, 1980.

United States Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1950, Korea, Vol. VII.* Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1976.

United States Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1951, Korea and China, Vol. VII.* 2 Parts. Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1983.

United States Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1952-1954, Korea and China, Vol. XV.* 2 Parts. Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984.

Kennan, George F. *The Kennan Diaries*; *Edited by Frank Costigliola*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2014.

Stevenson, Adlai E. *Major Campaign Speeches of Adlai E. Stevenson, 1952*. New York: Random House, 1953.

Memoirs

Acheson, Dean. *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1969.

Bradley, Omar and Clay Blair. *A General's Life: An Autobiography by the General of the Army*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983.

Clark, Mark W. *From the Danube to the Yalu.* London: George C. Harrap, 1954.

Collins, J. Lawton. *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Crusade in Europe*. London: Heinemann, 1948.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Mandate for Change: The White House Years*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1963.

Hughes, Emmet John. *The Ordeal of Power: A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years*. London: Macmillan, 1963.

Jebb, Gladwyn. *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972.

Kennan, George F. *Memoirs: 1950-1963.* London: Hutchinson, 1973.

MacArthur, Douglas. *Reminiscences.* New York: McGraw Hill, 1964.

Ridgway, Matthew B. *The Korean War*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1967.

Rusk, Dean. *As I Saw It*. New York: Penguin, 1990.

Truman, Harry S. *Memoirs, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1956.

Willoughby, Charles A. *MacArthur: 1941-1951, Victory in the Pacific.* London: Heinemann, 1956.

Whitney, Courtney. *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History.* New York: Knopf, 1956.

Secondary Sources

Barnes, Robert. “Branding an Aggressor: The Commonwealth, the United Nations and Chinese Intervention in the Korean War, November 1950-January 1951.” *The Journal of Strategic Studies,* Vol. 33, No. 2, (2010) 231-253.

Barnes, Robert. “Ending the Korean War: Reconsidering the Importance of Eisenhower’s Election.” *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 158, No. 3 (2013), pp. 78-87.

Barnes, Robert. *The US, the UN and the Korean War: Communism in the Far East and the American Struggle for Hegemony in the Cold War.* London: I. B. Tauris, 2014.

Blomstedt, Larry. *Truman, Congress, and Korea: The Politics of America's First Undeclared War.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016.

Brands, H. W. *The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman on the Brink of Nuclear War*. New York: Doubleday, 2016.

Broadwater, Jeff. *Adlai Stevenson and American Politics: The Odyssey of a Cold War Liberal*. New York: Twayne, 1994.

Caridi, Ronald J. *The Korean War and American Politics: The Republican Party as a Case Study.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968.

Casey, Steven. "White House Publicity Operations During the Korean War, June 1950 – June 1951." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35 No. 4 (2005): 691-717.

Casey, Steven. "Selling NSC-68: The Truman Administration, Public Opinion, and the Politics of Mobilization, 1950–51." *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2005): 655-690.

Casey, Steven. *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Casey, Steven. "Casualty Reporting and Domestic Support for War: The US Experience during the Korean War." *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2010): 291–316.

Casey, Steven, ed. *The Korean War at Sixty: New Approaches to the Study of the Korean War*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.

Casey, Steven. "Confirming the Cold War Consensus: Eisenhower and the 1952 Election," in Andrew Johnstone and Andrew Priest, eds. *US Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017.

Craig, Campbell, and Fredrik Logevall. *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Divine, Robert A. *Foreign Policy and U.S. Presidential Elections: 1952-1960*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1974.

Foot, Rosemary. *The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean Conflict, 1950-1953.* New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Foot, Rosemary. *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Gaddis, John Lewis. *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Greene, John Robert. *The Crusade: The Presidential Election of 1952*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1985.

Greenstein, Fred I. *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*. New York: Basic Books, 1982.

Higgins, Trumbull. *Korea and the Fall of MacArthur: A Precis in Limited War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960.

Jervis, Robert. "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1980): 563-592.

Kaufman, Burton I. *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.

Miller, Merle. *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman.* New York: G. P. Putnam, 1974.

Neustadt, Richard E. *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership from FDR to Carter*. Chichester: Wiley, 1980.

Stanley, Elizabeth. "Ending the Korean War: The Role of Domestic Coalition Shifts in Overcoming Obstacles to Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2009): 42-82.

Stanley, Elizabeth. *Paths to Peace: Domestic Coalition Shifts, War Termination and the Korean War*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Stueck, William. *The Korean War: An International History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Tannenwald, Nina. "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use," *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (1999): 433-468.

Weintraub, Stanley. *MacArthur's War: Korea and the Undoing of an American Hero*. New York: The Free Press, 2000.

Young, Marilyn B. "Hard Sell: The Korean War," in Kenneth Osgood and Andrew K. Frank, *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010.

Zhang, Shu Guang. *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1992.

Zhang, Shu Guang. *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995.

Vietnam

Manuscript Collections

Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas (LBJL)

Bundy, William P. Papers
Handwriting File (HF)
Tom Johnson Notes of Meetings (TJNM)
Meeting Notes File (MNF)
National Security Files (NSF)
Office of the President File (OPF)
Presidential Papers (PP)
Telephone Conversations (TC)
Warnke, Paul C. Papers
White House Central File (WHCF)
White House Famous Names File (WHFNF)

Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, California (RNL)

H. R. Haldeman, Diary [Handwritten and Taped] (HD)
Kissinger, Henry A., Office Files (HAKOF)
Kissinger, Henry A., Telephone Conversation Transcripts (Telcons) (HAKTC)
National Security Council Files (NSCF)
President's Personal File (PPF)
White House Central Files (WHCF)
White House Special Files (WHSF)
White House Special Files/Staff Member and Office Files (WHSF/SMOF)
White House Tapes (WHT)

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (LOC)

Clifford, Clark M. Papers
Harriman, Averell W. Papers

U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (AMHI)

Senior Officer Oral History Program
Westmoreland, William C.
Weyand, Frederick C.

Published Primary Sources

Barrett, David, M. *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection*, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1997.

Brinkley, Douglas, and Luke A. Nichter, eds. *The Nixon Tapes: 1971-1972*. New York: Mariner Books, 2015.

Gibbons, William C. *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Part 4: July 1965 – January 1968*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Haldeman, H. R. *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House*, New York: Putnam, 1994.

The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decision-Making on Vietnam, Senator Gravel edn. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.

Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson. 10 Vols. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1965-70.

Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon. 5 Vols. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971-75.

United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1964-1968, Vietnam*. 9 Vols. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1992-2010.

Interviews/Personal Correspondence

Bator, Francis M. Deputy National Security Advisor to President Johnson (1965-67). Telephone Interview, 16 March 2017.

Butterfield, Alexander P. Deputy Assistant to President Nixon (1969-73). Interview, Austin, Texas, 29 April 2016.

Califano, Joseph A., Jr. Special Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense (1964-65), Special Assistant to President Johnson (1965-69). Telephone Interview, 1 May 2013.

Johnson, Tom. Aide to President Johnson (1965-73). Email Correspondence, 4 May 2016 to 29 March 2017.

Negroponte, John D. Political Officer, U.S. Embassy, Vietnam (1964-68), Liaison Officer, Paris Peace Talks (1968-69), NSC Staff (1970-73). Interview, Washington, D.C., 27 March 2018.

Shepard, Geoff. Associate Director for General Government (1972). Email Correspondence, 20 January 2017 to 13 February 2017.

Memoirs

Chennault, Anna. *The Education of Anna*. New York: Times Books, 1980.

Clifford, Clark with Richard Holbrooke. *Counsel to the President: A Memoir*. New York: Random House, 1991.

Haig, Alexander M., Jr. *Inner Circles: How America Changed the World*. New York: Warner Books, 1992.

Haldeman, H. R., with Joseph DiMona. *Ends of Power*. New York: Times Books, 1978.

Johnson, Lyndon B. *The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency. 1963-1969*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston,1971.

Kissinger, Henry. *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003.

Kissinger, Henry. *The White House Years*. Boston: Little Brown & Co, 1979.

McNamara, Robert S., with Brian VanDeMark. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. New York: Times Books, 1995.

Nixon, Richard. *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978.

Rusk, Dean. *As I Saw It*. New York: Penguin, 1990.

Secondary Sources

Asselin, Pierre. *Vietnam's American War: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Barrett, David M. *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and his Vietnam Advisers*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993.

Bator, Francis M. "No Good Choices: LBJ and the Vietnam/Great Society Connection." *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 32, No. 3, (2008): 309-40.

Berman, Larry. *Lyndon Johnson's War*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1989.

Berman, Larry. *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

Brands, Henry Williams, Jr. "Johnson and Eisenhower: The President, the Former President, and the War in Vietnam." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1985): 589-601.

Dallek, Robert. *Nixon and Kissinger*. New York: Harper Collins, 2007.

Garofano, John. "Tragedy or Choice in Vietnam? Learning to Think Outside the Archival Box: A Review Essay." *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2002): 143-168.

Gelb, Leslie H., and Richard K. Betts. *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1979.

Goldstein, Gordon M. *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam*. New York: Henry Holt, 2008.

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

Halberstam, David. *The Best and the Brightest*. New York: Random House, 1972.

Hastings, Max. *Vietnam: An Epic History of a Tragic War*. London: William Collins, 2018.

Herring, George C. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam. 1950-1975*, 4th edn. New York: McGraw Hill, 2002.

Herring, George C. *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.

Hughes, Ken. *Chasing Shadows: The Nixon Tapes, the Chennault Affair, and the Origins of Watergate*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014.

Hughes, Ken. *Fatal Politics: The Nixon Tapes, the Vietnam War, and the Casualties of Reelection*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015.

Johns, Andrew. *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010.

Johnson, Dominic D.P. *Overconfidence and War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Khong, Yuen Foong. *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Kimball, Jeffrey. *Nixon's Vietnam War*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998.

Kimball, Jeffrey. *The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of the Nixon-Era Strategy*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004.

LaFeber, Walter. "Johnson, Vietnam and Tocqueville," in Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, eds. *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Lawrence, Mark A. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Lebovic, James H. *Planning to Fail: The US Wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Lee, Carrie A. *The Politics of Military Operations*. PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 2015.

Lerner, Mitchell. "Vietnam and the 1964 Election: A Defense of Lyndon Johnson." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1995) 751-66.

Logevall, Fredrik. "'There Ain't No Daylight': Lyndon Johnson and the Politics of Escalation', in Mark P. Bradley and Marilyn B. Young, eds. *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Logevall, Fredrik. *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Logevall, Fredrik and Andrew Preston, eds. *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Loi, Luu Van, and Nguyen Anh Vu. *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*. Hanoi: The Gio Publishers, 1996.

McMaster, H. R. *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson and Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

Nguyen, Lien-Hang, T. *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Preston, Andrew. *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Sagan, Scott D. and Jeremi Suri. "The Madman Nuclear Alert: Secrecy, Signaling and Safety in October 1969," *Quarterly Journal: International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Spring 2003.

Schmitz, David F. *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014.

Sieg, Kent G. "The 1968 Presidential Election and Peace in Vietnam." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (1996): 1062-80.

Small, Melvin. *At the Water's Edge: American Politics and the Vietnam War*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005.

Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2004.

VanDeMark, Brian. *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

VanDeMark, Brian. *Road to Disaster: A New History of America's Descent into Vietnam.* New York: Custom House, 2018.

Woodward, Bob. *The Last of the President's Men*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015.

Young, Marilyn B. *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

Iraq

Manuscript Collections

National Defense University, Washington, D.C. (NDU)

Casey, George W., Jr. Papers
Petraeus, David H. Papers

U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (AMHI)

CENTCOM Iraq Papers

Other

"The Rumsfeld Papers." Available online at: papers.rumsfeld.com (accessed 8 October 2019).

Published Primary Sources

Baker, James A., III, and Lee H. Hamilton. *The Iraq Study Group Report*. New York: Vintage, 2006.

Crane, Conrad C. et al. *Army Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency.* Carlisle: United States Department of the Army, 2006.

Rayburn, Joel D. and Frank K. Sobchak (eds). *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War,* 2 Vols. Carlisle: United States Army War College Press, 2019.

Interviews/Personal Correspondence

Blinken, Antony J. National Security Advisor to the Vice President (2009-13). Telephone Interview, 8 June 2018.

Brennan, John O. Homeland Security Advisor (2009-13), CIA Director (2013-17). Telephone Interview, 19 July 2018.

Cartwright, James. Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (2007-11). Interview, Washington, D.C., 26 March 2018.

Casey, George W., Jr. Commanding General, Multi-National Force – Iraq (2004-07), Chief of Staff, U.S. Army (2007-11). Interview, Arlington, VA, 16 March 2018.

Crane, Conrad C. Lead Author, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual, FM3-24* (2006). Interview, Carlisle, PA, 23 March 2018.

Flournoy, Michèle. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (2009-12). Interview, Washington, D.C., 3 April 2018.

Jeffrey, James F. Chargé d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad (2004-05), Special Advisor for Iraq, State Department (2006-07), Deputy National Security Advisor (2007-08), U.S. Ambassador to Iraq (2010-12). Telephone Interview, 28 June 2018. Email Correspondence, June 2018.

Kahl, Colin H. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East (2009-11). Interview, Washington, D.C., 15 March 2018.

Loftis, Robert. Senior Advisor for Security Negotiations and Agreements, State Department (2004-07). Interview, Boston, MA, 21 March 2018.

Lute, Douglas. Director of Operations, CENTCOM (2004-06), Director of Operations, Joint Staff (2006-07), Deputy National Security Advisor (2007-10). Interview, Rossyln, 3 April 2018.

Mullen, Michael G. Chief of Naval Operations (2005-07), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (2007-11). Interview, Washington, D.C., 29 March 2018.

Negroponte, John D. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (2001-04), U.S. Ambassador to Iraq (2004-05), Director of National Intelligence (2005-07), Deputy Secretary of State (2007-09). Interview, Washington, D.C., 27 March 2018.

O'Sullivan, Meghan L. Assistant to Paul Bremer, Coalition Provisional Authority (2003-04), Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan (2004-07). Phone Interview, 11 June 2018. Email Correspondence, January 2019.

Rapp, William. Director of Commander's Initiatives Group, MNF-I (2007-08). Interview, Cambridge, MA, 20 March 2018.

Sattler, John F. Director of Operations, CENTCOM (2003-04), Commander, I Marine Expeditionary Force (2004-06), Director of Strategic Plans and Policy, Joint Staff (2006-08). Telephone Interview, 25 July 2018.

Sky, Emma. Political Advisor to Commanding General, MNF-I (2007-10). Interview, Oxford, 26 February 2018.

Zelikow, Philip D. Counselor to the Secretary of State (2005-06). Interview, Charlottesville, VA, 19 March 2018.

Memoirs

Bush, George W. *Decision Points*. New York: Crown, 2010.

Casey, George W., Jr. *Strategic Reflections: Operation* Iraqi Freedom: *July 2004-February 2007*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2012.

Cheney, Dick. *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir*. New York: Threshold, 2011.

Chollet, Derek. *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World*. New York: Public Affairs, 2016.

Crane, Conrad C. *Cassandra in Oz: Counterinsurgency and Future War*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016.

Gates, Robert M. *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War.* New York: Knopf, 2014.

Hayden, Michael V. *Playing to the Edge: American Intelligence in the Age of Terror.* New York: Penguin, 2016.

Hill, Christipher R. *Outpost: A Diplomat at Work*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014.

Khalilzad, Zalmay. *The Envoy: From Kabul to the White House, My Journey Through A Turbulent World*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016.

Kilcullen, David. *Blood Year: Islamic State and the Failures of the War on Terror*. London: Hurst, 2016.

Mansoor, Peter R. *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

McClellan, Scott. *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception*. New York: Public Affairs, 2008.

Panetta, Leon. *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace*. New York: Penguin, 2014.

Rhodes, Ben. *The World As It Is: Inside the Obama White House*. London: Bodley Head, 2018.

Rice, Condoleezza. *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington.* New York: Crown, 2011.

Rove, Karl. *Courage and Consequence: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.

Rumsfeld, Donald. *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*. New York: Penguin, 2011.

Sky, Emma. *The Unravelling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq*. London: Atlantic, 2015.

Secondary Sources

Bacevich, Andrew J. *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History*. New York: Random House, 2016.

Badie, Dina. "Groupthink, Iraq, and the War on Terror: Explaining US Policy Shift Toward Iraq." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2010): 277-296.

Baker, Peter. *Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House*. New York: Doubleday, 2013.

Betts, Richard K., Michael C. Desch and Peter D. Feaver. "Correspondence: Civilians, Soldiers, and the Iraq Surge Decision." *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2011): 179-199.

Biddle, Stephen, Jeffrey A. Friedman and Jacob N. Shapiro. "Testing the Surge: Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?" *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2012): 7-40.

Brennan, Richard R., Jr., et al. *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq: The Final Transition, Operational Maneuver, and Disestablishment of United States Forces-Iraq*. Santa Monica: RAND, 2013.

Corn, David, and Michael Isikoff. *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007.

Debs, Alexandre, and Nuno P. Monteiro. "Known Unknowns: Power Shifts, Uncertainty, and War." *International Organization*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (2014): 1-31.

Desch, Michael C. "Bush and the Generals." *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2007).

Dueck, Colin. *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Dyson, Stephen B. "'Stuff Happens': Donald Rumsfeld and the Iraq War." *Foreign Policy Analysis,* Vol. 5, No. 4 (2009): 327-347.

Dyson, Stephen B. "George W. Bush, the Surge, and Presidential Leadership." *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 125, No. 4 (2011): 557-585.

Feaver, Peter D. "Anatomy of the Surge." *Commentary* (April 2008).

Feaver, Peter D. "The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision." *International Security,* Vol. 35, No. 4 (2011): 87-125.

Flibbert, Andrew. "The Road to Baghdad: Ideas and Intellectuals in Explanations of the Iraq War." *Security Studies* Vol. 15, No. 2 (2006): 310-352.

Gelpi, Christopher, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler. "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq." *International Security* 30, No. 3 (2006): 7–46.

Gelpi, Christopher, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler. *Paying the Human Costs of War: American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Gentile, Gian. *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*. New York: Free Press, 2013.

Gerges, Fawaz A. *Obama and the Middle East: The End of America's Moment?* London: Macmillan, 2012.

Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Obama Doctrine." *The Atlantic* (April 2016).

Gordon, Michael and Bernard Trainor. *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, From George W. Bush to Barack Obama.* New York: Pantheon, 2012.

Holsti, Ole R. *American Public Opinion and the Iraq War*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012.

Jacobson, Gary C. "George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the Election of Barack Obama." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol. 40, No. 2 (2010): 207-224.

Kahl, Colin H. and William E. Odom, "When to Leave Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2008).

Kaufmann, Chaim. "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War." *International Security,* Vol. 29, No. 1 (2004): 5-48.

Lake, David A. "Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War." *International Security,* Vol. 35, No. 3 (2010): 7-52.

Lebovic, James H. *Planning to Fail: The US Wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Mann, James. *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*. New York: Penguin, 2004.

Mann, James. *The Obamians: The Struggle Inside the White House to Redefine American Power*. New York: Penguin, 2012.

Marsh, Kevin P. "The Intersection of War and Politics: The Iraq War Troop Surge and Bureaucratic Politics." *Armed Forces & Society,* Vol. 38, No. 3 (2012): 413-437.

Mazaar, Michael J. *Leap of Faith: Hubris, Negligence, and America's Greatest Foreign Policy Tragedy*. New York: Public Affairs, 2019.

Mitchell, David, and Tansa George Massoud. "Anatomy of Failure: Bush's Decision-Making Process and the Iraq War." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2009): 265-286.

O'Sullivan, Meghan L. "The Problem with Obama's Decision to Leave Iraq." *Foreign Affairs* (October 2011).

Pillar, Paul R. *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, 9/11 and Misguided Reform*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Rapport, Aaron. "The Long and Short of It: Cognitive Constraints on Leaders' Assessments of 'Postwar' Iraq." *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2013): 133-171.

Rice, Condoleezza. *Democracy: Stories from the Long Road to Freedom.* New York: Twelve, 2017.

Ricks, Thomas E. *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006*-2008. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Robinson, Linda. *Tell Me How this Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq*. New York: Public Affairs, 2008.

Smith, Niel and Sean MacFarland. “Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point,” *Military Review* (March/April 2008): 41-52.

West, Bing. *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq*. New York: Random House, 2008.

Woodward, Bob. *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.

Woodward, Bob. *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008.

Woodward, Bob. *Obama’s Wars.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.