

**The Hearts & Minds That Matter Most:  
Maintaining American National Will**

**A Monograph  
by  
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## Abstract

THE HEARTS & MINDS THAT MATTER MOST: MAINTAINING AMERICAN NATIONAL WILL by MAJ Timothy S. Jacobsen, U.S. Army, 59 pages.

The national will of the United States, and other democratic nations, is far more vulnerable today than in the past. Changes in society and technology have allowed enemies to adapt. The character of war has evolved into a more unorthodox type of warfare; one that uses transnational networks and information age technology to conduct guerrilla tactics, terrorism, and psychological warfare against vastly more powerful nations on a scale never seen before in history. Adversaries avoid conventional military engagements, exploit democratic vulnerabilities, and directly target national will in the attempt to slowly influence a long-term shift in that will. It is imperative for the U.S. government and the American people to understand this threat and find a strategy to maintain national will in the face of a determined foe.

National will is the collective degree of political and popular support for national policies, foreign and domestic. This monograph divides those things that influence national will into two separate categories: contextual influencers and instruments of influence. Contextual influencers are the content of the information that affects national will: the perception of legitimacy, the perception of threat, and the perceived cost-benefit of the action. Instruments of influence are the vehicles that frame and transmit that information that affects national will: primarily the media, political rhetoric and opinion-maker engagement. Using this model of national will, this monograph examines several historical case studies of previous American conflicts (World War II, Vietnam, Somalia, Bosnia, and the Global War on Terror, including Iraq) to explain trends and identify ways national will can be nurtured and leveraged in future conflicts.

The context of information and the instruments that provide that information both have an affect on national will. There is a correlation between favorable contexts, supportive instruments, and retaining national will. Those cases that Americans saw as legitimate, where an existential threat existed, and where actual costs outweighed expected benefits retained national will. Additionally, those cases that received favorable, accurate media coverage and bipartisan political support retained national will. As any of those elements weakened, the result would be a corresponding erosion of national will.

This monograph outlines eight specific recommendations for sustaining national will: (1) only employ military force when there is a significant threat or vital national interests involved; (2) understand, through thorough analysis, all of the potential costs of war; (3) establish political and military objectives that are nested, realistic, and worth the potential costs; (4) use the “forces” necessary to accomplish the set objectives; (5) educate the public, frame the issues, and mobilize the nation into a united war effort that is commensurate with the scope of the conflict; (6) manage the expectations of the American people; (7) achieve durable bipartisan political consensus that marginalizes negative rhetoric; and (8) actively engage the media to provide information and context, and ensure standards are met while nurturing a lasting symbiotic relationship.

Even the most brilliant strategy, the most technologically advanced weapons, the best tactics, and the synergy of all elements of national power will not matter if the United States cannot maintain its national will long enough to persevere. By carefully calculating when and how to employ military force, reducing the negative effects of partisan discourse, educating and mobilizing the American public, managing expectations, and engaging the media, the United States can maintain its national will long enough to achieve its strategic objectives in both the present and future conflicts. Now, more than any other time in history, the preservation of national will during conflict is more important than any other aspect of war.

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## INTRODUCTION

Twice in the last 50 years, in Vietnam and the Global War on Terror, the United States has faced an unconventional enemy that bypasses military engagement and directly targets American national will. As long as the United States remains the sole superpower, America's enemies will continue to directly target that national will as a means to achieve their objectives. It is imperative for the U.S. government and American people to understand this vulnerability and find a strategy to maintain that national will in the face of a determined foe. The question is, how? How can a democracy maintain its national will in the contemporary operating environment long enough to achieve its strategic objectives?

The national will of the United States, and other democratic nations, is far more vulnerable today than in the past. Over the last half-century, the character of war has evolved into a more unorthodox type of warfare, one that uses transnational networks to conduct guerrilla tactics, terrorism, and psychological warfare against vastly more powerful nations. This new character of war avoids conventional military engagements, directly targets national will, and turns democratic morals and principles against the government's ability to maintain the will to continue operations. Enemies of the United States will not pursue a decisive victory.<sup>1</sup> These enemies are not interested in winning on the battlefield, but in slowly influencing a long-term shift in American political will. They will examine every aspect of the United States to find vulnerabilities, and then attempt to attack those vulnerabilities to break the nation's will to continue to fight.<sup>2</sup>

During the Vietnam War, the Communists utilized this still evolving method of warfare against the United States. "They knew the key to victory was the will of the American people.

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<sup>1</sup> William Lind et al., "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette* (October 1989): 23-25.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2006), 216, 222.

Knowing this, they developed a strategy to attack that will.”<sup>3</sup> The Vietnamese Communists were far less interested in military engagements in South Vietnam than in influencing the political arena in Washington. Their carefully calculated tactical operations were specifically designed to erode American will – trying to impose high casualty rates and lure the U.S. into making brutal retaliatory strikes so they could distribute pre-made and well-tailored messages directed at the American public.<sup>4</sup> They assigned the utmost importance to influencing American public opinion by manipulating the media and exploiting domestic opposition to the war within the United States.<sup>5</sup> By late 1967, they had successfully shifted the war’s principal battleground from Vietnam to the domain of U.S. domestic opinion where it remained until American national will was broken.<sup>6</sup> In *On Strategy: Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, Colonel Harry Summers recalls a conversation he had with a North Vietnamese colonel during negotiations in Hanoi in 1975, “You know you never defeated us on the battlefield,” Colonel Summers said. The North Vietnamese colonel pondered this remark a moment then replied, “That may be so, but it is also irrelevant.”<sup>7</sup> For the first time in American history, tactical victories were peripheral to achieving a strategic victory, and strategic victories are the only ones that ultimately win wars.

After Vietnam, this emerging warfare continued to mature taking full advantage of changes in society and new technologies. In *The Sling and the Stone*, retired USMC Colonel Thomas Hammes said that this new type of warfare

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>4</sup> Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Annex X: The Effect of the International Political Climate on Vietnamese Communist Plans and Capabilities,” *Analysis of the Vietnamese Communists’ Strengths, Capabilities, and Will to Persist in their Present Strategy in Vietnam*, (26 August 1966), X-2 – X-4, <http://library2.usask.ca/vietnam/index.php?state=view&id=1179> (accessed December 17, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 235.

<sup>7</sup> Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, (New York, NY: Presidio Press, 1982), 1.



uses all available networks – political, economic, social, and military – to convince the enemy’s political decision makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit...It does not attempt to win by defeating the enemy’s military forces. Instead, via the networks, it directly attacks the minds of enemy decision makers to destroy the enemy’s political will.<sup>8</sup>

Enemies of the United States (al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and Iraqi insurgents to name a few) also capitalize on the information revolution, which is drastically changing both society and technology in a way that alters nearly every aspect of warfare. Mass communications (cellular phones, satellite communications, and the internet) allow instantaneous communications and vast information sharing on a global scale. Societies are slowly starting to align more by interest (political, ideological, religious, ethnic, and tribal) than by the traditional, more artificial nation-state boundaries.<sup>9</sup> Mass media allows events to influence the American population and political decision-makers instantly, shows grotesque casualties in real-time, magnifies the horrors of war, and can even be deliberately manipulated by creative enemies or sly political opponents. These enemies therefore use tactical actions to create long-term strategic effects.

Those elusive enemies share intelligence instantly, spread radical ideologies, conduct distance education and training, coordinate networked cellular operations, and expose gross global inequality. They are parasitic in nature, taking advantage of Western technological advancements and social programs to operate. Many even live within free societies and abuse democratic rights to protect their operations, essentially turning America’s greatest strengths against it. Some of the democratic rights they abuse include the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, right to privacy, and right to legal representation in America’s criminal justice system.<sup>10</sup>

These enemies realize the futility in challenging the American military in conventional

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<sup>8</sup> Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> John Robb, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Lind, “The Changing Face of War,” 24-26.

warfare and the irrelevance of it since they have discovered how to target the national will of the United States directly while avoiding its military power. They have a long-term strategy, are willing to endure tactical defeats, and continue to fight for many years, even decades, to achieve their strategic goals. This evolved type of warfare results in long, primarily moral conflicts where the most resolved and enduring side ultimately succeeds.<sup>11</sup> The losing side is not militarily defeated, but demoralized to the point where it cannot continue to maintain the fight.<sup>12</sup>

Americans want traditional wars that are short and decisive, but wars in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are more likely to be long and inconclusive. Now, more than any other time in history, the preservation of national will during conflict is more important than any other aspect of war. Even the most brilliant strategy, the most technologically advanced weapons, the best tactics, and the synergy of all elements of national power will not matter if the United States cannot maintain its national will long enough to persevere.

And yet, despite its centrality to strategic thought, the concept of national will is not addressed in any of the United States' published national strategies or military doctrine. It is mentioned in the Army and Marine Corps' new Counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24, albeit briefly in the first paragraph of the introduction as a context setter, "They [enemies of the United States] try to exhaust U.S. national will, aiming to win by undermining and outlasting public support."<sup>13</sup> Other than identifying the enemy's goal and its operational impact for the military, it does not go into any further explanation, for it is a political responsibility to address policies that preserve will at the national level.

Several international relations theorists also briefly discuss national will. Hans Morgenthau defined national will in his landmark book *Politics Among Nations* as "the degree of

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<sup>11</sup> Robb, *Brave New War*, 26-27, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War: Lessons of Combat from the Marne to Iraq*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2006), 224.

<sup>13</sup> FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (December 2006), ix.

determination with which a nation supports the foreign policies of its government in peace or war.”<sup>14</sup> Another international relations theorist, John Spanier described it as “popular dedication to the nation and support for its policies, even when that support requires sacrifice.”<sup>15</sup> While providing valuable definitions of national will, they unfortunately do not go into much detail on what influences national will and how, nor do they outline specific ways in which nations can sustain it.

Regardless of whether at war with militant Islamists or another unforeseen enemy, preserving American national will is going to prove to be the most important and yet difficult task in future conflicts. By carefully calculating when and how to employ military force, reducing the negative effects of partisan discourse, educating and mobilizing the American public, managing expectations, and engaging the media, the United States can maintain its national will long enough to achieve its strategic objectives in future conflicts.

Currently no definitive studies exist on national will, of what it consists, or what influences it. For the purpose of this study, national will is defined as the collective degree of political and popular support for national policies, foreign and domestic. National will includes both political will and public will, which this monograph will show have always been inextricably connected in the United States. This monograph divides those things that influence national will into two separate categories: contextual influencers and instruments of influence.

Contextual influencers are the content of the information that affects national will: the perception of legitimacy, the perception of threat, and the perceived cost-benefit of the action. Instruments of influence are the vehicles that frame and transmit information affecting national will: primarily the media, political rhetoric and opinion-maker engagement. (See Figure 1.

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<sup>14</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 135.

<sup>15</sup> John Spanier, *Games Nations Play* 8<sup>th</sup> ed., (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1993), 177.

Influence on National Will)

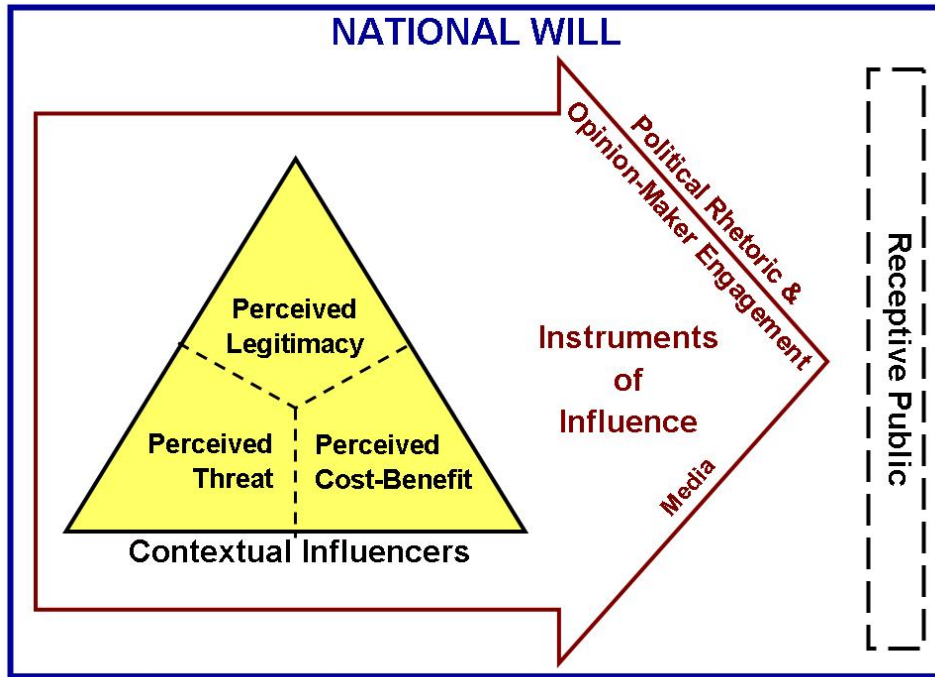
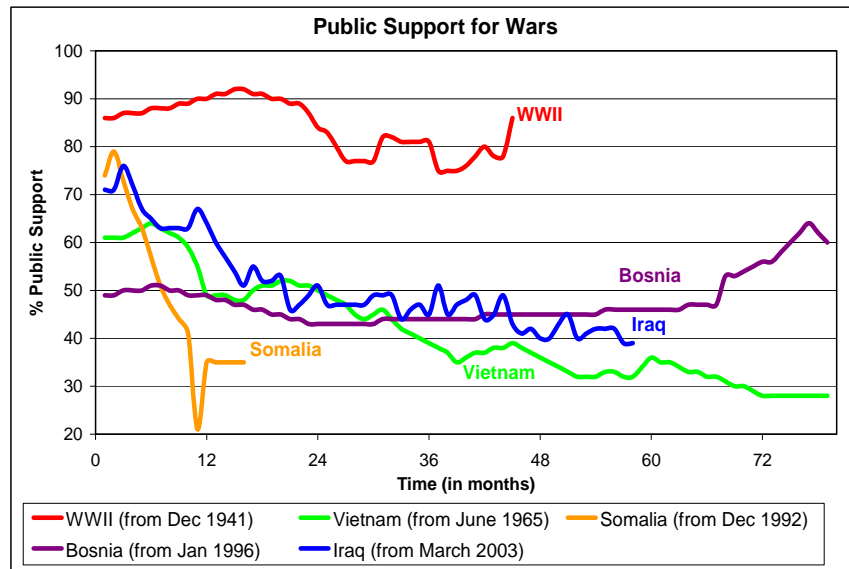


Figure 1. Influence on National Will.

The research for this monograph will examine several focused historical case studies of previous American conflicts: World War II, Vietnam, Somalia, Bosnia, and the current Global War on Terror, including the war in Iraq. These conflicts include those that ended both favorably and unfavorably, are modern enough to still be relevant today, and were significant enough to require national will. Due to the enormous scope of those cases, these studies were limited to focusing specifically on those contextual influencers and instruments of influence listed above to determine the affect they had on national will in each conflict examined.

National will is not easy to measure. The closest indication of the level of national will that has been historically measured is public support for war. As Figure 2 illustrates, support for World War II remained incredibly high, allowing the United States to maintain the national will necessary to achieve its strategic objectives. The Vietnam War started with a moderate level of public support, then dropped steadily from 1965 on, which was a critical reason for the overall loss of national will that led to the U.S. withdrawal. The humanitarian mission in Somalia started with a fairly high level of public support, but rapidly dropped in less than a year. The Bosnia

peacekeeping operation maintained a consistent, yet modest level of support throughout the mission.<sup>16</sup> The Iraq War started with a relatively high level of public support, but quickly dropped within the first 18 months where it has remained at varying levels ever since.<sup>17</sup> (See Figure 2. Public Support for Wars)



**Figure 2. Public Support for Wars.** Sources : Data adapted from Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 1996); American Enterprise Institute Studies in Public Opinion, *Public Opinion on the War with Iraq*, (29 November 2007). <http://www.aei.org/publicopinion2> (accessed December 14, 2007).

Using the national will model presented earlier, this monograph will explain these trends which either led to the retention or loss of national will. This monograph will present the findings of these case studies by synthesizing the information collected on all of the conflicts and derive conclusions about how each contextual influencer and instrument of influence have historically affected national will. Finally, this monograph will identify ways the United States can nurture national will in the future to prevent its erosion and leverage it to support the war effort.

<sup>16</sup> Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 1996), 108-118.

<sup>17</sup> American Enterprise Institute Studies in Public Opinion, *Public Opinion on the War with Iraq*, (29 November 2007). <http://www.aei.org/publicopinion2> (accessed December 14, 2007).

## CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCERS

Contextual influencers are the content of the information that comprises the background, significance, and circumstances of an event that shapes national will. The contextual influencers for wars include the perception of legitimacy, the perception of threat, and the perceived cost-benefit of the action. Together these contextual influencers constitute the pure information that shape the will of U.S. politicians and the American people.

### Perception of Legitimacy

*Perception of legitimacy* is whether the conflict is considered to be initiated and conducted in accordance with internationally accepted laws of war – in other words, is it right? Legitimacy for going to war is legally determined through *jus ad bellum*, or “justice to war”, criteria that are a part of the internationally accepted laws of war. These criteria for a just war vary, but include eight major elements: just cause, legitimate authority, public declaration, just intent, proportionality, last resort, reasonable hope of success, and end of peace. *Just cause* means having a legitimate and morally weighty reason to go to war, such as aggression, self defense, or humanitarian disaster, to name a few. *Legitimate authority* restricts those who can legally authorize war to specific leaders in legitimate governments of nation-states. *Public declaration* requires a declaration of war or an ultimatum before the initiation of hostilities. *Just intent* limits war aims by keeping the purpose of the war focused on returning to the *status quo ante*. *Proportionality* states that the costs of the war should be worth the benefits. *Last resort* means force should only be used when diplomatic and other means have already failed. *Reasonable hope of success* ensures that through the expenditure of lives and resources, goals can actually be reached. *End of peace* asks whether the outcome of the war will be a better peace – a

more stable condition than that producing the present cause of war.<sup>18</sup>

Once at war, legitimacy must be maintained through lawful conduct of the war, or *jus in bello*. There are generally two requirements for the just conduct of war: discrimination and proportionality. *Discrimination* is the distinguishing between combatants and noncombatants, targeting only the combatants. While accidents inevitably do lead to civilian casualties in war, the important thing is a deliberate commitment to discriminate targets and limit collateral damage as much as possible. *Proportionality* means that tactical targeting and weapons used need to be relative to the military value of the target.<sup>19</sup> Most Americans probably are not familiar with the laws of war, however these are the considerations commonly used by politicians and the media when framing conflicts for the public understanding that directly influences national will.

In the cases studied, there is a direct correlation between just war deviances and perception of legitimacy. The conflicts where the initial justifications for war and subsequent conduct were suspect, Vietnam and Iraq, are the ones where the overall legitimacy of the war was questioned. Vietnam and Iraq also represent the two most prominent cases where American national will was significantly eroded. While much of this can be attributed to miscalculations by national leadership and other factors that will be addressed later, the fact that both of these were limited wars fought against insurgents using evolved methods of irregular warfare cannot be overstated. (See Table 1. Perceived Legitimacy Factors)

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<sup>18</sup> Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 28-31.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

**Table 1. Perceived Legitimacy Factors**

<b>Conflict</b>	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Initial Justification</b>	<b>Just War Deviances</b>	<b>Subsequent Justification</b>	<b>Major Issues in Conduct</b>
<b>WWII</b> Seen as Legitimate		- Pearl Harbor attack - Declarations of war from Germany & Italy	None	None needed	None widely publicized
<b>Vietnam</b> Legitimacy Questioned		- Defend South Vietnam against spread of Communism - Gulf of Tonkin incident	- South Vietnam government seen as corrupt U.S. puppet - Questions on accuracy of Gulf of Tonkin incident reports	None needed	- U.S. brutality (My Lai, etc) - Strategic bombing - Use of napalm and chemical weapons
<b>Somalia</b> Seen as Legitimate		- Humanitarian (UN approved)	None	- Rescue American hostages - Capture Aided	None
<b>Bosnia</b> Seen as Legitimate		- Peacekeeping as part of NATO (UN approved) - Enforce Dayton Peace Accords	None	None needed	None
<b>GWOT</b> Seen as Legitimate		- 9/11 terrorist attacks	None	None needed	- Detainment and treatment of terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay
<b>Iraq</b> Legitimacy Questioned		- Iraqi possession of WMD - Iraqi government links to al Qaeda - Saddam Hussein's defiance of UNSCR	- No WMD found in Iraq - No significant links found between Saddam Hussein's regime and al Qaeda - U.S. oil interests	- Defeat terrorists coming to Iraq to fight Coalition forces - Free Iraqi people & spread democracy - Humanitarian	- U.S. brutality (Abu Ghraib, etc)

Sources: Data adapted from Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 1996); Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2005).

Major powers will always have difficulty maintaining legitimacy against these types of enemies. Whenever the strong are seen as beating the weak, the powerful are considered cruel and have difficulty maintaining the cohesion to continue the fight.<sup>20</sup> Famous Israeli historian, Martin van Creveld describes this David-and-Goliath paradox well,

A child who is involved in a serious fight with an adult is justified in using every and any means available – not because he or she is right, but simply because he or she has no choice. Similarly, in an insurgency of the weak against the strong, the former will have much less cause to worry about whether or not their actions are just.<sup>21</sup>

It is impracticable, therefore, for the stronger power to maintain a clean perception of legitimate

<sup>20</sup> Robb, *Brave New War*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War*, 226.



conduct fighting in wars where the enemy deliberately blends in with the civilian population, targets noncombatants, uses protected sites and innocents as human shields to safeguard their bases and operations, and stages incidents to raise questions on the morality of the stronger power's operations.<sup>22</sup> This has significant implications for future American conflicts. As long as the United States is a superpower fighting against an asymmetric enemy, a double standard will exist where the U.S. is held to unrealistically high moral standards while even the enemies' most egregious violations go without much criticism.

Gil Merom, an Israeli expert on why democracies lose small wars, submits that once stories of brutality reach the public and the normative difference between societal morals and conduct of the war is evident, public support is impossible to maintain.<sup>23</sup> In Vietnam, incidents of U.S. brutality, massive strategic bombing, and the use of napalm and other chemical weapons contributed to an erosion of American national will. An example of this occurred in 1965, when U.S. Marines used cigarette lighters to ignite thatched huts in the hamlet of Cam Ne in retaliation for Viet Cong small arms fire, while women and children watched screaming.<sup>24</sup> The widely publicized images of that incident and the government's subsequent cover-up made Americans begin to question the legitimacy of their military's actions. The incident at Cam Ne was just one example among many that caused university campus pressure and opposition to the war to develop "because of doubts concerning the morality of the war and the necessity to risk one's life in it."<sup>25</sup> According to COL Summers, "All of America's previous wars were fought in the heat of passion. Vietnam was fought in cold blood, and that was intolerable to the American people."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cook, *The Moral Warrior*, 33-35.

<sup>23</sup> Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Miles Hudson and John Stanier, *War and the Media*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998), 109.

<sup>25</sup> Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 237.

<sup>26</sup> Summers, *On Strategy*, 37.

When the My Lai massacre was uncovered, its publicity triggered an obvious shift to an intolerable level of public opposition to the Vietnam War and the U.S. conduct of it. In Iraq, the United States has experienced similar problems – the Abu Ghraib torture scandal may also prove to have been a major turning point in public support for the war in Iraq.<sup>27</sup> This and other publicized atrocities by Americans in Iraq, such as the Haditha killings and the rape of Iraqi women, have led to similar questions regarding the morality of the U.S. conduct of the war and an erosion of public support for the war. While these atrocities in both Vietnam and Iraq were isolated incidents that did not represent official policy or the norm of conduct, they nevertheless had a dramatic impact on the will of the United States to continue those wars.

The United States originally went to war against Iraq to dismantle their stock of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), remove Saddam Hussein’s tyrannical regime, and prevent Iraqi support for international terrorism, using previous United Nations Security Council Resolution violations and pre-emptive self-defense as legal justifications.<sup>28</sup> More than 70% of Americans surveyed accepted these as legitimate reasons for invading Iraq.<sup>29</sup> However, the entire just cause for the war was called into question when no WMD or significant ties to al Qaeda were found in Iraq.<sup>30</sup> While subsequent justifications for the war included defeating foreign fighters, freeing the Iraqi people, promoting democracy, and preventing a humanitarian disaster from sectarian violence, governments cannot make credible legal justifications *ex post facto*.<sup>31</sup> Regardless of

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<sup>27</sup> Robb, *Brave New War*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> John Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec 2005): 45.

<sup>29</sup> Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2005), 186.

<sup>30</sup> William A. Boettcher III and Michael D. Cobb, “Echoes of Vietnam? Casualty Framing and Public Perceptions of Success and Failure in Iraq,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50 no. 6 (December 2006): 837.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Byers, *War Law: Understanding International Law and Armed Conflict*, (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2005), 85. In law, there is no *ex post facto* justifications, so preemptive actions must be based on good intelligence.

how valid subsequent grounds for continuing the war in Iraq may have been, Americans felt misled into a war of questionable legitimacy. Iraq was a war of dubious choice rather than the war of necessity that was originally sold, and that belief by the American people ultimately led to a significant erosion of national will to support the war. While many other factors also shape national will, these cases clearly demonstrate the power wielded by the perception of legitimacy.

## **Perception of Threat**

*Perception of threat* is the level of existential danger to the United States and its vital national interests. Polls show that any deployment of U.S. military forces for a long-term conflict “that is not perceived as a direct and immediate threat to the continental United States will in all probability provoke considerable public opposition once the brief ‘rally around the flag’ effect dissipates.”<sup>32</sup> Typically a majority of Americans have supported deployments to defeat major threats and protect its vital national interests. However, Americans rarely found using military force to resolve ethnic conflicts and civil wars, promote democracy, or conduct humanitarian missions compelling enough to warrant support.<sup>33</sup> (See Table 2. Perceived Threats & National Interest)

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Lorell and Charles Kelley, jr., *Casualties, Public Opinion and Presidential Policy during the Vietnam War*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 1985), vi.

<sup>33</sup> Larson & Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, 107-108.

**Table 2. Perceived Threats & National Interest**

Factor Conflict	Threat to the U.S.	Specific Initial Threats	National Interests	Subsequent Threats & Interests
WWII	Existential	- Spread of Fascism with global design - Attacks against American military forces and merchant shipping	- Global economic security and international trade - Close U.S. Allies attacked and conquered - Liberal internationalist principles	- Initial threats and interests remained valid and even increased over the course of the war
Vietnam	Questionable	- Spread of Communism further into Southeast Asia (Domino Theory) - Attacks on U.S. military assets in the region	- Prevent spread of Communism	- Initial threats and interests questioned over time
Somalia	None	- Minimal, regional threats inside Somalia	- Minimal, regional humanitarian interests only	- Added interest of rescuing American hostages
Bosnia	None	- Minimal, regional threats inside former Yugoslavia	- Regional humanitarian interests - Proximity to European economic interests	- Initial threats and interests remained valid and strong
GWOT	Existential	- Spread of militant Islam with global design - Attacks against civilians in major U.S. cities	- Protecting international security and stability - Preserving Western values - Maintaining global oil trade	- Initial threats and interests remained valid (although nebulous nature of the enemy resulted in a general drop in perceived threat)
Iraq	Questionable	- WMD threat to regional U.S. military forces and national interests - Potential support to international terrorist groups	- Regional stability in the Middle East - Open trade routes and global access to oil	- Initial threats questioned - Terrorists traveling to Iraq - Terrorist safe haven in Iraq - Iranian regional hegemony - Iraq as a stable, democracy in the Middle East

Sources: Data adapted from Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 1996); Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2005).

In the cases studied, there is a direct correlation between the existence of major threats with strong national interests and those conflicts where national will was maintained. The opposite is also true, national will is far more likely to erode when threats and national interests are questionable or nonexistent. The Iraq War is a case in point. The initial WMD and terrorist related threats, claimed to be “grave and gathering,” were called into question when evidence of neither were found in Iraq.<sup>34</sup> This deflation in perceived threat and interest led to a sustained weakening of American will to continue the war in Iraq.

<sup>34</sup> Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” 45.

In World War II and to a lesser extent the Global War on Terror, where existential threats and significant interests existed, the national will remained stronger. In Vietnam and Iraq, significant wars where both threats and interests were questionable, the national will faltered over time. In Somalia and Bosnia, humanitarian / peacekeeping operations where little threat and interest existed, the national will varied based on costs and other factors that will be addressed later.

It is extremely hazardous for the United States to deploy its forces where minimal vital interests exist. This creates compelling reasons for enemies that do have vital interests to act in direct opposition to American forces and exploit that situation to influence U.S. public support for the operation.<sup>35</sup> The U.S. humanitarian mission to Somalia is a perfect example of this occurrence. Most Americans believed the United States had no important stakes in Somalia, but were willing to provide aid to relieve some of the starvation. Americans were not, however, willing to expend many lives in order to provide that humanitarian assistance. When the mission shifted focus from humanitarian assistance to stabilizing the deteriorating political and security situations, support for the operation dropped. Once the United States took casualties and the American people saw their dead soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu on TV, the already-fragile national will broke.<sup>36</sup> Contrast that with World War II, where because of a strong existential threat and significant national interests, the national will remained very strong in spite of considerable costs including the loss of hundreds of thousands of American lives. Overall, Americans want short wars and will not tolerate long ones, especially without an existential threat or vital national interests involved.

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<sup>35</sup> Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 210.

<sup>36</sup> Because of the lack of national interests in Somalia, the political will to continue operations there eroded as quickly as the public will. Politicians were even more sensitive to casualties in Somalia than the American people were, leading to bipartisan support for withdrawal. Larson & Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations*, 31-40.

## Perceived Cost – Benefit

The *perceived cost-benefit* is the analysis of the costs of a conflict weighed against the expected benefits based on Americans' cost tolerance in terms of casualties, time, and money, and the prospects and levels of success based on the limited information understood by any particular person or group of people. Generally speaking, Americans are unwilling to support a war if the costs involved outweigh the expected benefits. In total wars, such as World War II, where more existential threats exist, Americans have been more likely to accept substantially higher costs to achieve victory.<sup>37</sup> In limited wars, such as Vietnam or Iraq,

The costs and sacrifices imposed by U.S. involvement...are inherently difficult to justify to the public, because geographical locations are remote, military and political objectives are limited and abstract, the risk of lengthy stalemate is high, and achieving a clear-cut "total" victory may not be possible. The public tends to be unwilling to tolerate anything more than minimal costs in limited war situations.<sup>38</sup>

In humanitarian and stability operations, however, Americans are far less likely to accept even moderate costs.<sup>39</sup>

## Cost Tolerance

Patricia Sullivan, a professor of international affairs at the University of Georgia, explained this cost-benefit analysis in terms of cost tolerance,

States select themselves into armed conflicts only when their pre-war estimate of the cost of attaining their political objectives through the use of force falls below the threshold of their tolerance for costs. The more the actual costs of victory exceed a state's prewar expectations, the greater the risk that it will be pushed beyond its cost-tolerance threshold and forced to unilaterally withdraw its forces before it attains its war aims...But strong states are not militarily defeated by their weak adversaries. They choose to terminate their military operations without attaining their political objectives when they decide that the cost of victory will

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<sup>37</sup> Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, xvi-xvii. Understanding the potential effect the perceived human cost could have on the war effort during World War II, the government made a conscious effort to limit public exposure, censoring photographs and films containing American war dead.

<sup>38</sup> Lorell & Kelly, *Casualties, Public Opinion and Presidential Policy*, vii.

<sup>39</sup> Larson & Sayych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations*, 224.

exceed the price they are willing to pay to secure those objectives.<sup>40</sup> These costs can be defined in terms of human cost or casualties, resource or financial costs, and intangible costs such as the loss of civil liberties or the personal sacrifice of civilians back home.

Americans are, by far, most sensitive to the human costs of war and that casualty tolerance correlates directly with the previous contextual influencers – legitimacy and threat. Conflicts that are perceived as legitimate and have a major threat component have an exponentially higher level of public acceptance of casualties. Generally, in limited wars where “the United States or a close ally is not directly threatened by a major power, the willingness of the public to accept casualties is not high.”<sup>41</sup> In peacekeeping or humanitarian operations where little threat or interest exists, there is extremely low willingness to accept casualties.

In World War II, where the U.S. had legitimate causes for war, an existential threat, and vital national interests involved, the U.S. was able to accept hundreds of thousands of American deaths, sustain an unprecedented level of public support, and retain national will through to victory.<sup>42</sup> Americans were less willing to tolerate casualties during the Vietnam War, which had both questionable legitimacy and threats. In Vietnam, public support for the war dropped drastically as casualties mounted, exceeding 2,000 combat deaths in some months and more than 45,000 over the course of the war. The national will eroded over time leading to a withdrawal before the United States could meet its strategic objectives. In Somalia, a humanitarian operation where no threat and little national interest existed, Americans were unwilling to accept even a few

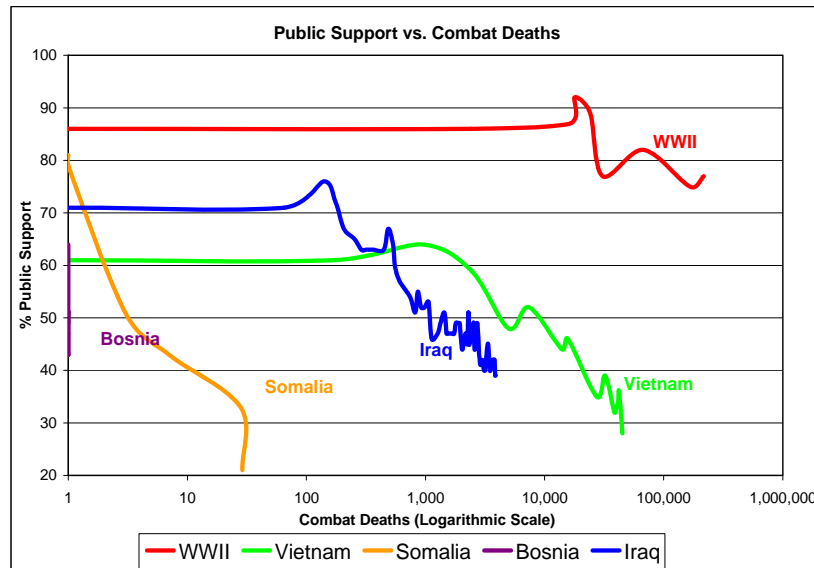
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<sup>40</sup> Patricia L. Sullivan, “War Aims and War Outcomes: Why Powerful States Lose Limited Wars,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51 no. 3 (June 2007): 497-498.

<sup>41</sup> Lorell & Kelly, *Casualties, Public Opinion and Presidential Policy*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> By 1945, the American public was growing wary of the war and its costs, though public support for the war never dropped below a still very high 75%. Anticipating a continued erosion of public support for the war, especially after the German surrender and in light of heavy Japanese resistance, American political and military leaders defined “unconditional surrender” somewhat more leniently for Japan than for Germany, even allowing the Japanese to retain their Emperor and sovereignty. Larson, xvi, 107-108; Michael D. Pearlman, *Unconditional Surrender, Demobilization, and the Atomic Bomb*, (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1996), 14-17, 19-21.

dozen fatalities, and the perception was that national will quickly eroded, leading to an almost immediate U.S. departure.<sup>43</sup> (See Figure 3. Public Support for Wars vs. Combat Deaths)



**Figure 3. Public Support for Wars vs. Combat Deaths.** Sources : Data adapted from Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations*, (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 1996); *Iraq Coalition Casualty Count*. <http://icasualties.org/oif/> (accessed December 14, 2007).

The American peacekeeping operation in Bosnia resulted in only one combat death in over 10 years, so fluctuations in support are the result of other factors. However, polls suggest that American tolerance for casualties in Bosnia would have been very low, similar to the case in Somalia.<sup>44</sup> In the Iraq war, a limited war where critics question U.S. legitimacy and threats, Americans have been very sensitive to casualties. Public support for the war in Iraq has declined consistently as the total number of casualties grows even though combat deaths have remained comparatively low.<sup>45</sup> By the end of 2007, the United States suffered less than 4,000 killed in Iraq over almost five years, with most months remaining below 100 combat deaths.<sup>46</sup> (See Figure 4.

<sup>43</sup> Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, 14-18, 24-29, 42-47. See also Mueller's *War, Presidents & Public Opinion*; and Gartner & Segura's *War, Casualties, and Public Opinion*.

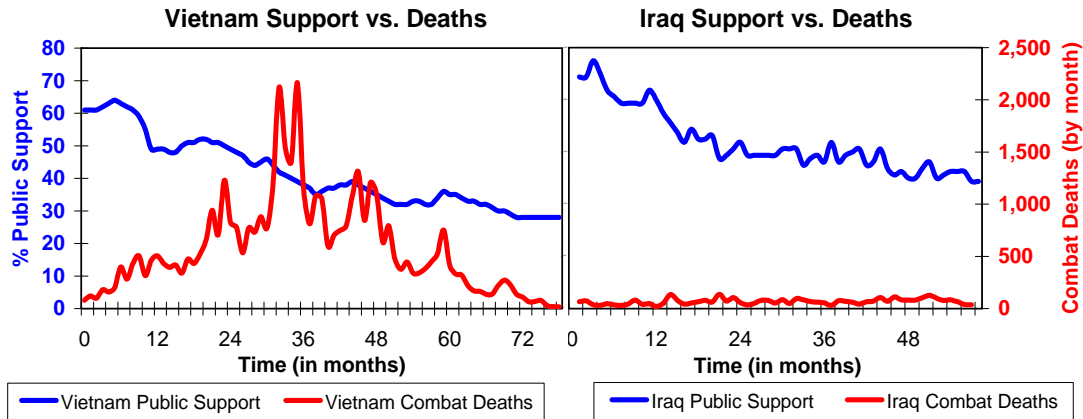
<sup>44</sup> Larson & Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations*, 64-68.

<sup>45</sup> John Mueller, "The Iraq Syndrome," *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec 2005): 44-45.

<sup>46</sup> *Iraq Coalition Casualty Count*, <http://icasualties.org/oif/> (accessed December 14, 2007).



Vietnam & Iraq Support vs. Combat Deaths)



**Figure 4. Vietnam & Iraq Support vs. Combat Deaths.** Sources : Data adapted from Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations* , (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 1996); American Enterprise Institute Studies in Public Opinion, *Public Opinion on the War with Iraq*, ( 29 November 2007). <http://www.aei.org/publicopin2> (accessed December 14, 2007); *Iraq Coalition Casualty Count* . <http://icasualties.org/oif/> (accessed December 14, 2007).

A RAND study on casualties and public opinion during the Vietnam War came to the conclusion that “initial levels of public support for U.S. involvement in a prolonged and indecisive limited conflict cannot be maintained indefinitely if substantial numbers of U.S. casualties continue to be generated.”<sup>47</sup> Although their tolerance for casualties in Iraq may be low, polls suggest that Americans are willing to accept high casualties in the overall Global War on Terror, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks legitimized the struggle and illustrated an immediate threat.<sup>48</sup>

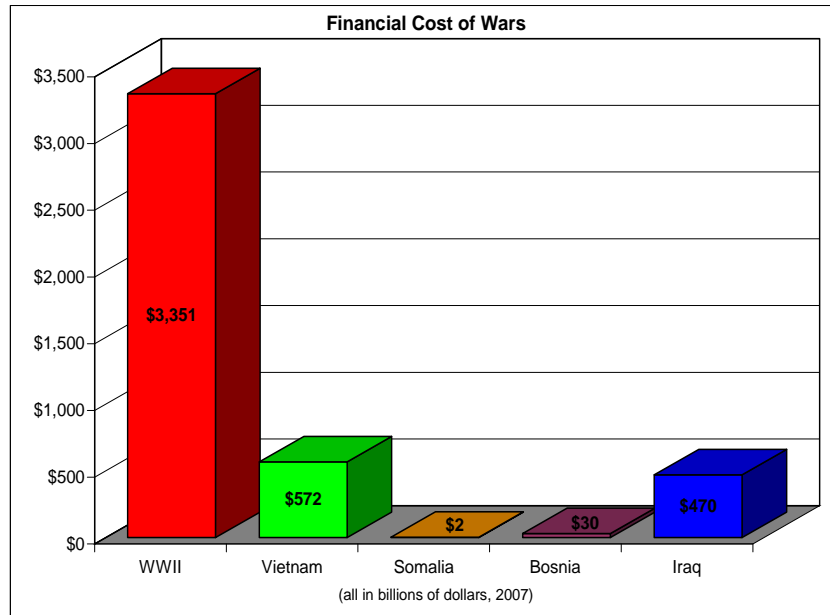
While human costs are emotionally significant, the financial costs of war directly affect a larger portion of the American population. These financial costs of war affect Americans in the form of taxes, budget cuts on non-defense related programs, national debt, inflation, and general economic loss.<sup>49</sup> World War II financially cost more than all other American wars combined,

<sup>47</sup> Lorell & Kelly, *Casualties, Public Opinion and Presidential Policy*, 79.

<sup>48</sup> Larson & Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations*, 120-125.

<sup>49</sup> Joshua S. Goldstein, *The Real Price of War: How You Pay for the War on Terror*, (New York: New York University Press, 2004), <http://www.realpriceofwar.com/site/index.htm#toc> (accessed January 8, 2008).

even those beyond the scope of this study.<sup>50</sup> It cost the United States the equivalent of more than three trillion dollars, with the Vietnam War a distant second costing over 560 billion and the Iraq war currently figured at approximately 470 billion dollars (all adjusted to 2007 dollars). By comparison, the financial cost of the peacekeeping and humanitarian operations were insignificant.<sup>51</sup> (See Figure 5. Financial Cost of Wars)



**Figure 5. Financial Cost of Wars.** Source : Data adapted from Congressional Research Service, *Costs of Major U.S. Wars and Recent U.S. Overseas Military Operations*, 3 October 2001; National Priorities Project, “The Cost of War,” [http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar\\_home](http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar_home) (accessed December 14, 2007).

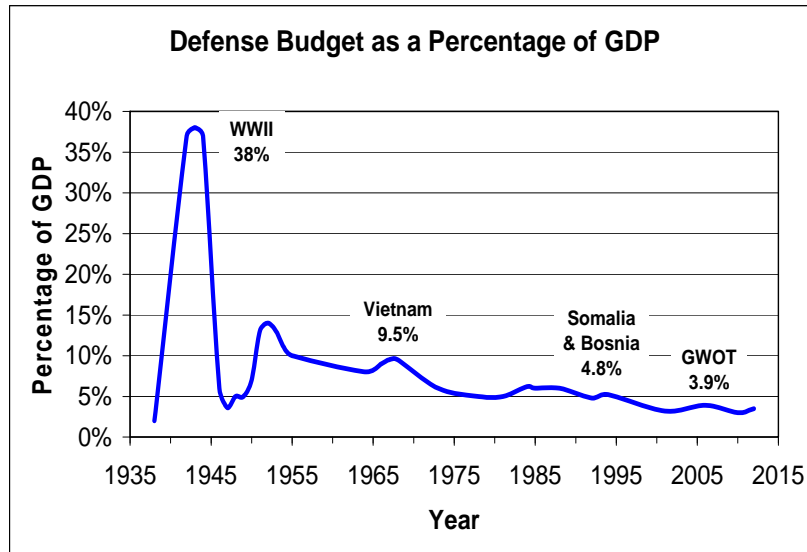
In his 1942 State of the Union Address, President Franklin Roosevelt said, “War costs money...That means taxes and bonds and bonds and taxes.”<sup>52</sup> During World War II, President

<sup>50</sup> David R. Francis, “More Costly Than the War to End All Wars,” *Christian Science Monitor* (29 August 2005), <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0829/p15s01-cogn.html> (accessed December 14, 2007). See also Congressional Research Service, *Costs of Major U.S. Wars and Recent U.S. Overseas Military Operations*, 3 October 2001.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., chart; National Priorities Project, “The Cost of War,” [http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar\\_home](http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar_home) (accessed December 14, 2007). All dollar-inflation calculations done using U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Inflation Calculator,” <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl> (accessed 14 December 2007).

<sup>52</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “State of the Union Address,” (Issued to a Joint Session of Congress on January 6, 1942), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16253> (accessed January 2, 2008).

Roosevelt significantly increased taxes, had wartime bond drives, and eventually ended up spending over half of the nation’s entire income on the war effort, an amount that ended up being about 38% of the U.S. GDP.<sup>53</sup> Yet despite this enormous financial cost that affected every American, the war remained extraordinarily popular. (See Figure 6. DOD Budget as a Percentage of GDP)



**Figure 6. DOD Budget as a Percentage of GDP.** *Source:* Data adapted from National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2006, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), April 2005; as found in the *U.S. Army 2006 Posture Statement*.

By contrast, in the limited wars in Vietnam and Iraq, Presidents Lyndon Johnson and George W. Bush went to great lengths to ensure that the American people felt little financial or economic burden from the wars. In 2001, President Bush instituted large tax cuts that he sustained after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks to stimulate the economy – unprecedented

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<sup>53</sup> Robert D. Hormats, “The Price of Liberty,” *The Huffington Post*, (April 29, 2007), under “Shared Sacrifice,” [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-hormats/the-price-of-liberty\\_b\\_47212.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-hormats/the-price-of-liberty_b_47212.html) (accessed January 14, 2008); U.S. Army, *2006 Posture Statement*, (Presented to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on February 10, 2006 by Secretary of the Army Francis Harvey and Army Chief of Staff Peter Schoomaker), 2.

during wartime.<sup>54</sup> At a time when one would think that Americans should have been willing to spend enormous amounts of money to fight the Global War on Terror, 75% of Americans supported the tax cuts and 60% favored additional cuts.<sup>55</sup> Support for tax cuts, however, equated into not spending necessary resources on the war effort. During the Vietnam War the United States spent only 9.5% of its GDP on national defense and, so far, less than 4% during the Global War on Terror.<sup>56</sup> Clearly U.S. political leaders and the American people were less willing to spend large sums of money on those smaller conflicts.

Other more intangible costs of war also exist, such as loss of civil liberties in the name of national security and the personal sacrifice of civilians at home in support of the war effort. While many people and groups condemn infringements of their civil liberties and complain about personal sacrifice, there is no evidence illustrating a large impact from either on wartime national will, even in drastic cases such as World War II.

## Prospects and Levels of Success

In this cost-benefit analysis, Americans, even if subconsciously, weigh those costs against the prospects and levels of success and anticipated benefits of the conflict. Much of national will involves expectation management. Part of that entails political framing of issues and will be discussed later, but a large part of it also includes the level of success perceived in the wars. To steal a phrase from Jonah Goldberg of the Los Angeles Times – “It’s losing that American’s hate, not war.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> At the time of this writing, the Bush Administration and Congress passed an economic stimulus package that will give thousands more tax dollars back to each American family, further impacting the government’s ability to properly fund the war.

<sup>55</sup> Alasdair Roberts, “The War We Deserve,” *Foreign Policy* (November/December 2007): 48-49.

<sup>56</sup> 2006 Army Posture Statement, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Jonah Goldberg, “It’s Losing We Hate, Not Wars,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 2006, <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-goldberg30nov30,0,6255949.column?coll=la-opinion-righttrail> (accessed January 18, 2008).

Conflicts that have little prospect of success and are associated with failed policies are far more likely to result in a rapid erosion of national will than those which are seen as successful.<sup>58</sup> Even in wars that are generally not going well, instances of success can temporarily boost support.<sup>59</sup> However, without an overall sense of success or a truly existential threat, national will is likely to erode forcing a premature end to the conflict.

Unfortunately, success is not an objective measurement and usually requires interpretation based on subjective opinion. War by its very nature is complex and rife with errors and setbacks. What is needed to understand success in war are context and the viewing of mistakes in relative rather than absolute terms.<sup>60</sup> Historian Victor Davis Hanson reminds that,

We forget that victory in every war goes to the side that commits fewer mistakes – and learns more from them in less time – not to the side that makes no mistakes...In past wars there was recognition of factors beyond human control – the weather; the fickleness of human nature; the role of chance, the irrational, and the inexplicable – that lent a humility to our efforts and tolerance for unintended consequences...what loses wars are not the inevitable mistakes, but the failure to correct them in time and the defeatism and depression that we allow to paralyze us.<sup>61</sup>

The United States suffered enormous misfortune during World War II in the form of intelligence failures, fratricide incidents, tactical and strategic errors, and poor assumptions that directly led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans. In spite of almost obvious indicators, American intelligence was surprised by the devastating attacks by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the Germans in the Ardennes in 1944.<sup>62</sup> A lack of force protection and

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<sup>58</sup> William M. Darley, “War Policy, Public Support, and the Media.” *Parameters* (Summer 2005): 127.

<sup>59</sup> Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” 48.

<sup>60</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, “In War: Resolution,” *Claremont Review of Books* (Winter 2007), under “The Home Front,” [http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1500/article\\_detail.asp](http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1500/article_detail.asp) (accessed January 2, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, “In War: Resolution,” under “The Home Front” and “Live and Learn, Learn and Live.”

<sup>62</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War*, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1989), 253-254, 442-444. See also George S. Patton, *The Patton Papers: 1940-1945*, ed. Martin Blumenson, (New York, NY: De Capo Press, 1974), 595-598.

proper coordination led to American antiaircraft gunners literally shooting the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division out of the sky during the invasion of Sicily and to the inadvertent bombing of U.S. units during the breakout from Normandy.<sup>63</sup> The United States committed strategic and tactical errors, such as the daylight bombing raids on Germany and fighting in the hedgerows of France, which resulted in near-disastrous setbacks.<sup>64</sup> Even in the last year of the war, there were significant upsets as poor assumptions by planners led to disproportionately heavy casualties on Iwo Jima and Okinawa.<sup>65</sup> However, because of a combination of a general understanding of the complexity of war and the perception of an existential threat, these major setbacks did not result in a significant erosion of national will during the Second World War. Although tired of the war, the American people were able to endure these and other misfortunes long enough to attain victory.

Unlike the Second World War, which in spite of its many failures did have clear battlefield victories to celebrate, success in counterinsurgencies like Vietnam and Iraq was and has been extremely difficult to quantify.<sup>66</sup> Success in Vietnam was illusory, with continuous poor intelligence and failed policies, and as early as 1966 many senior leaders in the U.S. questioned whether success was even possible anymore. Paradoxically, the major measurable event in the Vietnam War, its turning point, was the failed communist Tet Offensive in 1968, which Americans misconstrued as a major blow to the U.S. war effort.<sup>67</sup> Victor Davis Hanson recalled,

Vietnam's legacy was to insist that if American aims and conduct were less than perfect, then they could not be good at all...Later victories in Grenada, Panama,

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<sup>63</sup> Patton, *The Patton Papers*, 282, 488-489. LTG Lesley McNair, the U.S. Army's Ground Force Commander, the highest ranking U.S. military officer to ever be killed in combat, was killed during that inadvertent bombing of Americans during the Normandy breakout.

<sup>64</sup> Keegan, *The Second World War*, 425-426.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 566-567.

<sup>66</sup> Boettcher & Cobb, "Echoes of Vietnam," 832-833.

<sup>67</sup> Lorell & Kelley, *Casualties, Public Opinion and Presidential Policy*, 63, 71-79.

Gulf War I, and the Balkans persuaded Americans that war could be redefined...as something in which the use of force ends quickly, is welcomed by locals, costs little, and easily thwarts tyranny.<sup>68</sup>

This is the setting in which the Iraq War began.

Operation Iraqi Freedom, despite strategic intelligence failures on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), achieved rapid initial success and public fanfare as Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown in less than three weeks. The subsequent post-war occupation, however, has been rife with error and the significant number of successes hard to measure. Invalid assumptions led to deficient post-war planning – an underestimation of costs in time and money, an overestimation in Iraqi cooperation and oil revenues, and insufficient forces and equipment to counter the growing insurgency. Poor policy decisions, such as dissolving the Iraqi Army and de-Baathification, led to greater instability and dysfunction. Heavy-handed tactics, cultural ignorance, and isolated incidents of highly publicized atrocities magnified the problem, and the perception of failure.<sup>69</sup> Only recently with the implementation of the Baghdad surge under General David Petraeus' leadership and a new strategy have Americans begun to perceive success in Iraq. Colonel William Darley, an Army public affairs officer, believes the lack of American support for the Iraq War is more likely a result of the perceived failed policy and lack of success than because the American people disapprove of the war itself.<sup>70</sup>

Perception of success in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations is also elusive, and, because of their inherent inconsequential nature, far more sensitive to failure. In Somalia, the mission creep from a purely humanitarian to a far more bleak stability role and the October 1993 ambush of U.S. forces in Mogadishu quickly caused Americans to question the prospect of

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<sup>68</sup> Hanson, "In War: Resolution," under "Has War Changed, or Have We?"

<sup>69</sup> Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007), 512-513, 572-582; Mueller, "The Iraq Syndrome," 48-50; Hanson, "In War: Resolution," under "Intelligence Failures" and "Live and Learn, Learn and Live."

<sup>70</sup> William M. Darley, "Winning Back Public Support," *Marine Corps Gazette* (May 2007): 68.

success and precipitated a re-evaluation of the perceived cost-benefit of operations there.<sup>71</sup> While success in Bosnia was also difficult to measure, there was steady, albeit slow, progress and, more importantly, no major incidents to question success.<sup>72</sup>

It is also important to note that the government's war aims have an impact on the prospect and levels of success in conflicts. Military operations where the political objectives require direct combat to destroy enemy military forces are relatively easy to plan and execute. However, operations where the political objectives require a target's compliance are far more difficult to anticipate and measure.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, perception of success is significantly harder to attain when political objectives require a coercive strategy that attempts to change behavior. To gain support for going to war, costs must be specific, and benefits plausible and relevant to the American people.

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<sup>71</sup> Larson & Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations*, 31.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61, 88.

<sup>73</sup> Sullivan, "War Aims and War Outcomes," 506-507.



## INSTRUMENTS OF INFLUENCE

Instruments of influence are the vehicles that frame and transmit that information that affects national will. Instruments of influence include primarily the media, political rhetoric and opinion-maker engagement. The *media* is comprised of print, television, cable, and internet journalists who publish through the use of mass media outlets. *Political Rhetoric* and *opinion-maker engagement* consist of the public discourse of respected government officials, professionals in academia, and subject matter experts in foreign policy and military operations. Together these instruments of influence frame and present the information that shapes the will of Americans. However, to comprehend the ability to influence first requires an appreciation of the public's receptivity to the information presented.

### Public Receptivity

International affairs expert, Dr. James Rosenau, describes the American people as belonging to primarily two groups: the mass public and the attentive public. The mass public consists of 75% - 90% of the adult population, is generally uninformed about foreign affairs issues, and pays little attention to the daily events in world politics. "On the rare occasions when it does awaken from its slumber, the mass public, being no more informed than previously, is impulsive, unstable, unreasoning, unpredictable, capable of suddenly shifting direction or of going in several contradictory directions at the same time."<sup>74</sup> The attentive public, which is exponentially smaller, is always concerned with foreign affairs issues and is knowledgeable about them.<sup>75</sup>

Public opinion polls show that over two-thirds of Americans are unaware of important foreign policy news events even when they receive prolonged news coverage. So, regardless of

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<sup>74</sup> James N. Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, (New York, NY: Random House, 1961), 35-36.

how much information is available, a lack of interest results in general ignorance on important foreign affairs issues.<sup>76</sup> Particularly in an era of instant gratification and 30-second sound bytes, the American public's attention span has gradually withered as technology has adapted the speed and exchange of information.<sup>77</sup> Many Americans today seem far more interested in tabloid exposés than they do about the real facts of America's national security and foreign affairs.<sup>78</sup> They also tend to be self-absorbed, concerned more about their own needs and desires than with collective benefits and security. In recent decades, "Americans have remained largely unshaken in their commitment to a political philosophy that demands much from its government but asks little of its citizens" and an overall "rejection of sacrifice on a national scale."<sup>79</sup>

Because of the complexity involved in foreign relations, the mass public is generally ignorant of the significant information required to truly understand those issues. Most people even tend to believe their perceptions of issues over reality itself. Walter Lippmann went so far as to call the general public "deaf spectators" because of their inability to formulate intelligent decisions on complex issues.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, when it comes to supporting wars, the mass public is inclined to collectively react based more on emotions than on intellectual deliberation.<sup>81</sup>

It is also important to understand the traditions that the American public has towards the use of military force. Americans are historically slow to anger and resistant to intervention, but once mobilized Americans are prone to over-react, wanting immediate and overwhelming action

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>76</sup> Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1989), 328-329.

<sup>77</sup> Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 315.

<sup>78</sup> Hanson, "In War: Resolution," under "Has War Changed, or Have We?"

<sup>79</sup> Roberts, "The War We Deserve," 45, 46.

<sup>80</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, (1922; repr., New York, NY: The Free Press, 1965), 18; Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, (1927; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 3-11, 16-18, 27-28.

<sup>81</sup> Darley, "War Policy, Public Support, and the Media," 126.

to achieve success as quickly and at the smallest cost possible. Americans are far more likely to support short-term actions that have a high probability of success over longer-term involvements with uncertain prospects.<sup>82</sup> Yet, a small number of Americans never support the use of military force under any circumstances, outside of defending the United States itself.<sup>83</sup> This generally uninformed, uninterested, egocentric, and emotional American public with traditional tendencies is the setting in which the following instruments of influence operate.

## Media

Dr. Rosenau defines *mass media* as “those impersonal instruments of communication that are intended for, and made available to, anyone who is able to utilize them within their distributive limits.”<sup>84</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, this not only includes newspapers, radio, network television and movies, but also cable and satellite communications, and increasingly the internet. There is, however, a critical difference between types of mass media, with the major categories being print and broadcast. Print media, consisting primarily of newspapers and magazines, requires time for journalists to obtain the detailed elements they need to provide a holistic, informative story. Broadcast media, consisting primarily of radio and television, mainly need only quick pictures, sound bytes, and video footage for immediate transmission.<sup>85</sup> These characteristics are important because they influence the content level and value of information

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<sup>82</sup> Daniel Yankelovich and I.M. Destler, *Beyond the Beltway: Engaging the Public in U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 234-235.

<sup>83</sup> Darley, “Winning Back Public Support,” 69.

<sup>84</sup> Rosenau, 76, 81-82. Rosenau also further breaks mass media down into what he considers *quality* and *popular* media. Quality media treats issues seriously, gives them continuous and in depth attention, and is more suited to the small attentive public. Popular media, on the other hand, waits until a crisis erupts before spreading “sensational and oversimplified headlines.” It is more suited to the mass public who values entertainment over information. Unfortunately, as competition over viewership between the increasing number of news outlets grows, the line between quality and popular media begins to blur.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Halloran, “Strategic Communication,” *Parameters* (Autumn 2007): 12. The internet is an interesting combination of the two, requiring time and information for a detailed story, but also needing pictures, sound bites, and video clips.

presented to the public.

Previously Americans received most of their information from more detailed print media. However, with technological advances in broadcast media, Americans now receive most of their information from oversimplified broadcast television.<sup>86</sup> Because modern American wars are waged in foreign lands, Americans rely almost entirely on the media as their source of wartime information, from which they develop opinions and make decisions. Combined with the mass public's lack of interest and knowledge on foreign affairs, this ultimately leads Americans, who are easily swayed by oversimplified and potentially inaccurate sound bites, to making unsound decisions or supporting irrational policies.<sup>87</sup>

The prevalence of broadcast media has also affected the political aspects of war. Dr. Doris Graber, one of the nation's foremost experts on the media's impact on political science, said that "Media coverage is the very lifeblood of politics because it shapes the perceptions that form the reality on which political action is based. Media do more than depict the political environment; they *are* the political environment."<sup>88</sup> The broadcast media can dictate the public agenda by grabbing public attention, adding pressure to politicians to make hasty decisions before they have a true understanding of the situation, and limiting the President's freedom of action. Many even believe that it is impossible to fight and win long, foreign wars, because of the broadcast media's impact on the public's support for war.<sup>89</sup>

Even in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century before broadcast media and the Information Revolution, Alexis De Tocqueville, famous author of *Democracy in America*, emphasized the power of the American media, "When many organs of the press do come to take the same line, their influence

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<sup>86</sup> Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 315.

<sup>87</sup> Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 353. See also Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 304.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 347, 350-351. See also Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 319.

in the long run is almost irresistible, and public opinion, continually struck in the same spot, ends by giving way under the blows...after the people, the press is nonetheless the first of powers.”<sup>90</sup> Americans traditionally hold prominent journalists in high esteem. They are seen as nonpartisan experts whose duty it is to provide truthful information to the public. These journalists in the U.S. mass media have the greatest influence over American public opinion.<sup>91</sup>

However, Walter Lippmann warned, “news and truth are not the same thing.”<sup>92</sup> News disperses a limited amount of objective information to the public, and they are likely to digest even less.<sup>93</sup> Because of time and space alone, media outlets have to limit the information they present to the public. Through the very nature of this process, journalists and editors inevitably choose and interpret information selectively, sometimes even “spin” it, before introducing it to the American people. This interpretation of information is usually benign, but sometimes journalists or editors deliberately manipulate it to influence Americans. This gives the media the power to frame events and information for the public based on their own priorities, setting the public agenda, which sometimes conflicts with those of our elected representatives and pressures them into taking actions on issues they would otherwise not have addressed.<sup>94</sup> In wartime, the undermining of war policies and strategies through either inadvertent or deliberate media manipulation can have a detrimental effect on national will that is difficult to prevent.<sup>95</sup>

Fortunately, the media has a code of journalistic ethics that aims to retain their integrity

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<sup>90</sup> Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (1835; repr., New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 171-172.

<sup>91</sup> Philip J. Powlick and Andrew Z. Katz, “Defining the American Public Opinion / Foreign Policy Nexus,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 42 (1998): 37.

<sup>92</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 226.

<sup>93</sup> Boettcher & Cobb, “Echoes of Vietnam,” 838-839.

<sup>94</sup> Some elements of the media have their own priorities or hidden agendas such as liberal or conservative ideology, partisan political alignment, anti-war sentiment, or even sensationalism and exaggeration to increase ratings and profit. Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 304, 319. See also Boettcher & Cobb, “Echoes of Vietnam,” 838-839.

<sup>95</sup> Darley, “War Policy, Public Support, and the Media,” 132.

and keep news accurate. Many different versions of this code exist, but they all can be summarized in three main principles: *independence* from any outside pressure, *objectivity* in presenting factual and comprehensive information, and *balance* that favors no particular group or party.<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, though, the media contains no organization to police themselves, so significant elements of the media, in all forms and for various reasons, occasionally stray from this code of ethics.<sup>97</sup> Large portions of the media attempt to influence the public and pressure officials, and others allow fame, ratings, and money to corrupt their responsibility to properly inform the people on important issues.<sup>98</sup>

The news media's desire to compete for ratings with entertainment programs has led to increasing sensationalism in the news, where informing the public on boring national issues takes a back seat to tabloid-like and shocking stories designed to attract and maintain viewers.<sup>99</sup> There is also a tendency for the news to portray issues in black-and-white terms, whereas most issues are far too complex to fit into neat taxonomic comprehension and require a balance or compromise that the news usually avoids.<sup>100</sup>

News is typically selected for coverage only if it meets certain criteria: involves violence, conflict, disaster, scandal, or celebrities, or if it directly impacts the audience.<sup>101</sup> Major media outlets argue that they give their audience what they want – to be excited, shocked, amazed or

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<sup>96</sup> Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), 68. See also the *Project for Excellence in Journalism*, <http://www.journalism.org/> (accessed January 26, 2008).

<sup>97</sup> Ricardo S. Sanchez, "Military Reporters and Editors Address," (speech at the National Press Club, Washington, DC: October 12, 2007), [http://www.militaryreporters.org/sanchez\\_101207.html](http://www.militaryreporters.org/sanchez_101207.html) (accessed January 26, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Jim A. Kuypers, *Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press in the Post-Cold War World*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 35-37.

<sup>99</sup> Ratings equal money, and the media is a profit-based industry.

<sup>100</sup> James Fallows, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1996), 241, 244-246.

<sup>101</sup> Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 83-86.

horrified. “Good news seldom sells papers; dull news never does. So, inevitably, our news is everlastingly sensationalized.”<sup>102</sup> This focus on the negative is prevalent in most journalism today, as is a lack of context that gives Americans a comprehensive understanding of important issues.<sup>103</sup> According to a recent survey, 67% of Americans thought the media covered too much bad news that was not representative of reality.<sup>104</sup> To the detriment of American society and journalism, which require a holistic understanding of complex issues, many people treat the news as just another source of entertainment. It is the responsibility of journalists and editors to provide the public with the information they need to know in order to understand important issues, rather than give people what they want or “suspect to be true.”<sup>105</sup> These rating-seeking tactics represent a conflict of interest and creates a situation that violates the journalistic code of ethics.

Once the United States was drawn into the Second World War by the Pearl Harbor attacks, the perception of an existential threat led to the media allowing themselves to be “drafted” by the government into the U.S. war effort. The role that the American media played in the war was as decisive as that of any weapon in the U.S. arsenal.<sup>106</sup> Journalists wore uniforms and served right beside members of the armed forces. Media outlets voluntarily submitted themselves to censorship.<sup>107</sup> Daniel Schorr, an American journalist who began his career at the end of the war, remembered, contrasting it with the present,

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<sup>102</sup> Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, xi.

<sup>103</sup> Powlick & Katz, “Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus,” 40, 43. See also Fallows, *Breaking the News*, 264.

<sup>104</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Public More Critical of Press, but Goodwill Persists*, 26 June 2005, <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/248.pdf> (accessed December 14, 2007). Survey was conducted in conjunction with the Center for Excellence in Journalism.

<sup>105</sup> Fallows, *Breaking the News*, 239.

<sup>106</sup> Jordan Braverman, *To Hasten the Homecoming: How Americans Fought World War II through the Media*, (New York, NY: Madison Books, 1996), xx.

<sup>107</sup> Stephen Hess and Marvin Kalb, *The Media and the War on Terrorism*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 18. See also Braverman, 30.

In World War II correspondents knew which side they were on. They were a part of something called the war effort...They would go and ask, “Would it be harmful if I reported this? Would it be harmful if I reported that?” And it is important to remember that because that is an era of history where the press and the military worked closely together, being sure of the rectitude of what they were doing and why they were doing it, and that got lost somewhere.<sup>108</sup>

Even though censorship existed during the war, the media still enjoyed a large amount of freedom to report in the United States. They provided constructive criticism of the government to strengthen, rather than tear down, the war effort. They criticized those that chose divisiveness or partisanship over national security, and exposed the counterproductive rivalry between the Army and Navy, among other things. The full spectrum of media outlets, including Hollywood, sought to educate Americans through movies, radio shows, and publications about every aspect of the war and its high stakes. They also saw it as their responsibility to actively counter “the divisiveness and antagonism the Axis powers tried to sow among all Americans.”<sup>109</sup>

While the majority of the media cast aside dissension during World War II, no conflict is without its vocal opponents in the media. Some anti-Roosevelt and isolationist journalists and newspapers claimed that the President knew about the Pearl Harbor attacks in advance or was even responsible for them, that the government was creating a propaganda agency akin to Adolf Hitler’s, and generally criticized his wartime policies and strategies.<sup>110</sup> However, during World War II, opponents of the war effort were either minimal or marginalized. The media was truly a major player in the American war effort, as can be seen in almost any newspaper, magazine, or film of that era.

The Vietnam War saw a dramatic shift in the government’s media policies and the role of the media in covering the conflict. Unlike in World War II and most previous wars, there was no censorship whatsoever in Vietnam. Journalists no longer wore uniforms and did not consider

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>109</sup> Braverman, *To Hasten the Homecoming*, 38-39, 265-266.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 31-34, 265.



themselves a part of the war effort.<sup>111</sup> ABC's Ted Koppel argued that since war was not declared in Vietnam, that the issue of imposing censorship never arose.<sup>112</sup> However, in the early years of the conflict, President John F. Kennedy remarked,

If the press is awaiting a declaration of war before it imposes the self-discipline of combat conditions, then I can only say that no war ever posed a greater threat to our security. If you are awaiting a finding of "clear and present danger," then I can only say that the danger has never been more clear and its presence more imminent...Every newspaper now asks itself with respect to every story: "Is it news?" All I suggest is that you add the question: "Is it in the interest of national security?"<sup>113</sup>

In the first several years of the war, media coverage was a mixture of good and bad, but once the war escalated and became increasingly difficult, the media largely turned against the war effort. The combination of no unifying element, an ambiguous threat, a difficulty in understanding counterinsurgency, and, most importantly, the U.S. government's frequent deceiving of the media led them to distrust the government and become increasingly hostile toward the war effort.<sup>114</sup>

This anti-government attitude spread throughout the journalism community during the war. Bitterness toward the government led to a predominance of stories that represented the military and everything they did as evil; government policies were considered inherently nefarious, and this included the war itself.<sup>115</sup> Many stories were exaggerated and others totally untrue, some inadvertently resulting from the lack of accurate information and context, and some deliberately manipulated in accordance with hidden agendas. Atrocities like those at Cam Ne or

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<sup>111</sup> Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 6. See also Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 106, 305.

<sup>112</sup> Hess & Kalb, *The Media and the War on Terrorism*, 25.

<sup>113</sup> John F. Kennedy, "The President and the Press," (address before the American Newspaper Publishers Association, New York, NY: April 27, 1961), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=8093&st=press&st1=combat+conditions> (accessed January 27, 2008).

<sup>114</sup> Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 106, 114; Hess & Kalb, *The Media and the War on Terrorism*, 18.

<sup>115</sup> Ralph Peters, "War and the Media," *Armchair General* (Mar 2007): 82-83.

My Lai were generalized as the norm of American conduct in the war.<sup>116</sup>

The most prominent example of media inaccuracy in the Vietnam War was during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The Tet Offensive was a major failure for the communists – the Viet Cong were almost entirely destroyed forcing the North Vietnamese to intervene with regular army units just to sustain the war. The media incorrectly framed the Tet Offensive and portrayed it as a great Viet Cong victory, ignoring American battlefield success and the strategic significance of nearly destroying the Viet Cong movement.<sup>117</sup> Retired General Colin Powell recalled the media's impact on the event in the United States at the time,

The images beamed into American living rooms of a once faceless enemy suddenly popping up in the middle of South Vietnam's capital had a profound effect on public opinion. Tet marked a turning point, raising doubts in the minds of moderate Americans, not just hippies and campus radicals, about the worth of the conflict, and the antiwar movement intensified.<sup>118</sup>

It would be inaccurate to claim that the media was responsible for the American loss in Vietnam, but it undoubtedly was one of several major factors that, combined, led to the erosion of national will in that war.<sup>119</sup>

Media played a more unusual role in operations in Somalia and Bosnia. The media set the agenda that directly led to American involvement by showing terrible scenes of destruction, killing, and starvation. They framed Somalia and Bosnia as moral obligations for the United States to get involved, while other tragedies throughout the world went almost unnoticed due to a lack of media coverage. Then, from the moment when U.S. Marines conducting amphibious landings on the Somali beaches were met by camera crews to the filming of Somalis dragging an

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<sup>116</sup> Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 108-109, 113-114.

<sup>117</sup> Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 167-174; Peters, "War and the Media," 82-83, 87; Richard M. Nixon, *The Real War*, (London, UK: Pantheon Books, 1980), 115. Some claim that Tet was the first time the media ever overturned a battlefield verdict, others claim that Vietnam was the first war in U.S. history where the American media were friendlier to America's enemies than to its allies.

<sup>118</sup> Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey*, (New York, NY: Random House, 1995), 123.

<sup>119</sup> Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 304-305.

American soldier through the streets of Mogadishu, the media was in Somalia to ensure full coverage of the operation. Just as the scenes of starvation got the United States involved in Somalia, the scenes of increasing instability and dead Americans mobilized the people to demand that politicians bring the troops home<sup>120</sup> Throughout the duration of the peacekeeping operation in Bosnia, the media supported it, calling it both “prudent” and “necessary.”<sup>121</sup> Bosnia was different from Somalia in that there was no mission creep; there was a gradual improvement of conditions, and U.S. costs were minimal. Overall, the Bosnia peacekeeping operations were rather dull, and hence, not considered newsworthy.

There were many changes to media after Vietnam that significantly affected warfare. By the time the U.S. began the War on Terror and the Iraq War, live television and the internet changed how wars were covered and even, in some respects, how they were fought. Ted Koppel recalled that during the Vietnam War it took several days for film reels to get back to the United States, during which time journalists could reflect, call sources, double check facts, and properly write the film’s story. However, today’s television is literally “live,” which gives journalists no time to prepare, “it’s half a dozen evolutionary steps back.”<sup>122</sup>

Not only have the mechanics and time involved in assembling news stories changed, so has the media’s importance in warfare. 21<sup>st</sup> century enemies of the United States, far more dangerous and capable than the Vietnamese Communists, have recognized the latitude given the media and have sought to use it as the best vehicle for attacking American national will. Ayman al-Zawahiri, al Qaeda’s second-in-command stated that “we are in a battle and that more than half

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<sup>120</sup> Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 210. See also Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 256-259, 316-317.

<sup>121</sup> Kuypers, *Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press*, 101.

<sup>122</sup> Ted Koppel quoted in Hess & Kalb, *The Media and the War on Terrorism*, 18, 20-21.

of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media.”<sup>123</sup> This manipulation of the media by America’s enemies consists of many different forms, including propaganda, threats of terrorism, and disinformation about the success of America’s war effort.<sup>124</sup>

Media has become a tool of warfare, no different from the military and economic tools historically used to fight wars, but in many ways far more effective. Journalists attempting to retain their perceived objectivity considered themselves above national loyalty and were careful not to allow the U.S. government or military to taint their coverage.<sup>125</sup> “Yet they never seem to be upset by the undeniable fact that the enemy manipulates them with a cunning that is almost worthy of envy.”<sup>126</sup> In this new era of information warfare, a nation could inadvertently be defeated by their media and the enemy’s manipulation of it without ever fighting a single battle.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the war received better coverage than any in history because over 500 reporters were embedded in military units. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, this number of embedded reporters drastically dropped because of the reduction in staffing and financial costs involved in having reporters deployed.<sup>127</sup> There was also a perception in the journalistic community that those embeds had lost their objectivity from being in such close proximity with the military. By the end of 2003, the majority of journalists preferred to cover the war from heavily guarded Baghdad hotels where they received information from Iraqi informants and covered events from their hotel balcony rather than be embedded in military units throughout

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<sup>123</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), ODNI News Release No. 2-05, *Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi*, Washington, DC, 2005.

<sup>124</sup> Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 200.

<sup>125</sup> Peters, “War and the Media,” 86-87; Tim Ryan, “Aiding and Abetting the Enemy: The Media in Iraq,” *Black Five*, (January 2005), [http://www.blackfive.net/main/2005/01/aiding\\_and\\_abbe.html](http://www.blackfive.net/main/2005/01/aiding_and_abbe.html) (accessed December 18, 2007).

<sup>126</sup> Ryan, “Aiding and Abetting the Enemy: the Media in Iraq.”

<sup>127</sup> David Vaina, “The Vanishing Embedded Reporter in Iraq,” *Project for Excellence in Journalism*, (October, 26, 2006), <http://www.journalism.org/node/2596> (accessed January 29, 2008).

Iraq.<sup>128</sup> Michael Fumento, an embedded journalist in Iraq, was extremely critical of what he called the media's "Baghdad Brigade." He claimed those hotel-bound reporters covered events when they were nowhere near the scene, used "faux bravado" to sensationalize stories, and had no interest in covering the Iraq War for what it was. According to Fumento, "the glaring gap between the reality of the war and the virtuality emanating from the hotels" in Baghdad was what motivated the few remaining embedded journalists to venture out with units all around Iraq to get a better perspective and "tell the truth about it to the world."<sup>129</sup>

When Coalition forces found no WMD or al Qaeda connections in Iraq, the winds changed and the media swung from being a virtual cheerleader for the war to the other extreme, finding only negative stories to cover. The Vietnam-era media distrust of the military blossomed again. Good news was ignored in favor of shocking stories about death and destruction; every mistake was catastrophically exaggerated with no historical context given. Abu Ghraib, Haditha, and Muqtada al Sadr dominated headlines, with forsaken buzz words like "quagmire" and "civil war," and constant comparisons to tragic historical events such as Auschwitz, My Lai, and the Vietnam War.<sup>130</sup> For example, a recent study found a whopping 5,159 press mentions of Lynndie England, a soldier court-martialed for the Abu Ghraib scandal, whereas SFC Paul Smith, the only Medal of Honor winner of the war at that time, received a comparatively negligible 90 mentions.<sup>131</sup> Subsequent military heroes and other positive, newsworthy stories have received even less coverage.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Peters, "War and the Media," 83.

<sup>129</sup> Michael Fumento, "Covering Iraq: The Modern Way of War Correspondence," *National Review*, (November 7, 2006), <http://www.fumento.com/military/brigade.html> (accessed January 27, 2008).

<sup>130</sup> Peters, "War and the Media," 84-87.

<sup>131</sup> Karl Zinsmeister and Joseph Light, "Media Priorities," *The American Enterprise* (Sep 2005): 13.

<sup>132</sup> Rich Noyes, "Touting Military Misdeeds, Hiding Heroes," *Media Research Center*, (June 12, 2006), <http://www.mediaresearch.org/realitycheck/2006/pdf/fax0612.pdf> (accessed January 29, 2008).

Lieutenant Colonel Tim Ryan, a U.S. Army Battalion Commander in Baghdad, criticized the media for their focus on the negative and failure to provide a comprehensive perspective on Iraq,

The inaccurate picture they paint has distorted the world view of the daily realities in Iraq. The result is a further erosion of international public support for the United States' efforts there, and a strengthening of the insurgents resolve and recruiting efforts while weakening our own...headlines focus almost exclusively on our hardships...stories like this without a counter continually serve as propaganda victories for the enemy...with each headline, the enemy scores another point and the good guys lose one. This method of scoring slowly is eroding domestic and international support while fueling the enemy's cause.<sup>133</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Ryan also complained that the media was hypocritical in exaggerating the misdeeds of the American military, while largely ignoring the atrocities committed by the terrorists and insurgents,

What about the media's portrayal of the enemy? Why do these ruthless murderers, kidnappers and thieves get a pass when it comes to their actions? ...What the media didn't show or write about were the two hundred-plus headless bodies found in the main mosque there [Najaf], or the body that was put into a bread oven and baked. Nor did they show the world the hundreds of thousands of mortar, artillery and small arms rounds found within the "sacred" walls of the mosque...No, none of this made it to the screen or print.<sup>134</sup>

It seems as though the media rarely considers any atrocity committed by the enemies of the United States in Iraq or Afghanistan grave enough to warrant the months of headlines and demonization that Americans suffer at their expense.<sup>135</sup> This predominantly negative coverage and enemy manipulation of the media is counterproductive to the war effort and is extremely damaging to American national will. The media, however, is only one of the instruments that influences American national will.

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<sup>133</sup> Ryan, "Aiding and Abetting the Enemy: The Media in Iraq."

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., "Aiding and Abetting the Enemy: the Media in Iraq."

<sup>135</sup> Evan Coyne Maloney, "You Can't Win a Politically Correct War," (January 11, 2007), <http://brain-terminal.com/posts/2007/01/11/politically-correct-war> (accessed January 14, 2007).

## Political Rhetoric / Opinion-Maker Engagement

*Political Rhetoric* is the public discourse of the President, members of Congress, and key officials in governmental departments and agencies. *Opinion-maker engagement* consists of the public discourse of other respected professionals in academia, and subject matter experts in foreign policy and military operations. Both of these groups, because of their stature and position in society, transmit information and opinions about issues to the mass public.<sup>136</sup> In order to form their beliefs on foreign relations and conflicts, Americans depend on these elites to provide them with both information and context, because the mass public does not have the time, access, or desire to find it on their own.<sup>137</sup>

National leadership plays a vital role in building and sustaining American support for military operations. Politicians, especially the President, use crisis rhetoric to frame their policies for the public in order to justify the actions they wish to take.<sup>138</sup> They use their influence to awaken the public, elucidate issues, and ask for support or sacrifice from the people.<sup>139</sup> Americans tend to rally behind the President at the beginning of wars because of the overwhelming feelings of patriotism and national unity, and because of the crisis rhetoric used by the President to mobilize support for the war.<sup>140</sup>

## Framing & National Mobilization

In order to build support for military operations, national leaders must properly frame the war for the public. Relatively speaking, building support for taking a nation to war is the easy

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<sup>136</sup> Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 43-45.

<sup>137</sup> Jon Western, *Selling Intervention & War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 15-16.

<sup>138</sup> Kuypers, *Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press*, 195.

<sup>139</sup> Yankelovich & Destler, *Beyond the Beltway*, 227.

<sup>140</sup> Powlick and Katz, "Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus," 51. See also Yankelovich & Destler, *Beyond the Beltway*, 228.

part – maintaining that support over time, on the other hand, is extremely difficult. Historically, presidents framed wars in terms of the contextual influencers, proving to America that the military interventions they are proposing are legitimate, necessary, and worth their cost. For major wars that required significant time and resources; presidents framed them in such a way as to mobilize the nation in support of the war effort. In these cases, national mobilization calls for shared service and sacrifice among the entire nation. It can consist of calls to military or civil service, marshalling industry to support the production of necessary materials and supplies, raising taxes or starting bond drives, or general conservation efforts. To properly mobilize the nation, leaders must have a thorough understanding of the war on which they are embarking, what its costs will entail, have a strategy with clear objectives, and then convey those to Americans.<sup>141</sup>

Shortly after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt carefully framed World War II for America. He demonized the enemy, clearly explained the threat, and called for the complete mobilization of the United States in support of the Allied war efforts,

The forces endeavoring to enslave the entire world now are moving toward this hemisphere...to achieve their ultimate goal, the conquest of the United States...Our task is hard – our task is unprecedented...This production of ours in the United States must be raised far above present levels...We must convert every available plant and tool to war production...It means an all-out war by individual effort and family effort in a united country...We must face the fact of a hard war, a long war, a bloody war, a costly war.<sup>142</sup>

He called for shared effort and shared sacrifice. Throughout the war, President Roosevelt stressed the vital importance of the war to Americans and asked for their continued service and

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<sup>141</sup> Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, xxii-xxiii. See also Kuypers, *Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press*, 195; Darley, “War Policy, Public Support, and the Media,” 132.

<sup>142</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Message to Congress Requesting War Declarations with Germany and Italy,” (December 11, 1941), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16058&st=germany&st1=war> (accessed January 21, 2008); Roosevelt, “State of the Union Address.”



sacrifice.<sup>143</sup> The Second World War provided distinct and existential threats to Americans and everything for which they stood. Not since that time has the United States had such a clear case for national mobilization and war.

During the Vietnam War, President Johnson continuously downplayed the war in Vietnam even as it gradually escalated over years. After the Gulf of Tonkin incident, he claimed “our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting.”<sup>144</sup> President Johnson did not want the Vietnam War to obscure his vision of a Great Society for America, which he envisioned as his legacy. Johnson’s Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, recalled that “since we wanted to limit the war, we deliberately refrained from creating a war psychology in the United States...we tried to wage this war as calmly as possible treating it as a police action...”<sup>145</sup>

Colonel Summers thought it was a mistake to go to war in Vietnam without committing the American people and mobilizing the nation to support it.<sup>146</sup> Besides the failure to mobilize the nation to support the war, President Johnson and the national leadership made errors in judgment and poor assumptions that led to the eventual erosion of national will. President Richard Nixon remembered,

They misled the public by insisting we were winning the war and thereby prepared the way for defeatism and demagoguery later on. The American people could not be expected to continue indefinitely to support a war in which they were told victory was around the corner, but which required greater and greater effort without any obvious signs of improvement.<sup>147</sup>

The national leadership misrepresented the Vietnam War and unsuccessfully tried to convince the public of the importance of Vietnam through various stunts, explanations, and statistical

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<sup>143</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat,” (June 12, 1944), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16522> (accessed January 21, 2008).

<sup>144</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin,” (August 4, 1964), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26418&st=tonkin&st1=> (accessed January 21, 2008).

<sup>145</sup> Hudson & Stanier, *War and the Media*, 107-108.

<sup>146</sup> Summers, *On Strategy*, 13.

<sup>147</sup> Nixon, *The Real War*, 119.

manipulation.<sup>148</sup> They did not anticipate the excessive time and costs success would require, the lack of public support for continued action in Vietnam, and how Americans would react to sustained casualties in that war.<sup>149</sup> The latitude that the Johnson administration assumed they enjoyed exceeded what the critical American constituency was willing to accept in Vietnam.<sup>150</sup>

The War on Terror posed new problems for framing, as the enemy was elusive, consisted of non-state actors, and President Bush was both careful not to offend Muslims and adamant not to allow the terrorists to change American lives. Like President Roosevelt, he demonized the enemy, explained the elusive threat the best that it could be identified, and warned of the long, difficult road ahead,

This will be a different kind of conflict against a different kind of enemy...Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime...its goal is remaking the world – and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere...The terrorists’ directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinction among military and civilians, including women and children...They follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism...You will be asked for your patience; for the conflict will not be short. You will be asked for resolve; for the conflict will not be easy. You will be asked for your strength, because the course to victory may be long.<sup>151</sup>

However, unlike President Roosevelt, he did not ask for service, sacrifice or mobilization of the nation. To the contrary, the Bush administration, cautious of economic problems resulting from the attacks and altering the American way of life, only asked Americans to be calm, to continue to spend their money, travel, and live their lives.<sup>152</sup> While this frame initially made sense in order to boost the economy and prevent the terrorists from altering society, it set the conditions for a

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<sup>148</sup> Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle over Vietnam*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 220.

<sup>149</sup> Lorell & Kelley, *Casualties, Public Opinion and Presidential Policy*, viii-ix.

<sup>150</sup> Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 15, 237.

<sup>151</sup> George W. Bush, “Radio Address of the President to the Nation,” (September 15, 2001), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010915.html> (accessed January 21, 2008); George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” (September 20, 2001), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html> (accessed January 8, 2008).

<sup>152</sup> Roberts, “The War We Deserve,” 47.

dangerous course for the prosecution of the war.

American expectations of war have changed over the last two decades. To them victories in the 1980s and 1990s proved that wars could be fought quick and cheap with relatively few casualties and no sacrifice from the general public.<sup>153</sup> The problem is that people develop unrealistic expectations based on recent successes, whereas wars usually do not go according to plan. Wars typically take longer, cost more, and require considerable sacrifice. However, asking for public sacrifice in the form of higher taxes, military service, restrictions on civil liberties, and American casualties does not go over well at the ballot box.<sup>154</sup> The Bush administration and Congress have not demonstrated the political will to do what is necessary to sustain the long War on Terror.<sup>155</sup>

Pundits can argue whether or not the Iraq war is a part of the overall War on Terror, but to that conflict's detriment, many of the public attitudes and policies remain consistent – expectations of a quick, cheap victory and no mobilization of support. Several distinct differences in the framing of the Iraq war are responsible for its rapid decline in support. Americans believed the Iraq war was sold to them based on the threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and their support for international terrorism. Evidence has since demonstrated to the American people that the initial reasons they were given for war have been invalidated.<sup>156</sup> There are significant implications in overselling the use of military force, especially if the public later perceives dishonesty or exaggeration. This overselling creates unrealistic expectations and misperceptions about the war, which leads to a rapid loss of support once those expectations are not met and misperceptions realized.<sup>157</sup> At a certain point, the ability of politicians to persuade

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<sup>153</sup> Hanson, "In War: Resolution," under "Has War Changed, or Have We?"

<sup>154</sup> Roberts, "The War We Deserve," 48, 50.

<sup>155</sup> Darley, "Winning Back Public Support," 69.

<sup>156</sup> Mueller, "The Iraq Syndrome," 45.

<sup>157</sup> Western, *Selling Intervention*, 232-233.

the American public becomes severely hampered by a lack of credibility – the less popular the politician and their proposals, the less persuasive ability they will have over the people.<sup>158</sup>

In the War on Terror, complacency has set in across the United States and critics are claiming everything from no threats exist to Americans are responsible for the attacks themselves. In light of this apathy, the window of opportunity to rally the American people and mobilize the support necessary to sustain the war may have closed. While American national will to continue the War on Terror seems steady, although severely diminished, the national will to continue the Iraq war appears to be almost nonexistent. At this point, political reframing is likely to accomplish little and rallying the public to mobilize support for the Iraq war is unlikely.

### Partisanship & Harmful Rhetoric

Usually the rally factor at the beginning of wars unites even political opponents. As the war becomes more difficult, however, the opponent party frequently distances itself and eventually begins to criticize the war effort.<sup>159</sup> Since people rely on these elites, especially political leaders, for framing and information during wartime, it inevitably begins to divide the public when respected leaders begin to question or oppose war policies and strategies.<sup>160</sup> Unfortunately, American political leaders have spent less time trying to reach a consensus than they have fighting for partisan and ideological gain. I. M. Destler, the Director of International Security and Economic Policy at the University of Maryland, stated,

The end result is warfare among elites...in the name of causes, not compromises...rousing supporters by damning opponents, while serving the separate interests of particular candidates and groups...driven by ideological views and pressures and partisan animosities that the public, by and large, does

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<sup>158</sup> Powlick & Katz, “Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus,” 37-38.

<sup>159</sup> Richard Morin, “How Much War Will Americans Support?” *The Washington Post*, September 2, 1990, under “Myth 3 – In times of war, we aren’t Republicans or Democrats, we’re Americans.”

<sup>160</sup> Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, xxii-xxiii.

not share.<sup>161</sup>

The question then becomes, is the criticism by those opponents based on genuine, honest problems with the war, or is it based on duplicitous defamation for partisan political gain?

This phenomenon is even worse during elections when candidates polarize the electorate with divisive rhetoric, character and party assassinations, and unrealistic policy absolutes. While in a two-party democratic system some of this polarization may be unavoidable during campaigns, its fractious implications endure far beyond the elections.<sup>162</sup> This is especially problematic in wartime, when public unification is so important and short election cycles lead to almost never-ending partisan division.

Only rarely, after direct attacks on the United States, does this partisan rhetoric stop. Unfortunately, it does not stop for long – eventually political leaders and opinion-makers intentionally manipulate information in order to persuade the public to either support or oppose the war. This then leads to a public, informed by political leaders with ulterior motives, who support policies either for or against the war that are largely irrational, based more on partisan bias than wartime reality.<sup>163</sup> Partisanship has existed in nearly every war, however, historically the “common desire for victory usually overcame perpetual finger-pointing and serial despair.”<sup>164</sup>

In World War II, where an existential threat and major national interests were involved, there was little significant political rhetoric criticizing Roosevelt’s war policies and strategies. Even before the Pearl Harbor attack, there was growing political support for intervention in the Second World War. This support was only galvanized nationwide when the Japanese attacked

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<sup>161</sup> I. M. Destler, “The Reasonable Public and the Polarized Policy Process,” *The Real and the Ideal: Essays on International Relations*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2001), 81, 87.

<sup>162</sup> E. J. Dionne Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 15.

<sup>163</sup> Western, *Selling Intervention*, 16, 220.

<sup>164</sup> Hanson, “In War: Resolution,” under “Live and Learn, Learn and Live.”

and remained strong for the duration of the war.<sup>165</sup> Unfortunately, in most subsequent American wars, partisan rhetoric reared its ugly head.

Many blame the media and anti-war groups for initiating the opposition to the Vietnam War, however politicians were questioning the war long before the media.<sup>166</sup> Vietnam is an interesting variant from the typical split along party lines that has occurred in other American wars. Early in the war, the major criticism came from within the President's own Democratic Party. The 1968 elections magnified this anti-war rhetoric and by 1970, polarization emerged that fell predominantly along party lines.<sup>167</sup>

Support for the Vietnam War among parties shifted suddenly when the occupancy of the White House shifted from Democrat to Republican.<sup>168</sup> The public tends to view contextual information differently based on whom they affiliate themselves politically – for supporters something might be a reason to continue the war or rally behind the President, while for opponents that same thing may be considered an indicator of failure and a reason to withdraw.<sup>169</sup> When Johnson was President, Democrats were more likely to support the war, but as soon as Nixon became President, Republicans were more inclined to support the war than Democrats.<sup>170</sup> While partisanship played a large role in the loss of national will for finishing the war in Vietnam, the dissention within the President's own party only expedited and magnified that loss of support.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Adam Berinsky, *America at War: Public Opinion During Wartime, From World War II to Iraq*, (preliminary draft; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 63-64, 89, <http://web.mit.edu/berinsky/www/aaw.pdf> (accessed September 25, 2007).

<sup>166</sup> Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 213.

<sup>167</sup> Berinsky, *America at War*, 78-80.

<sup>168</sup> Morin, "How Much War Will Americans Support," under "Myth 3 – In times of war, we aren't Republicans or Democrats, we're Americans."

<sup>169</sup> Boettcher & Cobb, "Echoes of Vietnam," 840-841.

<sup>170</sup> Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, 87.

<sup>171</sup> Berinsky, *America at War*, 81.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President Bush received enormous bipartisan support for his policies and the strategy he planned for the War on Terror. Despite much criticism on the detention and treatment of terrorists, and a failure to capture Osama bin Laden in the early stages of the war, the overall War on Terror has continued to enjoy broad, albeit somewhat diminished, support.<sup>172</sup> The War on Terror, unfortunately, became increasingly polarized and overshadowed by the looming Iraq war starting as early as mid-2002.

The invasion of Iraq also enjoyed initial bipartisan support, albeit significantly less than the War on Terror – about 70% of Independents and Democrats initially supported the Iraq war.<sup>173</sup> In the summer of 2003, when no WMD were found, Democrat support for the war dropped significantly, continuing to decline as the insurgency stiffened and the post-war occupation seemed more difficult.<sup>174</sup> Republican supporters of the war continued advocating it as a critical front in the War on Terror, insisting it was going as planned, wishing away problems, and underestimating the enemy. Their Democrat opponents claimed the Bush administration lied to Americans, every aspect of the war was a failure, ignored relevant context, and maintained that Iraq was unimportant. Whether it was Vice President Dick Cheney claiming, “the insurgency is in its last throes,” or Democrat Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid stating that, “this war is lost,” the partisan rhetoric escalated dramatically.<sup>175</sup>

The partisan divide over Iraq and President Bush are deeper than any other modern war

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<sup>172</sup> American Enterprise Institute Studies in Public Opinion, *America and the War on Terrorism*, (29 November 2007), 56, 59, 71, <http://www.aei.org/publicopinion3> (accessed December 14, 2007); See also Larson & Savych, 127.

<sup>173</sup> Larson & Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations*, 181-184.

<sup>174</sup> Boettcher & Cobb, “Echoes of Vietnam,” 837; Larson & Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations*, 181-184.

<sup>175</sup> CNN.com, “Iraq Insurgency in ‘Last Throes,’ Cheney Says,” June, 20, 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/05/30/cheney.iraq/> (accessed January 21, 2008); Jeff Zeleny, “Leading Democrat in Senate Tells Reporters, ‘This War is Lost,’” *The New York Times*, April 20, 2007.

history has seen, and this polarization has fundamentally divided the country.<sup>176</sup> The partisan rhetoric during the Iraq war was so bad that the Co-Chairs of the Iraq Study Group sent a letter accompanying their report asking for an end to the harmful partisan rhetoric,

Many Americans are dissatisfied, not just with the situation in Iraq but with the state of our political debate regarding Iraq. Our political leaders must build a bipartisan approach...Our country deserves a debate that prizes substance over rhetoric, and a policy that is adequately funded and sustainable. The President and Congress must work together. Our leaders must be candid and forthright with the American people in order to win their support.<sup>177</sup>

Lieutenant General Richardo Sanchez, the military commander in Iraq, also expressed this frustration over partisan damage,

Since 2003, the politics of war have been characterized by partisanship as the republican and democratic parties struggled for power in Washington. National efforts to date have been corrupted by partisan politics that have prevented us from devising effective, executable, supportable solutions...The unmistakable message was that political power had greater priority than our national security objectives...Too often our politicians have chosen loyalty to their political party above loyalty to the constitution because of their lust for power. Our politicians must remember their oath of office and recommit themselves to serving our nation and not their own self-interests or political party. The security of America is at stake and we can accept nothing less.<sup>178</sup>

Unfortunately, because of the association of Iraq with the War on Terror, the loss of support and unparalleled polarization over the war in Iraq led to a gradual erosion of some support for the War on Terror.

Because of this polarization, Americans have lost faith in their nation's leadership and have learned to hate politics, relinquishing their involvement in the political process – a void that has only been filled by more partisan antics from the parties' extremes.<sup>179</sup> Since 1964, when 76% of Americans said they “had confidence that the government would do the right thing,” that

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<sup>176</sup> Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” 49.

<sup>177</sup> James A Baker III. and Lee H. Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, December 2006), 4, [http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq\\_study\\_group\\_report/report/1206/index.html](http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/index.html) (accessed December 14, 2007).

<sup>178</sup> Sanchez, “Military Reporters and Editors Address.”

<sup>179</sup> Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, 10-11. See also Destler, “The Reasonable Public and the Polarized Policy Process,” 80.



number has dropped to an abysmal 19%.<sup>180</sup> The American people want to feel like their representatives in government are keeping them informed and advocate their interests, rather than manipulate them for personal political or partisan gain, acting more interested in extreme ideologies and defamation of political opponents than representing them and doing what is right for the nation. Americans just want a sense that they have some connection to and control over their representatives and their government.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Destler, "The Reasonable Public and the Polarized Policy Process," 80.

<sup>181</sup> Fallows, *Breaking the News*, 241-242, 250.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

National will is the collective degree of political and popular support for national policies, foreign and domestic. This monograph looked at national will, what influences it, and how those factors affected national will in several case studies of American conflicts: World War II, Vietnam, Somalia, Bosnia, the War on Terror, and Iraq. The context of information and the instruments that provide that information both have an affect on national will. The elements that put interventions in context for Americans, or contextual influencers, are the perception of legitimacy, the perception of threat and national interest, and the perceived cost versus benefit of the action. This information is then transmitted through people who frame and manage it making complex issues understandable for Americans. These vehicles that carry information to the people, or instruments of influence, are primarily the media, political rhetoric and opinion-maker engagement. However, all of this requires a public that is receptive to the issues, interested and willing to learn and be influenced.

In two of the cases studied, World War II and Bosnia, national will was retained long enough to achieve national strategic objectives. In two of the other cases, Vietnam and Somalia, the U.S. lost the will to continue until those objectives were achieved. The last two cases, the War on Terror and Iraq Wars, are still ongoing. As of the end of 2007, national will to continue the War on Terror remained at a moderate level. National will to continue the Iraq War, however, seemed to be on a steady decline with the outlook questionable.

There is a correlation, which seems obvious in retrospect, between favorable context, supportive instruments, and retaining national will. Those cases that Americans saw as legitimate, where an existential threat existed, and where actual costs outweighed expected benefits retained national will. Additionally, those cases that received favorable, accurate media coverage and bipartisan political support retained national will. As any of those elements weakened, the result would be a corresponding erosion of national will. (See Table 3. National

Will Summary)

Table 3. National Will Summary

	World War II	Vietnam	Somalia	Bosnia	GWOT	Iraq
<b>Perceived Legitimacy</b>	+ - Legitimate - Pearl Harbor attack - Declarations of war	? - Questionable - Gulf of Tonkin incident - S. Vietnamese corruption - U.S. brutality	+ - Legitimate - UN approved - Humanitarian	+ - Legitimate - NATO mission - Peacekeeping	+ - Legitimate - 9/11 terrorist attacks - Questionable treatment of terror suspects	? - Questionable at best - No WMD found - No al Qaeda ties - U.S. atrocities
<b>Perceived Threats &amp; Interests</b>	+ - Existential - Spread of Fascism with global design - Attacks on U.S. military & shipping	? - Questionable - Spread of Communism? - Attacks on U.S. questioned	- - Minimal threats - Minimal interests	- - Minimal threats - Regional European interests only	? - Spread of militant Islam with global design - Attacks against civilians in U.S. cities - Nebulous nature of enemy	? - WMD and terror threats questioned - Militant Islamist battleground - Prevent Iranian regional hegemony
<b>Perceived Cost-Benefit</b>	? - Costs worth benefits...barely - Extremely high costs - Clear, significant benefits	- - Costs not worth benefits - Moderate costs - Few benefits - Success elusive	- - Costs not worth benefits - Low costs - Few benefits - Mission creep - Success elusive	+ - Costs worth benefits - Minimal costs - Few benefits - Gradual success	+ - Costs worth benefits - Potentially high costs - Long war - Significant benefits	? - Higher costs than expected - Longer war than expected - Benefits unclear - Success hard to measure
<b>Media Impact</b>	+ - Media a major part of the war effort	- - Initially supportive media - Government dishonesty - Hostile media	? - Media set agenda - Media reflected public opinion	+ - Media set agenda - Supportive media - Operations not considered newsworthy	? - Supportive media - Inaccurate, negative media	- - Initially supportive media - Perceived government dishonesty - Inaccurate, negative media
<b>Political Rhetoric</b>	+ - Well framed and managed - Mobilized nation - Bipartisan effort	- - Poorly framed and managed - No national mobilization - Partisan divisions	? - Well framed, but not reframed - Bipartisan support for intervention & withdrawal	+ - Well framed and managed - Mixed, generally bipartisan support	? - Poorly framed and managed - No national mobilization - Mostly bipartisan	- - Poorly framed and managed - No national mobilization - Partisan divisions
<b>NATIONAL WILL</b>	+ - Retained will	- - Lost will	- - Lost will	+ - Retained will	- - War ongoing - Outlook: Average	- - War ongoing - Outlook: Unfavorable

Prussian military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz described a trinity composed of the people, the military, and the government. These three elements have to remain balanced, “like an object suspended between three magnets,” in order to sustain war.<sup>182</sup> If one of the elements is not engaged at the level of the other two, then the system gets off balance, eventually collapsing, and war will be forced to a premature conclusion. In order to retain national will, the people have to

<sup>182</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 89.

be engaged, understand the necessity and costs involved, and support the policy. The military has to be properly utilized and successful. The government has to be united in effort, establish acceptable policies, formulate obtainable objectives, and manage the balance of the trinity. All three have to be connected and mutually supportive – balanced.

Understanding Clausewitz’s trinity, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell developed principles, later known as the Powell Doctrine, in which he advocated that American leaders thoroughly consider prior to embarking on any military intervention, many of which are relevant to maintaining national will. Those principles include having vital national interests threatened, frankly analyzing risks and costs, setting clear attainable objectives, and using overwhelming power.<sup>183</sup> These elements of the Powell Doctrine are compelling; however, that list is insufficient for maximizing national will. In addition to those elements of the Powell Doctrine mentioned above, the government needs to mobilize the nation, manage expectations, build bipartisan consensus, and engage the media in order to ensure the national will remains strong enough to achieve America’s strategic objectives.

First, maintaining national will in wartime requires *a significant threat or vital national interests* to be involved. Engaging the United States in conflicts in distant lands where few national interests exist, against forces that pose no real threat to Americans, or in actions widely viewed as illegitimate invites an erosion of national will, especially once costs begin to mount. Americans must perceive any military intervention as being both right and necessary.<sup>184</sup>

Second, preserving national will necessitates political and military leadership to do *thorough analyses of the costs of war*, including risks and costs of subsequent effects and unexpected circumstances. Clausewitz stated that “the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the

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<sup>183</sup> Colin Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead,” *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1992/1993): 38-41.

<sup>184</sup> Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, xxiii.

kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”<sup>185</sup> Ignorant optimism and underestimation of costs, either unintentionally or for the purpose of gaining initial support for military operations, quickly leads to the erosion of support once costs exceed those expected. Wars fought on the cheap end up neither cheap nor successful. Military leaders have the responsibility to inform and advise national leaders on the probable costs of war prior to and during U.S. action. Political leaders have the responsibility to heed the warnings of their military advisors and err on the side of caution to prevent cost expectation levels from being lower than needed to achieve strategic objectives.

Third, retaining national will calls for political and military *objectives that are nested, realistic and worth the potential costs*. When developing these objectives, leaders need to remember that operations whose objectives can be accomplished by force alone are far easier for which to plan and predict costs, whereas, war aims that require a target to change behavior are far more unpredictable, time consuming, and costly.<sup>186</sup> The American people traditionally accept costs proportionate to the perceived threats and interests – the higher they are, the higher costs people are willing to tolerate. Based on this cost-benefit analysis, people subconsciously have breaking points when the actual costs exceed the expected costs and are no longer worth the perceived benefits.

Fourth, maintaining national will requires *using the forces necessary to accomplish the set objectives*. The contemporary operating environment requires a holistic solution incorporating all elements of national power in a long-term strategy. The principle of overwhelming power still holds true, as wars cannot be fought on the cheap, but now involves the integration of other non-lethal means. Whether military forces, diplomatic actions, intelligence collection, or economic

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<sup>185</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 88.

<sup>186</sup> Sullivan, “War Aims and War Outcomes,” 506-507.

power; there are no major reasons for not using overwhelming power to end the war as quickly as possible other than potential inefficiency. Employing too few of the elements of national power can only result in failure, whether it is outright defeat or an erosion of national will due to a lack of success.

Fifth, preserving national will depends on *public education, framing of the issues, and national mobilization* to inform Americans and ensure enduring support for the war effort. The American people have to retake responsibility for participation in their government, caring more about United States foreign policy than tabloid news. They need to understand the uncertain nature of war and human imperfection, and accept success in war as the only tolerable outcome. They need to understand that their freedoms come at a cost, and willingly sacrifice for the nation during times of war. Americans are capable of this understanding, but it requires them to be receptive to information and education on key issues. Thomas Jefferson passionately believed that if properly informed, Americans were capable of doing what is right, “I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.”<sup>187</sup>

Leaders must properly frame national security issues for Americans to find them compelling enough to gain a good understanding. Support must be cultivated by leaders for their policies and strategies. Politicians, somewhat insulated from the real-world, frequently have trouble relating to and influencing the American people.<sup>188</sup> Dr. Frank Luntz, a political consultant and pollster, explained the importance of politicians understanding their audience in order to influence them,

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<sup>187</sup> Thomas Jefferson to William Jarvis, September 28, 1820, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, edited by Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, (Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904), xv:278.

<sup>188</sup> Darley, “Winning Back Public Support,” 71.

It's not what you say, it's what people hear. You can have the best message in the world, but the person on the receiving end will always understand it through the prism of his or her own emotions, preconceptions, prejudices, and preexisting beliefs. It's not enough to be correct or reasonable or even brilliant. The key to successful communication is to take the imaginative leap of stuffing yourself right into your listener's shoes to know what they are thinking and feeling in the deepest recesses of their mind and heart.<sup>189</sup>

In order for political leaders to cultivate support they must understand the American people and speak to them on a very personal level.

American leaders also need to mobilize the nation into a united war effort. Obviously not every conflict requires a World War II style total mobilization of the nation, but some level of national mobilization is always necessary to sustain national will. The level of mobilization required should be commensurate with the size and scope of the war. Small humanitarian missions require very little mobilization. Long wars against existential threats require significantly larger national mobilization.<sup>190</sup> There should never be a war that is only fought by a professional military that is completely detached from the rest of the government and American people.

Sixth, sustaining national will entails the President and other leaders properly *managing the expectations of the American people*. Changing conditions during the evolution of a conflict requires reassessment and reframing of the issues. American support for war rarely remains at initial "rally" levels and tends to gradually drop as costs mount. If the people's support for the war drops significantly, then either the policy or the public's minds must be changed. The American people ultimately weigh perceived benefits with actual costs. National leadership can relieve the public's "impatience, historical amnesia, and utopian demands for perfection" by

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<sup>189</sup> Frank Luntz, *Words that Work*, (New York: NY: Hyperion Books, 2007), xiii.

<sup>190</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Declarations of War and Authorizations for the Use of Military Force: Historical Background and Legal Implications*, (March 8, 2007). An additional asset that U.S. leaders have failed to utilize in the last half century is the declaration of war. Granted, declarations of war should be reserved for the gravest of circumstances, they should not be forgotten. A declaration of war invokes many sanctions, statutory powers, and wartime laws that are already on the books, which would greatly assist the nation during a time of war and help retain national will.

explaining to Americans the nature of war, each event's perspective in historical context, that truth is time-relative, and that in war the alternatives to bad choices are usually worse.<sup>191</sup>

Framing, reassessment and reframing of the war should be a continuous iterative process as the nation's leaders manage Americans' expectations.

Seventh, maintaining national will depends on *bipartisan consensus*. Americans long for politicians to forge coherent, bold policies that they can rally behind. Politicians should recognize that their partisan rhetoric and failure to compose a national strategy not only weakens the American war effort, but emboldens the enemy. They need to place national security and wartime policies as a higher priority than their own reelection or party power-broking. The onus is on the President to balance competing political pressures and foster an environment conducive to constructive bipartisan discourse. However, all parties involved need to put partisan differences aside, do what is best for the nation collectively, and come to a durable consensus on how to best achieve national strategic objectives.

Finally, preserving national will requires the government and military to *actively engage the media*. Journalists need to acknowledge their inability to remain truly objective. Journalist and media critic, James Fallows explained,

They inescapably change the reality of whatever they are observing by whether and how they choose to write about it...If they held themselves as responsible...as they hold "venal" politicians and the "selfish" public; if they considered that the license they have to criticize and defame comes with an implied responsibility to serve the public – if they did all or any of these things, they would make journalism more useful, public life stronger, and themselves far more worthy of esteem.<sup>192</sup>

Americans need to remind the media of their civic responsibility to inform the public on compelling issues in a balanced and comprehensive manner. The media should reinvigorate its journalistic code of ethics and develop a mechanism for enforcing that code. They also have the

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<sup>191</sup> Hanson, "In War: Revolution," under "Has War Changed, or Have We?"

<sup>192</sup> Fallows, *Breaking the News*, 260, 270.



responsibility to provide a holistic perspective on all issues – not just a perspective to counterbalance the government party-lines. Being the “honest brokers” and having the responsibility to inform the public, they must provide all perspectives in context to provide comprehensive information on important issues to the American people.

Journalists should defend against manipulation of the media by any outside sources, whether interest groups, political parties, or enemy forces. They should actively seek, even demand, the proper context for the stories they report. It is the context that turns the raw data of news into understandable information that America can use to draw rational conclusions. Government officials and military officers should aggressively engage the media. They should provide journalists the context they desire and the United States so desperately needs. They need to understand the media’s specific aspirations and deadlines, and develop strategies for nurturing a lasting symbiotic relationship.

Enemies of the United States will continue to utilize new methods of warfare to target American national will as a means to bypass conventional superiority, defeat it and achieve their objectives. Even the most brilliant strategy, the most technologically advanced weapons, the best tactics, and the synergy of all elements of national power will not matter if the United States cannot maintain its national will long enough to persevere. By carefully calculating when and how to employ military force, reducing the negative effects of partisan discourse, educating and mobilizing the American public, managing expectations, and engaging the media, the United States can maintain its national will long enough to achieve its strategic objectives in both the present and future conflicts. Now, more than any other time in history, the preservation of national will during conflict is more important than any other aspect of war. The future of the United States depends on Americans confronting this challenge with the same vigor they have attacked every other generational challenge in its history.

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