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PUBLIC OPINION AND STATE POLICY

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of Government
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

In Partial Fulfillment

**Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts**

by

Bart J. Cannon

1991

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts


Bart J. Cannon

Approved, May 1991


Michael Clark


David Dessler


Anne Henderson

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.

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ABSTRACT

As part of the research into the causes of war, different opinions have developed over the impact public opinion can have on the conduct of war. To explore this question, this paper examines the role played by public opinion in the Vietnam war through three different paradigms of public opinion (the force, constraint, and enabling condition models) and Daniel C. Hallin's hypothesis that public opinion regarding the Vietnam war was created by the president when he sent clear messages through the media. The three models and Hallin's hypothesis were used to explain data produced by six events during the Vietnam war and how they were reported during the conflict. It was discovered that the role of public opinion depends upon the event since no one model could explain all six events. Also, Hallin's theory was found to be limited in that, though a high level of agreement between public opinion and the media's reporting was identified, the president was unable to guide the media in all situations. The results demonstrate that the search for the causes of war and the role of public opinion in such events is far from complete.

PUBLIC OPINION AND STATE POLICY

CHAPTER I
PARADIGMS OF PUBLIC OPINION

The author's first formal introduction to the study of international relations was in the pages of Walter S. Jones' The Logic of International Relations.¹ As is standard with such texts, Jones' work covers many of the problems and issues faced by those who seek to understand human behavior in this field. One of these questions is a riddle that has plagued social scientists since the dawn of civilization: What are the causes of war?

In one chapter, Jones examines fourteen separate theories of the causes of war, each with its own merits.² In his estimation, the most "comprehensive theory" amongst these explains war as a tool of conflict resolution.³ In this theory war "is a rational instrument of decision, and war policies are decided by a logical computation of costs and benefits."⁴ Though Jones does not delineate this "rational" decision making process, a model of the "logical computation" that takes place in the mind of the statesman can be constructed through the works of Benjamin J. Cohen and Geoffrey Blainey.

In his search for the causes of imperialism (which he treats as identical to the phenomenon of war), Cohen claims

that since the current international system is characterized by competitive, sovereign states, the "rational" behavior for a state "is to broaden its range of options--to maximize its power position."⁵ Without attempting to determine the nature of power, Cohen proceeds to explain that power is accumulated through the simple process of gaining "influence" or "dominance" over others, which then allows the state to control the range of options available to its rivals.⁶ One way in which influence and dominance can be attained is through the tool of war.

However, war is useful in this regard only if it indeed increases a state's power position. Blainey discovered in his analysis of all wars from 1700 to 1971 that war occurs only when a state believes it can "gain more by fighting than by negotiating."⁷ In making this determination, he claims that a statesman will consider seven different factors which gauge a state's ability "to impose [its] will on the rival nation;" one of these factors is public opinion, both foreign and domestic.⁸

Though Blainey includes public opinion as an important consideration, he fails to explain exactly how public opinion can affect the conduct of war. Others, however, have tried to do so. In their works, Joseph A. Schumpeter, Thorstein Veblen, Raymond Aron, and Edmund Silberner reach various conclusions about the role of public opinion in armed conflicts.

PUBLIC OPINION AND WAR:

Both Veblen and Schumpeter suggest that modern public opinion is ill-suited to the purposes of statesmen attempting to carry out war policies and, thus, will tend to act as a restraining factor in such matters. In the words of political economist Claude Ake, Schumpeter believes that the imperialistic (or war) "impulse" derives its source "from the habits and instincts that moulded peoples and classes into warriors under pressure of the struggle for survival and supremacy."⁹ However, Schumpeter also indicates that "individualism and democratisation" as specific "modes of thought and action associated with the capitalist mode of production" will cause the modern world to turn away from such "non-rational" activities as warfare.¹⁰ Veblen views the influence of modern society in a similar fashion. He states that "subservience of the community" to war policies can only be maintained with great effort against the "disintegrating influence(s) of modern life."¹¹ The influences that Veblen is concerned about are to be found in industrial society,

where the machine industry constantly enforces the futility of personal force and prerogative in the face of wide-sweeping inanimate agencies and mechanical process, and where the ubiquitous haggling of the price system constantly teaches that every man is his own keeper.¹²

Essentially, both Schumpeter and Veblen contend that "the interests and ways of thought which the diffusion of the industrial system [will] spread among the masses" will

eventually change the attitudes of the public by lessening the "will to conquer" and the "will to power" and, therefore, reduce the likelihood of war.¹³

The exact opposite of this view is held by many, including Aron, who discount the arguments of Veblen and Schumpeter and view the public as open to war as it ever was. Aron states:

The desire for collective glory, the pride of participation in national greatness, even as one of the lowest of citizens or servants, may well survive in the age of cannons, skyscrapers, and underground stations adorned with marble.¹⁴

As evidence of this, he suggests that the "militarism of the masses" has given the world a "cult of violence" which can cause "charismatic leaders of popular factions [to be] driven farther by the delirium of power than are the inheritors of the feudal spirit. . . ."¹⁵ In this view, public opinion can easily become a tool for the marshalling of the resources of the state for war.

Finally, Silberner takes a more cautious approach and concludes that "the economic and social evolution of mankind" will produce public opinion that can take both hawkish and pacifist stances.¹⁶ After examining in detail several different schools of thought on the peaceful or warlike tendencies of public opinion, Silberner found no sufficiently convincing argument. Speaking as only a social scientist can, Silberner states that an understanding of the role of "pacific tendencies" and "the

forces making for war depends on each particular situation that is being examined."¹⁷ Silberner's answer to the question of how public opinion affects the conduct of war can be abbreviated to the simple statement: It depends.

It would seem, then, that there are different opinions about the appropriate place of public opinion in the strategic calculations of statesmen. To find an answer to this question, a widely accepted method is to conduct an empirical study in which the researcher selects a particular war (about which extensive and accurate data exist) and then analyzes specific events in that war to discover the part played by public opinion. Such a method is employed in this paper through the careful study of the Vietnam war.

TWO QUESTIONS:

There are innumerable aspects of the relationship between public opinion and the US government in the Vietnam war that can be studied. But the primary concern here is the impact that public opinion had on the management of the war. In addition, in light of the work of the authors just mentioned above, it is important to include an examination of the source of public opinion in the event. Therefore, it is necessary to find answers to the following questions: How did public opinion affect the US government's conduct of the Vietnam war? and What was the source of public opinion regarding this event?

The first question seeks processes by which public opinion influences the formulation and implementation of policy. From an examination of the works of several scholars who have studied these processes, it is apparent that at least three different paradigms have been and are being used to describe the impact of public opinion on government policy: the force, constraint, and enabling condition paradigms.

PUBLIC OPINION AS FORCE:

Public opinion has often been conceived of in a manner which suggests the action of one billiard ball striking another. In the force model, public opinion appears in the political environment, collides with existing government policy, and alters it--much as one ball hits another on the table and, therefore, changes its direction of motion. Examples of the use of this paradigm can be found in the works of Alexis de Tocqueville and George F. Kennan.

In his Democracy in America Tocqueville suggests that republics cannot well engage in large, extended projects in the face of obstacles, particularly in matters of foreign policy. Tocqueville's argument seems to rest on the belief that the public does not have the necessary skill. He claims that the public simply "has little capacity for combining measures in secret and waiting patiently for the result."¹⁰ He almost seems to suggest that citizens of republics simply lack the 'knack' for deceit. This

deficiency stems from the republican citizen's lack of proper education in the peculiarities of international politics:

Experience, mores, and education almost always do give a democracy that sort of practical everyday wisdom and understanding of the petty business of life which we call common sense. Common sense is enough for society's current needs, and in a nation whose education has been completed, democratic liberty applied to the state's internal affairs brings blessings greater than the ills resulting from a democratic government's mistakes. But that is not always true of relations between nation and nation.¹⁹

As a result of this, a republic tends "to obey its feelings rather than its calculations and to abandon a long-matured plan to satisfy a momentary passion. . . ."²⁰

This is the point at which he breaks into the force paradigm. Momentary passions (apparently his term for deeply felt public opinion) appear in the midst of complicated plans and knock them off course. Public opinion simply pushes the government about almost according to whim. Clearly, then, Tocqueville perceives public opinion as a force--one with which the government must reckon if it is to attempt to maintain any consistency at all in its foreign affairs.

Kennan has also used the force paradigm in his work. One observation that Kennan makes about republics is that they will produce erratic behavior in matters of foreign affairs. Specifically, he claims that as an assembly (in this case Congress) becomes involved in the foreign policy

making process, foreign policy itself becomes erratic. This effect is produced by the influence of domestic advocates on the decision making process. In his book The Cloud of Danger, he states:

Congress is, unquestionably and inevitably, more vulnerable than is the Executive branch, and the State Department in particular, to pressures from ethnic and other organized lobbies or minorities, anxious to influence foreign policy to the advantage of their various parochial aims and concerns. The examples of this are so numerous that it would be superfluous, perhaps even invidious, to cite any single one of them.²¹

Later in the book he claims:

When this sort of thing occurs, it simply means that the power of our government to act upon its international environment is being abused and distorted for domestic-political purposes, with the result that our actions on the external scene tend to become, as expressions of national policy, incoherent and either ineffective or self-defeating.²²

He describes this effect rather vividly by describing such a state in "the forest of international events [as] a man with some sort of muscular affliction, obliging him to perform purposeless and self-defeating movements."²³

As does Tocqueville, Kennan clearly describes public opinion as a force. Various interest groups, with their various opinions on different questions, place pressure upon Congress and push it to adopt certain policies. The government, in effect, gets knocked about like a billiard ball after the break.

PUBLIC OPINION AS CONSTRAINT:

Another way to conceive of public opinion is the constraint model. Under this paradigm, public opinion becomes an anchor which holds back the ship of state. In cases such as this, the public's preferences prevent the government from selecting specific policy alternatives--action is not altered but prevented. An example of the use of this model can be seen in Immanuel Kant's book Perpetual Peace.

The critical argument Kant makes in this book is that republics are more reluctant to engage in war than other forms of government. He suggests that war will simply cease to be a viable option for foreign policy under republican constitutions due to pressures from public opinion. Kant explains:

If, as is inevitably the case under this [republican] constitution, the consent of the citizens is required to decide whether or not war is to be declared, it is very natural that they will have great hesitation in embarking on so dangerous an enterprise. For this would mean calling down on themselves all the miseries of war. . . . But under a constitution where the subject is not a citizen, and which is therefore not republican, it is the simplest thing in the world to go to war. For the head of state is not a fellow citizen, but the owner of the state, and a war will not force him to make the slightest sacrifice so far as his banquets, hunts, pleasure palaces and court festivals are concerned.™^

In brief, Kant believes that republics are more peaceful due to forces that "rely for their effectiveness upon man's desire to pursue his self-interest and his

desire to survive"--forces that have the effect of restraining the government."²² Republics are less likely to engage in war because the public's extremely negative opinion of war acts as a weight pulling the option down, making its implementation difficult if not impossible.

PUBLIC OPINION AS ENABLING CONDITION:

The third and last way of explaining how public opinion can influence policy fits what may be referred to as the enabling condition paradigm. In this model, public opinion neither alters nor prevents action by the government but makes action possible--much as the soil makes possible the growth of a plant. Public opinion provides the political environment in which government policy can thrive. The public does so by merely making the implementation of the policy possible, not by directly supporting the policy alternative itself. Both Niccolo Machiavelli and Walter Lippmann make use of this last paradigm in describing the impact of public opinion on foreign policy.

Machiavelli's book The Prince is an instruction manual for the new ruler. In it he states that rulers who are supported (which includes a measure of respect or fear) by their subjects will have a freer hand in foreign affairs than those who are loved or hated by their subjects. In the chapter on cruelty he states:

Men are less concerned about offending someone they have cause to love than someone they have

cause to fear. Love endures by a bond which men, being scoundrels, may break whenever it serves their advantage to do so; but fear is supported by the dread of pain, which is ever present.²⁶

On the subject of being hated, he clearly indicates its disadvantages in the chapter on the utility of fortresses:

Not to be hated by his subjects is the best fortress a prince can have. If the people hate him, a fortress will not save him, for when the people take up arms against him they will never lack for foreigners to succor them.²⁷

On the other hand he claims that the prince who enjoys the support of the people "will be able to stand alone" and that "all near him [will be] disposed to obey him."²⁸ In support of this Machiavelli cites the example of the Spartan king Nabis who was able to sustain "attack from the whole of Greece and from a triumphant Roman army as well."²⁹

It is obvious then, as it surely was to Nabis, that a prince who is supported by the people will be better able to carry out foreign policies without fear of losing his crown. Other princes will be restricted since they must guard against foreign aided rebellions and conspiracies. But note that the support of the people does not include support for any policy alternative: it merely grants obedience to the ruler, making the implementation of policy possible. Therefore, the support of the people becomes an enabling condition which empowers the prince.

Lippmann makes use of the paradigm in a similar fashion. In describing governmental policy making, he makes the claim that, theoretically, governments have more flexibility in the conduct of their foreign affairs than they may have in other spheres of policy. Essentially, Lippmann claims that the public is severely underinformed and does not readily feel the effect of foreign events. This is so mainly because "[i]n foreign affairs the incidence of policy is for a very long time confined to an unseen environment."²⁰ He also suggests that it is the case that, "[t]he [political] environment must be confined within the range of every man's direct and certain knowledge."²¹ If this is the case, then "[t]he field of democratic action is a circumscribed area," and beyond that area is a field on which public opinion has no preferences.²² Therefore, since foreign affairs is beyond the range of direct and certain knowledge (which also means beyond the experience of the public), public opinion on foreign policy will be limited or even non-existent. Logically, then, Lippmann concludes that governments will have the ability to move with relative ease in foreign affairs:

Those programs are immediately most popular, like prohibition among teetotalers, which do not at once impinge upon private habits of the followers. That is one great reason why governments have such a free hand in foreign affairs.²³

In this case, public opinion (or the lack thereof) allows the government to take actions it deems proper and necessary in pursuit of the national interest. Again, support is not offered for any particular policy; various policy options are merely permitted by the public to exist on the range of viable alternatives without interference.

SOURCES OF PUBLIC OPINION:

The second question listed enquires into the source of public opinion in the Vietnam war regardless of how it influenced particular events. It has recently and commonly been suggested that the president provides the public with its opinions in foreign affairs, especially in matters of war and peace. In his book The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam, Daniel C. Hallin states in reference to President Lyndon B. Johnson's eventual reaction to the Tet offensive in the Vietnam war: Once the president acted, the public seemed to follow his lead, as it usually does in foreign policy.³⁴ Johnson could not, however, "lead" the people on his own. Since the administration could not communicate with the people directly, it had to be done through the media (hence the term). Once the media reported the president's position, the public then responded.

However, he points out later in book that,

[w]hen the administration fails to provide a clear direction, the media [begins] to become more active. . . . [W]ith officials divided and communication channels within the administration

inoperative, the media [becomes] a forum for airing political differences rather than a tool of policy.³³

Implicit in this statement (and explicit in his comment on Johnson's reaction to the Tet offensive) is the claim that when the president was clear, public opinion was guided by the media. However, when the president failed to communicate his positions clearly to the media, then the media as a "tool of policy" broke down. Taken as a whole, this is what happened in the Vietnam war. Hallin explains in the conclusion of his book:

The behavior of the media . . . is intimately related to the unity and clarity of the government itself. . . . This is not to say that the role of the press is purely reactive. Surely it made a difference, for instance, that many journalists were shocked both by the brutality of the war and by the gap between what they were told by top officials and what they saw and heard in the field, and were free to report all this. But it is also clear that the administration's problems with the "fourth branch of government" resulted in large part from political divisions at home, including those within the administration itself, which had dynamics of their own. In a sense, what is really remarkable, as [McGeorge] Bundy observed, is that the press and the public went as far with American policy in Vietnam as they did.³⁴

From this logic, it can only be assumed that events in the Vietnam war which negatively affected public opinion had their impact because the administration did not clearly indicate to the media which interpretation to use. Hallin's "hypothesis" also seems to suggest that an administration should, if it wishes to have public support at the start of a project, prepare public opinion prior to

the initiation of policy. Such efforts are made when presidents attempt to introduce the idea of an action (i.e. drop hints) long before anything is actually done.

Regardless, in seeking the source of public opinion in the Vietnam war, Hallin essentially claims that public opinion was created by the president when he sent clear messages through the media.

AN EMPIRICAL TEST:

Now that three different paradigms of public opinion and Hallin's hypothesis on the source of public opinion in the Vietnam war has been examined, the only remaining task is to apply these tools to specific events in the war. The substance of six events encompassed in the war is the subject of the second chapter.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

¹ Walter S. Jones, The Logic of International Relations, 5th ed. (Boston: Little, 1985).

² Jones 396-435.

³ Jones 434.

⁴ Jones 434.

⁵ Benjamin J. Cohen, The Question of Imperialism: The Political Economy of Dominance and Dependence, The Political Economy of International Relations Ser. 3 (New York: Basic, 1973) 241.

⁶ Cohen 242.

⁷ Geoffrey Blainey, The Causes of War (New York: Free, 1973) 245.

⁸ Blainey 246.

⁹ Claude Ake, A Political Economy of Africa (New York: Longman, 1981) 22.

¹⁰ Ake 22.

¹¹ Thorstein Veblen, Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution (1915; Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1966) 80-81.

¹² Veblen 81.

¹³ Raymond Aron, War and Industrial Society, trans. Mary Bottomore, Auguste Comte Memorial Trust Lecture 3 (1958; Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980) 60.

¹⁴ Aron 21.

¹⁵ Aron 22.

¹⁶ Edmund Silberner, The Problem of War in Nineteenth Century Economic Thought, trans. Alexander H. Krappe (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1946) 290.

¹⁷ Silberner 290.

¹⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Thompson and Max Lerner (1835; New York: Harper, 1966) 211.

¹⁹ Tocqueville 211.

²⁰ Tocqueville 211.

²¹ George F. Kennan, The Cloud of Danger: Current Realities of American Foreign Policy (Boston: Little, 1977) 6.

²² Kennan 7.

²³ Kennan 8.

²⁴ Hans Reiss, ed., Kant's Political Writings, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics, gen. ed. Maurice Cowling et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970) 100.

²⁵ Howard L. Williams, Kant's Political Philosophy (New York: St. Martin's, 1983) 17.

²⁶ Daniel Donno, ed. and trans., The Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli: With Selections from The Discourses (1513, 1519; Toronto: Bantam, 1981) 60.

²⁷ Donno 76.

²⁸ Donno 38.

²⁹ Donno 41.

³⁰ Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (1922; New York: Free, 1965) 154.

³¹ Lippmann 171.

³² Lippmann 171.

³³ Lippmann 154.

³⁴ Daniel C. Hallin, The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 170.

³⁵ Hallin 186-87.

³⁶ Hallin 213.

CHAPTER II
PUBLIC OPINION AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Table 1 presents an abbreviated chronology, derived from a history by John E. Mueller, of the Vietnam war from 1954, the year in which President Dwight D. Eisenhower offered aid to South Vietnam, to 1971, the end of which saw a drastic scaling down of United States military efforts in the country. During the war, several events occurred which affected the course of the conflict in ways which stand out from the rest--either because of the magnitude of their impact or because of the unique forces involved. This chapter examines six of these events and their relationships to contemporary public opinion.

Specifically, these events include Eisenhower's offer of aid to South Vietnam on 25 October 1954; Johnson's draft call on 28 July 1965; a set of three withdrawals ordered by President Richard M. Nixon on 8 June, 16 September, and 15 December 1969; the February 1966 Senate hearings on US involvement in South Vietnam; the Tet Offensive launched on 30 January 1968; and the US invasion of Cambodia in May 1970. Certain events in this list also share more in common than may be readily apparent. The first three events provide examples of the government acting under the

TABLE 1

CHRONOLOGY OF VIETNAM WAR 1954 - 1971

7/21/54	Geneva accords end Indochina war between French and Communist-led guerrillas
10/25/54	President Eisenhower offers aid to South Vietnamese government
2/12/55	United States advisers take over training of South Vietnamese army from French
10/23/55	Diem becomes president of South Vietnam
1958	Growth of Viet Cong guerrilla war against government of South Vietnam
11/8/60	South Vietnamese government charges North Vietnam is infiltrating troops into South Vietnam
11/10/60	Revolt of South Vietnamese paratroopers against Diem fails
Fall/61	Decision by Kennedy Administration to increase military and economic aid to South Vietnam, raise numbers of military advisers from 685 to several thousands
10/9/62	Diem says war against Viet Cong now going well
10/2/63	Defense Secretary McNamara predicts most of the 14,000 United States military personnel in South Vietnam can be withdrawn by the end of 1965
11/1/63	After months of internal political and religious turmoil, Diem ousted from office and killed in coup
11/22/63	Kennedy assassinated; Johnson becomes president
12/21/63	McNamara abandons plan to withdraw by end of 1965, notes gains of Viet Cong after Diem coup

(TABLE 1 CONTINUED)

3/17/64	United States pledge of continued assistance to South Vietnam as long as required to control "Communist aggression"; warnings to North Vietnam repeatedly issued
8/64	In response to two firings on American ships in Gulf of Tonkin, North Vietnamese PT boat bases are bombed; Congress passes resolution supporting action and other such measures to protect United States forces and "prevent further aggression"
11/3/64	Johnson reelected president
2/7/65	North Vietnam bombed by United States planes in retaliation for Viet Cong attack on United States bases in South Vietnam
2/24/65	United States planes bomb Viet Cong targets in South Vietnam for first time
2/27/65	State Department White Paper on aggression from the North
3/8/65	Marines land in South Vietnam to defend United States base
4/2/65	United States to increase troops in South Vietnam, increase air strikes
4/17/65	15,000 demonstrators in Washington protest bombings; teach-ins follow
5/65	Five-day suspension of air raids
6/21/65	Ky becomes premier of South Vietnam
7/28/65	Johnson announces increased draft calls to allow buildup in Vietnam from current 75,000 to 125,000
12/24/65	Month-long bombing halt begins

(TABLE 1 CONTINUED)

2/66	Senate hearings on war in Vietnam
4/12/66	First B-52 raids over North Vietnam
6/29/66	Extension of bombing raids to oil dumps near Hanoi
9/11/66	Elections in Vietnam for constituent assembly
12/66	Reports from North Vietnam by New York Times correspondent on civilian damage caused by United States air strikes
2/67	Wilson-Kosygin probes for negotiations on war; North Vietnam continues to demand unconditional bombing halt before talks can begin
4/15/67	Mass antiwar rally of 100,000 in New York
9/3/67	Elections of Thieu and Ky in South Vietnam
10/21/67	Antiwar demonstrators storm Pentagon
11/67	Bunker-Westmoreland visit to United States, voice optimism on war
1/30/68	Beginning of major offensive by Communists during Tet cease-fire
2/28/68	Military requests 206,000 more men
3/1/68	McCarthy gets sizeable vote in challenge to president in New Hampshire primary
3/22/68	General Westmoreland removed as commander in Vietnam and promoted
3/31/68	Johnson declares partial bombing halt, calls for talks, announces he will not run for reelection
4/3/68	North Vietnam agrees to preliminary peace talks

(TABLE 1 CONTINUED)

4/9/68	Defense Secretary Clifford announces policy of 549,500 troop ceiling and gradual transfer of war responsibility to South Vietnam
5/68	Further Communist offensives
10/31/68	Full bombing halt agreed to, "productive discussions" to be begun
11/6/68	Nixon elected president
Spring/69	Communist offensives
6/8/69	Nixon announces beginning of troop withdrawals: 25,000 by August
9/16/69	Nixon announces withdrawals of 35,000 more men as pace of war slackens
10/69	Nationwide protests against the war
11/15/69	Mass antiwar march in Washington
11/16/69	Reports of civilian massacre by United States troops in March 1968 at Mylai
12/15/69	Nixon announces further withdrawal of 50,000
4/20/70	Nixon pledges to withdraw 150,000 troops over the next year
5/70	Joint United States-South Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia; massive protest in the United States
2/71	South Vietnamese troops, with United States support, invade Laos
Spring	Trial and conviction of Lt. Calley for mass murder at Mylai
6/13/71	New York Times begins its controversial publication of the "Pentagon Papers"

(TABLE 1 CONTINUED)

10/71 Reelection of Thieu

12/71 Series of bombing raids on North Vietnam

Source: John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public
Opinion (New York: Wiley, 1973) 29-32.

influence of clear and easily identifiable public opinion. On the other hand, the last three events provide instances in which some factor appears to have affected (perhaps even to have created) public opinion itself.

THE GOVERNMENT ACTS:

A. Early Aid - 25 October 1954

By 1954, the Korean conflict was over. However, indigenous communist forces were active in former French Indochina. Shortly after the partition of Vietnam by the Geneva accords, rebel activity in South Vietnam began to increase. Since France was in no position to fortify the new South Vietnamese government, Eisenhower decided the US had no choice but to fill the void. American aid to anti-communist forces in South Vietnam actually began long before ground forces became involved. It was no secret that Washington had been aiding the French for years in their efforts to keep the colony out of communist hands.

The decision to offer material aid the South Vietnamese had the support of a significant segment of the American people. In early May 1953, of those who knew of the Indochina conflict (71% total), 56% said the US should send "war materials to help the French there."¹ However, the public was strongly against the idea of sending US ground forces. Of that same group who knew of the conflict, 78% said the US should not "send soldiers to take part in the fighting."² Table 2 presents evidence of the

TABLE 2

ATTITUDES TOWARD SENDING GROUND TROOPS TO VIETNAM

Date	Disapprove	Approve	No Opinion
The United States is now sending war materials to help the French fight the Communists in Indochina. Would you approve or disapprove of sending United States soldiers to take part in the fighting there?			
8/15/53	85	8	7
5/2/54	68	22	10
5/21/54	72	20	8

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935 - 1971, gen. ed. William P. Hanson and Fred L. Israel, vol. 2 (New York: Random, 1972) 1170, 1235, 1243.

continued popular opposition to plans to send ground forces to Vietnam. In August of 1953, and in two separate occasions in May of 1954, 85%, 68%, and 72% of respondents stated that they would not approve of sending ground forces to Vietnam.

The Eisenhower administration was not ignorant of this fact. In the early months of 1954, as the government continued to send military aid to the French, Eisenhower went to lengths to make sure the public understood that he did not intend to send ground forces to Vietnam to take part in the ground action. For example, in a news conference in February, Eisenhower claimed that the US getting involved in another war would be a mistake and that "everything he did was calculated to prevent this from happening."³ He also promised in another news conference a month later "that he would not involve the United States in any conflict, including Indochina, without first seeking a Congressional declaration of war."⁴ Such blanket, preemptive policy statements are not normally made from the White House, but Eisenhower apparently feared that public opinion would not tolerate another large scale war so soon after Korea. Consequently, US troop strength in Vietnam during the Eisenhower administration averaged only 650 per year.⁵

B. The Buildup - 28 July 1965

According to Table 1, the second major escalation of the war in Vietnam occurred in 1965 when Johnson announced a draft call to allow an increase in troop strength to 125,000. The war effort was not progressing well--the Pentagon needed more manpower to "finish" the job. This buildup reaffirmed US commitment to the South Vietnamese government and the continuation of the presence of American forces in Vietnam.

As was the case with Eisenhower's offer of aid, this too conformed to public attitudes about the war. The level of support that existed for the ongoing war effort is indicated in responses to the question "Should the United States continue its present efforts in South Vietnam, or should we pull our forces out?" in early and late February of 1965 in which, respectively, 64% and 66% of the total population favored continuing US involvement.⁶ In addition, Table 3 indicates that, from January to October 1965, a solid majority believed that the war was not a mistake. In January 50% of those polled believed the war was not a mistake and by October that percentage had risen to 64%. It was, therefore, entirely reasonable to assume that the public would approve of an increased US presence in the region. In support of this, Table 3 indicates that shortly after the announcement of the increased draft call,

TABLE 3

ATTITUDES TOWARD VIETNAM WAR AND
PRESIDENTS JOHNSON AND NIXON

Date	Mistake? (No)	Johnson in Vietnam	Johnson Approval	Nixon in Vietnam	Nixon Approval
1/65	50%		71%		
4/65	52		67		
5/65			64		
6/65			70		
7/65			65		
8/65	61				
9/65		58	63		
10/65	64				
11/65			66		
12/65		56	62		
1/66			59		
2/66		50	61		
3/66	59	54	58		
5/66	49	47	54		
7/66			56		
8/66		43	51		
9/66	49	43	48		
11/66	51	43	48		
1/67			46		
2/67	52				
4/67	50	43	48		
6/67			52		
7/67	48	33			
8/67			40		
10/67	44		38		
11/67			41		
12/67	46	39	46		
1/68			48		
2/68	41	35	41		
3/68		26	36		
4/68	40		49		
8/68	35		35		
9/68			42		
10/68	37				
11/68			43		
1/69	39		49		59
2/69	39				61

(TABLE 3 CONTINUED)

3/69		44	65
4/69		44	61
5/69		48	64
6/69			63
7/69		53	65
8/69			62
9/69	32	52	
10/69		58	57
11/69		64	68
1/70	33	65	61
2/70			66
3/70	32	48	53
4/70	34		
5/70	36		57
7/70			61
8/70			55
9/70			56
11/70			57
12/70			52
1/71	31		
2/71		41	51
3/71			50
4/71			50
5/71	28		
6/71			48
10/71			54
11/71			49
12/71			49

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935 - 1971, gen. ed. William P. Hanson and Fred L. Israel, vols. 2 & 3 (New York: Random, 1972); American Institute of Public Opinion, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1972 - 1977, gen. ed. William P. Hanson and Fred L. Israel, vols. 1 & 2 (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1978); Gallup Opinion Index and Survey Research Center (U of Michigan, Ann Arbor) qtd. in John E. Mueller, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion (New York: Wiley, 1973) 54-55.

(TABLE 3 CONTINUED)

Mistake? - Some people think we should not have become involved with our military forces in Southeast Asia, while others think we should have. What is your opinion? or In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?

In Vietnam - Do you approve or disapprove of the way the (Johnson Administration) (President Johnson) (President Nixon) is handling the (Vietnam situation) (situation in Vietnam)?

Approval - Do you approve or disapprove of the way (Lyndon Johnson) (Richard Nixon) is handling his job as president?

58% said they approved of the way in which the Johnson administration was handling the situation.

C. Withdrawal - 8 June, 16 Sept., 15 Dec. 1969

Support for the war, however, did not last forever. As the war progressed over the years, public opinion turned against the continuation of the war. Table 3 shows that by March of 1968 (the month Johnson announced that he would not run for reelection), only 26% of the population approved of the way he was conducting the war. In addition, Table 4 clearly demonstrates that by 1969, a large segment of the public had come to favor the commencement of a gradual withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. In December of 1968, 46% of the sample favored turning over responsibility for the fighting to the South Vietnamese, and, in January and May of 1969, 57% and 59% felt that the US should immediately begin a phased withdrawal. The public mood was summed up by Theodore H. White: The American appetite for war had long since been sated in Vietnam. From faculty club to student union, from bar to parlor, from Wall Street to Main Street, all wanted out of Vietnam.⁷

Nixon believed in 1968 that the issue of primary importance to the voters was the ending of the war.⁸ Nixon recognized this as a real political opportunity and, therefore, incorporated into his campaign platform a call for the rapid conclusion of the war. The implementation of

TABLE 4

ATTITUDES TOWARD TROOP WITHDRAWALS FROM VIETNAM

Date	Agree/Yes	Disagree/No	No Opinion

Some people say that the United States should continue to send military supplies to South Vietnam but that we should let them take over the fighting and make all the decisions about peace and dealings with the Vietcong. Do you agree or disagree?			
12/5/68	46	44	10
Some people think the time has come to begin to reduce month by month the number of United States soldiers in Vietnam. How do you feel--do you think the time has come to do this?			
1/1/69	57	28	15
5/22/69	59	25	16

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935 - 1971, gen. ed. William P. Hanson and Fred L. Israel, vol. 3 (New York: Random, 1972) 2172, 2179, 2199.

this policy began to have its first concrete impact when, after winning the election, Nixon authorized three withdrawals in mid and late 1969. His goal was "to phase out American forces slowly enough not to jeopardize the battlefield situation but fast enough to assuage American political opinion."⁹ He ordered the withdrawal of first 25,000; then 35,000; and finally 50,000 troops--thus beginning the gradual process of turning over the main responsibility for fighting the war to the South Vietnamese. In return for keeping his campaign promise and ordering the withdrawals, Nixon was duly rewarded. As indicated in Table 3, public opinion of Nixon's handling of the war improved greatly. Later, Nixon continued this policy with additional withdrawals.

THE PUBLIC RESPONDS:

A. Senate Hearings - February 1966

In his book on the media coverage of the Vietnam war, Hallin states:

Beginning with the live coverage of parts of the Fulbright Committee hearings in February 1966, dissent became a regular feature of television coverage. . . . The Fulbright hearings pushed the war at least partly into the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy. . . .¹⁰

These hearings were a public attempt to determine the merits of the Johnson administration's handling of the war. Really, for the first time, "J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and at one time the president's key Capital Hill supporter on foreign

policy, went public with his opposition to U.S. policy in Vietnam. . . ."11 In effect, the public learned, beyond all doubt, that its government was not of one mind on the issue of what to do in Vietnam.

Such public discussion of US policy had an impact. Table 3 indicates that the hearing occurred toward the beginning of a substantial slide in public perceptions of the Johnson administration, his handling of the war, and in overall support for the war. In February of 1966, 50% of the public approved of Johnson's performance in Vietnam, 61% gave Johnson a positive overall job performance rating, and, in March of 1966, 59% felt that US involvement in Vietnam was not a mistake. However, by November of that same year, those percentages had fallen to 43%, 48%, and 51% respectively.

B. The Tet Offensive - 30 January 1968

The Tet offensive was an unexpected campaign that caught the public's eye. During a religious season in Vietnam, the North Vietnamese army in cooperation with the National Liberation Front, attacked South Vietnamese and US positions in several separate actions involving "a wide range of powerful, simultaneous attacks against dozens of key cities and towns."¹² The offensive demonstrated that the US was not even close to the victory the administration and the military had been asserting would come before long. A former military intelligence officer who served in

Vietnam during the war told the author that, though the offensive was a military disaster for the North Vietnamese, it crippled the US war effort by solidifying public opinion against the war. In agreement with this assessment, Townsend Hoopes, then Under Secretary of the Air Force, later wrote:

I am sure . . . an attempt to carry on in Vietnam without significant change, as though the Tet offensive had not really happened, would have generated a wholesale domestic cataclysm, as well as a major explosion in the Democratic party, which neither Lyndon Johnson nor his Vietnam policy could have survived.¹²

It is not entirely clear exactly how this radicalization of public opinion occurred. Regardless, Table 3 indicates that the offensive did mark a sharp drop in Johnson's approval rating and estimates of his management of the war. In December of 1967, 46% of the sample approved of Johnson's job performance and 39% approved of his management of the situation in Vietnam. But by March of 1968, both percentages had dropped, respectively, to 36% and 26%. Table 3 also indicates that the offensive marked the end of a short term leveling off of public support for the war and the continuation of the former decline in support. From July to December 1967, the percentage of those that believed the war was not a mistake bounced between 44% and 48%. However, seven months after the Tet offensive, in August of 1968, only 35% of those polled held that same position.

C. The Invasion of Cambodia - May 1970

The invasion of Cambodia also had an unmistakable impact on public opinion. The goal of the administration in this invasion was to eliminate enemy supply depots and strategic forward bases that had previously been "protected" by Cambodian neutrality. In return for being left alone (so to speak), the Cambodian government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk had ignored the communist presence on its territory bordering South Vietnam. The US had for years wanted to directly strike at these bases. Nixon also, according to Peter A. Poole,

had been anxious, since the start of 1970, to find a way of showing Communist leaders around the world that his hands were not tied by anti-war opinion in the United States and that he was able to meet force with force when necessary.¹⁴

In May, he finally found his chance. It is interesting to note, however, that this expansion of the war occurred at the same time the US was in the process of reducing its presence in Vietnam.

The decision to invade Cambodia produced an impressive response from the public:

Meetings and demonstrations protesting the incursion took place in towns and cities across the United States. . . . Congressmen found their offices jammed with students, lawyers, veterans, and other groups urging them to reverse the President's decision by legislative action.¹⁵

In addition, Table 3 shows that May was the last month of a small increase in public support for the war and the

beginning of a decline in support of 8 percentage points one year later. This movement apparently reflected the public's growing disaffection with the war even with US involvement at lower levels. The decline in support, however, was not as dramatic as might be expected. As such, it may well have been more of a reinforcement of past trends than a new development.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA:

Finally, in an attempt to discover the source of public opinion, it only remains to be seen how these events were represented in the popular media. It is important, for this purpose, to select channels of communication which were utilized by significant elements of the general public and opinion leaders. With this in mind, Newsweek, New Republic, and Time were selected. All articles on American participation in Vietnam in these three popular newsmagazines for a period of three months before or after each event were examined (logically, based upon whether the events were ones in which the government acted in the context of identifiable public opinion--the first three--or whether the event had an impact on public opinion--the last three). A list of these articles is presented in Table 5. Then five questions were used to classify the articles and their stand on war policy at that time. The resulting data on the media's reporting of the war is presented in Tables 6 through 11.

TABLE 5

PRINT MEDIA SURVEY--ARTICLES

EVENT	NEWSWEEK	NEW REPUBLIC	TIME
Aid Offer	19 J1: 28+	26 J1: 6-7	19 J1: 22
	26 J1: 17-18	2 Aug: 7-8	19 J1: 23
	26 J1: 28	16 Aug: 16	26 J1: 16
	2 Aug: 15		2 Aug: 16-18
	2 Aug: 20		2 Aug: 18+
	2 Aug: 30+		2 Aug: 19
	2 Aug: 43		2 Aug: 20+
	23 Aug: 38+		2 Aug: 23
		9 Aug: 28	
		23 Aug: 32	
Johnson Buildup	3 My: 23-25	24 Ap: 7	30 Ap: 30-31
	10 My: 49-50	19 Je: 5-6	7 My: 23-24
	28 Je: 20-21		28 My: 21-22
	5 J1: 30-32+		18 Je: 19
	5 J1: 33		25 Je: 25
	19 J1: 15		2 J1: 13-14
	19 J1: 17-18		2 J1: 14-15
	26 J1: 19-21		23 J1: 15-16
		30 J1: 9-10	
Withdrawal Announcement	10 Mr: 112	15 Mr: 1+	21 Mr: 13-14
	31 Mr: 20-22	22 Mr: 5-7	
	7 Ap: 28-30		
	5 My: 58		
	2 Je: 44		
Senate Hearings	14 Feb: 15	26 Feb: 8	18 Feb: 20
	14 Feb: 33	26 Feb: 19-30	4 Mr: 26
	21 Feb: 23	5 Mr: 5-7	18 Mr: 27
	21 Feb: 24-27	28 My: 12-16	29 Ap: 26
	21 Feb: 28-29		20 My: 27-28
	28 Feb: 17-18		
	28 Feb: 19-20		
	28 Feb: 32		
	7 Mr: 23, 25-26		
	7 Mr: 25-26		
	14 Mr: 26-27		
14 Mr: 38			

(TABLE 5 CONTINUED)

Tet Offensive	19 Feb: 21 11 Mr: 25 18 Mr: 39-40 18 Mr: 45 29 Ap: 20	23 Mr: 6 23 Mr: 8-9	15 Mr: 13-14
Cambodian Invasion	4 My: 21-22 11 My: 22-26+ 11 My: 54 11 My: 112 18 My: 35-36 18 My: 36+ 18 My: 49+ 18 My: 57-58 25 My: 31-32 25 My: 29-31 25 My: 43-45 25 My: 120 1 Je: 33-34 1 Je: 78 1 Je: 106 15 Je: 29-30 6 J1: 88 13 J1: 16-22 13 J1: 23-24+ 17 Aug: 36	9 My: 9-10 16 My: 1+ 16 My: 11-13 23 My: 5-6 23 My: 15-18 30 My: 5-6 6 Je: 6 13 Je: 5-6 11 J1: 7-9	11 My: 10-15 18 My: 22+ 18 My: 24+ 25 My: 28-34 1 Je: 21-22+ 8 Je: 21 6 J1: 16-17 6 J1: 24 13 J1: 6-8

TABLE 6
PRINT MEDIA SURVEY--AID OFFER
(JULY-OCTOBER 1954)

Variable	+	(Neutral)	-
A	7		14
B	7		
E	6	14	1

Variable A: Does the article mention the event or the policy option?

Variable B: Does the article support the policy option?

Variable E: Does the article approve of the president's handling of the situation?

TABLE 7
PRINT MEDIA SURVEY--JOHNSON BUILDUP
(APRIL-JULY 1965)

Variable	+	(Neutral)	-
A	11		8
B	6	5	
C	10	7	2
D	7	10	2
E	8	9	2

Variable C: Does the article support the continuation of the war?

Variable D: Does the article agree with the president's rationale for the war at the current stage?

TABLE 8
PRINT MEDIA SURVEY--WITHDRAWAL ANNOUNCEMENTS
(MARCH-JUNE 1969)

Variable	+	(Neutral)	-
A	8		
B	6	2	
C		3	5
D	3	5	
E	3	5	

TABLE 9
PRINT MEDIA SURVEY--SENATE HEARINGS
(FEBRUARY-MAY 1966)

Variable	+	(Neutral)	-
A	12		12
C	7	14	3
D	5	14	5
E	5	11	8

TABLE 10

PRINT MEDIA SURVEY--TET OFFENSIVE
(FEBRUARY-MAY 1968)

Variable	+	(Neutral)	-
A	5		3
C		5	3
D		7	1
E	1	4	3

TABLE 11
PRINT MEDIA SURVEY--CAMBODIAN INVASION
(MAY-AUGUST 1970)

Variable	+	(Neutral)	-
A	39		
B	4	24	11
C	1	21	17
D	2	37	
E	3	20	16

Tables 6 through 8 demonstrate that the media, as public opinion (as examined above), supported each of the options that were eventually selected. For instance, in each of these three events (Eisenhower's aid offer, Johnson's buildup, and Nixon's withdrawals), not a single article opposed the eventually selected policy option and a majority of articles (overwhelmingly except in the case of the buildup) favored the option. In addition, virtually all of the articles, in all three events, approved of or were neutral toward the president's handling of the situation.

Tables 9 through 11 also demonstrate that the media's reporting mirrored the downward movement in support for the war found in public opinion (as examined above), though the media seems to have taken a somewhat more neutral rather than negative stance toward the war after the selected events. For example, after the Senate hearings; Tet offensive; and Cambodian invasion; the articles were recorded as (toward the continuation of the war) 7 positive, 14 neutral, and 3 negative; 0 positive, 5 neutral, and 3 negative; and 1 positive, 21 neutral and 17 negative, respectively. At the very least, the tables indicate that public opinion did reflect the media's reporting of the war.

Tables 9 through 11, however, also indicate that presidential interpretations of events were not always

respected. In all three cases, the media (while not directly contradicting the president) was clearly not persuaded to accept the president's explanations. The most extreme case is the Cambodian invasion after which only 2 articles were recorded as supporting the president's rationale for the war at the current stage and 37 were found to be neutral. It would seem, then, that presidential leadership in the editorial pages was not accepted by the media during the entire war.

Now that the six selected events and how they were represented in the media have been examined in detail, it is possible to attempt to use the three paradigms and Hallin's hypothesis to explain how public opinion affected the conduct of the Vietnam war and to discover the source of public opinion during the conflict. This task is accomplished in the third chapter.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER II

¹ American Institute of Public Opinion, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935 - 1971, gen. ed. William P. Hanson and Fred L. Israel, vol. 2 (New York: Random, 1972) 1146.

² American Institute of Public Opinion, 1935 - 1971, vol. 2, 1146.

³ Peter A. Poole, The U.S. and Indochina, From FDR to Nixon, rpt. as Eight Presidents and Indochina (1973; Huntington, NY: Krieger, 1978) 26.

↖ Poole 27.

⁵ John E. Mueller, War, Presidents and Public Opinion (New York: Wiley, 1973) 28.

⁶ American Institute of Public Opinion, 1935 - 1971, vol. 3, 1925, 1929.

⁷ Theodore H. White, The Making of the President: 1972 (New York: Atheneum, 1973) 245.

↖ White 238.

⁹ Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked (Washington: Brookings Inst., 1979) 349.

¹⁰ Hallin 192.

¹¹ Hallin 116.

¹² Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention: An Inside Account of How the Johnson Policy of Escalation in Vietnam was Reversed (New York: McKay, 1969) 139.

¹³ Hoopes 164.

¹⁴ Poole 209.

¹⁵ Poole 213.

CHAPTER III

THE RESULTS

Chapter I explored the question of the causes of war, established the importance of the role of public opinion in this question, and explained three paradigms which explain how public opinion can influence the conduct of war and an hypothesis on the source of public opinion. Chapter II pictured in detail six events in the Vietnam war, their relationships to public opinion, and how they were handled by the media. All that remains is to see if the models and hypothesis can explain the data.

THE GOVERNMENT ACTS:

A. Early Aid - 25 October 1954

The facts of this event can be most clearly explained by using the constraint model. In the constraint model, public opinion acts as an anchor holding back the ship of state. In effect, public preferences prevent the government from selecting specific policy alternatives: actions are not changed in any way but simply made impossible or extremely difficult.

As explained before, immediately prior to the aid offer the public favored sending military supplies to South Vietnam, but it unambiguously opposed the idea of sending

ground forces. The Eisenhower administration knew this and made efforts to avoid arousing the wrath of the public by announcing that there were no plans to send ground forces to take part in the fighting any time soon. Therefore, only material and economic aid, and no troops, were sent. In effect, public opinion held Eisenhower back from selecting and implementing a policy similar to that which had earlier been used in Korea.

B. The Buildup - 28 July 1965

While public opinion clearly constrained Eisenhower, it served as an enabling condition for Johnson when he issued the draft call. In the enabling condition model, public opinion simply makes action possible--as the soil makes possible the growth of a plant. Public opinion makes the implementation of an action possible by placing it in the range of acceptable alternatives, but it does not directly support any particular policy.

As demonstrated in the second chapter, at the time of the draft call and before, public support for the war effort was relatively high. In fact, overall public support for American involvement was at some of the highest levels reached during the entire conflict. Because of this broad based support for the war effort, a draft call to increase force levels in South Vietnam became a viable alternative (even though the public, of course, may not have been excited about the idea). As a result, Johnson

was able to give the military the troops he felt it needed to complete its assigned task.

C. Withdrawal - 8 June, 16 Sept., 15 Dec. 1969

Nixon's series of three withdrawal orders provides an excellent example of public opinion acting as a force. In the force model, public opinion is pictured as acting in the fashion of a billiard ball. Public opinion appears in the political environment and smashes into existing government policy and alters it--as one ball hits another and changes its direction of motion.

In this case, public opinion pushed the government toward a particular policy option. The public, by 1969, was rather displeased with the continuation of the war and Nixon recognized this. By ordering the withdrawals, then, Nixon was merely following the lead of public opinion. He was elected in part by promising to end the war quickly, kept his word by immediately ordering phased withdrawals after election, and was rewarded in the opinion polls after doing so.

THE PUBLIC RESPONDS:

A. Senate Hearings - February 1966

The data produced by the Senate hearings is not explained by the three models well at all. In this event an action occurred (the Senate hearings) and then a force was reduced (support for the war). As such, public opinion's role in the event was entirely reactive; it

neither forced, made possible, nor constrained anything. Rather, public opinion was left without direction. The event was characterized more by an erosion of force than anything else.

B. The Tet Offensive - 30 January 1968

At first glance, the Tet offensive also does not seem to fit well into any of the models. However, on closer examination it does seem to fill a gap in the force model. In the force model, public opinion alters government policy. But this public opinion must have a source. As pointed out earlier, the Tet offensive marked a significant decline in support for the continuation of the war effort, for Johnson's handling of the conflict, and for Johnson's overall job approval rating. These facts, combined with the domestic debate and general upheaval which Hoopes watched occur during the months of February and March, suggest that something happened in the event which caused the formation of a particular opinion in the public mind, the goal of which was to alter government policy.

If one assumes that the force of public opinion created by this event did alter policy in the long run, the Tet offensive can be used to enhance the explanative powers of the force model by identifying exactly where it was that the force originated in the first place. It also could be used to explain why the opinion against the war effort took the form and direction (which was against the "more of the

same" policy which had characterized Johnson's handling of the war) that it finally did. All of which may help the researcher discover the finer details of how the force of public opinion altered government policy by pointing out key areas of concern to the public. Regardless, the Tet offensive at least fits the force model to the degree that it helps explain the origins of certain aspects of public opinion.

C. The Invasion of Cambodia - May 1970

The facts of this event paint a similar picture to that produced by an examination of the Tet offensive. An event occurred in the conflict which apparently produced a negative reaction in public opinion toward the continuation of the war. In this case, however, the second chapter points out that the ratings dropped a smaller point spread while the physical demonstrations of dissatisfaction were more graphic and widespread. Nevertheless, it seems that something in each event did produce a particular opinion in the collective mind of the public. If this is the case, the invasion of Cambodia can also be used to enhance the explanative powers of the force model (but only if one assumes that a policy was later altered by this public opinion).

SUMMARY - QUESTION #1:

How did public opinion affect the US government's conduct of the Vietnam war?

So far this analysis indicates that the impact of public opinion on the conduct of the Vietnam war was varied. No single paradigm explains all of the six events; in fact, the data produced by separate events is best explained by using different models. Therefore, this suggests that no single explanation of the impact of public opinion on the conduct of war may be capable of explaining every event. As a factor in the rational calculation to employ the power building tool of war, one is forced to agree with Silberner and conclude that public opinion has a varied impact depending upon the individual situation.

THE SOURCE OF PUBLIC OPINION:

The data presented in the second chapter on the six events and the media's reporting of these events provides some evidence to support Hallin's hypothesis. In seeking the source of public opinion in the Vietnam war, Hallin essentially claims that public opinion was created by the president when he sent clear messages through the media. Through such a connection, the president could have exercised a great deal of influence on public opinion. If this is correct, one would expect to find two properties evident in the relationships between the six policy events, public opinion, and the media's representation of these events: a strong correlation between public opinion and the media's representation of the events and a high level of agreement between the media's and the president's public

interpretations of the events. It should also be the case that when no clear signal was sent from above, the media should have taken a less supportive stance of government actions.

In the results of the survey, it is apparent that public opinion and the media's reporting of the six events were in relative agreement. For example, Table 7 shows that Johnson's draft call in July of 1965 was supported as a policy option in 6 articles out of 11 (the other 5 being neutral) and Table 3 indicates that, in August and September of that same year, 61% of those polled said the Vietnam war was not a mistake and Johnson personally received a 63% approval rating. As time progressed, public opinion and the media kept relatively in step as they both turned progressively negative in their assessments of the merits of the war effort. During and after the Tet offensive, according to Table 10, 3 out of 8 articles did not favor the continuation of the conflict (the other 5 were neutral) and Table 3 shows that, one month after the offensive, only 41% of the sample felt the war was not a mistake. Table 3 also points out that two months after the offensive only 26% approved of Johnson's handling of the Vietnam situation and 36% approved of Johnson's job performance. While the media appears to have been slightly more neutral in the end, the deterioration in support for the war is equally evident in both.

The surveys also indicate that the media did indeed tend to agree with the president's interpretation of events in the earlier stages. However, that agreement turned more neutral as the war progressed. For instance, Eisenhower's aid offer was more than acceptable to the media. As demonstrated by Table 6, apparently the media strongly supported the idea since all 7 articles which mentioned the policy option supported it. In the case of the Cambodian invasion, however, Table 11 indicates that only 2 out of 39 articles (the rest were neutral) agreed with Nixon's rationale for the invasion. Further, the table also shows that only 1 article supported the continuation of US involvement in Vietnam while 21 were neutral and 17 were clearly against. Nixon was definitely not able to lead the media in this case.

One specific event, the Senate hearings, also seems to provide data which Hallin's hypothesis can explain. As mentioned above, Hallin's hypothesis suggests that when the president did not (or was unable to) send a clear message, the media became a forum for public debate rather than a device which the government could utilize to manage the public's perceptions. This apparently is what happened after the hearings. Table 9 demonstrates that after the hearings, which by definition demonstrated to the public that the government was unclear as to the wisdom of its current policies, the media assumed a more neutral stance

toward the conflict and the president's justification of the war than was found in earlier events: 5 articles agreed with the president, 14 were neutral, and 5 others disagreed.

SUMMARY - QUESTION #2:

What was the source of public opinion regarding the Vietnam war?

The findings above indicate that Hallin's hypothesis is in part born out by the facts of the histories of the six policy events. The data presented fits patterns that would be expected if Hallin is correct: a strong correlation between public opinion and the media's representation of the events and a high level of agreement between the media's and the president's interpretations of the events. However, the media only supported the president when expanding the conflict in the early stages of the war, not in latter events like the Cambodian invasion. This suggests that, even when the president sent a clear message, his hold on the media may not be have been as strong as Hallin claims. Therefore, there must be other variables which can create public opinion which Hallin did not include in his analysis. This is especially true since Hallin's hypothesis is correct when it suggests that the media as a "tool of policy" broke down when the president failed to communicate his positions clearly.

CONCLUSION:

These results demonstrate that the search for the causes of war is far from complete. As yet, no one even has an adequate explanation for the role of public opinion in the conduct of war. Therefore, models of the evolution of the international system that rely on the warlike or peaceful tendencies of public opinion as an important factor must be cast in grave doubt.

These results also suggest that public opinion is malleable. Essentially, the state can be conceived of as an agent in an environment. In this case, the environment consists of public opinion (in reality only one factor in the political environment). The state must move "through" public opinion as it acts, thus the environment can have an impact on the behavior of the actor. Public opinion can force certain actions, make other actions more difficult, and make still others possible. However, the state is not entirely at the mercy of public opinion for it can have an influence in its creation. The state, through the media, may be able to create an acceptable environment of public opinion, but only in restricted circumstances.

In effect, then, public opinion is malleable--it can be formed within limits to allow certain actions that otherwise would be difficult if not impossible. From this perspective, public opinion is not really an ephemeral

quantity floating out there in political space, but an integral part of the political event itself.

And this may have important implications for the future of armed conflict. If authoritarian regimes continue to fall and be replaced by representative democracies (as has been the case in the late 80's and early 90's), public opinion may become an even more critical factor in analyses of the international system, especially in regard to questions of war and peace. How well states are able to mold their own public's opinions and the opinions of citizens of other states could become a truly vital component of power in the emerging political order.

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