

REGIME TYPE AND THE PERSISTENCE OF COSTLY SMALL WARS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate

School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University
2008

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to answer the following questions: Why do powerful democracies repeatedly fail to cut their losses in costly small wars? And why have democracies exhibited such behavior more often than nondemocracies? Thus, this dissertation links regime type with the tendency of powerful states to *persist* in costly small wars.

I argue that a two-step model, linking the incentives of political coalitions, existing institutional constraints, and war policy, explains the variation in behavior between democracies and nondemocracies in small wars. Within the model, there are five variables—three types of coalition incentives (the type and probability of domestic punishment, elite time horizons, and the role of war propaganda) and two domestic institutional constraints (the number of veto players and the pace of policy change). I hypothesize that the first three variables can push democratic political coalitions toward a dominant incentive to continue their investment in costly small wars. And the two institutional constraints at times act as safety locks on the foreign policy process, making it doubly difficult for democracies to cut their losses.

The empirical section of this dissertation consists of four case studies: French-Indochina War, Iraqi Revolt of 1920, Soviet-Afghan War, and Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979. Two cases examine a powerful state persisting in a costly, protracted small war, and two cases investigate powerful states cutting their losses in asymmetrical conflicts. The cases are used to determine whether my model of domestic politics accounts for the variation in state behavior in small wars. As such, I process trace the events and processes that contributed to various outcomes in each case. The four case analyses provide considerable support for the two-step model. I consider the model as “strongly passing” empirical tests in three of the cases (Indochina War, Soviet-Afghan War, and Sino-Vietnamese War), and “weakly passing” the remaining case (Iraqi Revolt of 1920).

My research offers sixteen timely, pertinent implications for academic scholarship and real world foreign policymaking. These implications directly target the two-step model, the three alternative explanations of this study, as well as several ancillary yet important insights into international relations.

Dedicated to My Mother, Father, and Linda

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The document that is now in your hands has been a work in progress for almost the last seven years. My initial research and writing on many of the ideas contained herein occurred as a result of an independent study with Randall Schweller in the summer of 2001. Since that time, there have been a number of people who have provided invaluable support, assistance, and counsel to me and this dissertation. To the best of my recollection, I would like to acknowledge all of these people below.

First, from the spring of 2002 to the winter of 2003, I participated in a three-quarter seminar (Political Science 846) that was expressly designed to stimulate research projects by the department's international relations graduate students. Importantly, this seminar allowed me to flesh out much of my work on democratic foreign policymaking from the summer of 2001. Ted Hopf and Donald Sylvan, the two faculty leaders of Political Science 846, happily read all of my drafts and provided ample comments and suggestions. I am also grateful for the recommendations that many of my seminar colleagues made during the three quarters. Finally, many thanks to Alexander Thompson, who served as a discussant during a presentation of my 846 paper and elucidated a host of interesting critiques. Most notably, after the presentation, he gladly set time aside to discuss his critiques in person.

Second, I extend my appreciation to two faculty members who helped shape this project in various consequential yet subtle ways. John Mueller doggedly questioned the term “quagmire,” and forced me to rethink the dependent variable of this project. My revised dependent variable—costly, protracted small wars—is analytically clearer and more precise than the one I employed in the nascent stages of this dissertation. Among other things, Donald Sylvan emphasized the importance of a logical and transparent research design to good scholarship. His insights were crucial to much of the structure and content in chapter three.

Third, this project has certainly benefitted from the input of my dissertation committee. I am extremely thankful for all of their help. Alexander Thompson, a late addition to my committee, has quickly and graciously read two drafts and offered trenchant advice, especially on chapters one and two. His thoughts on liberal theorizing and political institutions sharpened the logic of my two-step model. Both Richard Herrmann and Randall Schweller have been more than generous with their time and considerable wisdom. And this is just as true today as it was when I began my prospectus in the summer of 2003. My dissertation, from top to bottom, is a far, far better project because of their contributions. And it must be noted that Schweller, my committee advisor, has served as a model mentor over the years. I cannot even begin to estimate how

much I have learned about international relations from him. Like so many other former Ohio State graduate students, I am intellectually indebted to Randall Schweller.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the four most important people in my life. Weylin Sternglanz, a dear friend, has been a vital wellspring of support, laughter, and even athletic competition during the dissertation process. My mother and father, Alice and Larry Nelson, have assisted and supported me throughout the years in countless ways. In particular, although neither have college degrees, my mother and father have been staunch advocates of my education. They have always encouraged and cheered my academic progress. In my view, the completion of this project demonstrates a commitment to higher learning that was instilled many years ago by my parents. Linda LaCloche, my wife, is my unsung hero. She has uprooted her life twice for me without complaint. After moving to town, she has tirelessly worked her way up from a low-level public relations assistant with the City of Columbus to a coveted policy advisor to Mayor Michael B. Coleman. With respect to my dissertation, she has proofread and edited several chapters and helped repeatedly with the copying efforts. And Linda—herself an excellent political science student as an undergraduate—has also acted at times as a sounding board for ideas. I cannot express in words how proud I am of her and how grateful I am for everything that she has done for me. My love for her is unshakable and everlasting.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Question

This dissertation attempts to answer the following research questions: Why do powerful democracies, such as the U.S., France, and Great Britain, repeatedly fail to cut their losses in costly small wars, even at times when the expected level of costs surpass the expected level of benefits accrued from future battle? And relatively speaking, why have democracies exhibited such costly behavior more often than nondemocracies? Thus, this dissertation links regime type with the tendency of powerful states to *persist* in costly small wars.¹ Since 1870 (see Table 1.1), powerful democratic states have engaged in costly, protracted asymmetrical campaigns far more often than powerful

¹ Bruce W. Jentleson and Ariel E. Levite view foreign military intervention as consisting of three disparate but related stages: “getting in,” “staying in,” and “getting out.” Following on this classification, the subject of powerful states persisting in small wars clearly addresses the “staying in” stage. Here, states remain committed to conflict, pouring more resources into the military struggle, without attaining a quick and successful political and military outcome. See Bruce W. Jentleson and Ariel E. Levite, “The Analysis of Protracted Foreign Military Intervention,” in Levite, Jentleson, and Larry Berman eds., *Foreign Military Intervention: The Dynamics of Protracted Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Similarly, Eliot Cohen refers to the second stage of foreign military intervention as “the middle game.” See Cohen, “Dynamics of Military Intervention,” in Levite et al, *Foreign Military Intervention*. A major point of distinction between this dissertation and the Levite et al volume is that I focus only on asymmetrical conflicts, whereas they explore cases in which the power of the intervening state fluctuates markedly, from superpowers to regional powers to states in the developing world.

nondemocracies.² In fact, of the population of costly, protracted small war cases, almost seventy-five percent (14 of 19) have been waged by powerful democracies.³ Furthermore, if I relaxed the operational definition of “costly small wars,” the next batch of cases eligible for inclusion in Table 1.1 would all involve powerful democracies.⁴ This is an overlooked empirical puzzle that calls for theoretical research and hypothesis testing.

² My research begins in 1870, around the time that the frequency of colonial wars markedly increased. See Ivan Arreguin-Toft’s data on asymmetrical conflicts: Arreguin-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” p. 124-128; and also R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History From 3500 B.C. to the Present 2nd ed.* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986). Importantly, democracies prior to the last quartile of the 19th century, I suspect, are less likely to behave in accordance with the logic of this project. The farther we move away from 1870, the more likely that democracies held relatively tight control over information channels, contained a small percentage of urban dwellers (with access to information), possessed advanced technology (transportation, communication, and so on) that was in the hands of only the select few, and allowed only a strikingly small percentage of citizens to vote (major democratic reforms in Britain and France occurred around 1870). The crux of this is that during the pre-1870 period, it is more likely that powerful states could wage wars at low levels of mobilization without many citizens even aware that their state was indeed at war. And if citizens are not cognizant that their state is at war, and few can even vote, then leaders really do not have to worry that failed, costly small wars will result in their removal from office.

³ Three points of clarification need to be made. First, I use the term “costly, protracted small wars” to emphasize that these campaigns are indeed costly. After all, costs are important to this project, since I am exploring the notion of states cutting their losses in war. Protracted small wars are not necessarily costly for the powerful. The British and French experience in colonial wars illustrates this point. Second, I use the terms “small war” and “asymmetrical conflict” interchangeably throughout this paper because small wars are by definition asymmetrical conflicts. Third, I use the term “powerful states” or the “powerful” rather than “great powers” to describe the side with more capabilities. It is true that most of the cases of costly, protracted small wars feature great powers as war combatants, but this does not hold for all of them. In Table 1.1, I have included the Netherlands and Portugal, two states that are not considered great powers of the first or second rank at time of their war involvement, yet both waged protracted, costly small wars. As Morgenthau tells us about the relationship between power and interests, dominant capabilities makes it more likely (and therefore not surprising) that the great powers will seek to assert themselves abroad in various ways, particularly through the use of force. See Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1948), chapter 1.

⁴ For instance, a number of democratic colonial wars, including those in Tunisia (1952) and Morocco (1953) and Dominican Republic (1917), and Cameroon (1955) would likely be among the population of costly, protracted small wars. Please see section 3.2.3 of this dissertation for an operational definition of costly small wars.

<i>Regime Type of the Powerful</i>	<i>Costly, Protracted Small Wars</i>
<i>Democracy</i> (14)	U.S.: Philippines (1899-05), Korea (1950-53), Vietnam (1965-74), Iraq (2003-present) Britain: Sudan (1882-1885), Boer (1898-1902), Somalia (1899-1905), Malaya (1948-60), Cyprus (1952-59), Kenya (1952-1960) France: Indochina (1885-95), Indochina (1946-54), Algeria (1954-62) Netherlands: Achinese (1873-1904)
<i>Nondemocracy</i> (5)	Russia: Afghanistan (1979-88); Portugal: Angola (1961-74), Mozambique (1962-74), Guinea Bissau (1962-74), Italy: Senusi (1920-1931)

Table 1.1: Population of Costly, Protracted Small Wars

The empirical data is surprising, for several reasons. First, considering the leverage that the public has over democratic government officials, one would think that the threat of punishment would motivate them to avoid international fiascos that could engender public dissatisfaction with the ruling regime.⁵ Moreover, as Kant suggested, democratic citizens are expected to push their leaders away from costly wars, since they bear the burden of the expense (increased taxation, economic disruptions, infrastructure

⁵ Certainly there is a large literature that links public opinion and foreign policy, and quite a bit of it discusses the negative influence of ordinary citizens. For an overview of this literature, see Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy Realism: The Fallacy of Political Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), chapter 2; and Ole R. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), chapter 2. But after the Almond-Lippman post consensus was broken during the 1970s, a number of scholars gradually began to put forward claims that public opinion can have a pacifying effect on foreign policy. Arguably, the earliest and most important work of this literature actually comes from Immanuel Kant's writings about republican regimes in 1795. See Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace", in Hans Reiss ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). More recently, democratic peace scholars who focus on the structural, rather than the ideational or normative, features of liberal democracies have emphasized Kant's thoughts about the beneficial role of the public in constraining the ability of leaders to arbitrarily send their state into war. For a summary of this literature, see Miriam Fendius Elman, *Paths to Peace* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), chapter 1; and James Lee Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), chapter 1.

damage, loss of lives, and so on).⁶ Second, nondemocracies have been characterized in academic scholarship, as well as in the policy world, as pariahs of international relations. They lack basic institutional mechanisms (e.g., checks and balances and voting) that can inhibit their leaders from arbitrarily waging wars without the consent of the public and approval from nondemocratic elites.⁷ And in the absence of widespread public participation in politics, it is reasonable to assume that nondemocracies have fewer domestic pressures than democratic regimes to remove themselves from battle when small wars turn costly. Nondemocratic domestic audiences typically lack both a direct political outlet to the regime to voice their dissatisfaction with the war effort and the potential to remove their leaders peacefully from office as a result of war rationales, processes, and outcomes.

Third, the empirical record is surprising considering the historical paucity of democracies compared to nondemocracies. As of 1870, there were only 10 liberal democracies in the international system; by 1922, 29 liberal democracies; and through the 1970s, there were never more than 36 liberal democracies in existence. By 1990, with the third wave of democratization underway, the number of liberal democracies had risen to

⁶ Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace", in Hans Reiss ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 100.

⁷ Bruce Russett succinctly writes: "Leaders of nondemocracies are not as constrained as leaders of democracies are, so they can more easily, rapidly, and secretly initiate large-scale violence." See Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 40. Relatedly, Miriam Fendius Elman proclaims that "According to the writings of democratic peace proponents, if nondemocracies are at war it must be because of their flawed regimes. Nondemocracies are aggressive because of features associated with their domestic institutions and cultural norms of conduct. By contrast, instances of peace between nondemocratic states tend to be attributed to external strategic considerations and the balance of power; rarely do democratic peace proponents acknowledge that peace among nondemocracies could be the result of influences internal to their regime types." See Elman ed., *Paths to Peace*, pp. 18-20.

59.⁸ To put this data in context, from 1870 to 1990, democracies never comprised more than one-half of the system of states. And in fact, for most of this period, well under 35 percent of the international system was democratic. As recently as 1973, only 24.6 percent of all states in the world were democratic.⁹ The simple fact that there have been far fewer democracies means that there have been fewer chances for these states to engage all sorts of costly behavior. Yet they have engaged in more costly, protracted small wars than nondemocratic states. So what explains the empirical data?

1.2 The Argument

Because the focus of my dissertation is on the motives underpinning the persistence or endurance of powerful states in small wars, my model begins after military conflict has been initiated, leaving behind the topic of war causation.¹⁰ In short, in small wars, powerful states are at times unable to secure their desired ends and coerce their weaker opponents to capitulate quickly and efficiently. Small wars turn costly and continue for a prolonged period of time. Under these conditions, a political coalition (or ruling elite) in the powerful state, which is the political face for the war, can decide to keep their state engaged in war, pouring more resources into conflict, or extricate their

⁸ Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp. 261-264. Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 26.

⁹ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 26.

¹⁰ For clarification, keep in mind that this dissertation does not aim to identify the precise breaking point in which democracies and nondemocracies exhaust themselves and subsequently cut their losses in small wars. For instance, see John Mueller, "The Search for the 'Breaking Point' in Vietnam," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 1980), pp. 497-519. Instead, I attempt to explore the broader *domestic political conditions* under which democracies and nondemocracies are more or less likely to cut costs.

state's forces, cutting losses by severing their war investment. As the empirical data seems to indicate in Table 1.1, political coalitions in democracies are more prone to engage in costly, protracted small wars than their counterparts in nondemocratic states. I argue that a two-step model, linking the incentives of political coalitions, existing institutional constraints, and war policy, explains the variation in behavior between democracies and nondemocracies in small wars.



Figure 1.1: Two-Step Model

First, political coalitions in democracies occasionally have a dominant incentive to persist in small wars, despite the high costs that result from continual military battle. The model starts with a top-down orientation because costly, lengthy small wars are driven by the machinations of the ruling elite. Indeed, over time these wars become so unpopular that citizens typically prefer that their home state withdraw from military battle; it is very unlikely that they extend the shelf-life of small wars by urging their leaders to continue the effort. Wartime policy in democracies suffers from what Miroslav Nincic calls “derailment from above,” in that it is largely a product of elites competing for power and attempting to maintain power.¹¹ Elites generally have an interest in holding their public offices for as long as possible. And the structure of democratic systems—free

¹¹ Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy: The Fallacy of Political Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), chapters 1-2.

and open participatory regimes—requires that elites must conduct small wars with an eye toward appearing competent, galvanizing support, appeasing support bases, and mollifying the public or risk losing legislative support and/or even electoral support. The problem is that, in responding to the structural imperatives of democratic regimes, in conjunction with their personal interest in political self-preservation, democratic coalitions at times tend to oversell small wars, incrementally escalate or de-escalate their war commitment, and, in the absence of severe domestic punishment mechanisms, refuse to back down in costly conflicts. I hypothesize that these three variables, either independently or interactively, can push democratic political coalitions toward a dominant incentive to continue—and even increase—their investment in small wars, even when these conflicts turn costly.

Second, institutional constraints intervene between coalition incentives and war policy, making it even more difficult for democratic decision-makers to withdraw from costly, protracted small wars. It is possible that extant domestic institutions could push democratic actors away from their dominant incentive to continue costly small wars toward war termination. But here, the presence of a diverse group of multiple veto players and the slow pace of policy change plausibly further hamper the ability of democratic coalitions to withdraw from conflict in a timely manner. Institutional constraints effectively act as safety locks on the foreign policy process, making it doubly difficult for democracies to cut their losses. I contend that the two institutional constraints variables—the number of veto players and the pace of policy change—can entrench the

status quo policy of war continuation, thereby preserving a democratic political coalition's dominant incentive.

By contrast, the two-step model tells us why nondemocracies likely withdraw from small wars before accruing exponentially high costs. First, nondemocratic political coalitions have structural incentives to forgo risky gambles that continue costly war efforts. Nondemocratic leaders should seek to avoid costly, protracted small wars that might spark public and elite dissatisfaction with the political regime and potentially trigger revolts against the state. Costly small wars also risk degrading the state's capacity to defend itself against internal political opponents.

Second, nondemocratic institutions can facilitate policy change away from continued warfare to war termination. In brief, relative to democracies, policy change is probably easier to achieve in nondemocratic states consisting of a small number of like-minded veto players, but this is contingent on the presence of rational leaders capable of initiating quick change. Even so, considering the incentives that nondemocratic leaders have in preventing costly, prolonged small wars, it is reasonable to expect that nondemocratic political coalitions will on balance support policies of timely extrication from military conflict. So here, we frequently find nondemocratic states reluctant to invest more resources in costly asymmetrical conflicts, choosing instead to cut their losses. Whereas both democratic coalition incentives and institutional constraints can entrench the foreign policy status quo of perpetual conflict, making war termination difficult to achieve, incentives to avoid costly, protracted small wars work in tandem with the relative absence of institutional constraints to facilitate nondemocratic withdrawal

from costly asymmetrical conflicts. At bottom, I argue that the structure of nondemocratic politics removes the safety locks apparent in democracies that can serve as barriers to policy change.

1.3 Why the Research Question is Important

The research question of this dissertation makes a contribution to four sets of scholarly literatures—democracy and conflict and peace, liberal international relations theory, war termination, and small wars. These four literatures are important to understanding some of the most fundamental questions about state behavior in international relations: Do democracies adapt to and learn better from their environments than nondemocracies? What are the political and economic mechanisms by which states can construct peaceful and cooperative relations in the international arena? Under what domestic political conditions are states more likely to cease conflict rather than remain committed to it? And why do democracies struggle in small wars? My dissertation synthesizes elements of the four literatures into one coherent model that enhances our ability to understand the relationship between regime type and costly, protracted small wars. In addition, my dissertation identifies new puzzles and develops new theoretical propositions of interest to scholars working in fields related to democracy and conflict and peace, war termination, small wars or asymmetrical conflict, and liberal international relations theory. Furthermore, my dissertation has clear policymaking implications for great power behavior in the post-cold war world.

1.3.1 Democracies and Conflict and Peace

International relations scholars link democracy and peace in the international system in four main ways.¹² The first two refer to constraints on the ability of leaders to pursue foreign policies without the consent of the public or elites. First, democratic institutions of accountability generally restrain potentially truculent leaders. The freedom to elect democratic representatives and leaders assures that ordinary citizens, who face high personal costs from war (battle casualties, taxation, destruction of private property, infrastructural damage, economic disruptions, and so on), are guaranteed to express their dovish political preferences. The likelihood for war declines, so goes the logic, because public officials have a strong interest in retaining domestic political power, and so they are guided by the dovish will of the people when formulating, debating, and enacting foreign policy. Officials who do not listen to the will of the people risk losing their jobs at the next round of elections.¹³ Second, decentralized power effectively prevents democratic leaders from hijacking the foreign policy process, taking the state into wars simply at their whim and without widespread elite support.¹⁴ The heart of decentralized

¹² Kenneth Schultz, "Do Democratic Institutions Constrain or Inform? Contrasting Two Institutional Perspectives on Democracy and War," *International Organization* (Spring 1999), pp. 233-66.

¹³ And if wars go badly, Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman point out that democratic institutions facilitate the mobilization of political opponents, making it easier for challengers to unseat governments that enact failed policies. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹⁴ The notion that decentralized government constrains policymaking dates back to Immanuel Kant, and can also be found in the writings of James Madison. Kant proclaims that the internal virtue of republics is that they separate power among the governing branches. Republics protect the rights of minorities by ensuring that the same body that makes laws also does not execute them. Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace," p. 100. It must be noted that many scholars and policymakers have misinterpreted "Perpetual Peace". Kant actually deplored democracy as a potential source of tyranny of the majority and instead saw republicanism (or what we nowadays call liberal democracy) as the form of government best able to protect

power in democracies is the principle of checks and balances, which is designed to ensure that no one branch of the government retains total power, capable of single-handedly making policy changes. Toward this end, democracies typically have multiple veto players or institutions that can block movement from the domestic and foreign policy status quo. In the context of war, the powers to declare war, mobilize forces, raise and approve wartime budgets, and serve as commander-in-chief are divided between the legislative and executive branches of government. The diffusion of power means that chief executives cannot arbitrarily lead their state into war, since the legislative branch can block efforts (raising funds, mobilizing resources, etc.) needed to execute military campaigns. In this domestic setting, democratic leaders must select policies that are logical, informed, and moderate, so as to accommodate both political allies and adversaries in various veto institutions.

Third, from a rationalist perspective, democratic institutions enhance a state's ability to make credible commitments, which can in turn facilitate peaceful joint democratic relations. Let us first look at the topic of (credible) commitments in democratic and nondemocratic regimes. Democratic leaders likely incur audience costs should they make threats that they later fail to carry out, since citizens are expected to punish their leaders for backing down in disputes. Backing down, according to rationalists, is a sure sign of political ineptness, incompetence, overconfidence, and policy mismanagement because here leaders admit that they guided the state into a bad situation and accordingly must degrade, if not halt, their commitment to an existing policy.

political and civil liberties and the right to engage in commercial transactions.

Democratic leaders, as a result, often have little leeway to engage in bluffing behavior.¹⁵ Additionally, rationalists claim that decentralized power (checks and balances, veto players, and so on) makes it difficult for democracies to break their commitments, even if democratic leaders decide to bluff or back down from threats that they issue.¹⁶ Hence, the conventional wisdom is that democracies are regimes that signal high resolve or determination to carry out threats—or in other words, democracies mean what they say.¹⁷ Nondemocracies, on the other hand, are associated with fewer audience costs, precisely because there is not a direct, formal mechanism that periodically ensures that elites are held responsible for their bluffing behavior.¹⁸ Moreover, nondemocratic domestic political institutions, which often do not constrain leaders and provide fewer roadblocks

¹⁵ James Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (1994), pp. 577-592. Similarly, Andrew Kydd contends that democracies maintain peaceful relations with each other because their transparent processes enables them to signal status quo, security seeking intentions as well as reassure other democracies that conflict will be avoided. See Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 114-154. Another implication of Fearon's work is that, because the public can sanction government officials when the state bluffs or backs down from disputes, elites choose very carefully the external conflicts in which their state participates. In short, democracies pick fights that they think they will win. This argument has been put forward by David Lake as well as by Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James M. Morrow. See Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Association*, Vol. 86 (March 1992), pp. 24-37; Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003); and Bueno de Mesquita et al, "An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 93, No.4 (December 1999), pp. 791-807. Mesquita et al also argue that because democracies tend to "fight hard" they are unattractive targets; and it is the conjunction of this argument with their high selectivity that produces the democratic peace.

¹⁶ Charles Lipson, *Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ This is precisely the logic that rationalists use to underpin the claim that democracies are transparent regimes. The ability to make credible commitments decreases the level of uncertainty about state intentions.

¹⁸ Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," p. 580.

to movement from the status quo, can allow for more policy flexibility relative to democratic regimes. Thus, nondemocracies are viewed as regimes that may or may not be sincere bargaining partners.

Rationalists take this discussion and situate it in the context of state interactions to arrive at expectations about the likely conflict behavior of nondemocracies and democracies. When nondemocracies issue threats or are threatened by other states (either democracies or nondemocracies), they may quickly back down or possibly opt to escalate hostilities and back down at a later point in time. *Ceteris paribus*, nondemocratic leaders can raise the stakes in a dispute, even when they know that they might capitulate during a military conflict, because they likely do not fear the domestic repercussions of backing down in militarized disputes. By contrast, democratic dyads likely negotiate their disputes *before* threats are made, because here both sides know that once threats are made public they have a strong incentive not to back down, which could lead to full-scale warfare.¹⁹ Viewed through the rationalist lens, then, the key to the democratic peace is the ability to make commitments credible, which prevents disputes from escalating out of hand.

Fourth, democracies are able to construct peaceful and cooperative inter-state relations because they learn and adapt well to their environments. Lars-Erik Cederman avers that democracies engage in two types of learning. First, democracies learn from discrete, previous experiences that warfare is highly destructive. This refers to simple learning in which states become better at assessing the costs and benefits attendant to

¹⁹ See Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," pp. 586.

war.²⁰ Certainly, he admits, democracies fail to learn this lesson immediately, as they continue to fight wars, but major systemic wars drive the point home over time. Second, dynamic learning occurs as states are socialized into the zone of liberal democracies, curbing their aggressive tendencies.²¹ Democracies recognize that free and open political processes, liberal norms of conflict resolution, and protection of human rights are desirable domestic traits. As states embrace these peaceful, transparent domestic traits, the level of mutual trust increases and they accordingly pursue deeper ties with fellow democracies. Importantly, democracies create international institutions to oversee and manage these burgeoning political, economic, and security relations, which effectively bind actors together by fostering a web of interconnections from which it is difficult, even costly, to break.²² Simple and dynamic learning work in tandem to produce slowly evolving patterns of reduced conflict between democracies. Cederman concludes that democracies are better learners in their mutual relations than when confronted other types of states, or than nondemocracies in their own interactions.

This dissertation shows that democratic institutions do not constrain states in ways that are consistent with what scholars typically anticipate—that is, democratic institutions

²⁰ Lars-Erik Cederman, “Back to Kant: Reinterpreting the Democratic Peace as a Macrohistorical Learning Process,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol 95, No. 1 (March 2001), p. 18.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 17-19.

²² Cederman’s argument follows from Immanuel Kant’s notion of universal hospitality, which sets forth the relationship between economic interdependence and peace between states. Within this discussion of free and open trade, which is Kant’s third condition for perpetual peace, he makes the case that international institutions (as well as international law) arise as a product of economic linkages, because states need impartial third parties to monitor and enforce contractual agreements. See Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” pp. 105-108; and Cederman, “Back to Kant: Reinterpreting the Democratic Peace as a Macrohistorical Learning Process,” pp. 16-19.

do not push states away from adopting harmful, sub-optimal foreign policies. And democracies do not necessarily adapt to new situations or learn from new information as a means to producing peaceful, cooperative behavior. In fact, at least in the context of small wars, democracies put forward self-defeating foreign policies more often than do nondemocracies. As indicated in Table 1.1, the empirical data show that democracies have engaged in more costly, protracted small wars than nondemocracies. I argue that a combination of political coalition incentives and institutional restraints prevent democracies from cutting their losses in a timely fashion in small wars. So rather than pushing states away from costly behavior, democratic institutions might actually promote the *persistence* of warfare and avoidance of war termination.

The argument that “democracy” at times fosters costly behavior challenges conventional thinking about democracies in international relations. In addition to the belief that democracy engenders pacific inter-state relations, some scholars claim that stable, mature democracies typically avoid entanglement in unnecessary, costly military conflicts. Jack Snyder and Edward Mansfield contend that democratizers or nascent democracies are particularly prone to bellicose behavior. Elites use ethno-nationalist rhetoric to galvanize mass electoral support in the context of weak and ineffectual domestic political institutions, and then over time they support militant foreign policies as a result of forces unleashed by nationalist appeals.²³ Democratic transitions can promote

²³ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 297-337. See also Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of War,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 5-38.

ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and inter-state wars. But mature democratic regimes, according to Snyder, likely prevent logrolled coalitions, mythmaking, and overexpansionist, irrational wars. Free and open democratic regimes empower a host of actors (in terms of access to the government and possession of resources), such as ordinary citizens, parliament, independent media, policy experts, and academic institutions, who can either directly or indirectly block costly inter-state behavior.²⁴ My dissertation posits that mature democracies, like 20th century Great Britain, France, and United States, do on occasion fight long, costly, self-defeating wars. In fact, among other things, democracies are indeed prone to inflating threats and crusading.²⁵ Despite contrary assertions consistently made by academics and policymakers, a mature democracy is not a panacea for deleterious inter-state behavior.²⁶

1.3.2 Liberal International Relations Theory

Liberal international relations scholarship in general—not only the democratic peace literature—emphasizes the variables that promote peace between states. There are extensive literatures devoted to the democratic peace, international regimes and

²⁴ Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 49.

²⁵ Chaim Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War,” *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Summer 2004), pp. 5-48; See also Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 232-249.

²⁶ While such scholars as Michael Doyle recognize that democracies can and do act aggressively in their relations with nondemocracies, the thrust of the democratic peace literature points out that democracies over time have carved out a zone of peace within a nasty and brutish hobbesian international system. By logical extension, then, the larger the zone of peace, the smaller the number of potential threats to international peace and stability. This theoretical point clearly has policy implications, and it has in particular informed, to varying degrees, the democracy promotion movement in U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years. Both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have consistently argued that the world—and therefore also the U.S.—would be a safer and more secure place if there were more democracies in existence.

institutions and law, and economic trade. The argument, in brief, is that democracy, international organizations and law, and trade induce pacifying effects on inter-state relations. One could argue that much of liberal scholarship is a direct extension of Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace," which argued that these three components were key conditions for establishing a growing zone of peace in the world. And in terms of university classroom instruction, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, liberal scholarship is presented as the paradigm of peace and cooperation. In short, scant attention is given to liberal variables that can foster or perpetuate belligerent behavior. And there is no liberal theory of war—or at the very least, no scholar recognizes his or her theory as a liberal theory of war.²⁷ This dissertation helps to fill this gap in the literature.²⁸ I use a host of liberal variables in a two-step model to illustrate how and why powerful states continue in costly small wars. In particular, I posit that various democratic actors, rules, and processes can entrench status quo foreign policies in wars already in motion. Certainly, more research on the connection between liberal variables and war should be done, but this project is a start in that direction.

1.3.3 War Termination

My research question also dovetails the war duration and termination literatures. And they are really two sides of the same coin: If the conditions to put aside arms and peacefully resolve wars are not present, then warfare continues. Hein Goemans writes:

²⁷ Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Autumn 1999), pp. 5-55.

²⁸ Many thanks to Alexander Thompson for pointing out the gap in the liberal literature and the role my dissertation plays in filling it.

“Wars can end only when the minimum terms of settlement of both sides become compatible, when both are asking no more than the other side is willing to give up.”²⁹

Both literatures emphasize interests or stakes, venue of conflict, and capabilities as variables that strongly determine how long wars endure and when actors are more likely to cease hostilities.³⁰ Prolonged warfare is more likely when we find combatants that highly value the war stakes, possess relatively equal power bases, and are located near each other. This describes a situation in which two evenly-matched sides fight tenaciously for their survival, as often seen in regional wars, hegemonic wars, and wars involving contiguous combatants. But in contrast to both sets of literature, this project has discovered a class of cases, in which powerful states persist in war against much weaker opponents even though homeland defense and survival are not at stake for the former (yet they are often on the line for the latter), and many of the cases are conflicts in the periphery. In addition, the propensity to engage in protracted small wars varies according to regime type. This indicates that capabilities, interests, and proximity really do not explain the behavior of the powerful in costly, protracted small wars. If anything, based

²⁹ H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment: The Causes of War Termination and the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 3.

³⁰ Notable works include Goemans, *War and Punishment*; James D. Morrow, “A Continuous Outcome Expected Utility Theory of War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 29 (September 1985), pp. 473-502; Morrow, “Capabilities, Uncertainty, and Resolve: A Limited Information Model of Crisis Bargaining,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 33 (1989), pp. 941-972; Scott D. Bennett and Alan C. Stam, “The Duration of Interstate Wars, 1816-1985,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (June 1996), 239-257; Alan C. Stam, *Win, Lose, or Draw: Domestic Politics and the Crucible of War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Francis A. Beer and Thomas F. Mayer, “Why Wars End: Some Hypotheses,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 12 (1986), pp. 95-106; Paul R. Pillar, *Negotiating Peace: Termination as a Bargaining Process* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and David Wittman, “How Wars End: A Rational Model Approach,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 23 (1979), pp. 743-763.

solely on power differentials, the powerful should handily win asymmetrical conflicts; and based simply on interests or stakes, it would be reasonable to expect them to withdraw expeditiously when it appears that war will be costly and protracted.

Furthermore, if there is a strong relationship between conflict and proximity, then we should not expect to find repeatedly conflicts in the periphery. Based on the data (Table 1.1), there might be something “sticky” about democratic institutions that restricts policy flexibility. Hence, I explore deep inside the state to look at the landscape of political actors, their incentives, and the extant network of domestic institutions that shape the direction that states pursue in warfare.

1.3.4 *Small Wars*

The bulk of the asymmetric conflict literature questions why powerful states at times lose wars against much weaker opponents.³¹ Scholars, such as Gil Merom, have even pointed out that democracies, in particular, are prone to losing asymmetrical conflicts.³² Among other reasons, the public (often the middle class) constrains the ability of democratic leaders to take decisive, brutal measures that can effectively defeat

³¹ Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1975), pp. 175-200; Eliot Cohen, “Constraints on America’s Conduct of Small Wars,” *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 1984), pp. 151-181; 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* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Efraim Inbar ed., *Democracies and Small Wars* (Portland: Frank Cass Ltd., 2003); and Ivan Arreguin-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 93-128.

³² It should be pointed out that neither Merom nor any of the other scholars conducting research on asymmetrical conflicts look at the propensity of states to participate in costly small wars as a percentage of the total number of times that they engage in asymmetrical militarized disputes. And at best, Merom and Mack use anecdotal evidence when making comparisons between regime types. So when they make the point that democracies are especially “prone” to losing small wars, Mack and Merom are simply arguing that democracies exhibit this type of behavior repeatedly over time.

insurgents in war.³³ Losing wars can cover an entire continuum, from long and draining struggles to short conflicts with only nominal costs accrued. This project is concerned only with the processes of long, draining asymmetrical conflicts. More importantly, the ultimate war verdict is irrelevant to this project, as powerful states sometimes manage to win costly, protracted small wars, at many other times this type of small war results in a stalemate (or a draw), and still other—yet rare and infrequent—small wars end in a loss for the powerful.³⁴ To be clear, my dissertation asks a different, overlooked question:

Relative to nondemocracies, why are democracies less proficient at cutting their losses in asymmetrical conflicts? And why do democracies on occasion fight long past the point at which costs outstrip the benefits of future warfare? In short, rather than focusing on the outcome of small wars, my dissertation deals with the reasons why powerful states of all stripes *persist* or *endure* in costly small wars.

And this is a puzzle that is relevant to contemporary international relations.

During the *Pax Americana* era, the first and second tier great powers have participated exclusively in small wars, not wars fought for regional or hegemonic aspirations. In fact, Martin van Creveld speculates that low intensity conflicts involving guerilla or

³³ 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* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁴ For the purposes of this paper, a loss occurs when opponents make political and/or military advances or gains—thereby generating a new status quo (one that is preferred and favorable to the opposition)—and the powerful surrenders, preferring to cut its costs rather than substantially increase its war commitment to drive the opposition back to the original status quo (a preferred outcome for the powerful); a draw is a stalemated war in which both sides are unable to alter dramatically the political and military status quo via force.

insurgency warfare will be the main type of war for the foreseeable future.³⁵ As an example, recent American military involvement in Iraq has successfully ousted the Hussein regime but has also failed to extinguish resolve of insurgents to oppose U.S. domination—insurgency operations continue and sympathizers still flock to the rebels. As a result, costs on multiple dimensions have steadily soared. American public support for the war and the president has declined since war began in March 2003. The U.S. lacks an exit strategy, and the Bush administration is reluctant to pull back from its publicly expressed commitment to exporting democracy and liberalism in the Middle East. Instead, it is pouring more resources into a costly effort.

1.4 Empirical Data

1.4.1 Research Methods

The empirical section of this dissertation consists of four case studies: the French-Indochina War, Iraqi Revolt of 1920, Soviet-Afghan War, and Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979 (see Table 1.2 below). These cases were selected with several aims in mind. First, the four cases allow for variation on the dependent variable (persistence of small wars/cutting losses), as well as on the regime type construct. Two cases explore a powerful state persisting in a costly, protracted small war, and two cases investigate powerful states cutting their losses in asymmetrical conflicts; I also select two democracy (one involved in a costly, protracted small war, and one that cut its losses) and two nondemocracy cases (again, one involved in a costly, protracted small war, and one that cut its losses). By comparing what happened to democracies and nondemocracies in two

³⁵ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

types of small wars, we can begin to figure out why powerful states in general endure in these conflicts and why democracies in particular tend to do so more often than nondemocracies.

Second, the cases permit this dissertation to control for variables that could have an impact on the dependent variable. All four cases control for the extent of external great power participation in small wars and the level of strategic interests at stake for the powerful. These two variables can serve as the foundation for potential alternative hypotheses on the behavior of the powerful in small wars, and I will in fact treat them as such in each case summary. At most, the great powers on the sidelines contributed military assistance, though they did not deploy any troops to affect significantly the outcome of war. Sideline great powers did not prolong nor lengthen the duration of the small war cases. With respect to interests, homeland security was not on the line for any of the powerful combatants. Instead, the powerful possessed what Michael Desch terms intrinsic or extrinsic interests.³⁶ Hence, the argument that the Soviets and French fought long and hard to protect their sovereign territory can be ruled out.

Third, the two costly, protracted small war cases (French-Indochina and Soviet-Afghan Wars) offer additional benefits. On the one hand, these cases are clear-cut examples of powerful states continually investing more resources into a stalemated effort. Given the length of time and the amount of costs devoted to war, it is evident that I am

³⁶ Michael Desch, "Why Realists Disagree About the Third World", in Benjamin Frankel ed. *Realism: Restatements and Renewal* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 358-384; Desch, "The Keys that Lock Up the World : Identifying American Interests in the Periphery, *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Summer 1989), pp. 86-121.

testing my model against representative cases about which this dissertation is interested. On the other hand, these two cases represent critical events in international relations. As Stephen Van Evera, Stephen Walt, and Jeffrey Taliaferro recommend, international relations scholars should prefer to study significant cases that have broad strategic consequences for great power politics and regional and/or world security.³⁷ The Soviet-Afghan War, in conjunction with a number of other variables, paved the way for the dissolution of the Soviet empire, which completely altered the distribution of power in the international system and in effect created the conditions under which balance of power politics—the discipline’s most basic expectation about state behavior—no longer dominated international relations. Instead of a bipolar world of competitive balancing between two great powers and their concomitant spheres of influence, we were left with one great power and the conspicuous absence of military balancing against the U.S.³⁸ The post-cold war era has been the *Pax Americana* era in which the U.S. single-handedly deals with the world’s security problems. In addition, the Soviet-Afghan War helped to break the Afghan state, which has led to severe consequences for the international community. Even after the Soviets left Afghanistan, the weak and shaky Afghan government was plagued with the perception of being a Soviet puppet. But as the Soviet Union underwent its own political and economic turmoil in the early 1990s, it failed to help Afghanistan create effective and durable domestic political institutions, and later withdrew the

³⁷ See Stephen Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 14-15; Jeffrey Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks*, pp. 18-22; and Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

³⁸ William Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999).

economic and military assistance that was vital for the Najibullah government's continued rule. Not surprisingly, then, by 1992, Najibullah faced a fierce insurgency that eventually overwhelmed the Afghan army and displaced the communist government in Kabul from power. In the 1990s, Afghanistan became a much more dangerous, volatile, and radical country than before the Soviet invasion in 1979. In fact, Afghanistan became a failed state, lacking the basic domestic institutions capable of such tasks as routing out crime and criminal elements, protecting the integrity of its borders and territory, and providing political goods for its citizens. Afghanistan lapsed into, and still is, a haven for fanatical, radicalized militants who engage in drug- and weapons-trafficking and commit murderous atrocities.³⁹

The French-Indochina War was very important in shaping Vietnamese perceptions of the Western world. The French were viewed as occupiers during the war, and France actually held Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as colonies for almost 75 years. When the U.S. increased its involvement in Vietnam in the early 1960s, the growing conflict was seen as an extension of the French war, and the Americans were also viewed as having imperialist ambitions. These perceptions in part explain why the Viet Cong fought so hard for so long against the French and U.S. and why both had great difficulty in coercing their opponent to capitulate.

³⁹ In the aftermath of the 9/11/01 attacks on American soil, Afghanistan is widely seen as the major front in the so-called war against terrorism. For a quick, succinct overview of the connection between Afghanistan as a failed state and violence and radicalism, see Stephen Walt, "Beyond bin Laden: Reshaping U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2001/02), p. 62.

	<i>Costly, Protracted Small War</i>	<i>Cut Losses (Avoided a costly, protracted small war)</i>
<i>Democracy</i>	French-Indochina War	Iraqi Revolt of 1920
<i>Nondemocracy</i>	Soviet-Afghanistan War	Sino-Vietnamese War

Table 1.2: Case Studies

To “test” the model that explains why democracies are prone to fighting costly, protracted small wars, I process trace the way in which “initial case conditions are translated into case outcomes.”⁴⁰ Clearly, I view the processes and motives underpinning small wars as complex and multifaceted, and so it is important to get inside the cases to determine what is pushing and pulling states toward or away from continual battle. Toward this end, process tracing is particularly appropriate because it allows the dissertation to uncover and evaluate the causal linkages that connect independent and intervening variables with hypothesized outcomes.

As such, the cases are used to determine whether my model of domestic politics accounts for the variation in state behavior in small wars. I use observable indicators for the hypothesized variables to investigate whether my theoretical model corresponds with the chain of real world events in the cases. In particular, are my proposed set of political coalition incentives and domestic institutional constraints associated with—and causally linked to—the observation that democracies persist in small wars? After all, it is possible

⁴⁰ Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, p. 64.

that there are other important variables that better explain democratic behavior in protracted small wars. If the cases show that omitted variables are in fact the driving forces of inter-state behavior, then my model has been falsified. In addition, do the values of my variables fluctuate when I observe democracies withdrawing from wars in a timely fashion? In this instance, it is possible that my variables are really constants—characteristics endemic to democracies and do not vary in degree, scope, or intensity—and are therefore not capable of producing change in the dependent variable. This finding would also falsify my model. In total, there are eleven falsifying conditions for my two-step model.⁴¹

1.4.2 Findings and Implications

The four case analyses provide considerable support for the two-step model. I consider the model as “strongly passing” empirical tests in three of the cases (Indochina War, Soviet-Afghan War, and Sino-Vietnamese War), and “weakly passing” the remaining case (Iraqi Revolt of 1920). What this means is that, at a minimum, at least one variable on each link passed empirical tests for all four cases. And on the “strong pass” cases, there was support for four of the five hypotheses of my model. Across the cases, there was at least some evidentiary support for all five hypotheses. Arguably, the war propaganda hypothesis was weakest of the five. And the veto players hypothesis turned out to be strongest; it passed empirical tests on all four cases.

⁴¹ See table 3.4 in chapter three for a complete listing of all eleven conditions, and section 3.5 for an extended discussion of falsification.

The case studies offer conclusions and implications that are pertinent to international relations scholarship and policymaking. Specifically, in chapter seven, I list sixteen disparate but related implications that were derived from my analyses in chapters four through six. Some of these implications were directly tested; some were not. I include observations that were not directly tested for two main reasons. First, this batch of findings seemed important and relevant to the main themes of this project. Second, untested claims can be used as hypotheses in future research that builds upon the theory and empirics herein. One major theme of the sixteen implications is that governments and leaders need to find ways to make rational, cost-efficient decisions in a timely manner. Several implications highlight specific means by which they can move in this direction. In particular, among other things, leaders must streamline policy processes and manage various inputs on policy; avoid, if possible, promoting domestic political instability or any form of protracted interruptions in the policy process; demonstrate an openness to fresh, new ideas and policies; opt for decisive rather than incremental policies; and refrain from seeing changes in military tactics as a panacea for the problems that the powerful face in small wars.

1.5 Conceptual Definitions

1.5.1 Democracy

To avoid confusion, it is important to state up front a working definition of democracy. In particular, I use a procedural definition of democracy. Following on Joseph Schumpeter's model of democracy, Samuel Huntington underscores the method by which governments are formed. He writes: "In other governmental systems people become

leaders by reason of birth, lot, wealth, violence, co-optation, learning, appointment, or examination. The central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern.”⁴² A political regime is democratic to the extent that its most important decision-makers are selected through open and fair elections in which candidates compete for votes among a population base that is relatively freely permitted to participate politically.⁴³ This definition of democracy involves two crucial dimensions—political contestation and participation—which is entirely consistent with the work of such eminent scholars as Robert Dahl, Juan Linz, and Giovanni Sartori.⁴⁴ A state is not democratic if transitions in power are managed by elites, or the majority of the population is excluded from voting or running for office. Democratic governance also implies the protection of some liberal rights and freedoms—such as the freedom to speak, assemble, organize, and publish—necessary for the conduct of electoral campaigns.⁴⁵

⁴² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave*, pp. 5-13. See also Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1950).

⁴³ For clarification, the “most important decision-makers” are those who are directly responsible for making war decisions, such as the legislature and executive branches. Democratic peace scholars, such as Bruce Russett, use a similar definition of democracy. See Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*; and Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

⁴⁴ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962); and Juan Linz, “Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration,” in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

⁴⁵ See Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, No. 76 (November/December 1997), pp. 22-43.

1.5.2 *Small Wars*

Small wars are a class of asymmetrical conflicts involving powerful states (often great powers) and their much weaker foreign opponents.⁴⁶ Power asymmetries are typically conceived in terms of military capabilities. Scholars also highlight battlefield tactics as a salient characteristic of many small wars.⁴⁷ Rather than deploy organized military forces to wage war directly against the great powers—states that have a superior resource base and more sophisticated weaponry and defense systems—the weak frequently resort to indirect tactics, such as guerilla warfare.⁴⁸ The powerful, in turn, respond with counter-insurgency tactics to defeat opposing forces.

⁴⁶ The term “small wars” was originally coined by C.E. Caldwell to describe British campaigns of colonial conquest during the 19th century. It implies conflicts between foreign adversaries—either between independent states or involving states and foreign territories. As a result, asymmetrical conflicts such as the First and Second Chechen Wars—at bottom, intra-state wars—fall outside the scope of this dissertation. In this sense, then, small wars can be viewed as a subset of asymmetrical conflicts. See Colonel C. E. Caldwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996/1896). For further discussions about small wars, see Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1975), pp. 175-200; Cohen, “Constraints on America’s Conduct of Small Wars,” *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 1984), pp. 151-181; Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Inbar ed., *Democracies and Small Wars* (Portland: Frank Cass Ltd., 2003); and Ivan Arreguin-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 93-128.

⁴⁷ Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Inbar ed., *Democracies and Small Wars* (Portland: Frank Cass Ltd., 2003); and Arreguin-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 93-128.

⁴⁸ Robert Taber, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerilla Warfare* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s Inc., 2002); Walter Laqueur, *Guerilla Warfare* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004); B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991); Robert E. Harkavy and Stephanie G. Neuman, *Warfare and the Third World* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerilla Warfare* (New York: Praeger, 1961); John Ellis, *From the Barrel of a Gun: A History of Guerilla, Revolutionary, and Counter-Insurgency Warfare, from the Romans to the Present* (London: Greenhill, 1995); Robert Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerilla in History* (New York: William Morrow, 1994).

Costly, protracted small wars—the subject of this dissertation—are conflicts in which powerful states fail to extricate themselves from military battle in a timely fashion. These actors continue to fight wars that only degrade their resource bases, and frequently fight well after the point at which the expected level of costs surpass the expected level of benefits gained from further war.⁴⁹ Powerful states appear to engage in irrational, self-defeating behavior, because in the end it would be better if they withdrew from warfare far earlier than they do.⁵⁰ Instead, the powerful continue to increase their investment, making the risky gamble that costly and even failing wars can turn out to be successful in the long-run. Powerful states also lack a coherent exit strategy that informs leaders when it is appropriate to remove their troops from battle, and how they can move seamlessly from the battlefield to the negotiating table.

Note that homeland defense is only on the line for the weak. As Jeffrey Taliaferro and Andrew Mack point out, the weak often lack the capacity to invade the homeland of powerful states.⁵¹ There are two basic reasons for this. One, the weak have a small resource base and lack sophisticated weapons-delivery and transport systems to project those capabilities into other state territories. And two, the great distance between the combatants makes it even less likely that the weak can attack the powerful. Many asymmetric conflicts involve powerful states and weak ones in the periphery, which

⁴⁹ See chapter 3 (section 3.2.3) for an operational definition of costly, protracted small wars.

⁵⁰ Note that these wars appear irrational from an outsiders perspective, but they could be—and likely are—rational from the point of view of elites who make war decisions. In fact, the logic presented in chapter two hypothesizes that democratic elites make decisions which prolong war as a rational response to their domestic political environments.

⁵¹ See Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks*; and Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars.”

means the latter must project their forces into far away areas of the international system in order to threaten *directly* the homeland of the former.⁵² Meantime, the powerful possess both a capacity to invade and a threat to occupy the periphery and subjugate its civilians.⁵³ Note that this project does not assume that the venue of conflict is inconsequential to the powerful side.⁵⁴ Some areas in the periphery are rich in natural resources, some are important components of a broad grand security strategy, still other areas might have cultural or social ties to powerful states.

There is some conceptual overlap between the terms “small war” and “limited war.”⁵⁵ Like small wars, limited wars can refer to wars in the periphery, since these

⁵² Jeffrey Taliaferro, “Quagmires in the Periphery: Foreign Wars and Escalating Commitment in International Conflict”, *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1997). While not all costly, protracted small wars are fought in the periphery, these areas do comprise the bulk of the population of cases. See Table 1.1. For an overview of the definition of the periphery in international relations, see Johan Galtung, “A Structural Theory of Imperialism,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 13 (May 1971), pp. 81-117; Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 16 (September 1974), pp. 387-415; James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, “A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era,” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 467-491; Michael C. Desch, “The Keys that Lock Up the World: Identifying American Interests in the Periphery,” *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Summer 1989), pp. 86-121; Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks*, pp. 27-28; Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965-1990* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 4.

⁵³ Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1975), p. 181.

⁵⁴ Jeffrey Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks*, chapter 1. Taliaferro mistakenly argues that the periphery is inconsequential to the great powers, when this obviously is untrue. If the powerful had no interest (whether it involves direct homeland security, or intrinsic or extrinsic interests) in the periphery, then they would not send their troops and commit infinite resources to these areas.

⁵⁵ Small wars can be limited in means, or political conditions, or ends, or in two or three of these components. But limited wars do not necessarily involve combatants with large power asymmetries, and they do not necessarily consist of guerilla and counterinsurgency warfare. As Eliot Cohen points out, limited wars include “the possibility of direct conventional engagement between the superpowers when such conflicts remain regionally contained.” See Cohen, “Constraints on America’s Conduct of Small Wars,” *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Autumn 1984), p. 152. In addition, there is some similarity between the term quagmire and costly, protracted small wars. Both refer to situations in which leaders demonstrate

conflicts are confined geographically, but they need not only refer to such limits. Wars can also be limited according to the number of selected military targets, the magnitude of forces put into battle, and the amount of destruction caused from the deployment of force.⁵⁶ In fact, Andrew Mack argues that small wars are limited wars for the powerful side. The domestic opposition that emerges from long, costly small wars constrains war mobilization. Moreover, he writes: “Not only is full mobilization impossible politically, it is thought to be in the least necessary.”⁵⁷ The asymmetries in power between both sides are so large that elites expect an easy, cheap victory. Meantime, for the weak, military conflict actually resembles total warfare.⁵⁸ These wars are viewed in zero-sum terms, where victory guarantees self-determination and defeat foreshadows external domination. The extremely high stakes (survival) require that all available resources are projected by any means necessary against the powerful.

1.6 Structure of Dissertation

In brief, my dissertation proceeds in eight chapters. Chapter two sets forth the theoretical foundation for the entire dissertation. In particular, I explain why democracies

great difficulty in removing their state from conflict. And both wars in Vietnam are classic examples of quagmires. However, international relations scholars tend to consider asymmetrical conflicts, major great power wars (such as World War I and II), and symmetrical regional wars (such as the Iran-Iraq War) as quagmires. See Jeffrey Taliaferro, “Quagmires in the Periphery; and Lawrence Freedman, “Escalators and Quagmires,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Jan, 1991).

⁵⁶ Robert Osgood, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), chapter 1.

⁵⁷ Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars,” p. 181.

⁵⁸ As Robert Osgood writes, total wars are a “distinct 20th century species of unlimited war in which all the human and material resources of the belligerents are mobilized and employed against the total national life of the enemy.” Robert Osgood, *Limited War*, p. 3.

have been involved in more costly, protracted small wars than nondemocracies, emphasizing the incentives of democratic political coalitions to support continual war and the presence of domestic institutional mechanisms capable of restraining these actors from terminating conflict. This chapter also explains why I expect nondemocracies to exit from small wars in a timely fashion. The point here is to generate expectations about the relationship between regime type and the propensity to cut losses in small wars. Chapter three explicates the research design. Among other things, I operationalize important variables, describe the research methodology, propound the project's hypotheses, explain the case selection, and state how my model can be falsified. The next three chapters (chapters four through six) cover the empirical component of the dissertation by exploring, in order, the French-Indochina War, Sino-Vietnamese War, Iraqi Revolt of 1920, and the Soviet-Afghanistan War. These four case studies examine the causal processes leading powerful democracies and nondemocracies to extend or terminate their level of effort in costly small wars.

Chapter seven, the concluding chapter, does a number of tasks. First, it pulls together the evidentiary case material to determine what has been learned and evaluates the model put forward in chapter two. In light of the empirical evidence, I distill implications for further academic research and current and future real world policymaking. In addition, in this chapter, I briefly explore the current war in Iraq in the context of my two-step model. I end by setting forth a road map for future research.

CHAPTER 2

DEMOCRATIC AND NONDEMOCRATIC LOGICS OF COSTLY, PROTRACTED SMALL WARS

Chapter two explains why democracies persist in costly small wars more frequently than nondemocracies.⁵⁹ Toward that end, I propose a two-step model in which domestic institutional constraints mediate the affect that political coalition incentives have on war policy. While the preferences of political coalitions shape the direction of foreign policy, they by no means determine its final form. In fact, democratic elites discuss, bargain, and enact foreign policy within the confines of domestic political institutions, and so it is essential to investigate whether they cause, facilitate, or obstruct changes from the policy status quo. Within the model, there are five important variables—three types of incentives, and two institutional constraints. Specifically, the type and probability of domestic punishment, elite time horizons, and the role of propaganda in overselling small wars might create incentives to continue costly small wars; while the presence of veto players and the pace of policy change may serve as institutional constraints or barriers to altering wartime policies.

⁵⁹ See chapter three (section 3.2.3) for an operational definition of the dependent variable. There, I explore the various gradations of “persistence” in asymmetrical conflicts, moving from minimal force to costly, protracted small wars.

The two-step model applies to both democratic and nondemocratic behavior in small wars. Given the research questions of this dissertation, it is important for the model to establish that democracies at times persist or endure in costly small wars, as well as that nondemocracies tend to withdraw from conflicts before costs exponentially rise. Consequently, in this chapter, I explore how the model is expected to work in democracies and nondemocracies. In other words, I filter the model through both democratic and nondemocratic regime types, thereby creating two different sets of expectations about inter-state behavior in war. What we should find is that as we move from democracy to nondemocracy, the values of the five variables do in fact vary, and that the fluctuation in the values accounts for the variation in behavior.⁶⁰

2.1 What About Non-Domestic Politics Variables?

For clarification, this dissertation *does not* take the position that domestic politics are the only important elements in explaining why powerful states fail to cut their losses in small wars. Among other things, material interests, state reputation or face, proximity, and the role of powerful states external to the conflict surely can and often do play a role in extending the commitment of the powerful in small wars. The problem is that, in general, there is no *a priori* reason to think that they matter more or less in the decision-making calculus for either democratic or nondemocratic leaders. That is, *ceteris paribus*, democratic and nondemocratic elites should value material interests, their state's reputation, and so on relatively equally. In other words, these variables are unlikely

⁶⁰ See chapter three for information regarding empirical testing procedures of the two-step model.

candidates to explain the variation in behavior between both regime types, which is the goal of this dissertation.

2.2 Democracies and Small Wars

2.2.1 Democratic Political Coalitions

Consistent with the approach advocated by Lake and Powell, this dissertation specifies the microfoundations at work in democratic and nondemocratic small wars.⁶¹ By analytically separating the relevant actors from their environments, I am able to draw causal linkages between both, as well as link actors and their environments to war outcomes. For the purposes of this dissertation, actors are the individuals and groups who form a formal or informal political coalition that is the political face for the war effort. The environment refers to the two major policy options or actions—war termination or war continuation—available to actors.⁶² The political coalition at times has a dominant incentive, which can vary according to regime type, to select one policy option over the other. Opting to continue or terminate small wars has a strong impact on the overall war outcome, depending on the ability of domestic institutions to permit or restrict actor behavior. The added benefit of this approach is that we can see that democracies or nondemocracies *qua* actors do not terminate or prolong small wars, but rather political

⁶¹ Microfoundations help organize international relations phenomena, and sharpen the logic of theories by emphasizing linkages between causal variables. Lake and Powell state: “Sharper and tighter deductive reasoning is a prerequisite to the difficult empirical work that must be done to test and evaluate any theory. By emphasizing microfoundations and a fuller description of a strategic setting, the strategic choice approach calls attention to assumptions and logical consistency.” For more on microfoundations, see David A. Lake and Robert Powell eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, pp. 5, 21-25.

⁶² Note that I recognize that this is a simplification of the extant policy choices. In real world situations, there are likely more nuanced and complex options available to actors.

coalitions within each regime type do. Put another way, I move away from treating the state as a reified actor capable of making decisions, and more properly place the locus of decision-making at the level of individuals.⁶³

Once small wars reach the top of a government's foreign policy agenda, this issue is frequently supported by a democratic foreign policy coalition. There are a number of types of foreign policy actors within this decision-making unit: elites without strong special interest ties, bureaucratic officials and elite staffers, elites with direct ties to special interests, and special interests that lobby governing officials or have indirect links to the regime.⁶⁴ First, it is possible to find elites who make foreign policy decisions on occasion with the national interest, rather than narrow, parochial interests, in mind.⁶⁵ However, the push and pull of democratic politics much more often than not forces elites to balance the demands of such important international political events as wars with the concerns of the groups, individuals, and constituencies who helped them get elected. Second, democratic political coalitions might include bureaucrats and elite staffers who

⁶³ States as political units do not decide to engage in, prolong, or withdraw from warfare. The state as a network of domestic institutions is merely an aggregation of elite and public political preferences, which by itself says nothing about how preferences are funneled into policy decisions and how these decisions are made. Officials in a variety of state channels initiate, deliberate, negotiate, and enact decisions that lead their home state deeper into or out of war.

⁶⁴ Political scientists use the term "elites" to describe important (however defined) political, economic, and military decision makers and personnel, as well as intellectuals (academics and policy wonks) and religious figures. Here, I use the term to refer only to important political officials; and I narrowly define it as democratically elected members of the legislative and executive branch, because typically in democracies only they *necessarily* possess direct veto power over foreign policy. But the key point of this sentence, to be clear, is that democratic political coalitions can feature more than simply elected officials or even governments (elected officials plus bureaucratic chiefs).

⁶⁵ These are the types of elites that Morgenthau and Lippman hoped to find in foreign policymaking circles. See Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955); Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*.

provide specialized information, develop policy options, and offer counsel. Keep in mind, however, that these individuals might attempt to push specific policies through the state as a means to promote their own agendas (entrench or extend their policy influence, job promotion, and so on) and thus can constitute a special interest influence on policymaking, depending on the context of the situation. Finally, special interests (such as the military, financiers, elites with strong special interest ties, and at times bureaucrats) within and external to the political regime can access the policy arena through extant democratic institutions, which enables manifold sectors, groups, and individuals to shape and potentially distort the policy process. As examples, British and French financiers and American foreign policy elites with economic ties to Western Europe played important roles in small wars by seeking to protect assets and conquer new areas for further profit.⁶⁶ One major distinction between democracies and nondemocracies is that in the former, special interests can constitute the regime (that is, democratic elites can have direct ties to special interest groups), and those outside of the regime are allowed to compete for resources from the state via lobbying efforts.⁶⁷ Nondemocracies likely block special interests that do not have ties to the ruling political regime. Because scholars typically

⁶⁶ Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), chapters 5 and 7; Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), chapter 5.

⁶⁷ American politics scholars make the distinction between “direct access” and “lobbying.” Direct access refers to democratic elites who represent special interests within the government. Parochial constituencies, financial ties to various economic sectors, and current or former ties to the military are all examples of direct access. By contrast, lobbying activities occur when sectors without direct access are allowed to influence policy by transmitting specialized information, providing funds (bribes?), and making promises. See Theodore J. Lowi and Benjamin Ginsberg, *American Government*, 2nd ed, pp. 295-302.

doubt that special interests are important foreign policy actors, I elaborate below how they can indeed influence this policy domain.

Some American and comparative politics scholars argue that special interests fail to capture either the domestic or foreign policy processes.⁶⁸ And special interests certainly are not expected to shape the general or national interest. Such scholars as Anthony Downs and Ronald Rogowski contend that elections necessarily force democratic elites into competing for the median voter and avoiding domestic and foreign policies that benefit primarily imperial, concentrated interests.⁶⁹ The logic is that the public at large will reject democratic leaders and representatives who work to benefit the few rather than the entire society; and because the first priority of elites is to retain public office, democratically elected officials are expected to limit the influence of special interests.

⁶⁸ Scholars working in the research areas of American and comparative politics expect special interests only to affect narrow domestic policies. Comparativists argue that special interest influence on narrow policy issues depends on a host of variables, most notably the number of salient political parties. Single or two party governments can limit special interests, while multiparty coalition governments, with political parties that often directly represent special interests, provide more ripe conditions for parochial interests to thrive within the state. See R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman eds., *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993), chapter 1. Meantime, American politics scholars have observed iron triangle relationships between interest groups, bureaucratic agencies, and congressional oversight committees—each of which are autonomous actors that mutually reinforce self-interested seeking behavior. These three actors cultivate strong bonds with each other over many years, work to dominate policy areas, and keep outsiders off of their policy turf. What entrenches this relationship is the tendency for congresspersons and individuals in bureaucratic agencies to cycle into special interest groups, using their personal contacts and insider information to secure benefits for concentrated interests. See Theodore J. Lowi and Benjamin Ginsberg, *American Government*, chapter 11; Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek, *Congress and its Members* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1994), chapter 10; R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman eds., *Do Institutions Matter?*, pp. 27-30.

⁶⁹ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965); Ronald Rogowski, "Trade and the Variety of Democratic Institutions," *International Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Spring 1987), pp. 203-223; Norman Frolich and Joe Oppenheimer, *Modern Political Economy*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1978).

But special interests can significantly impact democratic foreign policies. Liberal democratic institutions (multiple access channels, decentralization of power, and so on) permit special interest groups to access the state's foreign policy machinery, such as parliament, president/prime minister, cabinet, and foreign policy agencies. First, special interests might possess some leverage over the democratic foreign policy process. Special interests groups that do not constitute the ruling political regime fund election campaigns, provide additional logistical, organizational, and public support for democratic candidates for office, offer insider knowledge about policy sectors, and promise favors and post-government jobs—all with the hope of securing resources for programs that benefit them.⁷⁰ Moreover, democratic elites, who have ties to special interest groups, may personally benefit from aggressive foreign policies. For instance, elites can directly reap profit from specific economic sectors to which they have ties, such as in investment and consulting firms, as they can dole out contracts to those sectors to rebuild societies devastated by war.⁷¹ They can also indirectly benefit if the reconstruction effort lines the pockets of their cronies, who then use a part of the profit to contribute to their electoral campaigns in various ways. Given the benefits that special interests can offer, democratic elites might not see empowering special interests as a necessary trade-off when pursuing the median

⁷⁰ Theodore J. Lowi and Benjamin Ginsberg, *American Government*, chapter 11; Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek, *Congress and its Members*, chapter 10; R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman eds., *Do Institutions Matter?*, pp. 27-30; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 32-39.

⁷¹ In contemporary American politics, this was the subject of intense political criticism when it was revealed that Halliburton, a company with which Vice President Dick Cheney had strong ties, was granted millions of dollars in defense contract fees to rebuild war-torn Iraq. Among other references, see Jane Mayer, "Contract Sport: What Did the Vice President do for Halliburton?," *The New Yorker*, February 16 and 23, 2004, found at http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content?040216fa_fact.

voter. Rather, they might view granting special interests influence within the state as complementary, not harmful as Jack Snyder suggests, to pursuing electoral votes.⁷²

Second, ruling elites can utilize their monopoly over specialized, sensitive information (e.g., threats in the international system) to justify asymmetrical conflicts when special interests seek warfare. In this case, elected officials and bureaucrats (who might profit in various ways from small wars) claim that warfare is necessary based on intelligence data. Contrary to Snyder's expectations, the public and media—who lack full and complete access to security intelligence—frequently fail to challenge the regime's war rationale and instead rally around the president, at least in the early war phases.⁷³ It is often only *after* wars turn costly do they turn a critical eye on the war. Given such information asymmetries, one problem is that, as Chaim Kaufmann points out, democratic elites can build support for warfare by inflating or grossly distorting potential security threats.⁷⁴

And third, special interests of all stripes can overcome the inherent transparency of their agendas by hiding under the cover of democratically elected elites, their staffers, and bureaucratic agencies.⁷⁵ With so many actors involved in the coalition at times, it can

⁷² Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 49-52.

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 35-38.

⁷⁴ Chaim Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Summer 2004), pp. 5-48.

⁷⁵ Although Snyder doubts that special interests can hijack the state in democracies, this argument is really not inconsistent with his work because here special interests are tied to the state. He writes: "Yet groups with concentrated interests in expansion suffer one disadvantage in the propaganda battle: the transparency of their self-interest. At least in America, some studies have shown that obviously self-interested propaganda hurts the cause of its proponents, whether business or labor. Consequently, unless more credible

be difficult for the public to pinpoint the direct link between the influence of special interests and foreign policy outputs. And if the public cannot trace this linkage, then it is less likely to punish democratic elites for supporting concentrated rather than diffuse interests.

2.2.2 Democratic Political Coalition Incentives

I do not aim to explain why or how democracies and nondemocracies get involved in small wars. It is possible that the political coalition pushes its state into war by logrolling policies. Perhaps the political opposition is weak and/or disorganized relative to the coalition advocating warfare, which paves the way for the latter to run its policies through the state without much resistance. Maybe on occasion the political opposition supports bellicose policies because, should such policies fail or turn costly, this could result in the defeat of the ruling regime and its own political ascent. But these arguments are subject to further research, and are outside the parameters of this study. Here, I simply pick up the story with a domestic coalition that is the political face for the war, and now war is widely viewed as a costly campaign. Why does the coalition press on rather than cut its losses?

Contrary to the fears of such scholars as Hans Morgenthau and Walter Lippmann, costly, protracted small wars are not cases in which a fickle, impassioned, militant public prolongs conflict by constraining the ability of democratic elites to seek a quick exit.⁷⁶ In

sources like the press or state can be bought or co-opted, the group's propaganda may be discounted as coming from an obviously biased source." Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 37.

⁷⁶ This refers to what Nincic calls "derailment from below." Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy: The Fallacy of Political Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), chapters 1-2; Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*; Lippmann, *Public Opinion*; Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among*

these cases, the public gradually becomes disenchanted with warfare and prefers that its home state terminates warfare. Instead, it is the structure of democratic systems that creates incentives for political coalitions to continue in small wars. Specifically, what Miroslav Nincic calls “derailment from above” has deleterious effects on the foreign policy process in democratic regimes.⁷⁷ He defines derailment from above as “problems originating within the upper echelons of political power and the very structure of democratic authority that include the manner in which foreign policy authority is apportioned within the government....Possible problems also include the pattern of incentives by which democratic leaders are driven—at election time in particular—that are not always thought conducive to wisdom and foresight in international affairs.”⁷⁸ In particular, democratic elites are motivated by the desire to pursue domestic political power and maintain power over time. And in fact, foreign policies are often filtered—and subsequently distorted—through this motivation. A major problem is that elites in democratic regimes are forced to conduct small wars with an eye toward appearing competent, galvanizing support, appeasing support bases, and mollifying the public or risk losing legislative support or even electoral support. This at times results in deeply flawed foreign policies. The rest of this section is nested within the logic of “derailment from above.”

Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace; Ole R. Holsti, “Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (December 1992), pp. 439-466.

⁷⁷ Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy*, pp. 11-15, 90-123.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

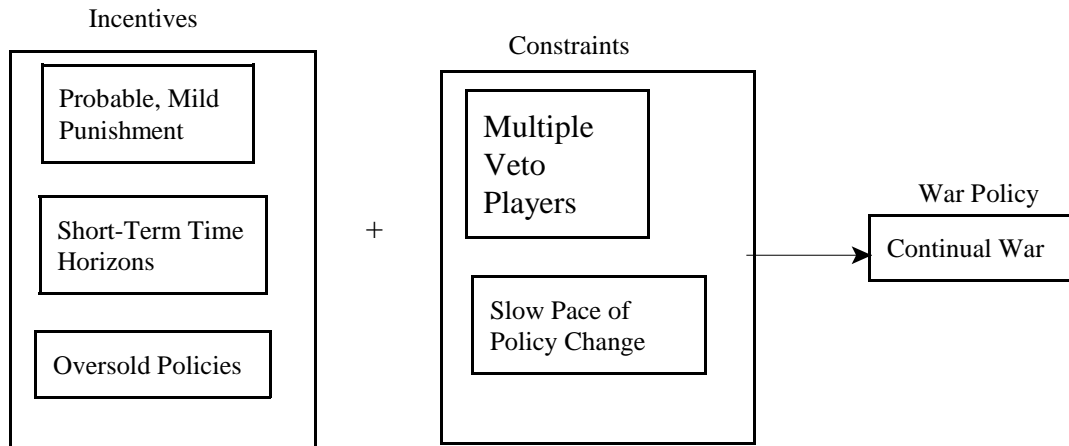


Figure 2.1: Two-Step Model of Democratic Behavior in Small Wars

2.2.2.1 Democratic Incentives to Continue Costly Small Wars

2.2.2.1.1 PROBABLE, MILD PUNISHMENT

In democratic political systems, in which there is high probability that elites will be punished for costly, losing wars, yet the consequences of being punished are very mild, elites can be motivated to adopt resolute foreign policies.⁷⁹ Hein Goemans argues that a relatively moderate loss means that elites will be voted out of office.⁸⁰ The logic underpinning this observation loosely follows on James Fearon's work about audience costs. Fearon writes: "at least since the eighteenth century leaders and publics have typically understood threats and troop deployment to 'engage the national honor,' thus

⁷⁹ Why are losing wars relevant to this project, especially when considering that most small wars are stalemates? First, stalemates are often viewed as losing wars from the perspective of foreign policy elites, as well as ordinary citizens. Second, and more importantly, the focus of this discussion is not necessarily on military defeat but the tendency of elites to avoid losing wars so as to evade domestic punishment. In short, this is an application of Goemans' findings to the incentive structure of elite decision-making in small wars.

⁸⁰ H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment*, pp. 21, 47-50.

exposing leaders to risk of criticism or loss of authority if they are judged to have performed poorly by the relevant audiences.”⁸¹ So democratic leaders who lose wars risk suffering a diplomatic humiliation and tarnishing their state’s reputation, face, and honor at the international level, which could then turn into a defeat domestically at the ballot box. As one real world example, Robert Dallek recently revealed that American National Security Advisor Kissinger vigorously pushed against a withdrawal from Vietnam in 1970 because he feared the electoral consequences of backing down in war.⁸² Meantime, according to Goemans, a worse loss in war (high casualties, loss of territory, loss of sovereignty/occupation, etc.) increases the chance of severe punishment (namely, the threat of exile, punishment, and death) of individual elites, often by wartime opponents bent on revenge. As a result, democratic political coalitions should have *prima facie* few incentives to undertake risky gambles that prolong losing wars.

Goemans’ logic, then, suggests that democracies should avoid disastrous conflicts like costly small wars, which result in high casualties and risk sully a state’s reputation and honor. But when we move from wars in general to small wars, the incentive to avoid persisting in losing, costly warfare seems less likely to hold. Elites in powerful democracies do not face the extreme deterrent mechanism to continual costly state behavior in small wars, even if the conflict produces a disastrous outcome, precisely because war opponents by definition pose little threat to their political regime. If

⁸¹ James Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (1994), p. 580.

⁸² Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007).

democratic leaders and representatives fail to win small wars, they are voted out of office, not personally harmed by either an internal or external foe. And because democracies are non-repressive and non-exclusionary regimes, elites voted out of office frequently can run for office again, retire, or pursue opportunities in the private sector. This was just as true for Robert Schuman, Harry Truman and Lyndon Baines Johnson as it is today for George W. Bush. According to Goemans' logic in the context of small wars, then, it might be worthwhile for elites to gamble in small wars with the hope of turning around losing, costly conflicts and saving their jobs. The potential payoff of successful war is high (re-election), and the consequences of a stalemated small war are mild (loss of office). In fact, if this is indeed correct, we should then observe democratic elites as reluctant to back down in small wars, preferring resolute and unwavering foreign policies, for fear that the slightest intimation of defeat (such as publicly reconsidering parts of the war effort or dramatically scaling back war ends) signals political incompetence and poor management of the war, thereby paving the way for imminent loss of office. Toward this end, elites might create myths and/or deny setbacks as a means to frame the war as proceeding as planned.

A caveat must be made for presidential democratic systems. Constitutional restrictions typically prohibit leaders in presidential democracies from holding a third term in office. As a result, second-term presidents are mostly freed from the electoral constraints that they faced throughout their initial term. Look at the second term of American President George W. Bush as an example. Despite a growing opposition to the war and his presidency, and his party's control of Congress on the line, Bush refused to

change course on his Iraq policy in 2006. It is conceivable that presidents with strong party loyalties might still be marginally constrained in their policymaking, in that they do not want to make decisions that damages their party after they leave office. But in general, they can support policies and take positions that might be politically unpopular without fearing the direct future political repercussions. Here, their decisions to stand firm or back down in military conflicts likely might be associated with establishing and preserving a favorable political legacy, among other things.

This argument about the type and probability of punishment can be viewed as an extension of and compatible with the rationalist logic of political survival put forward by, among others, James Fearon, Kenneth Schultz, and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and his cohorts.⁸³ Political survival refers to the ability of elites to select domestic and foreign policies necessary to ward off threats to their continued tenure in office. But instead of focusing on the war initiation phase, as Fearon, Schultz, and Bueno de Mesquita et al do, here I situate the logic of political survival within the topic of war duration. In the war initiation phase, in order to avoid domestic punishment, democratic elites are expected to choose very carefully the disputes that they escalate. But once warfare has started, there is another, compatible, yet overlooked, expectation of democratic policymaking.

⁸³ Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," Schultz, "Do Democratic Institutions Constrain or Inform? Contrasting Two Institutional Perspectives on Democracy and War," Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003). See also Bueno de Mesquita et al, "Political Institutions, Policy Choice, and the Survival of Leaders," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (October 2002), pp. 559-590; and Bueno de Mesquita et al, "Policy Failure and Political Survival," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 1999), pp. 147-161; and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Randolph M. Siverson, "War and the Survival of Political Leaders," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (December 1995), pp. 841-855.

Rationalists argue that democracies tend to “try harder” than nondemocracies in disputes.⁸⁴ Similarly, I claim that, in the war duration phase, democratic political coalitions will likely remain indefinitely committed to military conflict so as to avoid a political and military loss and future domestic punishment.

This argument is also an improvement, in that the rationalists fail to consider that the type of elite punishment has an affect on foreign policy decisions. Rationalists clearly argue that the probability of being punished for poor foreign policy decision-making is important in distinguishing between regime types: In democracies, the high probability of punishment prevents leaders from backing down in disputes that they escalate; in nondemocracies, a relatively lower probability, in which leaders’ jobs are not likely on the line, means that they can back down or escalate crises. But by folding in the type of elite punishment, we can understand in more detail why democracies at times increase their investment to military conflicts, and why nondemocratic leaders likely will not indefinitely persist in warfare. Certainly, democratic elites might refuse to back down for fear of domestic punishment, but that is only one part of the story. It is also important to recognize that the type of punishment does little to dissuade democratic elites from continuing to invest resources in warfare, even in costly, losing campaigns. By contrast, in nondemocracies, leaders have a strong incentive to cut their losses when elite punishment could take the form of physical confinement and personal injury. Moreover, though beyond the scope of this dissertation, after examining the type of elite punishment, contra the rationalist claims, it is also apparent why in some instances (say, against an

⁸⁴ Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival*, p. 236.

external threat capable of overthrowing the regime) democratic elites may indeed back down during crises. Properly stated, then, this variable explores the politics of elite survival, not simply the logic of political survival.

2.2.2.1.2 SHORT-TERM TIME HORIZONS

Once war commences, it can be difficult for political coalitions to extricate their state's forces from warfare because of elite short-term time horizons.⁸⁵ Democratic elites focus on the next election, not the long-term international or domestic political setting. As a result, they lack the vantage point that enables them to consider the consequences of protracted, asymmetrical conflict, neglecting to calculate the costs related to war and the probability of accruing such costs over time vis-a-vis war benefits. In fact, democratic political coalitions occasionally adopt a “muddling though” approach to warfare.⁸⁶

Viewed in this light, democratic elites are prone to doing just enough to keep small wars

⁸⁵ Snyder argues that imperial, concentrated interests in cartelized states often have a short-term political vision, but what he overlooks is that democratic elites by definition also have a short-term time horizon. See Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 49-52. Nincic, among others, avers that democratic elites are indeed short-term oriented actors. See Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy*, chapters 1-4. However, in more recent work, Miroslav and Donna Nincic depict democratic elites as “economic investors,” which suggests that they might have a somewhat longer-term perspective than he originally believed. The Nincics model democratic governments as actors who place resources in some venture and realize that they must wait for a period of time to reap an adequate payoff on their investment. While in a narrow sense it is true that democratic governments commit resources in support of various policies with the hope of observing tangible results at a later point in time, nevertheless on a more macro domestic level this characterization is very misleading. The Nincics fail to put forward a recursive model of domestic politics in which the public and the government are linked and affected by each other. The public invests its support in the government, the government invests resources to achieve domestic and foreign policy ends, and the success or failure of the government to procure these ends affects continued public support. Viewed in this way, democratic governments would certainly be highly motivated to secure their ends as quickly and efficiently as possible for fear of risking their tenure in office. See Donna J. Nincic and Miroslav Nincic, “Commitment to Military Intervention: The Democratic Government as Economic Investor,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1995), pp. 413-426.

⁸⁶ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1966* (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publishers, 1967), p. 39.

in motion, forestalling a military defeat, while restraining the amount of forces and modifying the tactics they use in battle for fear of engendering mass dissatisfaction with the war and government.

At bottom, democratic elites play a multi-pronged game of foreign policy.⁸⁷

Because of the strong role that the public plays in democratic politics, elites are forced to balance the short-term concerns of the public (do not put too many troops in danger, do not lose too many troops, do not employ inhuman war tactics, do not harm civilians) with the longer-term battlefield demands of warfare (win the war).⁸⁸ In effect, the public places a brake on the level of war mobilization. The problem is that this sometimes causes democracies to fail to marshal enough force and implement the appropriate counter-insurgency tactics to rout their opponents quickly and at low cost. And as these

⁸⁷ My thoughts here on democratic foreign policy have been shaped by the literature on governmental and bureaucratic politics. For a superlative overview of this literature, see Greg Cashman, *What Causes War? An Introduction to Theories of International Conflict* (New York: Lexington Books, 1993), pp. 77-123. Additionally, see David A. Welch, "The Organizational Process and Bureaucratic Politics Paradigms," *International Security*, Vol. 17., No. 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 112-146; Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1971); Robert J. Art, "Bureaucratic Politics and American Foreign Policy: A Critique," *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (December 1973), pp. 467-490; Morton H. Halperin and Arnold Kanter, "The Bureaucratic Perspective," in Robert Art and Robert Jervis eds., *International Politics: Anarchy, Force, Political Economy and Decision-Making* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1985), pp. 439-466; Charles Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy: Decision Making Through Mutual Adjustment* (NY: Free Press, 1965). See also Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*; and Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1966* (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publishers, 1967).

⁸⁸ Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam*; Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict"; and Daniel Ellsberg, *The Papers on the War* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1972) pp. 42-135. As a critique of Schlesinger, Ellsberg argues that the Vietnam War was not driven by ill-founded optimism, but rather was predicted by defense policy planners. Recognizing the pitfalls of meeting war demands halfway, they recommended to the Kennedy and Johnson administrations that the U.S. should employ full force or pull out. See also Efraim Inbar ed., *Democracies and Small Wars* (Portland: Frank Cass, Ltd., 2003), pp. VIII-IX.; and Avi Kober "Western Democracies in Low Intensity Conflict: Some Postmodern Aspects", in Inbar ed., *Democracies and Small Wars*.

wars linger and costs escalate, the public continues to resist sharp increases in force deployments—even though such action could conceivably end the war on the powerful side’s terms—and gradually withholds support for the war; while at the same time rancorous, divisive policy debates over resolving the war emerge within the government and become a salient aspect of domestic politics. In this environment, democratic coalitions frequently tend to play it safe by incrementally escalating or reducing their home state’s level of war commitment so as to not alienate any potential base of domestic political support (either public or elite).⁸⁹ Incrementalism can mean all things to different groups in society. For instance, minor shifts upward or even downward in the level of investment to war appease hawks because the state remains committed to using military force as the primary vehicle to obtaining its interests; and incremental shifts placate doves, thereby somewhat muting their criticism (particularly in the early war phases), because war operations are still conducted in restrained manner.⁹⁰ This is a classic shortsighted method of executing wars, for here democratic elites manipulate their home state’s level of commitment to war as a means to garnering the political support of both

⁸⁹ For a classic discussion of incrementalism, see Charles Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy*. See also Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*; and Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage*.

⁹⁰ Both Merom and I contend that the domestic structure of democracies can fundamentally shape the conditions on the battlefield. Merom argues that domestic political constraints help explain why democracies lose small wars. I argue that these same domestic political constraints affect the escalation or de-escalation of their commitment to war. What emerges in costly, protracted small wars, which Merom overlooks, is that a fault line can develop between hawks and doves, and democratic elites have to put forward foreign policies that capture the support of hawks and doves. Withdrawal risks losing the support of hawks; dramatically escalating the level of force and violence risks losing the support of doves. Incrementalism attempts to partially satisfy members of both camps.

elites and the public in the near term—at the next election, with respect to the public; and for daily policy programs, with respect to elites.

An important point of distinction between incrementalism and the dependent variable of my dissertation must be made. The dependent variable refers to the presence or absence of costly, protracted small wars. Incrementalism, which is a proxy for short-term time horizons, is a separate and distinct concept from the dependent variable. Readers might be tempted to view both as inherently similar, primarily because of the vast and influential literature on the Vietnam War, which was all about a conflict that churned forward incrementally. Certainly all wars—small and major, short and long—are to an extent marked by an escalation of forces in the beginning phase and a tapering of hostilities and commitment toward the end. The variable at hand, however, sees a much broader arc of incrementalism, one that is apparent in the beginning, middle, and end stages of military conflict. In fact, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that all costly, protracted small wars proceed in an incremental fashion. It is possible to envision a powerful state engaged in a protracted small war, yet it really does not escalate or de-escalate its commitment over time. Instead, what we see is stasis during the bulk of the war. As just one example, the current war in Iraq fits this description. For most of the duration of the war, the U.S. has kept a steady flow of 130,000 to 150,000 troops in Iraq, depending on events in the country (Iraqi elections, violence). Even the recent so-called “surge” of 25,000 additional troops has essentially boosted the number of U.S. forces in Iraq to slightly over the upper number of the aforementioned interval. So far the U.S. has resisted the magnitude of incremental changes that has been characteristic of prior

democratic small wars. Similarly, the number of Soviet forces in the Afghan War remained fairly static throughout the life of the conflict. What did fluctuate was the number of large Soviet offensives, though the variation should be characterized as chaotic and random rather than incremental and linear.

2.2.2.1.3 LEADERS TRAPPED BY THEIR RHETORIC

Democratic political coalitions may also have incentives to continue costly small wars as a result of oversold foreign policies. Democratic elites must justify small wars—usually through war propaganda—to mobilize fellow elite and public support.⁹¹ Domestic political opponents could block the ruling coalition’s military plans and other legislation; and citizens possess the right to turn elites out office if they are not convinced that wars are waged for a worthy cause. Moreover, without a convincing rationale for using force, the political coalition could engender low morale among its troops fighting in battle, which could then impair the state’s ability to impose its coercive power on others in battle.⁹² War propaganda can also be used to disguise concentrated, narrow interests as benefitting society more generally. Jack Snyder speculates that imperial interests can be exposed by a host of democratic channels (free press, independent experts/universities/think tanks, government inquiries), which can prevent the state from repeatedly sliding into costly behavior.⁹³ But it is just as likely that the role of special interests is revealed only after the fact—after the war’s chain of events have been

⁹¹ John M. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 44-45.

⁹² Ibid, p. 45.

⁹³ Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 39-40.

triggered. After all, democratic elites have access to sensitive national security information, and are able to conceal, distort, and selectively leak this during the mobilization and early war stages, which can then undermine the extent to which countervailing institutions will challenge and restrain democratic foreign policymaking.⁹⁴

Once wars begin, propaganda is often employed to defuse and rebut criticism launched by political opponents, the public, and media, among many others in society. The political coalition now must explain that small wars are worth the large resulting expense—increased taxation, economic disruptions, political polarization, and loss of lives. There are two primary concerns at this juncture. First, the more unpopular the war, the more unpopular the regime, and so it is more likely it will be jettisoned from office at next round of elections. Second, the appearance of war weariness and lack of social cohesion can embolden adversaries, who realize that they cannot win outright militarily but can achieve victory by degrading the political resolve of the imperial power.⁹⁵ So propaganda serves to maintain public and elite support for the war, and undercut the potential damaging signals that both could send to opponents.

⁹⁴ Chaim Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas,” pp. 43-46; Jon Western, *Selling Intervention & War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 16-18, 18-19. And relatedly, as Western suggests, the ability of countervailing institutions to perform sober assessments of war policy might be impaired for various reasons beyond the machinations of democratic elites. For instance, unsafe conditions in third world war zones can prevent non-partisan observers from monitoring events. Similarly, language barriers, remote battles, and secretive missions can all hamper information procurement by third parties. The end result is that the narrative spun by democratic governments can stand uncontested until the obstacles to information gathering are reduced over time.

⁹⁵ Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars,” pp. 175-200.

The political coalition can gain support for small wars by appealing to the protection and/or advancement of liberalism worldwide—strategic goals which are *prima facie* consistent with the values of a liberal state. Democratic elites have historically argued that they have a moral responsibility to safeguard liberal beliefs and practices. British and French elites repeatedly cited the mission of civilizing the periphery, uplifting the backward and primitive by supporting and encouraging new political and economic systems (liberalization and democratization) and social values (human rights), to justify intervention. Elites in both states used media outlets to propagate the stereotype of Africans and Asians as barbarians incapable of governing themselves—that is, these areas needed European culture and morality brought to (or imposed upon) them.⁹⁶ Even the Vietnam and Korean Wars were considered vital to U.S. national security for liberal reasons. By obstructing the Westward encroachment of communism and preventing falling dominoes, American elites sought to protect existing liberal safe havens. In fact, if the U.S. and its Western allies did not demonstrate the commitment to containing Soviet maneuvers in far-flung areas, so goes the cold war logic, then the Soviets, perceiving low Western resolve, might eventually risk moving into areas well within the liberal camp.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Niall Ferguson, *Empire*, chapter 5; Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*.

⁹⁷ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, chapter 3; Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); George Kennan, *American Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 107-128; Michael Desch, “Why Realists Disagree About the Third World”, in Benjamin Frankel ed. *Realism: Restatements and Renewal* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1996); and Desch, “The Keys that Lock Up the World : Identifying American Interests in the Periphery, *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Summer 1989).

But democratic elites frequently use liberal rhetoric as a cover for other factors that motivate their decisions to go to war.⁹⁸ As noted by Hans Morgenthau, democratic elites can use warfare to impose their values, beliefs, and codes of conduct on societies, when their home state has the power to assert itself abroad. Liberalism, however, is not necessarily transmitted to other societies in this process: Democratic elites usually foist liberal values on others only when it does not work against higher-order national security concerns, such as the protection of homeland territory, acquisition of new or additional material capabilities, defense of allies and spheres of influence, and so on.⁹⁹ Societies in the periphery are often treated as subordinates, supplying powerful democracies with raw materials, markets for goods and services, and military bases. As examples, since the 19th century, France, Great Britain, and the U.S. have repeatedly carved out formal and informal areas of influence in Asia and the Middle East and Africa under the guise of

⁹⁸ This is entirely consistent with Chaim Kaufmann's recent analysis of contemporary U.S. foreign policy with respect to Iraq. Like this dissertation, Kaufmann challenges Jack Snyder's assertion that mature democracies avoid inflating and distorting threats and tend not to create "myths of empire" to justify wars. He argues that, in the months leading up to the U.S. invasion, the Bush administration exaggerated the Iraqi threat by portraying Saddam Hussein as undeterrable, and as someone who sought nuclear weapons, possessed biological and chemical weapons, and assisted al-Qaeda personnel with the September 11, 2001 attacks. This describes the methods that the Bush administration used to galvanize support for war. But after the invasion, as events exposed a gap between threat rationales and reality, Bush and his cohorts shifted war myths. Consistent with this dissertation, thereafter, and until today, the invasion was justified on the grounds that regime change could provide a powerful example that democracy and liberalism can survive in the Middle East. In effect, just as the British and French had claimed during their colonial periods, the U.S. has attempted to civilize an area of the world that could not do so on its own. See Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas," pp. 5-48.

⁹⁹ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 232-249.

liberalism, though these missions have been frequently carried out for ulterior motives, usually related to great power competition, among other things.¹⁰⁰

Liberal propaganda can facilitate perpetual war because it might be politically costly for the political coalition to back down from its publicly acknowledged commitment in the periphery. In short, democratic elites can become trapped by their war propaganda as military campaigns are portrayed as contests between forces of good and evil or light and dark.¹⁰¹ On the one hand, democratic leaders frequently depict their states as morally virtuous and civically enlightened when purportedly spreading, safeguarding, and defending liberal ideals. Should democratic leaders back down during military conflicts, they risk signaling to domestic and international audiences that their state is unwilling to pay high costs to protect liberal values, which could have severe

³⁰ Although it is beyond the scope of this research project, since I am focusing on the persistence of small wars, it is possible that liberalism may explain why democracies intervene in small wars. Put another way, liberalism as a rhetorical tool could be important in determining why and how democracies get into these costly, small wars. Viewed from this angle, liberalism might at times facilitate expansionist behavior. In this scenario, democratic elites recognize that they have a pre-packaged set of ideas that the public will support, even if it means using force when the state is not directly threatened. So when these elites have grand foreign policy objectives, such as building empires and engaging in great power competition, they can simply use liberalism as a shield for their designs. They identify ostensibly low-cost missions, and then tell the public and fellow elites that force is required to spread or defend the liberal branch, when other motives are indeed at work. Perhaps, then, small wars are on occasion, at least in part, wars of elite ambition. When I refer to “elite ambition,” I do not have job security or preservation in mind. Rather, this term refers to elites who have bold plans for their state in the international system, (e.g., building empires, moving up the great power ladder, maintaining great power status, and so on). This is entirely consistent with the logic of derailment from above. Nincic writes: “one could argue that professional statesmen are not only apt to be swayed by popular emotions but are also capable of fanning them when this suits their purpose.” See Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy*, p. 13.

¹⁰¹ This is consistent with the Snyder’s argument that it is difficult for political coalitions to retrench from war propaganda, which he calls myths of empire. The twist here is that these myths are indeed sometimes spun by political coalitions in democracies, even if logrolling is minimized in these regimes. See Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*. Gil Merom also observes the tendency of democracies to frame small wars as contests between forces of good and evil. See Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam*.

repercussions. Domestic audiences may become angry because they believe their state no longer strongly stands for its cherished traditional values. And if democratic elites opt to cut their losses, their rhetoric appears disingenuous, leaving many to believe that the casualties of war died for a worthless cause. In addition, international state and non-state actors could simply view their commitment to liberalism as rhetoric, thus rendering future attempts to cloak foreign military interventions in liberal clothes as virtually non-credible. Moreover, will a negotiated resolution, perhaps seen as a sign of weakness, embolden international actors to mount challenges in the future?

On the other hand, war propaganda generally asserts that international opponents—in the context of small wars, generally those characterized as resisting liberalism—must be defeated through force. Such individuals and groups pose a threat to the liberal democratic way of life worldwide. Not surprisingly, then, the language describing these opponents is laced with negative overtones, using terms such as evil, malicious, untrustworthy, and so on, to galvanize elite and public support for bellicose policies.¹⁰² The problem is that it can be difficult for the political coalition to cease warfare and negotiate with opponents—and therefore abandon their commitment to liberalism—after they have been openly demonized.¹⁰³ War propaganda can conceivably

¹⁰² Together, the appeal to liberal values and to adversaries who pose a threat to these values can at times overcome a major dilemma pointed out by Jon Western: the resistance to distant wars among liberal publics. Western suggests that arguments for war against foes in far away lands are difficult to sell. Perhaps this is true. But when pro-war arguments do resonate among domestic audiences, we often see some variation of liberal rhetoric employed by democratic elites. See Western, *Selling Intervention & War*, pp. 20-22.

¹⁰³ Nincic writes: “According to Theodore Lowi the difficulty of achieving consensus in the face of such diversity impels leadership to overstate challenges and oversell solutions....” See Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy*, p. 14.

reduce the policy flexibility of democratic elites to adapt to failing war conditions.

Indeed, concessions and bargaining may be ruled out as (or at least not seen as viable) policy options. How can the state deal with the devil? How can this possibly be sold as a positive outcome to its constituents? It is logical to expect democratic political coalitions to believe that their only option by default is to continue in costly warfare.

A few words of clarification are required: Note that this argument does not imply that democratic leaders in general speak in Manichean terms more often than nondemocracies do. I do suspect that they are more prone to do so in small wars (relative to nondemocratic leaders) because of the need to sell conflicts with less than vital national interests on the line. But more importantly, and this is the bottom line, I argue that democratic leaders are much more likely to get *trapped* by their political and military propaganda than their nondemocratic counterparts. It is this process—the act of getting trapped—that can crucially drag democracies deeper into small wars, potentially acting as quicksand underneath the feet of key policymakers.

2.2.2.2 Democratic Incentives to Cut Losses

The discussion so far begs the following question: When are political coalitions in democracies more likely to cut their losses? This is a relevant question because not all small wars turn into costly, protracted struggles. Powerful states might employ enough force to achieve an easy, quick, and cheap victory. The Falklands Islands War and the first Persian Gulf War in 1991 are examples. But this is not very puzzling, for this is what one would expect in confrontations between states with such large gaps in capabilities. But powerful states can also withdraw from wars before they turn exponentially costly.

Following on the above logic, several conditions appear sufficient to push political coalitions away from supporting perpetual war.

First, democracies could have a set of elites who act in ways that differ from the expectation that backing down or capitulating is to be avoided because of the negative personal political consequences that might result. Democratic elites might be willing to be punished for poor war performance, and so they withdraw from small wars, without securing their stated war objectives, rather than sacrifice more lives and other resources. Perhaps job security is not their first priority. Moreover, democratic elites might doubt that the public will eject them from office. After all, costly small wars grow gradually unpopular over time. Elites might simply believe that they are fulfilling the will of the people by removing their state's forces from battle. And as incumbents, democratic elites possess natural advantages of office, such as access to resources, continual media attention, and an established political record, *inter alia*, which might cushion their perception of the negative impact of costly wars on the next election. They could also perceive the opposition as disorganized and weak or view the public as unwilling to make a change in leadership—all of which will relax further the overriding incentive to stand firm in war as a means to win the next election; they believe they have the next election already won. Whatever the reason, the result is that democratic elites are able to think strategically, make rational decisions, and most importantly not let themselves be constrained by the demands of electoral politics.

Second, democratic elites might move from short-term to long-term oriented actors. Here, they are able to insulate themselves from electoral politics, the demands of

political factions, and the benefits of tight ties to interest groups. In these situations, democratic elites can stand above the messy wrangling and competition of domestic politics and dispassionately, objectively evaluate the cost-benefit calculations of continued warfare.

Third, when war propaganda does not depict conflicts in such stark, dichotomous, Manichean terms, elites have more flexibility to withdraw their forces gracefully. Small wars are often framed as contests pitting good versus evil for the sake of domestic consensus building. In the American cold war cases, when democratic elites told their constituents that the failure to contain advances by evil (Soviet inspired) communist elements meant a mortal threat to the self-preservation of liberal ideas and institutions worldwide, it was then difficult to halt engagement in proxy wars without achieving their stated objectives. However, when war propaganda asserts the obvious point that war is necessary, but discards the harsh rhetoric demonizing opponents, it naturally folds in more policy options for elites. Elites are no longer locked into continual warfare, for negotiating with an opponent is more acceptable when it is not viewed as an irrevocably evil actor bent on eliminating all vestiges of liberalism from the international system. In addition, in this case, there is probably less concern (among elites and the public) that opponents will cheat or renege on settlement terms, using a peace pact merely as a period of recovery for the next major struggle, which would render meaningless all of the war casualties and the large war expense. Here, it is reasonable to expect elites to proclaim that the application of force is one of many tools available to coerce adversaries into changing their behavior, thus portraying war as a contingent and unfolding set of

processes. As such, the efficacy of using force is subject to evaluation vis-a-vis other available tools, and revision of war policy is possible. This leaves the door open for a war exit, even if the political coalition has not secured all of its objectives.

Fourth, if small wars are often fought under the guise of liberalism, with democratic elites using liberal rhetoric to secure their desired ends, then which elite motives will prevent timely war termination? Democratic political coalitions might be able to refrain from perpetual war when elites do not see the weak as an opportunity to carve out a new international order. It is easier for actors to reorient their strategy, cutting losses, when the weak is viewed as an outlet for enhancing capabilities and influence rather than spheres of outright control and domination. Through informal political ties, powerful states can gain such integral benefits as favorable trade deals, access to military bases and other strategic resources, as well as regional alliances—and none of these necessarily require victory in war to achieve. On the other hand, when the weak is viewed through the lens of regime change, thwarting popular political movements, and formal occupation, then democracies must fight to win on the battlefield. In this case, because the opponents will tenaciously oppose all of these machinations, powerful democracies must follow the path of perpetual war to impose their will.

2.2.3 Democratic Institutional Constraints

This dissertation views democratic institutional constraints—particularly veto players and the pace of institutional change—as intervening variables between political coalition incentives and war policy. In order to determine how elite incentives connect to war policy, we have to consider the presence of domestic level forces beyond the ruling

coalition that can impact the pace and eventual product of foreign policymaking. The simple point is that political coalitions do not make foreign policy in a domestic vacuum unaffected by other intra-state variables. Foreign policy—both democratic and nondemocratic—is proposed, deliberated, and enacted in the context of domestic political institutions. Viewed in this light, it is important to ask whether domestic political institutions prod foreign policy elites away from their dominant policy preferences. If they restrict the behavior of foreign policy elites, then it is possible that institutions can facilitate movement away from status quo war policy. However, it is likely that democracies lack strong institutional mechanisms that can push political coalitions away from their dominant policy preference—to continue warfare. And in fact, the theoretical logic of democratic institutions suggests that they can at times contribute to dangerous foreign policies, because multiple veto players and the slow pace of policy change essentially entrench status quo policies, making it very difficult to change course in a timely, expedient manner.

2.2.3.1 Democratic Institutions Prevent Deviations from Status Quo Policies

2.2.3.1.1 MULTIPLE VETO PLAYERS

Multiple veto players induce policy stability, because each can block movement from status quo policies. As the number of veto players increases, it is harder to gain consensus on when, how, and why the status quo should be altered, if not overturned. So the larger the number of veto players, the more difficult is to make policy changes. According to George Tsebelis, what distinguishes democracies from nondemocracies is the observation that in the former, veto players are selected through open, public

contestation among political candidates. A democratic regime, he argues, does not necessarily contain more veto players than in a nondemocratic one.¹⁰⁴ Look at the current war in Iraq as an example. For almost the first four years of the war, the U.S. Congress and president was led by the same Republican Party. In Tsebelis' logic, from 2003-2006, the U.S. possessed only one veto player. But public voting does indeed imply that democracies *on average* have more veto players than nondemocracies do. Democratic elites are by definition a diverse group. More specifically, democratic elites, who espouse diverse beliefs about domestic and international politics, are culled from various parts of the state, under different conditions—all of which makes it more conducive to have elites within veto institutions who have discordant policy views, and to observe variation in the majority views of various veto institutions throughout the state.¹⁰⁵ As a consequence, democratic regimes are less likely than nondemocracies *on average* to have veto players that are “absorbed” by other veto players.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, democratic regimes are often characterized by decentralized power.

In short, democracies are systems in which many actors are able to hold and wield

¹⁰⁴ George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), chapter 3.

¹⁰⁵ See Ajin Choi, “The Power of Democratic Cooperation,” *International Security*, Vol. 28., No.1 (Summer 2003), p. 144. Importantly, these elites are pushed and pulled in different directions by their domestic audiences that might have parochial, concentrated interests. Moreover, democratic elites can have manipulable constituencies, which provides them opportunities to push the agendas of special interests (either those to which they have direct ties or those that simply lobby) in the guise of the national interest. And democratic elites certainly can support varying special interests, and the type of policies special interests will advocate will also vary across the board. There is no domestic instrument within democracies to align the views of foreign policy elites.

¹⁰⁶ See Tsebelis, *Veto Players*, chapter 2. Absorption refers to a process in which there is relatively little or no ideological distance in the policy preferences of major domestic actors, so that each essentially serves to rubber stamp the policy proposals of others.

political power. We usually think of presidents, prime ministers, and key heads of ministries as the main policy brokers. But decentralized power allows other actors—even those who might sit outside of the ruling political coalition—to crucially shape, distort, and block domestic and foreign policies. As an example, in France, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the extremely fractured party system, which included an important role for the opposition parties, effectively bottlenecked the policy process and helped to extend Paris' involvement in the Indochina War. In effect, the Socialists and Communists managed to wield veto power over French domestic and foreign policy. In this vein, opposition political parties, but also charismatic opposition leaders, viceroys and colonial bureaucrats and administrators, prestigious non-political individuals, among others, can all act as veto players. Their access to power, at least for some of the above, might be informal and indirect, and perhaps this is a reason why we typically do not think of them as possessing and casting political power, yet in a decentralized power system their influence can be decisive at times. Take the French and British cases in chapters four and six. Both cases had colonial bureaucrats who subverted policy from the home office and made conflict more difficult to contain and subdue. These officials routinely disobeyed and rejected policy advice and suggestions from the home office and asserted their own political autonomy. Interestingly, a major difference in the two cases is that Britain stepped in and took control over events on the ground—even going so far as to reassign the main bureaucratic troublemaker in Iraq, Arnold Wilson—in a much more time-efficient fashion.

Applied to the topic of small wars, the consequences of multiple veto players can be catastrophic. The presence of multiple veto players hampers the ability of the state to withdraw from small wars when conflicts become stalemated. At bottom, this means that there is not a unified or dominant push to disengage from such conflicts. And so what happens is that the status quo policy of war continuation persists indefinitely, turning these wars into even more costly and bloody military engagements.

2.2.3.1.2 SLOW PACE OF POLICY CHANGE

And to the extent that policy change is possible, democratic institutions can ensure that it occurs very slowly. Above I argued that one method of consensus building—oversold small wars—can serve as a incentive for political coalitions to continue small wars. But we can also think about the notion of consensus building in the context of institutional constraints on the actions and responses of political coalitions. The manifold functions of domestic political institutions can slow down and inhibit or hasten and facilitate the consensus building required to pass or overturn policies. Let us assume that all veto players in some hypothetical democracy are controlled by the same political party so that we find, according to Tsebelis' absorption properties, really only one veto over policy. Even in this case, the policy process will move more slowly than in nondemocratic regimes. Centralized power in nondemocracies means that veto players, working in concert with state leadership, at times act as a rubber stamp on policy, especially when there is policy consensus. Domestic institutions in centralized political systems frequently operate to serve quickly and efficiently the preferences of leaders and their staff (which may or may not correspond with the national interest) rather than

provide extensive oversight and supervision, which is a naturally time consuming process, over policy elites.

In stable, mature democracies, by contrast, domestic political institutions are generally not easily manipulable tools of governments. Decentralized power requires democratic elites to deal regularly with a host of domestic actors, often with the express purpose of generating policy consensus in the face of opposition from diverse individuals within veto institutions. And explicit separation of powers, with institutions working at cross-purposes in providing political oversight, guarantee that democratic leaders must consistently go through designated channels and follow specific procedures when enacting or overturning policies.¹⁰⁷ Building policy support is a gradual, often protracted, process that requires bargaining between democratic elites to find mutually acceptable outcomes. During small wars, the longer these processes continue without fostering widespread support for policy change, the longer that the status quo of persistent warfare is maintained.

Relatedly, the pace of policy change is also influenced by the number of important foreign policy actors. Compared to democracies, nondemocratic ruling elites generally have to meet and consult with far fewer actors: the public and special interests external to the regime—two major democratic actors—are minimally important to nondemocratic

¹⁰⁷ Democratic peace scholars claim democratic institutions (such as decentralized power, checks and balances, and voting), which induce caution and restraint, tend to prevent democracies from rashly and haphazardly waging wars because they allow enough time for leaders to negotiate outstanding grievances. For an overview see Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*; Miriam Fendius Elman ed., *Paths to Peace*, chapter 1; James Lee Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict*, chapter 1. There is also a too numerous to mention literature in American and comparative politics on the role of democratic institutions in inducing sluggishness on the policymaking process.

foreign policy decision-making. Indeed, the discrepancy in the number of important actors widens when we compare the baseline nondemocracy to a multi-party democracy, a diffuse power state with multiple important decision-making foci. The simple point here is that the more voices that have at least limited policy input—while maybe not all possess a direct veto over policy—the longer it takes to make decisions and overturn existing policies. As examples, gathering and processing polling data, deliberating with staff, consulting with special interest groups, meeting with specialized government agencies and congressional/parliamentary committees, bargaining with democratic foreign policy elites, and mobilizing public support, among other things, are protracted processes.

2.2.3.2 When Can Democratic Institutions Facilitate Policy Change?

I take the position that democratic institutions are likely to preserve or maintain status quo policies. In the context of the research question of this dissertation, this then means that democratic institutions can entrench failed or flawed policies in small wars. That said, I must also address the conditions under which democratic institutions are more likely to act as roadblocks to further war. Rockman and Weaver argue that foreign policy immobilism can be somewhat ameliorated when policy debates are characterized by choices between two similar policy options rather than multiple, diverse proposals.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, Tsebelis points out that it is easier to move from status quo policies when democracies can limit the number of extant veto players—often when the chief executive

¹⁰⁸ R. Kent Weaver and Bert A. Rockman eds., *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993), chapter 1.

and parliament are controlled by the same political party.¹⁰⁹ Both arguments highlight situations when democratic elites likely view and develop responses to international relations problems and phenomenon. So when there is relatively broad-based agreement among members in various veto institutions that war is costly and should be terminated, it then follows that there will likely be minimal domestic resistance to changes in wartime policy. In this domestic climate, democracies will be able to withdraw from costly small wars in a more timely, efficient fashion. Nevertheless, even under these conditions, we should keep in mind that democratic elites at times have strong incentives to perpetuate small wars. Moving from their dominant preference is probably time consuming, and frequently only occurs after a significant amount of evidence disconfirms the thought that continued war will yield benefits.

Moreover, as indicated above, even if democracies can limit the number of veto players, the pace of democratic policy change is still quite slow. The pace of moving from the status quo will hasten if democratic governments either usurp power from other important domestic political players or simply block these players various from accessing and participating in the foreign policy process—thereby centralizing democratic politics and by extension policymaking. In other words, policy change can occur more quickly if democracies look and act more like nondemocracies. Centralized power serves to streamline the policy process so that democratic leaders interact with and are responsible to a relatively small number of actors. For instance, leaders can opt to restrict their engagement with a host of domestic actors, such as policy experts, bureaucrats, special

¹⁰⁹ Tsebelis, *Veto Players*, chapter 3.

interest groups, and at times they can keep the bulk of policy debates within their inner circle of advisers and associates. Relatedly, imperial leaders can limit the length of policy debates. And lastly, centralized power decreases the authority of domestic institutions (legislative and judicial branches, for example) over state leaders, and can turn such entities into tools that leaders use to insulate themselves from political opponents. The net result is to enhance the speed with which leaders can ram policies through the state.

2.3 Nondemocracies and Small Wars

2.3.1 Nondemocratic Political Coalitions

The structure of nondemocratic politics illuminates why political coalitions in these regimes might look different than democratic ones. A political coalition that supports small wars in nondemocracies can feature an array of actors—including, nondemocratic leaders, their staff or associates, heads of key ministries, and special interests. Power is centralized in the hands of nondemocratic elites, and so politics is usually a top-down process, not a synergistic, cross-cutting maze of institutions that enables both the state and society to participate politically and to respond to each other.¹¹⁰ Note that nondemocracies limit the extent of special influence on policy to those that have direct connections to the ruling regime. Unlike democracies, nondemocratic states usually do not allow special interests outside of the regime to compete for resources.¹¹¹ In fact, the state is frequently in a position to provide inducements or issue coercive threats

¹¹⁰ Among others, see Juan Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); and Paul Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes: Theory, Government, & Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹¹¹ Many thanks to Richard Herrmann for pointing out this argument.

to keep this type of special interest in line. Moreover, nondemocratic regimes provide fewer institutional access points than democracies do, and nondemocratic ruling elites can at times block or narrow contact with the government and the policy process, which gives special interests fewer opportunities to achieve their policy ends. And because nondemocratic regimes by definition do not hold public elections, special interests outside of the regime have far less leverage over elites than they do in democratic states. The nondemocratic case studies in chapters five and six nicely illustrate this set of arguments. There, we find that the dominant political coalition consisted entirely of officials and groups that had a direct tie to the Soviet and Chinese state. Moscow and Beijing effectively blocked outsiders—in fact at times even dissenters within the state—from accessing and influencing the policy process.

Special interests can influence politics in nondemocracies by forming direct ties to the governing apparatus. For example, sometimes nondemocratic elites formulate a broad-based political coalition that includes special interests to appear legitimate or to buttress their political support. Within the government they can push through policies via deal making, policy trade-offs, and logrolling, inter alia. It is also possible that nondemocratic leaders have direct connections to special interests, and allow such sectors to play an integral role in policymaking in return for political support. In the case of imperial Japan, it was possible for aggressive, militant special interests within the regime to justify intervention in the periphery, use their control over bureaucratic ministries to block the dissemination of information and stifle competing analysis, and push the state

into warfare.¹¹² But leaving war initiation aside, intra-regime special interests might be important because the primary threat to leadership and government stability comes from disgruntled nondemocratic elites—who might have special interest connections—seeking to aggrandize power and wealth. In order to reduce the likelihood of an elite-led revolt, leaders might have to placate elite demands on a host of policy domains. And if these elites have direct or indirect ties to sectors or groups with foreign policy interests and concerns, then the state might be influenced on this domain by special interest demands.

2.3.2 *Nondemocratic Political Coalition Incentives*

In contrast to democratic regimes, the domestic structure of nondemocratic regimes creates fertile conditions for elites to cut their losses when small wars turn costly. In other words, nondemocratic political coalitions have incentives to change the status quo policy of continual warfare to war termination (and political settlement of existing grievances). In fact, nondemocracies can overcome both derailment from above and below, problems that can hamper democratic foreign policymaking. The threat of extreme punishment, in combination with the absence of free, open, and periodic political competition for leadership, means that nondemocratic elites have the flexibility to change war plans and a strong motive to do so.

¹¹² Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp.31-49, 112-152.

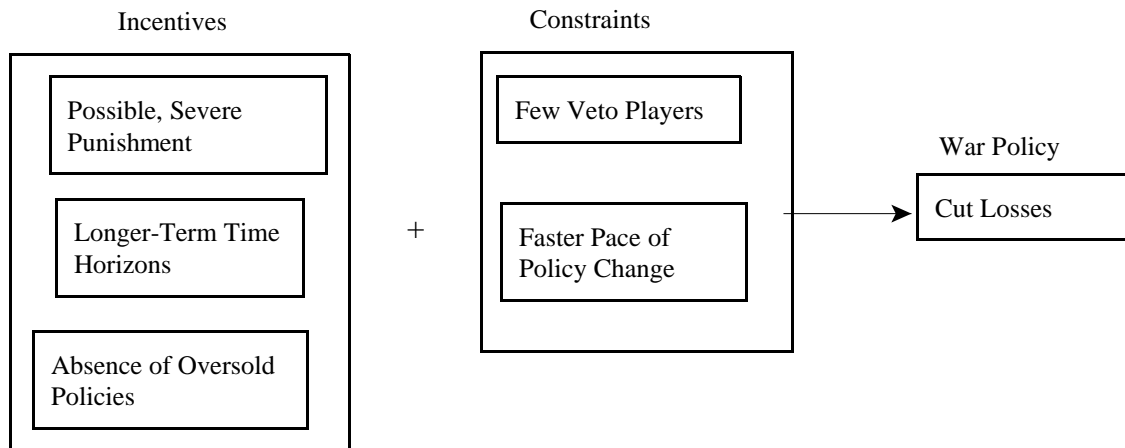


Figure 2.2: Two-Step Model of Nondemocratic Behavior in Small Wars

2.3.2.1 Nondemocratic Incentives to Withdraw from Costly Small Wars

2.3.2.1.1 SEVERE, POSSIBLE PUNISHMENT

The probability and severity of punishment might push nondemocratic elites away from protracted, costly wars. The lack of public institutional checks on nondemocratic elites means that it is easier for them to wage wars. They suffer few political or audience costs, at least in the early war phases, so backing down or losing wars usually will not result in their removal from office.¹¹³ Simply engaging in a short-tem inter-state conflict typically does not produce enough domestic anger and disenchantment—either from the public or elites—to jeopardize the tenure of the ruling political coalition. However, audience costs can vary over time, and this is best captured when we move our focus

¹¹³ H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment*, chapter 2. And this argument is also consistent with Fearon's work on audience costs and the democratic peace literature's implicit claims about nondemocratic politics. See James Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes"; Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival*, chapter 6; Miriam Fendius Elman ed., *Paths to Peace*, chapter 1; and James Lee Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict*, chapter 1.

from war initiation to the persistence of war. And in fact, the lack of public voting restrains nondemocratic behavior over the *long-term* during warfare. The longer that costly small wars persist, the higher the probability that elites will be removed from office.¹¹⁴ Nondemocratic citizens formally lack the ability to turn elites out of office for poor performance at regular intervals. And the political and military muscle and organization of nondemocratic regimes generally deters collective action against the state. But at least in theory, prolonged, costly wars and their attendant domestic consequences can serve as a rallying point around which grassroots anti-war and anti-government movements are stimulated into political action. Such wars also risk degrading elite support for the regime and emboldening dissenting elites to compete for domestic political power. As an example, Portugal suffered from massive governmental instability and turmoil in the 1960s and 1970s in part because of the simultaneous small wars waged by Lisbon in Africa. Meantime, many nondemocratic states and societies exist in a virtual state of war, with the use of brutal, repressive tactics against citizens lurking in the background. The violent and repressive actions of such nefarious nondemocratic leaders as Stalin, Pol Pot, Hussein, Amin, al-Bashir, among others, against individuals and domestic groups are well known. Such tactics are usually used to punish political dissenters and opponents and to serve as a deterrent mechanism against future anti-government activities. Powerful nondemocratic states cannot afford to waste resources in interminable small wars because this could weaken their ability to rule effectively and adequately suppress potential revolts and anti-government (and war) movements among

¹¹⁴ H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment*, pp. 40-41.

elites and the public at large, thereby creating fertile conditions for political opponents to seize power. Thus, costly, protracted small wars increase the probability of successful nondemocratic punishment.

The type of nondemocratic punishment could be severe and harsh. Aside from the instances in which transitions in power are managed in private by elites (such as 19th century Spain, contemporary China, and so on), a major mode of engineering nondemocratic change is through internal revolt, which carries the threat of punishment, exile, and death to existing nondemocratic elites. Obviously, a number of cases throughout non-first world countries fit this description today. To take one current newsworthy illustration, Pervez Musharraf took power in Pakistan via a military coup in October 1999, which led to the ousting of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who then went into exile abroad. But since then, in the absence of elections in a country with pockets of politico-religious extremists, Musharraf himself has been the target of several assassination attempts.¹¹⁵ In general, severe punishment could occur for several reasons. The opposition-turned-ruling elite might seek revenge for previous repression. Severe punishment might be viewed as a vehicle to deter future repressive activities and exclusionary control by nondemocratic elites. And finally, it might be employed to

¹¹⁵ And we can take this example further by applying it to the general logic of this hypothesis. A standard story about Pakistan nowadays is that it has been a reluctant partner with the U.S. in the so-called war on terror against Islamic terrorists. Arguably, Musharraf has refrained from engaging in a costly, protracted asymmetrical conflict against the Taliban and al-Qaeda militants in sections of Pakistan because he fears that such action would destabilize an already weak and shaky regime and further place himself in grave danger. So instead, Musharraf has opted to execute limited military strikes against various targets, and to seek peace deals with North Waziristan—a place that is suspected to be home to Islamic militants. See Amin Tarzi, “South Asia: Will North Waziristan Peace Deal Spawn Limitations, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 23, 2006. Found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/9aae7a16-dee2-41b9-90eb-b730cc100281.html>.

prevent the old guard from re-constituting itself and coordinating behavior by rallying around former leaders and their associates.¹¹⁶ Nondemocratic elites have an incentive to avoid deeply unpopular situations, like costly, protracted small wars, which over time could inflame anti-government sentiment and action, for they potentially place the life of themselves, as well as their friends, associates, and family, in jeopardy. So when wars turn disastrous, it is reasonable to expect ruling coalitions in nondemocracies to lower their demands and look to settle conflicts at the negotiating table, foregoing continual battle.

2.3.2.1.2 LONGER TIME HORIZON

If we compare the structure of domestic politics in nondemocracies to democracies, it logically follows that nondemocratic elites can more easily adopt a longer-term time horizon. In nondemocracies elites do not have to worry about the next election, and so they can move beyond the myopia endemic to democratic politics.¹¹⁷ Perhaps nondemocratic elites are at times in a better position than democratic elites to consider the long-term consequences of domestic and foreign policy. This does not imply that they implement better foreign and domestic policies in general; instead, it simply means that it is possible that they can more reasonably assess the costs and benefits associated with small wars because they are insulated from popular pressures. In effect, nondemocratic elites are less likely to view small wars continually through the prism of short-term partisan demands and debates. Unlike democratic regimes, here it is not as

¹¹⁶ H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment*, pp. 40-41.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, chapter 2.

necessary to balance the preferences of elite and domestic audiences with the demands of international political problems, such as wars. In fact, elites can withdraw from small wars without achieving all of their objectives, perhaps at times even admit mistakes in war, because there is not the strong fear that poor performance in war—at least in the near term, before costly exponentially escalate—will automatically cost elites their jobs. For instance, as will be revealed in chapter five, this is exactly how Deng Xiaoping behaved during China’s war with Vietnam. Moreover, because electoral politics are either absent or just a sham, public opinion does not exceptionally constrain elites from implementing harsh and brutal war tactics against opponents.¹¹⁸ Certainly, Moscow was insulated enough that it was not concerned about nor did it really listen to any public complaints about human rights violations committed by the Soviets in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. In this sense, then, the Soviet Union had a freer hand to dictate events in these two cases than, say, the French and U.S. did in Vietnam. The end result is that nondemocratic elites can deploy enough military force to win small wars or simply withdraw from war in a timely manner by forgoing the continual resource investment.

2.3.2.1.3 THE ABSENCE OF TRAPPED LEADERS

Compared to democracies, nondemocratic political coalitions are probably less likely to oversell small wars. Democratic regimes consist of a diverse body of elected officials, many of whom have weak political party ties, and diffuse power that is decentralized away from leaders and toward countervailing domestic institutions.

Democratic elites at times oversell small wars, framing them as contests between good

¹¹⁸ Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars,” p. 189.

and evil (or light and dark) to galvanize public support and foster consensus building among fellow elites. In nondemocracies consensus building is less of an issue because (as discussed below) leaders can constrain the amount of decision-making diversity—and therefore the amount of intra-governmental opposition—by weeding out dissenting elites and replacing them with political lackeys. That said, two points of qualification are necessary. First, nondemocratic leaders do have to rally their bases of support during war, particularly among the political, economic, and military elite, to solidify their domestic political positions. And if nondemocratic leaders view the domestic setting as unstable, given the severe consequences of a successful internal rebellion, they will be especially attentive to mollifying public and elite sentiment. Second, admittedly, it is possible to view nondemocratic leaders just as prone, if not more so, to oversell asymmetrical conflicts as their democratic counterparts, precisely because they might not believe that they will be punished by fellow elites for inflating threats.¹¹⁹ Finally, to secure optimal levels of mobilization and war preparedness, nondemocracies might be tempted to oversell hegemonic or regional or even proximate inters-state wars in which opponents are capable of invading their homeland territory. A cursory glance at the rhetoric between Iran and Iraq during the 1980s surely shows that both sides considered each others as enemies, pariahs.

¹¹⁹ While the recent Second Chechen War is an asymmetrical conflict, not a small war, it offers useful insights to the point made above. Russia used heavy-handed methods in the conflict with the justification that the Chechen rebels were evil terrorists who sought jihad against Russian soil. The argument that the Chechen rebels were secessionists vying for political independence was de-emphasized in public speeches, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11. President Vladimir Putin was free from worry about the domestic political consequences of such verbal claims (and military actions), in part because his popularity rested on the notion that he was a tough-guy seeking to restore order and stability in the Russian Federation. Claiming to uproot and eliminate irrevocably “bad guys” was and is consistent with the popular image of Putin.

But the main point here is that nondemocracies are less likely to get trapped by the rhetoric put forward by their leaders. Ruling coalitions in nondemocracies can wield strong control over information channels within the state, using these as vehicles to give biased accounts of the war effort or simply to withhold information about warfare. At bottom, this is an attempt to keep the public in the dark about war events—which exacerbates the problem of information asymmetries in states that lack a critical media that can hold the feet of nondemocratic elites to the fire—and can muffle dissent. If the public is relatively uninformed or receives faulty information about small wars, it is then unlikely that warfare will generate much disapproval and angst (either about the conduct of war or its justification), at least in the early war phases before information likely leaks out through various sources.¹²⁰ Importantly, bending and distorting information can also effectively dupe citizens in nondemocracies in beneficial, cost-efficient ways. In particular, strong control over information allows leaders to claim that their state has achieved its stated objectives in small wars, perhaps even “won” such conflicts, even if these claims have almost no basis in reality. In other words, nondemocratic leaders can aver that their wars are progressing faster and deeper than in the real world. As we will see in chapter five, Deng claimed that China had reached all of its military and political objectives in its war with Vietnam, when in reality it is difficult to say that China really

¹²⁰ The longer that wars continue, the harder it is for nondemocracies to conceal or distort information about warfare. There are a number of ways that nondemocratic citizens can acquire information about wars. For instance, soldiers come home and communicate with people in their home state about the war, and they then spread this information to others. Citizens might even have ties to people in more open societies who have access to a host of informational outlets. And simply put, the longer that wars persist, it is more difficult to persuade citizens that such conflicts are relatively costless or clearly winnable. The lack of a war resolution in itself reveals information about the war.

achieved much for its considerable effort. Distorted information can provide leaders with a safe and acceptable opening to settle militarized conflicts at the negotiating table, thereby averting prolonged, costly small wars. In short, it is a method to fend off criticisms of being weak from political opponents and militant nationalists and stimulate some groundswell support for war termination. For if most if not all of the stated commitments to war have been fulfilled, then what is the point of continuing to fight?

2.3.2.2 Nondemocratic Incentives to Continue Costly Small Wars

Nondemocratic political coalitions are less likely to cut their losses when the existing political regime looks and acts like democracies often do. In short, I hypothesize that nondemocracies engage in costly, protracted small wars when domestic politics promotes policy stagnation, gridlock, and myopia. There are a number avenues through which this could occur. The structure and operation of existing domestic political institutions might lead to inflexible policies and cultivate a political climate resistant to change. In systems that extensively promote and appoint like-minded (hardline, pro-war) officials up and down the political ladder, it can be difficult to break from status quo policies. In addition, it is likely that the ability of nondemocratic elites to weigh costs and benefits is impaired if the regime is unstable, for this can turn these actors into short-term calculators of interest. For instance, during periods of instability (violence, coups, civil strife, extreme political polarization, repeated non-violent turnover in power), if a nondemocratic political coalition pushes the state into war, it is possible that it thereafter lacks the ability to create and manage efficient foreign policies. In this instance, leaders might aim to keep the coalition going rather than subject it to scrutiny by pulling back

from its war commitments, which could then rip the coalition apart and provide openings for opposition groups to challenge the leadership for power. And under these conditions, perhaps nondemocratic leaders are more prone to spin myths about the war to protect and maintain their hold on domestic political power. Instability could also effectively disrupt policymaking at critical junctures, potentially prolonging the duration of small wars. Such disruptions might prevent or inhibit learning from policy mistakes, halt or stall or rule out negotiations on the war, bring to power hardliners committed to continued warfare, and so on.

2.3.3 *Nondemocratic Institutional Constraints*

At this point I have now established the presence of a nondemocratic political coalition, and that it has incentives to cut its losses in small wars. I next explore whether there are nondemocratic institutions that either push it toward or away from warfare. It is possible that there are institutions that can push the coalition further into warfare despite its dominant preference to terminate conflict. It is also possible that existing nondemocratic institutions act as a facilitator for perpetual warfare, so the ruling coalition might find it difficult to extricate itself from small wars. But that is not likely the case for nondemocracies. Here, nondemocratic institutions can check costly behavior.

2.3.3.1 Nondemocratic Institutions Can Facilitate Policy Change

2.3.3.1.1 FEWER VETO PLAYERS

Nondemocracies likely contain fewer veto players. Sure, since 1870 there have been a number of autocratic nondemocracies consisting of one dominant political figure and a weak and ineffectual domestic institutional framework. For good and bad, African

politics since the end of colonialism have tended to resemble this characterization. That said, overall, it is not necessarily the lack of a dense network of political institutions, loosening restraints placed on elites, that makes the policy process more flexible. Brutal totalitarian states, for instance, design an elaborate array of institutions with the goal of penetrating the private sphere to indoctrinate and surveil its citizens.¹²¹ What does appear to matter most is who is actually in these institutions. In short, it is reasonable to expect to observe fewer veto players here than in democracies, for in nondemocracies the rules of “absorption” are more likely to apply. I expect nondemocratic states on balance to consist of relatively like-minded veto players. Nondemocratic leaders often select officials to head key ministries based on social ties—friendship, family, ethnicity, religion, area of residence, and so on. They choose individuals who share similar experiences, have been as deeply affected by key events, and embrace and value consonant political ideas. One-party rule—a political phenomenon we only see in nondemocracies—reflects these tendencies. A lone, dominant political party can provide an overarching foundation for roughly similar thinking about politics, economics, and cultural and social issues. Moreover, in centralized power systems, nondemocratic leaders can relatively easily replace key decision-makers and cabinet officials when deep, protracted disagreements emerge within the ruling elite, which inevitably induces at least some semblance of ideological conformity by deterring competing analysis that significantly challenges the established political orthodoxy. Relatedly, centralization also allows despotic leaders to constrict the number of access points to the domestic and foreign policy process, shutting

¹²¹ Juan Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*.

out entire groups of people and political institutions, which can further limit the number of veto players.

In all, this is a political setting that is hospitable to foreign policy change. Here, state actors likely see problems at least somewhat similarly and agree on the tools required to remedy such problems, and the number of potential policy brokers—especially those who might obstruct change—can be restricted by leaders.¹²² So when nondemocratic leaders opt to pull their forces out of battle, by logical extension, nondemocratic state elites probably do not face strong resistance to changes in wartime policy.¹²³ Please note that I do not believe that political systems with only one veto player (either by design or via absorption rules) are entirely monolithic. I fully expect debate to occur and for disagreements to emerge on a regular basis during military conflict. And the nondemocratic case studies in chapters five and six bear this point out. The main point here is that the debates and disagreements are not likely very wide or deep so as to create a political chasm that is extremely difficult to break. In short, internal foreign policy disputes can be resolved in a timely fashion.

Importantly, in order for nondemocracies to cut their losses in a timely, cost-efficient manner, they require a mechanism to initiate policy change.¹²⁴ Like-minded veto

¹²² Although outside the parameters of this research project, it is possible that nondemocratic elites have similar problem representations. See Donald A. Sylvan and James F. Voss, *Problem Representation in Foreign Policy Decision Making* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹²³ Consistent with the thrust of this dissertation, Ajin Choi claims that nondemocracies are likely to be very responsive to their external environments (i.e., they seek policy change) when a single leader or small group of leaders, relatively unchecked by congressional or judicial bodies, make policy decisions. Choi, “The Power of Democratic Cooperation,” p. 145.

¹²⁴ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp.52-54.

players serve as a permissive condition for policy change away from the status quo of war continuation: Policy change is possible only if the political coalition elects to move from the status quo. But absent some mechanism to support and implement policy change, existing war policy will continue. Within nondemocracies, policy change is usually enacted by a leader or ruling group. Hence, nondemocracies must have leaders who are farsighted, rational calculators of war costs and benefits so that they can determine when it is appropriate for the state to withdraw from warfare, and accordingly to pursue and implement policy change. Given the incentives to avoid jeopardizing their rule and being severely punished, it is not unreasonable to expect most nondemocratic leaders to act in this fashion in small wars.

2.3.3.1.2 FASTER POLICY CHANGE

Finally, relative to democratic regimes, the institutional pace of policy change (in this case, moving from perpetual war to war termination) can move faster in nondemocracies. As suggested above, *ceteris paribus*, nondemocratic politics are likely more amenable to policy change because of a restricted number of important consultative policy actors, the lack of autonomous oversight committees and agencies, and ideological conformity. However, in order to determine whether the policy process works marginally or significantly faster in nondemocracies, we must also consider the speed with which leaders can wield influence and control over members in key veto institutions. That is, does it take a long or a short amount of time for leaders to configure the domestic political landscape so that they can quickly and easily obtain their policy preferences? For even if nondemocratic leaders can induce ideological homogeneity, assuming for the sake

of argument that this is true, this does not necessarily mean that they immediately do so upon entering office. So determining whether nondemocratic leaders have consolidated their support bases before small wars begin provides some insight into the pace of policy change. If leaders are indeed able to stack veto institutions and appoint heads of ministries with elites who will grant them *carte blanche* over the policy domain, then certainly nondemocratic leaders will be able to make policy changes rather expediently. This describes the China case in chapter five. Before the war began, Deng was able to pack the majority of the Politburo with supporters who were then dependent on him for continued tenure in office and for promotion up the political ladder. By contrast, if veto institutions are filled with dissenters and those who are non-aligned, and nondemocratic leaders have to either mobilize their support or weed them out and find new minions, then policy change will take more time. This describes the Soviet case in chapter six. Repeated transition in power at the general-secretaryship throughout the early to mid-1980s meant that each new leader had to mobilize their bases of support upon promotion before policies could be enacted. This became especially important during Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure. Gorbachev expressed reservations about the war well prior his political ascent, but he could not initiate and execute policy change on the war (as well as on domestic issues) until he planted or promoted enough pro-reformers in key ministries and entities who would willingly support his "New Thinking". It took about two years to cultivate this domestic political environment.

2.3.3.2 When is it More Difficult to Achieve Nondemocratic Policy Change?

Nondemocratic institutions can inhibit policy change in a host of ways. Here, I broach three of them. First, and most importantly, if nondemocracies lack a veto player (often, a leader or the executive branch in general) willing to change course, then the status quo remains in place. In states with only one veto player, policymaking can move in host of directions and at varying speeds over time. Ultimately, it is up to this actor to support and enact change. Leaders might not need to initiate policy change, because it is conceivable that change could emerge from the ideas and proposals of subordinate officials and eventually work its way up to the top rung of the political hierarchy. But leaders definitely need to support and enact movement away from status quo policies. It is only these actors who possess the power to translate policy preferences into action in the real world. And relatedly, once they make such policy changes, no other domestic group or institution has the power to check or override these shifts in policy.

Admittedly, this begs a consequential question: Can a hypothesis about one veto player be falsified? At first glance, under these domestic political conditions, it might seem as if foreign policy will inevitably track with the policy preferences of leaders. If this is the whole story, then whatever policies leaders support and enact will provide evidence in favor of this hypothesis. Certainly, a part of the problem is that the direction of foreign policy in these instances really is dependent upon the identity of the lone veto player in power. That said, there is a major way in which this hypothesis can be falsified. In particular, this dissertation does not expect leaders (or any institution or group or faction) to hold certain beliefs and preferences about warfare—either for or against

continued fighting—yet fail to see them translated concretely into policy. During small wars, I do not expect leaders to be so apathetic or timid to allow other formidable political forces dictate policy—to push their preferences through the state or override the preferences of the dominant leader. Evidence in support of these counter-expectations would falsify the veto player hypothesis. And while I do not expect leaders to act in such ways during warfare, each of above very well could occur. For example, when a lone veto player has a decisive but weak hold on political power—call it a narrow majority—domestic opponents, under various conditions, might be able to leverage strong influence over policymaking.

Further, we should not dismiss the possibility of nondemocracies containing multiple veto players at any one point in time.¹²⁵ Multiple veto players, as described above, fold in more obstacles to policy change during warfare and make timely war termination more difficult. We often find multiple veto players when nondemocracies have some form of checks and balances—either formally or informally—in domestic politics. This often manifests itself in legislative-executive relations, in which the former has at least some minimal oversight powers over the latter. Obviously, in these cases, the extent to which nondemocratic leaders are constrained is dependent upon the legislature being dominated by an opposing or rival faction. We might also observe multiple veto players as a result of collectivist rule. Here, governing power is divided among two or more political elites, typically to prevent the emergence of autocratic rule. While the

¹²⁵ Tsebelis, *Veto Players*, pp. 77-78. See also Karen L. Remmer, *Military Rule in Latin America* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

Soviet Union struggled to contain the power of its leaders, especially on foreign policy, a clear decision was made after 1965 to ensure that various political responsibilities and prerogatives were split among at least two officials.

Second, in light of the ideological homogeneity possibly present within the ruling cadre, nondemocratic leaders are susceptible to blowback.¹²⁶ And they could be especially prone to this during times of instability and regime transitions, for in these instances leaders plausibly seek to insulate themselves from chaos by forming tight bonds with associates who block out bad news and give rosy characterizations of the domestic political arena. Over time nondemocratic leaders might fail to revise their war policies, because their minions, who are selected for their similar political outlook, tend to reinforce their views about war rationales, likelihood of victory, and cost-benefit ratio of war. So as wars grow increasingly costly, rather than re-evaluate the interests at stake in tandem with the costs of battle, nondemocratic leaders—who believe they are charting the right course—may propagate myths to galvanize and sustain elite and public support. Hence, we could find a vicious cycle between mythmaking and warfare that distances elites from reality yet also prevents nondemocratic leaders from revising war doctrines when small wars turn costly.

Third, it is plausible that political instability can extend the pace of the policy process in nondemocracies. As mentioned above, in section 2.3.2.2, political instability can come in various forms—both violent and non-violent. Repeated transitions in power is one example of instability. Civil wars, coups, repeated non-violent transitions in power

¹²⁶ Tsebelis, *Veto Players*, pp. 41-42.

interfere with the policy process, namely, by extending the time it takes to put new foreign policies into action. New governments, supporters, ideas and proposals all must be nurtured and cultivated, perhaps from scratch—which is a labor-intensive and time-consuming set of tasks. Extreme polarization among nondemocratic elites is another example of political instability. Here, we might find divisions within the government and legislature over the way in which war is being fought, to the point that rival factions of hawks and doves emerge, much like in democratic politics. Specifically, we could find rancor between pro-change advocates and those attempting to obstruct wholesale shifts from the wartime status quo. In this domestic environment it is difficult to gain consensus on policies, including war policy, as ideological conformity gives way to dissension and competing perspectives about how domestic and international politics should operate. It is possible that hawks and doves take opposing positions on the merits of continual war and then actively work to bolster or undermine support for the war effort. And in particular, those seeking to continue war and maintain support for it might actively and vigorously attempt to block movement from the status quo policy of perpetual war.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA

3.1 Methodology and Hypotheses

3.1.1 *Research Methodology*

The empirical component of this dissertation investigates four cases: Two costly, protracted small wars (one with a powerful democracy, and one with a powerful nondemocracy), and two cases in which powerful states (again, one powerful democracy, and one powerful nondemocracy) avoided such an outcome by paying a price but withdrawing before costs rose exorbitantly (second stage of the operational definition; see section 3.2.3). For the purposes of this research project, both regime type and war outcome are dichotomous variables. This approach to case selection allows for variation on both variables.¹²⁷ Absent a large-N population of costly, protracted small wars that is required to perform a statistical analysis, I use the four cases to process trace the causal mechanisms leading powerful states to continue or withdraw from small wars.¹²⁸ Process

¹²⁷ Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), chapter 4.

¹²⁸ For a discussion of process tracing see Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), chapter 2. Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George, "Process Tracing in Case Study Research," Paper presented at the MacArthur Foundation Workshop on Case Study Methods, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (BCSIA), Harvard University, October 17-19, 1997. Can also be found at <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/bennetta/PROTCG.htm>. Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George,

tracing is especially appropriate here, according to Andrew Bennett and Alexander George, because it is useful in attempting to determine whether multifaceted, causal relationships between a chain or sequence of real world events match those expected by theory.¹²⁹ Moreover, process tracing “can identify paths to an outcome, point out variables that were left out in the initial comparison of cases, check for spuriousness, and permit causal inference on the basis of a few cases or even a single case.”¹³⁰ Thus, process tracing is a valuable methodological tool that is employed in theory testing and developing theories about complex phenomena.

I evaluate the causal mechanisms of the model presented in chapter two versus three competing explanations for war duration. Strong alternative explanations include the following variables: the presence of a great power in alliance with the weak, whether the powerful holds strong interests in the weak (either inside or proximate to it), and geographic proximity. If a great power allies with the weak, if the weak contains features of strong interest to the powerful, and if the venue of battle is located relatively close to the powerful, then the powerful will be more likely to persist in warfare—to obtain their material and ideological interests, contain or minimize the role of great power

“Case Studies and Process Tracing in History and Political Science: Similar Strokes for Different Foci,” in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman ed., *Bridges and Boundaries: Historian, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 137-166.

¹²⁹ Bennett and George call this “process verification,” which is distinct from “process induction.” See Bennett and George, “Process Tracing in Case Study Research.” See also Andrew Bennett, “Causal Inference in Case Studies: From Mill’s Methods to Causal Mechanisms,” Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, 1999. Also can be found at <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/bennetta/APSA99.html>.

¹³⁰ Bennett and George, “Case Studies and Process Tracing in History and Political Science,” p. 144.

competitors, and reduce or eliminate threatening behavior displayed by the weak. The powerful side will be more willing to expend resources and fight harder when these three variables are present. Absent these variables, then we would not expect to observe costly, protracted small wars. Distant venues of conflict means that the weak would be very unlikely to directly impinge upon the powerful in any meaningful way. If external great powers abstain involvement in these small wars, then such conflicts do not carry the potential to decisively jeopardize the great power status and prestige of the powerful. For in these cases, should the powerful lose or earn a draw in conflict, it usually only means that its own influence has been checked or thwarted. But should an external great power side with the weak, this actor would be in a prime position to expand its own influence into the gap vacated by the losing or departing powerful side. And finally, weak or secondary interests should create enough policy flexibility for leaders to embark upon an exit from war in a timely manner. Leaders themselves should recognize that there the stakes are not exceptionally high. And leaders, particularly those in democracies, should not fear being punished for backing down when weak or secondary interests are on the line. Domestic audiences should recognize the reality of the stakes.

3.1.2 Hypotheses

This dissertation has five hypotheses. Let us discuss the hypotheses in the context of two cases at a time (see Table 3.1). On the one hand, I explore the salient processes in the costly, protracted democratic small war and in the case in which a powerful nondemocracy avoided a lengthy asymmetric conflict. Or in other words, why do democracies fail to cut their losses? And why do nondemocracies execute more timely

extrication from small wars? First, democratic elites are expected to receive probable but only mild punishment for backing down during crises, and so they support continued war to secure victory in battle, enhance their domestic political reputations, and preserve their jobs. Perpetual war in nondemocracies risks inflaming political opponents and weakening the state's ability to repress internal threats, so leaders should prefer to cut their losses, limiting the amount of costs accrued from war. Second, democratic political coalitions have short-term time horizons, which likely leads them to incrementally increase or decrease their commitment to war, rather than decisively withdraw from war or crush wartime adversaries. By contrast, absent meaningful electoral constraints, nondemocratic coalitions are expected to act more decisively in small wars by deploying enough force to win small wars or withdrawing without fearing the domestic political repercussions.

Third, democratic political coalitions occasionally oversell small wars as contests between good and evil to galvanize support; but in doing so, it theoretically follows that elites reduce their amount of extant policy flexibility to settle disputes at the negotiating table. In effect, they become trapped by their rhetoric. Nondemocratic coalitions, on the other hand, face fewer incentives to oversell wars, and, more importantly, are less likely to become trapped by whatever propaganda they do publicly put forward. Fourth, I argue that democracies on average likely have more veto players than do nondemocracies, which means that there are more actors who can block movement from the status quo policy of perpetual warfare; the more veto players present within a state, the more difficult it is to change policies (or in this case, withdraw from warfare). Fifth, relative to nondemocratic states, I expect that the pace of institutional change (moving away from

status quo policies) should be much slower in democracies; so even if there are an equal number of veto players in a democratic and nondemocratic regime, it is reasonable to expect such forces as consensus building to cause a democracy to persist longer in small wars.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Democracy</i>	<i>Nondemocracy</i>
Probability and type of punishment of regime	Probable, Mild	Possible, Severe
Time horizon	Short-term	Longer-term
War Propaganda	Trapped leaders/coalitions	Absence of trapped leaders/coalitions
Veto players	Many	Few
Pace of institutional change	Slow	Faster

Table 3.1: Baseline Variable Expectations

But what about the remaining two cases? Why do democracies at times cut their losses and nondemocracies engage in protracted small wars? Let us look at both domestic coalition incentives and institutional constraints again. Democratic political coalitions are more likely to push for war termination when elites are willing to be punished for poor war performance, when they believe that they will not be punished, when war outcomes are not portrayed in dichotomous, good-evil terms, or when elites do not espouse exceptionally ambitious plans for the weak. The speed of war of termination is also enhanced when there are high levels of agreement over war rationales, the conduct of

war, and the pernicious impact of continual battle; when political practices and processes are streamlined; or simply when there is a small number of veto players (such as $N < 3$). What all of this points to, then, is that democracies are more likely to cut their losses when they look and act like nondemocracies typically do.

On the other hand, I hypothesize that nondemocracies engage in costly, protracted when they look and act like democracies usually do. Here, we likely find political processes in nondemocracies disrupted, slowed down, and inefficient. There are two main avenues through which this could occur—notably, via institutional rigidity and political instability. Under these circumstances, nondemocratic elites are more likely to put forward resolute foreign policies, have a short-term time horizon, and may even have incentives to oversell conflict and generate myths as a means to generate domestic consensus and support. Additionally, this dissertation expects to observe veto players—whether one or more than one—unwilling to support and pursue policy change and sluggish, non-adaptive policymaking.

3.2 Operationalization of Key Constructs

3.2.1 *Small Wars*

Small wars or asymmetric conflicts are conventionally operationalized as one side holding a ten to one advantage in capabilities (usually measured in terms of armed forces and population).¹³¹ This dissertation operationalizes small wars consistent with the literature. In a recent *International Security* article, Ivan Arreguin-Toft has performed a

¹³¹ Arreguin-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” p. 110.

useful task by coding 197 cases of asymmetric conflict, from 1800 to 1996.¹³² Although some of his cases include civil wars and secessionist movements (both of which are outside this project's class of cases), Arreguin-Toft's data set serves as a tool that I use to identify costly, protracted small wars.

3.2.2 *Regime Type*

I code states as democratic or nondemocratic based on the work of democratic peace scholars, such as Michael Doyle, and, importantly, the Polity III data set—both of which are consistent with my definition of democracy. Michael Doyle lists all democracies in the international system, from 1700-1990, dividing the time period into 50 year intervals. Doyle's data classifies 14 small wars as containing a powerful democracy, but one should not assume that the remaining cases necessarily involve nondemocracies.¹³³ So I next used the Polity III data set to examine the leftover 9 cases.¹³⁴ According to Polity III, five cases do contain nondemocracies, but the powerful state in the other four small wars is in fact best characterized as a mixed regime—those states that combine democratic and authoritarian elements. Polity III ranks states from 1 to 10 on two dimensions—level of democracy and authoritarianism—so that each state for a

¹³² Ibid, pp. 124-128.

¹³³ Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp. 261-264.

¹³⁴ See <ftp://isere.colorado.edu/pub/datasets/polity3/politymay96.data>. I use the Polity for several reasons. First, the Polity data sets are widely seen as the standard for research related to regime type. Second, and more importantly, it is useful in determining how democratic or nondemocratic a state may be for any given year and across time—something that is essential for this project. Relatedly, Polity captures the degree of domestic political change and the direction of that change, which can help in observing any regime transitions that might occur during or after small wars.

given year has two raw scores.¹³⁵ The higher the number on the each scale, the more features it has consistent with democracy or authoritarianism. So as a random example, Polity III gives the U.S. in 1960 scores of 0 (on the authoritarian scale) and 10 (democracy scale), which indicates a very open, free, and participatory American political apparatus that lacks anti-democratic elements. By contrast, mixed regimes typically receive scores between 3 and 6 on both scales, suggesting the presence of both democracy and authoritarianism. The four small wars consisting of mixed regimes include Spain-Cuba (1868-75), Spain-Cuba (1895-98), Spain-Morocco (1912-26), and Japan-China (1937-45). I omitted these cases from Table 1 (in chapter one) because they do not fit the general class of cases this project aims to theorize about—democracies and nondemocracies.

3.2.3 *The Dependent Variable*

In order to operationalize costly, protracted small wars, we must first think of powerful states using force as a trichotomous variable in terms of their level of involvement in military conflict and the costs they accrue from these situations. First, powerful states minimally employ force by lobbing missiles or sending non-partisan international peacekeepers to restore civil order. America's participation in Somalia in 1993, and its launching missiles against Libya in 1986, illustrate powerful states deploying low levels of force in the periphery while eschewing a direct military

¹³⁵ The two raw scores are then synthesized into one overall score (democracy score minus authoritarianism score), producing a 21 point scale that ranges from 10 to -10 (The higher the number, the more democratic; the lower the score; the more authoritarian). I find it more useful to look at the two indicators individually so that I can get a more complete sense of the levels of democracy and authoritarianism present in states at any point in time.

confrontation in which they absorb high costs. Second, powerful states mobilize and project their forces, incur some costs, and then withdraw from conflict. This stage differs from minimal force, for here troops are on the ground and actively fighting, and costs on multiple dimensions (domestic and/or international political, economic, military, and so on) result from battle. But in these cases, the powerful avoid costly, protracted small wars by opting not to escalate continually its level of commitment to win the conflict. Instead, it withdraws its forces, and settles for a loss (opponent makes advances or gains, and the powerful surrenders) or draw (stalemate). Example cases include the Italo-Abyssinia War, British withdrawal from Palestine, British reorientation of strategy in Iraq in 1920, and a number of Spanish missions throughout South America in the 1820s.¹³⁶

Third, powerful states engage in costly, protracted small wars. They project their forces, pay a high price, and escalate their commitment to conflict, persisting for a long period of time in military battle. There are five indicators to consider when determining which of Arreguin-Toft's cases fit this type of conflict. First, although all of Arreguin-Toft's cases fulfill this criterion, it should be pointed out again that small wars are conflicts in which there is a ten to one differential in capabilities between combatants. For instance, the Fashoda incident of 1898 and the Moroccan crises of 1906 and 1911 are not applicable because, while they are disputes in the periphery, such conflicts violate the

¹³⁶ R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History From 3500 B.C. to the Present 2nd ed.*, pp. 812-819, 848-49, 1006, 1221-27; Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Defined* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Fareed Zakaria, "Our Last Real Chance," *Newsweek*, 19 April 2004.

definition of asymmetrical power between the primary combatants.¹³⁷ Second, there is a time element involved. Actors who cut their losses manage to withdraw from battle in a timely fashion, while those who fail to do so persist in lengthy conflict. So the question, then, is: How long must states endure in conflict to qualify as a protracted small war? I use two years, which is the average length of time for inter-state wars, as rough proxy for time.¹³⁸

The third factor to consider is the amount of costs absorbed by the powerful.¹³⁹

Are these wars politically, economically, or militarily costly? Tabulating war costs can be a very tricky and complicated effort that requires a host of approaches and sources.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Dupuy and Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History From 3500 B.C. to the Present*, pp. 848, 995-996; See also Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks*, chapter 3.

¹³⁸ Protracted small wars are by definition hard to get out of and necessarily endure for a prolonged period of time. I calculated the average war duration for each militarized dispute termed extra-state and inter-state wars and discovered that the average war lasted 2.00 years. Thus, it seems appropriate, as an initial attempt to arrive at a population of costly, protracted small war cases, to determine that such wars persisted at least longer than the average war. For further information, see J. David Singer's Correlates of War Project web site at <http://www.correlatesofwar.org>.

¹³⁹ There can be a measurement problem when estimating costs related to warfare. And there are a few ways to think about the task of estimating costs. First, there does appear to be a scholarly consensus that several small wars (and many in Table 1.1), such as the Vietnam War and the French-Indochina War, were very costly. So following the lead of prior scholarship is one approach to placing cases within the population of costly, protracted wars. Second, there is social cognitive element that is attendant to conflict. Specifically, the expense of small wars is funneled through the perceptions of the public, elites, and governments, and so on. In other words, costly small wars are conflicts that are viewed as costly, and they might or might not be excessively costly in a crude objective sense relative to other conflicts. So another approach is to find the small wars that were widely perceived as costly at the time. And this an important part to consider, because if there isn't a some minimal or basic level of shared belief that war is costly, then is cutting costs really a puzzle? Third, rigorous empirical research can reveal which small wars seemed to result in a large expense for the powerful. This dissertation employs a combination of all three methods of estimating costs.

¹⁴⁰ Wars can be costly in a number of ways. First, states can suffer direct material war costs, such as loss of manpower, military goods and equipment, territory, and access to natural resources. Second, there are international political costs associated with warfare. Loss of international prestige and reputation are examples. Third, there are often domestic political costs imposed on the political regime, typically when public dissatisfaction with the war threatens the government's tenure in office and regime stability. Severe infringement on the rights and freedoms of civilians—which is sometimes attendant to warfare—can exacerbate bad relations between state and society. Fourth, wars are also economically costly, and the

Importantly, while the human toll is one widely-cited proxy for war costs, we should not overlook other factors that might drain and weaken the powerful. For example, the protracted Mau Mau rebellion resulted in the deaths of less than 100 British, yet the overall effort to brutally subdue the population in Kenya cost more than 130 million dollars.¹⁴¹

Fourth, note that this project is solely interested in conflicts in which powerful states militarily intervene in weaker foreign states, colonies, or territories. Costly, protracted civil wars and internal secessionist movements are outside the class of cases about which this project theorizes. This presents a minor issue because, at a basic level, civil wars, secessionist movements, and colonial conflicts are all wars of independence. In these cases, the key is to determine which conflicts involve adversaries that are formally disconnected and/or subordinate politically to the powerful.

And finally, are these conflicts really lengthy small wars or are they isolated incidents that have been inappropriately lumped together as one conflict? Without careful attention to the start and end dates of inter-state conflicts, it is impossible to determine if actors really cut their losses or not. In practice, this means that I had to verify Arreguin-Toft's data set via extensive historical research. While this was time consuming, it proved to be valuable, as the war duration of several of Arreguin-Toft's cases (including Tonkin

burden is shifted to the public, usually through taxes, who must pay for the war effort. Additional economic costs may include massive infrastructural damage, refugee overflows, loss of adequate housing and jobs, and loss of experts and professionals.

¹⁴¹ Walter Laqueur, *Guerilla Warfare* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), p. 313.

in 1873-1883; U.S.-Nicaragua, 1927-1933; Second Philippine 1899-1902, among others) were incorrectly coded.

3.2.4 Independent and Intervening Variables

I dichotomously operationalize the model's five independent and intervening variables. In brief, do the variables operate according to the hypothesized expectations set forth in Table 2—yes or no? Certainly, the variables could be operationalized as ordinal level variables with multiple measurable dimensions or even as interval level variables with a continuous scale. But in order to keep the number of combinations of the five variables manageable (in this case, there are 32 combinations), I opt for a dichotomous, nominal scale.

3.3 Study Variable Indicators

The indicators of the model's independent and intervening variables (see Table 3) follow directly from the logic specified in chapter two, and are later used to identify the presence or absence of these variables in the case material. First, to identify the type and probability of elite punishment, I look at how governments are selected (free and fair elections? sham elections? elite-managed transitions in power? mass-led revolts?), how often they are selected, and the potential consequences that elites can suffer (imprisonment? death? exile? return to private life? temporary respite from politics?) from domestic political defeat. Second, evidence of incremental escalation or de-escalation is an effective proxy for elite time horizons. Incrementalism is a way to conduct wars that inherently keeps one eye on policy proponents and detractors and the other on the battlefield demands of war. Elites who have a longer-term vision of the

world decisively end wars by deploying enough force to defeat small war opponents quickly or simply withdrawing from battle in a timely manner. Third, I use policy rhetoric and policy options as indicators of trapped leaders and domestic political coalitions. Do elites frame small wars in Manichean terms? Or do they characterize their small war opponents and the interests at stake by using less extreme, non-dualistic language? And if they do speak in dualistic terms, has this rhetoric narrowed the number of available policy options to resolve the war, effectively reinforcing the status quo? Fourth, to determine the number of veto players, I simply count the number of intra-state actors who are capable of blocking changes to the foreign policy status quo. Presidents or prime ministers and various bodies or chambers within congress or parliament are typical veto players.¹⁴² But as 19th and 20th British and French history illustrates, veto players can also be colonial offices and viceroys who exercise a great deal of influence over foreign policy. Fifth, the pace of policy change can be determined by identifying the size of the network of important foreign policy actors, and whether domestic political institutions provide oversight over and constrain elites or are merely tools that these actors can use to serve their own self-interests.

¹⁴² Tsebelis, *Veto Players*, chapter 1.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Probability and Type of Punishment	Method of Selecting of Governments; Periodicity; Consequences for Deposed Officials
Time Horizons	Incrementalism
War Propaganda	Content of Policy Rhetoric, Policy Options
Veto Players	Number of Veto Players
Pace of Policy Change	Function of Domestic Political Institutions; Number of Important Consultative Actors;

Table 3.2: Observable Indicators

3.4 Falsification

How will I know whether the cases effectively refute or provide substantial support for my theoretical propositions? In short, what will falsify my model?¹⁴³ Of course, if factors other than the five variables of this study are the primary forces driving the policies of powerful democracies in small wars, then my model has been falsified. After all, the major goal of this project is to explain why and how democracies persist in costly, protracted small wars. But this is only one falsifying condition. Let us look at the potential combinations of the five variables in more detail.

¹⁴³ For a classic discussion about the role of falsification in scholarly research designs, see King, Keohane and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. 100-105; and Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, p. 20.

<i>Probability and Type of Punishment</i>	<i>Time Horizon</i>	<i>War Propaganda</i>	<i>Veto Players</i>	<i>Pace of Policy Change</i>
Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
No	Yes	No	Yes	No
No	Yes	No	No	Yes
No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
No	No	Yes	Yes	No
No	No	Yes	No	Yes
No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3.3: Twenty-One Sufficient Conditions Under which Variables Operate as Expected

Specifically, given the number of variables and how they arranged and linked (five variables in a multi-step model), there are 21 sufficient combinations that are consistent with the overall theoretical expectations of the model (see Table 3.3). A “yes” code indicates variables that behave consistent with the hypothesized expectations in Table 3.1, whereas a “no” code refers to variables that fail to do so. I consider a combination of variables to be sufficient if there is at least one incentive variable and one domestic institutional variable that operates according to the expectations of this dissertation. To capture the essence of the model, in which there are two separate linkages (independent variables to intervening variables; intervening variables to dependent variable), it makes sense to require at least one variable from each link to pass an empirical test. To be clear, none of the five independent or intervening variables are individually necessary or sufficient conditions; instead, each link is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition. The theoretical model of this dissertation suggests that equifinality might be present. So it is possible to observe similar behavior (cutting losses or continuing warfare) from different states that actually corresponds with a different batch of the five variables.¹⁴⁴ I consider combinations in which only one coalition incentives variable or one institutional constraints variable passes expectations as disconfirming evidence, as these instances violate the spirit of the multi-link model. In particular, the following 11 combinations of variables falsify my model:

¹⁴⁴ Bennett and George, “Case Studies and Process Tracing in History and Political Science,” pp. 154-155.

<i>Probability and Type of Punishment</i>	<i>Time Horizon</i>	<i>War Propaganda</i>	<i>Veto Players</i>	<i>Pace of Policy Change</i>
No	No	No	No	No
No	No	No	Yes	No
No	No	No	No	Yes
No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Yes	No	No	No	No
No	Yes	No	No	No
No	No	Yes	No	No
Yes	Yes	No	No	No
No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

Table 3.4: Eleven Falsifying Conditions

Note that I also consider whether the values of the five variables fluctuate when I move from costly, protracted small wars to cases in which states cut their losses? It is possible that my variables are really constants—characteristics of democracies that do not vary in degree, scope, or intensity—and are really not capable of producing change in the dependent variable. This observation would also falsify my model.

If the cases do not provide supporting evidence of nondemocratic behavior, this is slightly less damaging to the project. For in this scenario it is still possible to get an approximate fit between the logic of democratic behavior in small wars and the empirical data. The data, then, would suggest that my model is only appropriate for powerful

democracies. But even here valuable knowledge would be gained about the link between regime type and small wars, because now we would begin to understand some of the mechanisms that promote enduring asymmetrical warfare. Further research, model revisions, and hypothesis “testing” regarding nondemocracies and small wars would be required.

A final few brief words about the relationship between the structure of the model and the falsifying conditions should be made. At this point, readers may have a several questions. Why do I fail to treat the five variables as an additive model of inter-state behavior, in which the presence of a certain number of variables—a threshold count, so to speak—is sufficient to contribute to costly, protracted small wars? Or why is it not possible for the institutional constraints variables to override the coalitions incentives variables? Or similarly, why is it not possible for the coalition incentives variables to override the institutional constraints variables? In other words, why is it not possible for just one link of the model to adequately explain the behavior of the powerful in small wars? In the end, I might find empirical evidence to support one or more of the above hypothetical questions. And if I do, I will point this out and analyze the implications in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

But for the purposes of this project, all of the above questions naturally violate the intent of the two-step model. The model of this dissertation is conceived as a link or chain of variables, and both links are necessary to pass a falsification “test.” My model is formulated in such a way because it gets to the heart of my hypotheses about the connection between domestic politics and international relations in the context of small

wars. Viewing one link or step as a passed test, then, contradicts the theoretical logic outlined in chapter two. Remember, I believe that domestic political coalitions have incentives to terminate wars or to press on in them, depending on the regime which these actors operate. Their ability to act is either constrained or facilitated by the institutional conditions in which they exist. After all, all political coalitions maneuver in a domestic context rife with institutions, and their policies are to an extent, however large or small, affected by this context. I view both steps as necessary and see each as equally important. There is no *a priori* reason to determine that in general one step is more important than the other. I will let the empirical data illustrate any instances in which one link or a set of variables seems more important than the other link or remaining variables. Again, if I find evidence of this, it will be discussed in concluding chapter.

3.5 Cases

The Sino-Vietnam War of 1979, Soviet-Afghanistan War, French-Indochina War, and Iraqi Revolt of 1920 are the four cases of this project. Based on war duration and costs imposed on the state and society, the French-Indochina War and the Soviet-Afghanistan War are prototypical costly, protracted, small wars. Both conflicts lasted well over eight years, which obviously indicates prolonged warfare, and resulted in high economic cost, excessive casualties, and international disrepute, among other things. The Sino-Vietnam War and British involvement in Iraq during the interwar period are cases in which powerful states put forces on the ground, paid a price in battle, and then withdrew before costs escalated exponentially over a prolonged period of time (in short, both states avoided a costly, protracted small war; second stage of the operational definition of the

dependent variable). China invaded Vietnam on 17 February 1979, experienced immediate success by capturing border towns, but then met stiff Vietnamese resistance and counteroffensives. Progress halted, casualties mounted, and finally state leaders withdrew Chinese forces on 15 March 1979. In response to Britain's role as occupiers, Arab nationalists launched mass revolts in July 1920. Though Britain repressed the rebellion, it did so at great cost, and eventually its leaders decided to hasten plans to transfer power to local elites, abandoning more ambitious occupation designs. I selected two cases that represent great powers avoiding costly, protracted small wars (second stage of the operational definition of the dependent variable) rather than applying minimal force against weaker opponents (first stage). In minimal force cases, powerful states have not invested much or incurred enough costs to make cutting losses an issue. And after all, the notion of cutting losses is at the heart of this project.

Admittedly, this project cannot control for proximity as playing a role in the four cases. Perhaps regional or contiguous war combatants really are more likely to fight harder and longer than those separated by considerable distance. Nevertheless, the problem is not as severe as one might think. In the four cases proximity correlates with regime type, not a particular value of the dependent variable (costly, protracted small war or not). Specifically, in the nondemocracy cases, the adversaries of the powerful were contiguous to the Soviet and Chinese homeland. On the other hand, the democracy cases deal with conflicts in the periphery. If proximity exerts an extremely strong presence on the dependent variable, then we would expect *both* nondemocracy cases to result in protracted, costly warfare. And we would also expect *both* democracy cases to avoid

becoming entangled in such types of warfare. But both hypotheses are correct for only two of the four cases: One democracy (Great Britain) and one nondemocracy (Soviet Union) case appear consistent with the link between proximity and war outcomes. The Chinese and French cases move in directions contrary to the proximity hypothesis, and so the concern for controlling this variable is dampened for these two cases. In the Soviet and British cases, then, I will have to take note of the role that proximity played in elite decision-making in order to facilitate this project's ability to sort out my claims about powerful state behavior from alternative ones.

The four cases permit this project to hold constant two major variables: the presence of great power allies, and the perception of strong interests. Minimizing the number of extraneous moving parts enhances the ability of this dissertation to determine the strength of my proposed theoretical logic vis-a-vis contending explanations.¹⁴⁵ In fact, by holding rival independent variables constant while letting the values of the dependent variable fluctuate (protracted, costly small war/avoided such outcomes), it is evident that the former cannot explain variation in the latter. Put another way, the presence of great power allies and strong interests cannot explain why powerful states in certain instances cut their losses and press on in war at other times. Other variables must account for change in the dependent variable. Moreover, without looking at the role of rival or omitted variables in the cases, I could overlook a potential relationship between the

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion about leveraging control over omitted variable bias, see King, Keohane and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. 168-182.

project's hypothesized variables and rival ones.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, it is plausible that important rival explanations are perfectly correlated my proposed variables, which may indicate that my explanation for the behavior of powerful states in small wars is really epiphenomenal and does not independently move behavior. At bottom, failing to leverage control over particular variables could result in the project overestimating the causal effects of my theoretical logic.¹⁴⁷

In the four cases, the great powers sat on the sidelines, at times contributing military and economic assistance to the weak, and did not supply ground forces to affect the overall war outcome or extend the pace of conflict. So the role of great powers is minimized across the board. Furthermore, given the large asymmetries in capabilities between war combatants, none of cases are situations in which survival was on the line for the powerful. Because the weak lacked an ability to invade the homeland of the powerful, the case studies also show that national homeland defense was not at stake. Even so, the four cases represent powerful states with fairly strong material and ideological interests at stake. Hence, we are left with cases with similar values on the dimension of state interest in small wars. Intervention in Afghanistan was an application of the Brezhnev doctrine, which commanded the Soviets and their allies to protect and shield socialist forces worldwide from threats, particularly those from the West, that attempt to move states away from the Soviet orbit. Indochina was valued because it was long held as a colony, providing France with national honor, prestige, and influence into

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 169.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 171.

Asia. Britain viewed Mesopotamia (Iraq) as a territory rich in natural resources and located in a strategic gateway between British India and continental Europe. And China held longstanding claims to border territory, offshore islands, and waterways that were contested by Vietnam. But in none of the four cases were national defense issues on the line.

3.6 Evidentiary Questions

To ensure that I systematically obtain data across the four cases, this dissertation employs Alexander George's method of structured, focused comparison. George writes: "the comparative analysis of cases is both structured and focused—focused because it deals selectively with only certain aspects of the historical case, and structured because it employs general questions to guide the data collection and analysis in that historical case."¹⁴⁸ Similarly, this dissertation explores only one part of the four cases—whether and why powerful states cut their losses. In addition, I use five sets of questions to guide the search for empirical data by directing my attention to key components within the case material. This enhances the ability of this project to acquire data that can be studied and compared. Each set of questions directly follow from the theoretical arguments and the hypotheses stated above, and nicely fit with the other features of the research design (i.e., operationalization of key variables, indicators). And to be clear, this dissertation tests the

¹⁴⁸ Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in Paul Gordon Lauren ed, *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1979), pp. 61-62. See also Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George, "Research Design Tasks in Case Study Methods," Paper presented at the MacArthur Foundation Workshop on Case Study Methods, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (BCSIA), Harvard University, October 17-19, 1997. Can also be found at <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/bennetta/RESDES.htm>. And for a good example of using general questions to structure case study research, see Richard Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), chapter 3.

logic of the two-step model. I do not simply attempt to locate the variables (via the indicators) in the case material and determine whether they behave consistently with my expectations; I also explore whether the underlying logic of the model is broadly supported. The below questions reflect this testing objective. All five sets of questions are asked, in order, of each case:

(1) How were elites selected for public office? What was the frequency with which these elites are selected? What were the consequences of suffering domestic political defeat?

Did the threat of punishment drive elites to continue or terminate conflict? Did elites use war continuation as a vehicle to enhance their personal political reputations and maintain job security?

(2) Was the level of force rapidly or incrementally escalated or de-escalated throughout the conflict? Why did this occur? For instance, did the domestic political setting inhibit or distort elite policy decisions throughout the war? If so, which domestic actors contributed to this?

(3) What kind of language did elites use to characterize their conflict opponents and the war? Did this rhetoric constrain their ability to withdraw from conflict? Specifically, does war propaganda limit the number of available policy options, thereby reinforcing the wartime status quo? Or does it merely paper over various ulterior motives? Or does war rhetoric simply reflect the beliefs of elites?

(4) How many veto players are present? Who or what were they? Did their presence slow down, speed up, or have little or no effect on the pace of the policy process?

(5) Were there many important consultative actors? To what extent was elite consensus building an important part of the foreign policy process? Was there an extensive network of oversight agencies and committees? Did any of these domestic political features induce caution and delay in the foreign policy process? Or did their presence hasten or have little or no discernable impact on the pace decision-making?

3.7 Organization of Case Studies

I devote the next four chapters to case study analyses. Each chapter is similarly structured in three main parts. First, to provide readers with some background information, I present a brief overview of the conflict, highlighting in particular the war objectives, the primary actors, and pivotal events. Second, I specify the unit of analysis. Third, I turn to the five hypotheses of this dissertation. I use the research or evidentiary questions to process trace the events of the four cases on dimensions relevant to the theoretical hypotheses. Note that I deal with each hypothesis individually, beginning with the three political coalition incentives hypotheses and then following with the two domestic institutional constraints hypotheses. Fourth, I end each chapter by discussing the role that the three alternative explanations played in prolonging or curtailing costly small wars.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Bennett and George point out that one of the benefits of process tracing is that it can do a better job at tracking omitted variables than many other research approaches, including statistical analyses. See Bennett and George, "Process Tracing in Case Study Research."

<i>Chapter Four: Democratic Case</i>	<i>Chapter Five: Nondemocratic Case</i>	<i>Chapter Six: Deviant Cases</i>
Indochina War	Sino-Vietnamese War	Iraqi Revolt of 1920
		Soviet Union-Afghanistan

Table 3.5: Organization of Cases

Finally, note that I cover the four empirical cases in the next three chapters, and the manner in which they are grouped and will be discussed is as stipulated in table 3.5. Certainly, I could have simply devoted a separate chapter to each case. But instead, I believe that there are really three classes of cases that will be discussed hereafter. One class deals with a costly, protracted small war waged by a powerful democracy. The second class highlights a nondemocratic state that engaged in a somewhat costly, short small war. These two classes of cases capture what was talked about at great length in chapter two—the heart of the two-step model. The third class investigates the deviant cases, the cases that cut against the expectations of democratic and nondemocratic state behavior in small wars. For clarification purposes, while I do group the two deviant cases together, they will be given as much space and attention as the other two cases.

CHAPTER 4

FRENCH-INDOCHINA WAR

4.1 Case Summary

The French-Indochina War was largely a product of the political relationship between France and Indochina. French forces had been in parts of Indochina for almost 100 years prior to the outbreak of war in 1946. By 1893, France held Laos, Cambodia, Cochin China, Amman, and Tonkin (the latter three later united as Vietnam) under a union of Indochinese territories. During World War II, however, France lost control over Indochina to Japan, and Japanese officials gave local elites more decision-making freedom. Once Japan surrendered in 1945, in the absence of great power supervision, a political vacuum throughout Indochina was effectively created. The French government sought to reclaim control over Indochina, but a major problem was that the political vacuum, particularly in the Vietnamese territories, was quickly filled by nationalists and communists who aimed to expand upon the freedom they had been granted under Japanese authority. In late 1945, French officials announced plans for a federation of Indochina territories within a French Union. Cambodia and Laos accepted the terms, but Vietnamese nationalists demanded unification of Amman, Tonkin, and Cochin China into one state and complete independence. French officials were reluctant to unify the three

territories and unwilling to recognize Vietnam as a free state outside of the French Union and the control of Paris. A number of conferences between French and Vietnamese officials were held in 1945 and 1946 to diffuse a looming crisis. But the conferences simply revealed that both sides would make little, if any, concessions, and that both were highly resolute in their demands: France insisted that Cochin China, Tonkin, and Annam remain members of the French Union, while Vietnamese nationalists sought political freedom without strings attached. By 1946 Vietnamese nationalists realized that victory in war was the only way that they would ever receive full independence from France and recognition of sovereignty by the United Nations.¹⁵⁰

Military conflict began in 1946 and lasted until 1954. It was a classic guerilla war, in which French forces, believing that the opposition had high value bases and targets, attempted to control the towns and roads, while the Viet Minh held the countryside and rural areas, which enabled mobile guerillas to slip easily in and out of territories and launch covert military strikes.¹⁵¹ The Viet Minh, taking lessons from Mao Tse-Tung's teachings and writings on guerilla war, sought to avoid direct military engagement with France until the balance of forces on the ground shifted to its advantage.¹⁵² The goal was to place an overwhelming burden on French forces so that

¹⁵⁰ R.E.M. Irving, *The First Indochina War* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), chapter 2.

¹⁵¹ For discussions of guerilla warfare in the Indochina War, see, among others, Robert Taber, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerilla Warfare* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, Inc., 2002), chapter 5; and Walter Laqueur, *Guerilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), pp. 262-268.

¹⁵² See Mao Tse-Tung (Samuel B. Griffith, II, trans.), *On Guerilla Warfare* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000). And for discussions about the role and impact of Mao's guerilla warfare principles on the Indochina War, see Taber, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerilla Warfare* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's,

over time French political and military leaders would lose resolve and seek to negotiate on the Viet Mihn's terms. By 1950, if not earlier, the war had become a stalemate, as French forces struggled to cut off, round up, and eliminate the seemingly endless supply of Viet Mihn sympathizers willing to fight for independence. After the humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu, weary and drained from eight long years of war, France finally looked to end the war through a negotiated settlement. French and Vietnamese negotiators first agreed to remove all forces in Cambodia and Laos and accepted a cease-fire, then they began the more difficult task of determining the status of Vietnam. Among other things, the Geneva conference of 1954 divided Vietnam into two spheres at the 17th parallel, with the North ruled by the communist government of Ho Chi Mihn and the South led by French-backed Bo Dai. In the end, eight years of war cost France more than it received in Marshall Aid from the United States—annually ten percent of the National Assembly budget—led to more than 75,000 casualties, and resulted in a widely-perceived shameful loss of a cherished colony.¹⁵³

4.2 Unit of Analysis

This dissertation views the French government as the unit of analysis in the Indochina War. As mentioned in chapter two, I take the position that political coalitions are the main foreign policy decision-makers for powerful states in small wars. The main point of that discussion was that governments are not necessarily the only or even primary

Inc., 2002), chapter 5; Robert E. Harkavy and Stephanie G. Neuman, *Warfare and the Third World* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 193-196.

¹⁵³ Alastair Horne, *The French Army and Politics, 1870-1970* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 73.

foreign policy actors; instead, it is possible to observe a host of different individuals who, in manifold ways and at various times, can influence and distort foreign policy. And scholars tend to think of policymaking in terms of a specific set of people, especially in the context of warfare.¹⁵⁴ This is consistent with much of the current debate about American war policy in Iraq, as the successes and failures there are often attributed to George Bush, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld, among many others.¹⁵⁵ Domestic political instability in France during the 1940s and 1950s, however, makes it difficult to connect war policy in Indochina to a consistent set of people responsible for those decisions. There was a continual rotation of French legislators, prime ministers, and key bureaucrats in and out of office during the Fourth Republic.

¹⁵⁴ Scholars of many different stripes, even realists who view “the state” as the main unit of analysis, often attribute policies to specific key decision-makers who are in charge of thinking about, negotiating, enacting, and executing them. As examples, Merom’s *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* and Taliaferro’s *Balancing Risks*—two books that have influenced this dissertation—consistently refer to select policy elites (both within great powers and in third world, peripheral states/territories) in the narrative discussion of their case studies as the primary determinants of war events. See Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, chapters 5-14; and Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks*, chapters 3-6.

¹⁵⁵ Typical critiques of American actions in Iraq point out various elected officials, department chiefs, and bureaucrats within a neoconservative cabal as responsible for policymaking. For some recent examples of this approach, see Tony Smith, “A Deal with the Devil,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 6 (November/December 2004), pp. 130-131; Larry Diamond, “Diamond Replies,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 6 (November/December 2004), pp. 131-133; Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005). David J. Rothkopf, “Inside the Committee that Runs the World,” *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 147 (March/April 2005), pp. 30-40; Chaim Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War,” *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Summer 2004), pp. 5-48; Leslie H. Gelb, Daniel Pipes, Robert W. Merry, and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “The Freedom Crusade, Revisited: A Symposium,” *The National Interest*, Vol. 82 (Winter 2005/2006), pp. 9-17.

Indeed, the one consistent body that was responsible for foreign policy from 1946 to 1954 was the French government. It is for this reason that I use the French government—which typically consisted of an alliance between Christian Democrats and Socialists—as the chief foreign policy actor that influenced, shaped, and ultimately made decisions about war in Indochina.

4.3 Evidence of Model’s Hypotheses in the French-Indochina War

4.3.1. Periodic, Mild Punishment

French elites in the Fourth Republic could potentially receive periodic, mild punishment. The primary punishment mechanism was via the ballot box. Elections to the National Assembly (the lower house) and Council of Ministers (upper house) were held in 1946 and 1951.¹⁵⁶ Winners claimed a seat in parliament, while losers went back into private life, still holding the opportunity to run again for public office at the next round of elections. Elites suffered no threat of physical danger, imprisonment, or forced exile because of losing national elections. Keep in mind that the elections of 1946 and 1951 produced unstable coalition governments, usually with some combination of Christian Democrats (MRP) and Socialist (SFIO) ministers playing integral policy roles.¹⁵⁷ In fact, one of the consequences of the Fourth Republic was that there was constant turnover in

¹⁵⁶ During the Fourth Republic, national elections were also held in 1956, but this occurred after the war and is therefore outside of the parameters of this study.

¹⁵⁷ For further insight about government instability during the Fourth Republic and MRP dominance, see Peter Campbell, *French Electoral Systems and Elections Since 1789* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1965); Richard Barron, *Parties and Politics in Modern France* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959); Duncan MacRae, Jr., *Parliament, Parties, and Society in France, 1946-1958* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967); Philip M. Williams, *Crisis and Compromise: Politics in the Fourth Republic* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1964); Maurice Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People, 1936-1996* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and R.E.M. Irving, *Christian Democracy in France* (London: George Allen, Ltd., 1973).

French governments. In total, there were 27 different governments. Governments were tossed out of office very rarely through no confidence votes; instead, governments usually resigned preemptively, preferring not to risk the embarrassment and humiliation of formal eviction, when the prime minister was unable to pass key pieces of legislation through the National Assembly.¹⁵⁸ Viewed in this light, the ability to shorten the duration of government tenure is another punishment mechanism present during the Fourth Republic. The bottom line, then, is that the French Fourth Republic contained periodic punishment mechanisms, but the consequences of punishment were very mild.

The periodic threat of political punishment was probably one motive that contributed to the persistence of the French-Indochina War. The French government was susceptible to attack from the domestic political right, and it was this wing of the political spectrum that induced great pressure on key elites to continue the war in Indochina. Specifically, at various decision points when it appeared that the French government was softening its stance toward the Indochina problem, the French People's Rally (RPF) severely rebuked French foreign policy officials for allegedly betraying and selling out the French empire.¹⁵⁹ And the threat of criticism from the right effectively trumped concerns about disenchantment from the left and from the public about the war effort.

¹⁵⁸ Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁹ Roger Price, *A Concise History of France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 312. RPF criticisms peaked during the 1947-50 period, when French governments searched for a political solution to a stalemated military conflict. Toward this end, France attempted to empower a local figure, in this case Bo Dai, who could serve as an alternative, and more palatable, nationalist rallying point to Ho Chi Minh. But in order to legitimize Bo Dai, over time France had to grant him increasingly more local autonomy, which generated the ire of RPF, among others. For further discussion about the Bo Dai "solution," see section 4.3.4 of this dissertation chapter. See also Irving, *The First Indochina War*, chapter 4.

The RPF was able to exercise considerable influence over the French government. Because the RPF was a party created in 1947 by Charles DeGaulle, and he was highly regarded by the public, open proclamations by the party were taken seriously by the electorate.¹⁶⁰ But in addition, it was the content or substance of the RPF's criticisms that worried the ruling SFIO and especially the MRP the most. The RPF was essentially an anti-system party that was bent on overturning the Fourth Republic, revising the French constitution, and instituting a much stronger chief executive in office (namely, DeGaulle).¹⁶¹ And as anti-system party that had no members in the government, the RPF was free to go on the offensive and launch vigorous attacks on French foreign and domestic policy. One of the major policy planks of the RPF, and one that was initiated and championed by DeGaulle, was its insistence that the government refrain from liquidating French colonial holdings. A strong, powerful, and assertive France, so went the logic, was a good way to extirpate the recent humiliation of World War II and recapture past glory and honor.¹⁶² In fact, DeGaulle stated that anyone responsible for the loss of French territory would have to explain his actions before the high court and potentially face impeachment.¹⁶³ The RPF labeled all French governments that appeared willing to grant more autonomy to the locals in Vietnam, even if these people were not

¹⁶⁰ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 140-143.

¹⁶¹ Campbell, *French Electoral Systems and Elections Since 1789*, p. 113.

¹⁶² See Robert Gildea, *France Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 6-7; Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 144-146; A.W. DePorte, *DeGaulle's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968); and Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 144-146.

¹⁶³ R.E.M. Irving, *Christian Democracy in France* (London: George Allen, Ltd., 1973), p. 208.

the Viet Mihn but instead hand-picked puppets by the French, as unpatriotic, defeatist, and traitors.¹⁶⁴ One of the RPF's goals was to paint a general picture of the government as unwilling and incapable of defending French national interests so as to degrade public support of the dominant political parties.¹⁶⁵ This was an effective threat of electoral punishment, and there is evidence that it worked. Many French parliamentarians and ministers supported continual warfare, at least in part, because they were fearful that capitulation in war would mean that RPF attacks would resonate among the public, which would then negatively affect their public standing and their personal political reputations.¹⁶⁶ French elites did not want to be viewed as sell-outs or traitors, especially when this could result in the death-knell of their political careers. They decided that it was better to try to maintain the French Empire as long as possible.

An additional problem was that the RPF and MRP—since the latter was a conservative, catholic party, it also leaned to the right—tended to compete for the same electorate, one which tended to be nationalistic and inclined to support bellicose, inflexible foreign policies. In this domestic political environment, MRP officials were concerned about the RPF stealing votes from their electoral base.¹⁶⁷ And there was some

¹⁶⁴ Price, *A Concise History of France*, p. 312.

¹⁶⁵ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 140.

¹⁶⁶ Alain-Gerard Marsot, "The Crucial Year: Indochina 1946," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April 1984), pp. 337-354.

¹⁶⁷ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 140. And the RPF did indeed make significant electoral gains over the course of the Fourth Republic. It made striking gains in local government elections in the fall of 1947, and in the 1951 elections it came in second to the communists in terms of percentage of electoral support and first in terms of seats in the national assembly with 107 out of 544. See Campbell, *French Electoral Systems and Elections Since 1789*, chapter 5.

justification for their concern, as the RPF picked up steam in the 1947 local elections and performed even better in the national election in 1951, while the MRP, during this same period, lost seats in the National Assembly, falling behind the Communist Party (PCF) in terms of party dominance in parliament.¹⁶⁸ As expected, MRP officials were acutely sensitive to the perception that they appeared weak or irresolute, for fear that they would lose votes directly to the RPF (as well as other pro-war parties).¹⁶⁹ The net result was that MRP parliamentarians and ministers had to at least somewhat match in deed or action—specifically, stay committed to the war—what the RPF expressed in word about French foreign policy.

It must also be noted that Indochina was only one potential issue on which elites could be sanctioned for poor policy performance. Put another way, here we must think about the Indochina War within the context of other important events in French society. For during the late 1940s and early 1950s, inter alia, economic policy, European integration, and domestic recovery from the destruction of World War II, in addition to Indochina, were all salient policy issues that dominated public and elite attention. And French elites were concerned about their performance on all of these issues. It would be misleading to assume that they believed at all times that Indochina was the only or main policy on which they would be evaluated by fellow elites and the public, despite the

¹⁶⁸ Campbell, *French Electoral Systems and Elections Since 1789*, chapter 5; Williams, *Crisis and Compromise*, chapter 10; Barron, *Parties and Politics in Modern France*, chapter 6; and Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front*, chapter 9.

¹⁶⁹ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 61.

commitment to military force.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, the link between elite punishment and Indochina policy was not strong throughout the entire war period, and in fact it varied when we shift the unit of analysis, from the government to parliament.

As evidence, recovery from World War II dominated the headlines and the attention of French elites and the public in the mid- to late-1940s. In fact, Jacques Dulloz claims that during the 1940s, Indochina was regarded as the “forgotten war” because of the high level of public apathy.¹⁷¹ Indochina was located far from French soil, the war received little mainstream media coverage, no conscripts were used, and there were no great battles to generate strong public attention to the war effort.¹⁷² So French war policy through 1950 was not likely pushed or pulled in one direction out of concern for public opinion about the conflict. But after 1947, when the RPF was launched and the Communist Party (PCF) was evicted from the ruling coalition, Indochina was a salient

¹⁷⁰ This is the assumption that rationalists such as Fearon make when discussing the relationship between regime type, conflict, and audience costs. Rationalists view conflicts—especially those that involve boots on the ground—as the most important factor that democratic citizens use to evaluate the effectiveness and competency of their leaders. Among other readings, see Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes.” See sections 1.3.1 and 2.2.2.1.1 of this dissertation for a discussion about the rationalist literature. But there are a few problems with this argument. First, conflicts do not occur in a political vacuum; instead, they take place at the same time as other domestic and international issues and problems, especially ones that are at times pressing and urgent. Second, conflicts vary with regard to intensity and level of commitment. Some conflicts are destructive and require considerable force mobilization and deployment. These conflicts likely generate much public attention and will probably be salient issues for voters. But conflicts that are conducted in a much more limited way (limited means, or ends, or geographic scope, and so on) are less likely to be the most important issue for voters; and these conflicts might compete for public attention with other salient domestic and international issues and problems. The point here is that not all conflicts dominate the foreign policy agenda of powerful states. And in the early stages of the Indochina War, the conflict did indeed compete with other policies in the late 1940s, especially those that more directly affected French society.

¹⁷¹ Dulloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-1954*, p. 103. Ambler also cites the relative disinterest and lack of opinions about the pace and conduct of the war effort in the early war years. John Steward Ambler, *The French Army in Politics, 1945-1962* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1966), p. 103.

¹⁷² Dulloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-1954*, p. 103.

issue for the government because of the increased attacks from the left and right.¹⁷³ And after 1949, when China turned communist and the war was at times called part of an international war against communism, the National Assembly began seriously debating how to diffuse tensions in Indochina yet maintain it as a member of the French Empire.¹⁷⁴ It was after 1947 and 1949, for the government and the National Assembly, respectively, that both became more susceptible to pressure from the right to demonstrate their commitment to French glory and honor.

4.3.2. *Short-Term Time Horizons*

French governments consistently demonstrated that they viewed foreign policy through a short-term lens. By attempting to conduct the war in a palatable and acceptable manner, they sought to appease the public and elites so as to not lose their political support. French elites made the initial mistake, when conflict began, of not putting enough troops on the ground to rout the Viet Minh quickly and efficiently. And as conflict lingered through the late 1940s, French governments avoided increasing the number of forces on the ground. In both cases, force levels were not dictated solely by the demands of the war, but were shaped in part by the public's resistance to conscription as a

¹⁷³ The PCF was a member of a tripartite coalition from the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1944 to May 1947, except for a two month period in December 1946 and January 1947. The PCF was turned out of office in 1947, after labor strikes broke out in areas where communist support was strong. Socialist prime minister Paul Ramadier blamed communists for the disturbances and demanded the PCF to issue blame to its base of support. When the PCF failed to comply with Ramadier's demand, its party members were ultimately forced out of the government. See Gildea, *France Since 1945*, p. 43; Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front*, p. 155; and Vinen, *France, 1934-1970*, p. 95.

¹⁷⁴ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, chapter 3.

supplementary contingent to the volunteer forces already deployed in Indochina.¹⁷⁵

Conscription would have placed many more troops at risk of dying at war. So in effect, the French public placed a constraint on the level of war mobilization. What also limited war mobilization was the concern that escalating levels of force in Indochina could fracture ruling domestic political coalitions by generating enough intra-elite dissent to unseat the MRP and SFIO. The main concern was that high levels of force would engender intense opposition from the PCF and the radical left.

By resisting increases in force mobilization and deployment, French governments sowed the seeds for rampant dissatisfaction with the war, which made it virtually impossible by the early 1950s for France to win the war. Thus, what eventually happened was exactly what French officials tried to avoid when they attempted to conduct the war in restrained fashion. But by maintaining relatively low levels of force, even reducing these levels over time, France allowed the conflict to linger, costs to soar, and the public to turn in opposition to the pace, consequences, and methods of war.

The Indochina War was certainly unpopular among communist sympathizers, supporters of other leftist parties, and anti-war activists.¹⁷⁶ But importantly, criticism of the war and governing elites—particularly from the clergy, academics, and the media—was further spurred in the early 1950s after some of the gory details of the war became public knowledge, including evidence that French forces tortured and killed thousands of

¹⁷⁵ Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 109; and Robert Taber, *War of the Flea*, chapter 5.

¹⁷⁶ Dulloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-1954*, pp. 119-125; and Edward Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance: The French Left, Indochina, and the Cold War, 1944-1954* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

seemingly innocent Vietnamese civilians.¹⁷⁷ In this setting, public support for the war steadily declined from 47% in 1947 to a scant 7% in 1954.¹⁷⁸ And by May 1953, one poll indicated that 65% of French citizens favored ending the war immediately either via negotiation (46%) or outright withdrawal (19%).¹⁷⁹ As evidence for their rising anger, the French cited the mounting casualties, the high economic cost, especially at a time when the country had recently emerged from a major world war, and the prospect that war was not likely to be won on France's terms.¹⁸⁰

At the same time, French governments were bombarded from the left with anti-war rhetoric and protests and from the right with opposing criticisms. The PCF used the war as an opportunity to voice its opposition to the government after its ministers were booted from power in the spring of 1947. Party newspapers focused extensively on the war, detailing human rights atrocities committed by French forces, propagating anti-war slogans, creating cartoons that lampooned French leaders, and pointing out that the war was contributing to the decay of French society.¹⁸¹ The PCF claimed that the war was driven by French imperialists backed by the U.S.¹⁸² In their eyes, Indochina was a "dirty

¹⁷⁷ Taber, *War of the Flea*, chapter 5; Dulloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-1954*, pp. 124-125.

¹⁷⁸ Dulloz, *The War in Indochina*, chapter 6.

¹⁷⁹ Ambler, *The French Army in Politics, 1945-1962*, p. 103. Consistent with Ambler's findings, Horne also cites polling data that show, in the war's later years, that a majority of French public opinion turned sharply against continued conflict and favored either negotiation or withdrawal. Horne, *The French Army and Politics, 1870-1970*, p. 75.

¹⁸⁰ Dulloz, *The War in Indochina*, p. 119.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 119-120.

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 120.

war,”and it sullied those who waged it.¹⁸³ Indeed, although French forces tried to fight Indochina as a conventional war, over time many French parliamentarians recognized that this was a different, arguably more brutal and vicious, type of war that required extreme and relentless tactics to uproot Vietnamese guerillas.¹⁸⁴ The PCF, like the French public, also saw the war as economically wasteful for a country still in ruins and penury.¹⁸⁵ On the right, as mentioned above, the RPF insisted that France remain committed to keeping its empire intact. Any action that appeared to increase the likelihood—either immediately or in the future—of dismembering the French empire triggered harsh invectives from Gaullists, among others. Thus, French governments had to navigate an extremely rocky domestic political terrain that, depending on the policies they selected, provoked criticisms from either the right or left.

Faced with pressure from the right and left and from below, French governments embraced a policy approach that strove to placate everyone. In short, French war policy developed and fluctuated over time in incremental fashion. Muddling through the war was a more acceptable option than using full force or completely withdrawing—the two decisive options that were recognized by some as the only way to win the war or lose face

¹⁸³ Ibid, pp. 116-125.

¹⁸⁴ This characteristic is consistent with great power behavior in several small wars. Guerilla warfare tactics prompt the powerful into taking measures that later prove to be extremely unpopular domestically. For in order to cope with guerilla warfare, rather than risk continually exposing themselves to violence and destruction, the great powers resort to such strategies as forced concentration camps, slash and burn techniques, forced separation of locals from the rest of the population, resettlement programs, and even large-scale massacres. Once information of these tactics reaches the public, this usually escalates the level of domestic dissatisfaction with the war and with the existing ruling government. See Dulloz, *The War in Indochina*, p. 120; and for more general discussion of this phenomenon, see Taber, *War of the Flea*.

¹⁸⁵ Dulloz, *The War in Indochina*, pp. 119-125.

without suffering more costs—because of domestic political pressures.¹⁸⁶ Once pressure from the left and below began to become more vocal and intense, the French government decided to incrementally de-escalate its level of war effort. So by 1950, France reduced the number of French soldiers in Indochina by 9,000, even though at this time the war had turned into a stalemate and most observers knew that *more* troops were needed to secure victory in battle.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, French officials hereafter tended to refer to Indochina as a police action rather a war, which implied high levels of force and massive casualties and destruction, and they foreclosed the option of using conscripts.¹⁸⁸ Yet, at the same time, in order to appease the nationalist and hawkish center and right, French governments continued to pledge that they were committed to the war and the French empire. In other words, a reduced level of commitment, they argued, did not mean that France would capitulate to the Vietnamese guerillas.

Thus, given the dual war positions, from 1950-1954, the plan was to Vietnamize and Americanize the war so as to reduce the level of costs imposed on the French state, making the war more palatable to the public and the left, while also maintaining the fight to preserve France's colonial holdings, which was aimed at appeasing the right. The war was gradually fought by many more Vietnamese soldiers than French forces and the price of the war was increasingly underwritten by the Americans. Indeed, at the beginning of

¹⁸⁶ In particular, by 1950, Pierre Mendes-France (who headed a French government during the Fourth Republic, from June 1954 to February 1955, and was in power when the Indochina War ended) was one of the officials who tried to clarify the available policy options and the means and sacrifices that would be needed to achieve them successfully. See Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 81.

¹⁸⁷ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, p. 109; and Taber, *War of the Flea*, p. 65.

¹⁸⁸ Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, p. 109.

1946, 88% of the casualties suffered on the French side were French, but by 1953 that figure had fallen to 17% while the percentage of local Indochinese killed steadily rose to more than 50%.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, estimates indicate that, by 1952, the U.S. funded over 50% of France's war expenditure; by 1954, this number sharply increased to more than 80%.¹⁹⁰ In fact, as the war continued through the early 1950s, French ministers on several occasions lobbied the U.S. for more assistance than simply economic aid and arms, seeking aerial and even troop support to sustain the war effort. President Eisenhower rebuffed both options.¹⁹¹ But for the purpose of this study, Vietnamization and Americanization was important in that both enabled France to reduce yet *extend* its commitment to the war. That is, both lengthened the shelf-life of war by shifting the burden of war away from France, so that the economic, political, and military costs never rose so high as to convince French elites to surrender until 1954.

¹⁸⁹ Note that these numbers reflect per year death casualties. See Dulloz, *The War in Indochina*, p.142.

¹⁹⁰ These estimates highlight per year contributions to the war. See Dulloz, *The War in Indochina*, p. 144.

¹⁹¹ According to President Eisenhower: "Had the circumstances lent themselves to a logical use of military force, the task of explaining to the American public the necessity for sacrifice would have been an acceptable one. But the losses would have been heavy, and because there never arose a situation justifying intervention, speculation as to 'might have beens' is—as always—scarcely more than an exercise in futility....The strongest reason of all for United States refusal to respond by itself to French pleas was our tradition of anticolonialism. This tradition, violated—almost accidentally—for a time in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was born in the circumstance of our own national birth in 1776. Our deep conviction about colonialism has often brought us embarrassment in dealing with our friends in Western Europe, whose histories as colonists are largely alien to our history. But the standing of the United States as the most powerful of the anticolonial powers is an asset of incalculable vale to the Free World. It means our counsel is sometimes trusted where that of others may not be...Never, throughout the long and sometimes frustrating search for an effective means of defeating the Communist struggle for power in Indochina, did we lose sight of the importance of America's moral position." Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p.373-374 (but see chapter 14 for a more complete discussion about American actions in Indochina).

4.3.3 *Liberal Rhetoric, Great Power Aspirations*

A steady stream of French ministers, parliamentarians, and elites cited liberal political arguments as an important justification for continuing the war in Indochina. French governments viewed their role in Indochina as providing order and stability for people who could not or were incapable of doing so on their own.¹⁹² Toward that end, France offered political counsel and oversight as a method of teaching Indochinese peoples how to live in peace with (limited) freedom. Absent French authority and influence in Indochina, so went the prevailing wisdom, there would be a proliferation of shaky, ineffectual, corrupt political regimes, providing ripe conditions for an explosion of violent and interminable conflict. Thus, the French saw themselves on a mission to civilize Indochina—eliminate barbarism, instill republican principles, create and maintain political institutions—but this mission was not yet complete. France had to remain engaged in Indochina to save and protect its people (the indigenous locals and the French) from the brutal savages—the Viet Minh—who, in French eyes, looked to subjugate, repress, and indoctrinate them with an anti-republican ideology.¹⁹³

Moreover, French governments proudly pointed out that their presence in Indochina also directly produced a host of other benefits. For example, France brought

¹⁹² Tony Smith, *The French Stake in Algeria, 1945-1962* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 71; Irving, *Christian Democracy in France*, p. 204. Irving makes an interesting distinction between the French and British colonial experience that explains that the French empire was more inherently untenable over time. British leaders envisioned some sort of self-government for their colonized peoples, whereas the French ruled out extensive autonomy and aimed to assimilate colonized peoples, so that in the end they would speak the same language, have the same political, economic, and social interests, and see the world similarly.

¹⁹³ D. Bruce Marshall, *The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-Making in the Fourth Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), chapter 1.

floods and famines under control, dredged canals and built dikes, created vast new areas for plantation, helped fight and contain dangerous diseases, and erected telephone lines and railways, among other things.¹⁹⁴ A clear self-portrait of France was that of an altruistic actor performing good works for the people of Indochina. If France withdrew all of its resources, French ministers wondered, who would do all of the essential political, economic, and socio-cultural tasks required for a stable society? Those who sought to throw out or resist the French, and thereby remove the gracious and much-needed French assistance, were viewed as enemies—of France and of the progress of humanity—and were treated as such.¹⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, then, French governments consistently believed that negotiation should be avoided with Ho Chi Mihn—the leader of the Viet Mihn and de facto communist government of northern Vietnam—since any accord likely would have been simply a temporary respite before the next spate of violence against French forces, civilians, and installations.¹⁹⁶

Once the communists secured decisive control over China in 1949, the argument that war was necessary to protect political liberalism in Indochina became intertwined with increasing anti-communist sentiment, particularly among those associated with or who supported center- and right-leaning political parties. In this setting, two important

¹⁹⁴ W. MacMahon Ball, “Nationalism and Communism in Vietnam,” *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (February 1952), pp. 23-24.

¹⁹⁵ Ball, “Nationalism and Communism in Vietnam,” p. 22; and Smith, *The French Stake in Algeria, 1945-1962*, p. 70.

¹⁹⁶ Ho Chi Mihn was frequently characterized as an insincere interlocutor looking to double-cross the French. Marsot, “The Crucial Year: Indochina 1946,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April 1984), pp. 348-349; Smith, *The French Stake in Algeria, 1945-1962*, p. 72.

events occurred. First, the MRP and RPF—two political parties that opposed and distrusted the PCF domestically—increased their anti-communist rhetoric as they applied it to international relations, emphasizing now that France could not deal with Ho Chi Minh because of his communist sympathies whereas earlier they claimed that a deal was off-limits because Ho sought to degrade and eliminate French influence.¹⁹⁷ Second, the war in Indochina was gradually called part of the international war against communism. One fear (of the French and Americans) was that if the communists wrested control away from the French in Indochina, this could provide a spark for communist expansion throughout Asia, probably with Soviet and/or Chinese assistance. Hence, during the early days of the cold war, the Viet Minh were linked with the wider scourge that plagued international relations, and thus were viewed by some within France as pure evil.¹⁹⁸

The evidence, however, indicates that it was unlikely that French governments were strongly trapped by their liberal rhetoric. In fact, in its interactions with Indochina, France can hardly be described as altruistic; and it is questionable how sincerely dedicated French officials were to spreading liberal values and institutions. Indeed, the bottom line is that French governments created few, if any, self-imposed constraints by connecting liberalism to the Indochina War.¹⁹⁹ While Indochinese territories did indeed receive some benefits from its role as either a colony or protectorate, the relationship was

¹⁹⁷ Price, *A Concise History of France*, p. 312; Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 133-136.

¹⁹⁸ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 136.

¹⁹⁹ For a brief review of the concept “self-imposed constraints,” see Donald A. Sylvan, “Planning Foreign Policy Systematically: Mathematical Foreign Policy Planning,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. (1979), pp. 144-145.

far lopsided in France's favor. What French elites failed to admit publicly was that France restricted the development of independent industries, inhibited the rise of a middle class, gave few locals an opportunity to acquire administrative and political experience, and unilaterally made key political and military decisions. Furthermore, areas such as Vietnam were used simply as outlets for surplus French capital and human labor, markets for French goods, and sources of raw materials. In return, tax rates were especially high, people in Indochina were poor, and too few held jobs.²⁰⁰

It is more likely that liberal rhetoric was propagated to paper over the great power aspirations of French decision makers.²⁰¹ Although France was on the winning side in World War II, the amount of death and destruction it incurred, in addition to the fact it was occupied by German forces, meant that most French elites viewed the war as a decisive, humiliating loss.²⁰² In response, French governments, pushed vocally at first from inside and then after 1946 from the outside by Charles DeGaulle, tried to move away from the horrors of the last war and save face by recapturing past glory and honor.²⁰³ According to DeGaulle, the goal was for France to retake its position as a strong, dominant, and influential great power, with its empire intact. DeGaulle stated: "United to the overseas territories which she has opened to civilization, France is a great power.

²⁰⁰ Ball, "Nationalism and Communism in Vietnam," p. 22-24.

²⁰¹ But then this begs the following question: Who was the political audience? The war was likely clothed in liberal dressing to prevent defections from the government's bases of support, sway and placate anti-war constituents and leftist sympathizers, diffuse any societal dissension, and to justify the war to the international community.

²⁰² Irving, *Christian Democracy in France*, p. 201

²⁰³ Gildea, *France Since 1945*, pp. 8-9; and Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 144-146.

Without these territories she risks being one no longer.”²⁰⁴ Thus, the first step in 1945 was to recapture Indochina, which fell under Japanese control during World War II, and hold these territories as members of the French empire, with Paris as the central hub of policymaking.²⁰⁵ Capitulating to demands for Vietnamese independence would dismember the empire and undermine the great power project. And over time ministers embraced a French version of the domino theory: Once one colony won independence, this would embolden others to seek independence, leading a whole chain of colonies eventually to fall.²⁰⁶ France, in this state, would look like an empty shell of its former period of dominance. So viewed in these terms, Indochina was valuable for two reasons: (1) Indochinese territories were inherently important in potentially contributing to France’s power, status, and prestige; and (2) The preservation of Indochina as permanently French-controlled was essential in order to forestall falling dominoes in places like Algeria and Tunisia. French governments believed that they had to fight hard in Vietnam, sending the signal that independence would not come easily and without high costs, so as to deter future subversive activities.

²⁰⁴ Smith, *The French Stake in Algeria, 1945-1962*, p. 67.

²⁰⁵ Indochina, like Tunisia and Algeria, was subordinate to Paris. French governments adopted the doctrine of “progressive federalism,” which inched away from assimilation but still depicted the empire as a family of French nations with Paris clearly at the head. Gildea points out that this was rather paradoxical, given the liberal rhetoric: the French portrayed themselves as on a civilizing mission to liberate and civilize oppressed and benighted peoples, yet their mission in Indochina, Algeria, and elsewhere did not allow for independence outside of French control. So in other words, France, in practice, did not, nor did they seek to, liberate these oppressed peoples. See Gildea, *France Since 1945*, pp. 20-21.

²⁰⁶ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p.145

4.3.4 *Many Veto Players*

The formal structure of French domestic politics during the Fourth Republic specified only a few key decision points, but a closer investigation reveals many more. The constitution of 1946 allowed for a bicameral legislature headed by a president. The president was selected by the National Assembly, and this position held far fewer powers than during the Third Republic. The president was largely a consultative and ceremonial office. Similarly, the constitution sharply curtailed the powers of the Council of the Republic (after December 1948, once again called the Senate), effectively reducing its ability to obstruct policies put forward by the lower chamber.²⁰⁷ The National Assembly was the only domestic political institution elected by the public, and the only formal institution to wield much legislative power.²⁰⁸ Importantly, proportional representation was the system by which seats were apportioned to political parties in the National Assembly. The result of this, as comparative politics scholars expect, was that French domestic politics was characterized by multiple spheres of policy influence.²⁰⁹ And each

²⁰⁷ Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front*, p. 148.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 144-147.

²⁰⁹ Among other readings in a vast literature focusing on proportional representation in democratic regimes, see Richard Gunther, "Electoral Laws, Party Systems and Elites: The Case of Spain," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (September 1989), pp. 835-858; Richard Gunther, "The Relative Merits (and Weaknesses) of Presidential, Parliamentary and Semi-Presidential Systems: The Background to Constitutional Reform," *Journal of Social Sciences and Philosophy*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (March 1999), pp. 61-92; Juan J. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does it Make a Difference?", in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy, Vol. 1* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Scott Manwaring, "Presidentialism, Multipartism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (July 1993), pp. 198-228; Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

of these spheres served as a veto player with the ability to produce prolonged periods of foreign policy stagnation.

In total, during the Fourth Republic, there were five main veto players. Four of them functioned as political parties in the National Assembly, while French colonial bureaucrats and viceroys served as the final veto player. French overseas administrators routinely disobeyed or ignored instructions from Paris, which effectively put them in a key position during the Indochina War of serving as an obstruction on the implementation of policies supported by the government.²¹⁰ So if we view the policymaking process on a continuum, from the early stages of deliberating over a host of policy proposals to the final round of implementing one selected course of action, this veto player was occasionally a check or distortion on the late end or final sequence of the French foreign policy process. Meantime, the MRP, PCF, SFIO, and RPF engaged in a political tug-of-war for influence in the National Assembly and for positions within the government. And each worked to advance their own agendas and subvert and undermine the policy proposals of rival parties. Here, French political parties subverted and stonewalled the early to middle stages of the foreign policy process—namely, the deliberation, consensus building, and decision phases. The MRP, which dominated cabinet positions within the

²¹⁰ Irving argues that French colonial bureaucrats had a relatively longstanding tradition of obstructing the implementation of policies. He writes: “France was further hindered in working out a new relationship with her former colonies by a much more pernicious tradition than the concept of the indivisible Republic, namely the colonial administrators’ habit of disobeying or ignoring instructions from Paris. The tradition had been established by Marshal Lyautey in Morocco in the 1920s. In the Fourth Republic it was continued by Admiral d’Argenlieu and General Valluy in Indochina, by Marshal Juin in Morocco, and finally by Generals Massu and Salan in Algeria. In a famous article in *La Nef* in 1953 Robert Schuman, who as Foreign Minister had been responsible for the protectorates (Morocco and Tunisia) from 1948-52, complained of the ‘independence’ (i.e. disobedience) of various governor-generals during his time as Foreign Minister.” See Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 4.

government, pushed its foreign policy platform of defending the French empire, with much criticism and political pressure from the RPF to stay the course. The SFIO acted as a political counterweight within the government to the MRP by advocating more flexible approaches to resolving the conflict. Finally, the PCF attempted to push the government from the outside into cutting its losses and preferably tilting toward Moscow and away from the U.S.

The five veto players made it more difficult for France to disengage from the war. Let us first explore the party dynamics. The left-right struggle for dominance stymied major changes to war policies, allowing the status quo to continue for a prolonged period of time. Ultimately, what we find is that there was not one coherent push across the political spectrum to withdraw from the war, as each faction, with their own specific interests, supported different policies with respect to Indochina. On one side, the French government led the state into war and defended its policy to keep the empire intact. On the other side, there was a three-pronged attack either to entrench this policy, seek policy alternatives, or completely overturn the status quo and cut France's losses. The MRP and the RFP were unwilling to deal with Ho Chi Minh, grant independence to any of the territories, let alone loosen the political ties between Indochina and France, and in general preferred a more hardline, inflexible approach to resolving the conflict.²¹¹ The Socialists, meanwhile, were willing to negotiate with Ho or any Vietnamese figure who commanded the respect and authority of the people in the area and was willing to reach a compromise

²¹¹ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 37-41.

with France.²¹² The PCF, by contrast, sought to deal only with Ho, as he was viewed as the only local actor who headed a legitimate government within Vietnam.²¹³ Over time the positions of the parties hardened, to the point that each refused to give ground and work to overcome bargaining failures. An important series of events during the late 1940s further highlights the role that party dynamics played in obstructing major wartime policy changes.

In an effort to pursue a political approach to a conflict that could not be settled by military means, the French government in 1947 embraced a policy track that has been termed the Bo Dai “solution.” In brief, in this “solution,” the goal was to install a puppet who was content to receive political, economic, and military guidance and oversight from the metropole. France effectively halted negotiations with Ho Chi Minh—a tactic designed undercut Ho’s legitimacy—and looked to deal with someone more acceptable to French officials, preferably someone who looked like an ardent nationalist and could be a charismatic leader, thereby potentially able to galvanize support for French-friendly foreign and domestic policies, but was willing to accept Vietnamese unification within the French empire. The French handpicked Bo Dai, an ex-emperor of Vietnam during the interwar period, to lead a Paris-backed government in Saigon. In response, an intense inter-party debate about the amount of local control that would be ceded to Bo Dai quickly emerged in the National Assembly. The MRP and the RPF agreed with the French government that negotiations with Ho should stop, but both were concerned that

²¹² Ibid, p. 37.

²¹³ Ibid, pp. 6, 37; and Dulloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-1954*, p. 119.

inevitably Paris would grant Vietnam under Bo Dai extensive autonomy and sell-out the empire.²¹⁴ Their policy proposals and lobbying efforts were geared around circumscribing and forestalling any devolution of political power to the three Indochinese territories. The PCF, by contrast, preferred to deal exclusively with Ho, and argued that France should grant Vietnam complete independence without strings attached.²¹⁵ Lastly, the SFIO, after toying with an idea of some kind of joint Bo Dai-Ho Chi Mihn government, also advocated direct negotiations with Ho.²¹⁶

The impact of the inter-party debates on the war was deep and lasting. In effect, the intransigence of the four major French political parties produced policy stagnation, in that the Bo Dai “solution” was not implemented until January 1950. For almost three years, the wartime status quo in Indochina was maintained without change: France approached the conflict almost solely through military means with scant political effort *in practice* aimed at diffusing tensions and resolving the dispute.²¹⁷ The MRP and RPF placed a brake on the extent to which French governments loosened their grip on Vietnam. And as this occurred, Bo Dai was reluctant to take office with conditions on his rule and such heavy influence from Paris. He did not officially head a government until France, by the end of 1949, gave more local control over internal affairs, provisionally

²¹⁴ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 54.

²¹⁵ Ibid, p. 54.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 54.

²¹⁷ While there was continual governmental (and after 1949, National Assembly) debate about French policy in Indochina in the late 1940s, there was little progress in terms of implementing new policies on the ground. It is within this context that I use the term “in practice.”

agreed to Vietnamese unification, and permitted the creation of a national army, among other things.²¹⁸ Consequentially, the inter-party debates undermined the likelihood of success of the “solution,” because the three-year delay allowed Ho Chi Mihn ample time to consolidate more control over the rural areas within Vietnam by rallying support around his nationalist call for independence in the face of French force; and relatedly, by the time that Bo Dai actually took office in Saigon, his tenure was already delegitimized because there were so few non-aligned or pro-French locals who were willing to endorse his leadership. Moreover, keep in mind that 1948 was likely a crucial year in the conflict. China had not reached out to Vietnam until 1949 and the U.S. did not launch aid drives until 1950; so at this point, in 1948, France had a relatively free hand to bring the conflict to conclusion on its own terms. But by 1950, the French government had to deal with a organizationally, politically, and militarily stronger, empowered Ho, who was now backed by the Chinese. In this setting, France had to deal with both failing military *and* political war options.

The French-Indochina War also offers an example of colonial bureaucrats and viceroys, the fifth veto player, almost single-handedly blocking and subverting French foreign policy at various decision points. As one salient example, Admiral Thierry D’Argenlieu, the French High Commissioner of colonial affairs in Indochina, repeatedly ignored or disobeyed instructions and acted without orders from Paris, preferring instead to support the more militant and nationalist policy views of DeGaulle. In short, the High Commissioner tenaciously refused to dismantle the French empire and worked to prevent

²¹⁸ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 55-58.

any change in relations between Indochina and the metropole—thereby helping to extend France’s duration in war.²¹⁹ There were two factors that seemed to condition his behavior. First, D’Argenlieu and his staff protested against changes to the status quo relationship between France and Vietnam because they feared that such moves could jeopardize their jobs.²²⁰ If France loosened its grip on Vietnam, granting more administrative and legislative power to local authorities, then there would be no need for an elaborate network of French colonial officers and bureaucrats. Rather, a very streamlined staff would be sufficient to maintain close political ties. And second, D’Argenlieu believed that, by negotiating with Ho’s rebel government, France risked legitimizing Ho, his de facto government, and his movement of sympathizers—individuals who clearly longed for complete independence from Paris.²²¹ The concern was that, by consorting with and recognizing this unsavory group, French governments would signal to local citizens that it was acceptable to embrace similar political sentiments. D’Argenlieu viewed these events as the first steps toward dismantling the French empire.

D’Argenlieu certainly played a key role in the early stages of the conflict. In June 1946 D’Argenlieu sought to sabotage a potential agreement that could have paved the way for a unified Vietnam by authorizing the proclamation of an autonomous Cochinchina republic, which effectively dismembered Vietnam. Vietnamese officials considered this as a stab in the back, as Cochinchina held important symbolic significance, and a

²¹⁹ Marsot, “The Crucial Year: Indochina 1946, p. 344; Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 4, 13, 15, 17.

²²⁰ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 18.

²²¹ Ibid, p. 17.

reflection of France's sincerity to arrive at a *mutually* acceptable outcome.²²² And this destroyed a considerable amount of confidence that Ho had in France as a result of a series of negotiations that had taken place during 1945 and parts of 1946; hereafter in 1946 and 1947, Ho warily bargained with French officials, believing that they were not dealing in good faith.²²³ More notably, at a crucial juncture in negotiations between France and the Viet Mihn in December 1946, D'Argenlieu held up correspondence from Ho Chi Mihn that proposed a peaceful settlement to the conflict. He also attempted to persuade French ministers to close their ranks against a policy of concessions and managed to get influential newspapers such as *Le Figaro* and *L'Aube* to support his views. D'Argenlieu feared that Prime Minister Leon Blum would be receptive to Ho's proposal, grant concessions to the Vietnamese, and support a policy that was opposed by most parliamentarians. So when the telegram finally arrived in Paris on December 26, Ho, figuring that the French were unwilling to compromise and likely plotting an imminent large-scale invasion, had already launched a pre-emptive attack.²²⁴

4.3.5 *Slow Pace of Policy Change*

Admittedly, a part of the slow pace of policy change was due to the presence of multiple veto players, but other domestic political features also crucially account for France's inability to move away from the wartime status quo. As mentioned above, French veto players served to obstruct foreign policies that appeared to jeopardize the

²²² Marsot, "The Crucial Year: Indochina 1946," pp. 340-342.

²²³ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 17-30.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 14.

cohesiveness and viability of the French empire. Consensus building played a minor role at most in contributing to the slow pace of policy change. In fact, because the dominant party in the ruling coalition for most of the Fourth Republic—the MRP—was against offering concessions, empowering the locals, and starting negotiations with Ho and his followers, it should not be surprising that there were few attempts by the French government to galvanize support for radical changes to existing Indochina policies. Instead, what was important was the intransigence of the political parties, for each effectively dug in their heels and refused to compromise with each other, which permitted the hawkish policies of the dominant party to stand. Certainly, the MRP had little incentive to change its Indochina policy, given that it was in a position to reap the spoils of political dominance (e.g., ability to nominate MRP officials to cabinet positions, control over policymaking, etc.) and that it faced domestic political pressures from the right. And we must acknowledge that the remaining political parties are not blameless, for it was their refusal to consider alternative courses of action in Indochina and their failure to sell these options to the government that additionally contributed to the persistence of war.

Furthermore, the intransigence of and the open competition between the major political parties created weak, ineffectual, and unstable French governments. And government instability had the perverse effect of forestalling changes to existing policies in Indochina. During the Fourth Republic, French political coalitions were extremely tenuous and unstable, to the point that government turnover occurred about every six months. Keep in mind that, despite the instability, there was some continuity from one

government to the next. Officials from one government would often participate in successor administrations in different positions and roles. As evidence, French governments typically retained three-fourths of the ministers of the previous cabinet, and some, though not many, even kept their portfolios.²²⁵ That said, the repeated dissolution of French governments lead to sporadic and disrupted rather than continued policy debates. Because each new government ushered in a new prime minister, this meant that France essentially had a new chief policy planner every six months, which hindered long-term strategic foreign policy thinking.²²⁶

But even more important, government instability fostered the tendency of French prime ministers to approach policymaking in a conservative, risk-averse manner. That is, instead of seeking to challenge, revise, and overturn failed policies of the previous administration, French prime ministers opted to keep most of them unaltered. This was not done simply because officials were concerned about generating enough intra-elite dissension to cause existing governments to collapse, though there surely was some truth in this, but because they also wanted to maintain a solid political reputation for future opportunities.²²⁷ As stated throughout this chapter, one particular popular foreign policy, especially among the MRP and RFP, was the notion that all available instruments should be used to preserve the French empire and squash colonial threats—for fear that successful rebellions could cause the empire to unravel while also tempt troublemakers in other

²²⁵ Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front*, p. 146.

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 146.

²²⁷ For a discussion about the relationship between elite punishment and the propensity to continue costly small wars, see section 2.2.2.1.1.

colonies to seek greater political autonomy. For more than eight years, French prime ministers upheld this policy. One explanation for this is that such a policy approach would allow prime ministers a good chance of bouncing back politically after their governments fell, as it would signal to fellow elites that they are like-minded, loyal, and, above all, willing to preserve the national interest. Because the French political system was so unstable, leaders had their eyes *simultaneously* on saving their existing jobs and preserving a strong personal political reputation so that they could reacquire power in the future. Put another way, following the party line on Indochina was a personal strategic calculation that could provide future payoffs, and it tended to work. Of the 23 prime ministers during the Fourth Republic, 16 were members of the previous cabinet and 12 went on to serve in the cabinets that succeeded them.²²⁸

But beyond the agendas of and the interactions between the veto players, in order to capture a more complete picture of the nexus between French domestic and foreign politics, we must explore the broader landscape of French politics during the Fourth Republic. Specifically, there were a host of important French political actors, and some had a profound direct *and* indirect impact on French war policy. The French party system reflected a very decentralized and fragmented policy process, in which dozens of parties competed for power and influence. The MRP, SFIO, PCF, and Radical Party, at various times, were members of governing coalitions during the war years, and so these parties were directly able to shape domestic and foreign policy. But because the MRP tended to hold a majority of the ministerial and leadership posts, including the positions of Foreign

²²⁸ Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front*, pp. 145-146.

Affairs minister and Minister of Overseas Affairs for most of the war, it possessed the major decision-making levers to condition war policy. In addition, the political spectrum also contained a handful of loosely aligned conservative groups, several parties of the extreme right, a crop of ephemeral minor parties, the PCF post-1947, and, of course, the RFP—all of which were able to push and pull French policy in various directions via indirect means.²²⁹ Because all of these parties were outside of the government during the war, they relied on verbal and written recriminations and protests against French domestic and foreign policy to stimulate change. Such action did not really garner much political traction until the early 1950s, when war costs mounted and the public and French governments directed more of their attention to the war.

But aside from party politics, there was one new actor in the Fourth Republic who played an overlooked, indirect role in preventing and delaying changes to the wartime status quo—women.²³⁰ Based on their wartime service and contributions to the resistance, French women were finally granted the right to vote in 1945, which more than doubled

²²⁹ Parties of the extreme right included anti-system parties, like the RPF, but also those that espoused anti-De Gaulle sentiments. The ephemeral minor parties included various splinter organizations, some specific issue-oriented parties, centrists, as well as parties constructed around a particular charismatic, popular individual. See Williams, *Crisis and Compromise*, pp. 60-183.

²³⁰ The bulk of the literature on the Indochina War that focuses on French decision-making includes few, if any, references to the stark change in the composition of the electorate in the Fourth Republic. And not surprisingly, then, there are also few references to the emerging role that women indirectly played in shaping and influencing French war policy. And what has been written about women in the context of the Indochina War, usually via the framework of feminism or post-feminism studies, appears to sit outside of mainstream approaches that typically investigate the war through the lens of French political parties, government instability, and the emerging ideological clash between liberal democracy and communism.

the size of the electorate.²³¹ This simple act lurched French politics to the right. Indeed, many women were drawn to the socially conservative, center-right MRP for a host of reasons. Some cited the party's commitment to family-friendly legislation; others expressed the willingness to support a pro-catholic party; still more appreciated that the MRP pursued policies designed to empower women.²³² And just as important, the MRP made active attempts to integrate women into the framework of the party. In particular, the MRP created local level groups in which women were able to think about, discuss, and take positions on prominent contemporary political and social issues.²³³ It is in this sense that these groups served as training grounds for women who had local or national political aspirations. The groups also generated advantageous political feedback effects, which sustained and expanded the MRP's base of support, in that they served as vehicles to recruit more like-minded women into the party apparatus. In short, the MRP appealed to women and encouraged their participation in French politics, and both were primary reasons that the MRP sustained its political dominance for much of the Fourth Republic. But we must not forget that political parties have domestic *and* foreign policy agendas. So

²³¹ In fact, by 1946, women consisted of approximately 53% of the electorate. Patricia Prestwich, "Modernizing French Politics in the Fourth Republic: Women in the Mouvement republicaine populaire, 1944-1958," in Martin S. Alexander and Kenneth Moure, *Crisis and Renewal in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), p. 204.

²³² Better jobs, fair pay, equal political status, vocational training, and pro-marriage and pro-family policies (vacation time, childcare, low-cost housing, etc.) were examples of salient women's issues at the time. See Prestwich, "Modernizing French Politics in the Fourth Republic."

²³³ And relatedly, via intra-gender discussions, women were also able to generate their own political identity by thinking about their function and role in French society. These group meetings addressed basic normative questions that were important to women. For example, should women strive for political office? Should they remain dependent on men for income support? Should women seek jobs only in specific industries? Should family rights and responsibilities trump those of women? Should women try to act and think like men in the public sphere?

when women cast their lot with the MRP, they not only pushed France into new policy avenues domestically but also into hardline, inflexible foreign policies aimed at keeping the empire intact. By introducing women into the political process, this pushed France into a position in which conflict and militancy, even prolonged military disputes, became much more politically acceptable. Viewed in this light, then, French women played an indirect role in the decision to remain militarily engaged, rather than cut and run, in Indochina.

4.4 Evidence of Alternative Explanations in the French-Indochina War

4.4.1 Remote Venue of Conflict

The evidence does not support the hypothesis that protracted conflicts are more likely in cases in which combatants are located near each other. The logic is that hot spots or threats are more dangerous if they are located close to a state's homeland, since in these instances state or non-state based actors do not need to possess a high level of power projection potential to strike the powerful directly. Here, it is not necessary for such actors to have access to sophisticated technology and weapon delivery systems; instead, mobile revolutionaries or guerillas carrying improvised, crude bombs, grenades, rifles and pistols can be sufficient to inflict enormous violence and destruction against the powerful. Hence, the powerful should fight long and hard to eliminate or reduce proximate threats. The Indochina War, however, is a classic example of a conflict in the periphery—when a powerful, usually first world, state fights against a developing, far weaker, third world state or territory that is situated far from the main core of actors in

international relations.²³⁴ In other words, the distance between Vietnam and France was great, and Vietnam posed little threat to harm French soil directly. Nevertheless, this conflict in the periphery lasted for a prolonged period of time.

Paradoxically, the distance of Indochina from France probably, at least marginally, contributed to the persistence of war. From 1945 to 1949, as mentioned above, polling data suggests that few French citizens were concerned about the war, in part because the remoteness of Indochina dampened public interest in the war.²³⁵ The war involved names and places that seemed very unfamiliar to the French, in contrast to prior great power wars located on the European continent. And given that the war posed no direct security threat to French soil, many French citizens lacked a strong incentive to learn about and follow the war consistently. This likely gave French governments some policy flexibility to conduct the war without the fear of being punished electorally. That is, French governments could attempt to placate the right by maintaining their commitment to keep the empire intact—in this case, via military force—and not worry about engendering massive public unrest, at least for the first four years of the war. During this period, in the absence of the public as a major influence on war policy, the

²³⁴ For an overview of the term “periphery,” see Johan Galtung, “A Structural Theory of Imperialism,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 13 (May 1971), pp. 81-117; Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 16 (September 1974), pp. 387-415; James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, “A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era,” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 467-491; Michael C. Desch, “The Keys that Lock Up the World: Identifying American Interests in the Periphery,” *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Summer 1989), pp. 86-121; Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks*, pp. 27-28; Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965-1990* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 4.

²³⁵ Dulloz, *The War in Indochina, 1945-1954*, p. 103.

major constraints on war policy were primarily set by the anti-war left. This then means that French governments had to balance the preferences of fewer actors than what we would normally expect in a functioning, mature democracy, making the road to continual warfare a less complicated process domestically.²³⁶

4.4.2 *The Limit of Great Power Contributions*

Another potential explanation for the inability of France to cut its losses in Indochina refers to the role of additional great powers in small wars. When an outside or external 1st or 2nd tier great power (i.e., outside of or external to the initial set of disputants) intervenes in a small war, siding the weak, this might make it more difficult for powerful states to move from the battlefield to a negotiated settlement as these conflicts become directly intertwined with great power aspirations and concerns. As an example, the powerful might fight harder and longer in small wars as a means to prevent the expansion of another great power's influence around the world. In the Indochina case, *both* China and the U.S.—in an unexpected twist on the hypothesis—influenced the political and military setting in Indochina during the 1950s. By 1950, after the communists rose to power, China began giving the Viet Minh light arms and ammunition and extensive training in Mao's political, military, and organizational principles of guerilla warfare.²³⁷ Around the same time, and in part a response to Chinese assistance, the U.S. provided France with weaponry, ammunition, political and military counsel, and

²³⁶ Review hypothesis 5 of this dissertation (pace of policy change) in chapter 2 for a complete specification of the expected relationship between the number of important policy actors and the pace of policy change in democratic regimes. See section 2.2.3.1.2 of this dissertation.

²³⁷ King C. Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1938-1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), chapters 4 and 5.

a massive amount of funds. By 1953, according to some estimates, the U.S. served to underwrite about two-thirds of the war's financing.²³⁸

Both the U.S. and China lengthened France's engagement in war. Though neither put boots on the ground, both essentially helped to nourish and sustain the war effort of the Viet Minh and the French. On the one hand, China's support helped the Viet Minh to endure the high material costs of war and to gradually increase the manifold domestic and international costs for France. In short, with China's help, the Viet Minh became a very formidable opponent, to the point that French Union forces could not coerce it into capitulation. And on the other hand, by shifting a significant portion of the war expense away from Paris, U.S. assistance enabled French governments for four years avoid making the tough decision to pull out of the conflict. Just as important, American war contributions came with strings attached. For instance, much to the dismay of French elites, American aid continued and increased only as the level of France's commitment to the war—viewed through the eyes of the Truman and Eisenhower administration—either

²³⁸ Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 136. For a more complete, rich survey of American contributions to the war, typically discussed in the context of a background primer on the Vietnam War, see, among many other texts, Alan J. Levine, *The United States and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, 1945-1975* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995); Eisenhower, *The White House Years*; Allan B. Cole (ed.), *Conflict in Indochina and International Repercussions: A Documentary History, 1945-1955* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1968* (New York: Fawcett Publications Inc., 1968); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1996); George C. Herring (ed.), *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993); Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972); Fall, *The Two Vietnams*; Geoffrey Warner, "The United States and Vietnam: Part I, 1945-65," *International Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (July 1972), pp. 379-394; Geoffrey Warner, "The United States and Vietnam: Part II, 1945-65," *International Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Oct. 1972), pp. 593-615; Edward Rice-Maximin, "The United States and the French Left, 1945-1949: The View from the State Department," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 19 (1984), pp. 729-747; and Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Wash, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1979).

remained constant or increased.²³⁹ Furthermore, fearful of the spread of communism further into Asia, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson repeatedly argued that, in return for military, political, and economic support, France could not negotiate with Ho Chi Minh nor recognize the Maoist government in China.²⁴⁰ The problem was that there was not an alternative North Vietnamese leader acceptable to the French or Americans who could galvanize local nationalist forces. Thus, the U.S. constrained the policy options available to the French government, arguably pushing France into perpetual warfare, given that French governments viewed outright capitulation and dismemberment of the empire as unacceptable until 1954.²⁴¹

However, there are definite limits to the explanatory power of the hypothesis that additional great powers—particularly those who side with the weak—in the Indochina War extended France’s war commitment. In particular, three important points must be taken

²³⁹ As a percentage of total contributions to the war from the powerful side, French contributions declined over time. Nevertheless, France still actively participated in the war. But the extent of their participation was a topic of debate between the French and Americans. Among other things, if France was so burdened by the war effort, U.S. officials wondered, then why were there not more French nationals deployed to fight? As the Truman and Eisenhower administrations made clear, France could not win the war by completely free riding on the back of the U.S., and this is something, in their view, France tried and hoped to do. Irving, *The First Indochina War*, chapter 7.

²⁴⁰ Interestingly, there was a paradox associated with American involvement in the war. France sought U.S. assistance to reduce the war burden, allow it to continue to fight, and keep the empire intact. But as a condition on its assistance, the U.S. wanted France to loosen its ties with Vietnam and give up the attempt to force a close-knit French union. So while aid from Washington helped France keep the war in motion, it simultaneously also served to undermine the main reason Paris was engaged in military conflict.

²⁴¹ Although this doesn’t directly address the hypothesis at hand, think about a possible theoretical extension: Can actors that opt to align with the powerful strongly influence, if not determine, war policy? In other words, did U.S. intervention drive France into perpetual conflict? Surely, as mentioned above, the U.S. did influence the war in general and France’s war policy in particular. But the Americans did not make persistent conflict after 1950 inevitable. In fact, France foreclosed its own policy options. Indeed, one major problem was that France did not devise a viable alternative to Ho Chi Minh. French governments did search for an alternative to Ho, but partisan intransigence within the National Assembly prevented their hand-picked ruler (Bo Dai) from taking office until 1950 and in the end undermined his legitimacy. See section 4.3.4 for further information about the role that domestic politics played in the Bo Dai “solution.”

into consideration. First, a simple counterfactual can illustrate the explanatory limits of this hypothesis: Would France have continued to fight for a prolonged period of time even without China's support for the Viet Mihn? It is reasonable to expect that France would have persisted in the struggle. In this scenario, instead of arguing that the war was justified and essential because it was a part of the international war against communism, which done in the 1950s in part to appease the U.S., French governments would have framed the war—as they had from the start—as a last-ditch effort to preserve and maintain France's great power status and prestige.²⁴² Put another way, a major reason for initially responding to Vietnam in 1946 with force, and one of several reasons for continuing the fight, remains the same with or without China's intervention. And arguably, without Chinese assistance, it is plausible that, for quite some time into the 1950s, French leaders would have remained optimistic that they could have worn down the Viet Mihn's will over time and exercised greater military and political control over events in Indochina.²⁴³ Moreover, rather than relying heavily on the Americans, who might not have granted as

²⁴² Although some MRP officials claimed that anti-communism was the primary reason for the war from the beginning, the push to frame the war as a struggle against communism really only picked up momentum after China began granting assistance and China and Moscow recognized Ho Chi Mihn's government in late 1949/early 1950. As evidence, Irving points out that there were few references to communism in Vietnam in French newspapers, parliamentary debate, and public speeches during the 1946-1949 period. Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 133-136.

²⁴³ Marshall and Marsot argue French officials engaged in wishful thinking and false optimism throughout the war. Marshall writes: "The French government greatly exaggerated the size of the pro-French Vietnamese elite and overestimated the relative power of that elite in relation to the more aggressive nationalist groups in Indochina. It also failed to appreciate the stimulus given to Vietnamese nationalism by the Japanese. Finally, as a consequence of the two previous errors, the government grossly overestimated its own power to control the political changes already underway in Indochina." See Marshall, *The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-Making in the Fourth Republic*, p. 194; and Marsot, "The Crucial Year: Indochina 1946," p. 338. For a more general discussion about false optimism in warfare, see Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), chapter 2.

much support absent Chinese intervention, France would likely have placed a much greater emphasis on the Vietnamization of the war as a method of shifting costs away from the state.

Second, China's involvement in Indochina influenced the behavior of the U.S. much more than France; and France's behavior was influenced primarily by the U.S. The Truman administration started granting military and financial support for the war because it was concerned about communist China potentially dominating Indochina.²⁴⁴ And the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 only reinforced existing concerns about the threat of communism spreading further into Asia.²⁴⁵ In short, as we now know, the early 1950s were really the early and formative stages of the domino theory that underpinned American foreign policy for much of the rest of the cold war era.²⁴⁶ So when China began pumping in aid to the Viet Minh, the U.S. responded similarly by assisting the French. France, by contrast, became increasingly dependent on U.S. aid and, as a result, it was more difficult for French governments to resist foreign policy advice and

²⁴⁴ According to President Eisenhower: "Manifestly the loss of Indochina would have been equally disastrous. Unless checked decisively and promptly, the situation could become really alarming. We as a nation could not stand aloof—unless we were ready to allow free nations to crumble, one by one, under Communist pressure....At this time, the spring of 1953, our main task was to convince the world that the Southeast Asian war was an aggressive move by the Communists to subjugate the entire area." See Eisenhower, *The White House Years*, p.168.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 166-167.

²⁴⁶ For a brief survey of important cold war principles such as reputation and falling dominoes, which were often discussed in the context of deterrence strategies, see, among others, Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), chapter 2; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), chapter 3; Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). George Kennan, *American Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 107-128.

recommendations from Washington. And in an effort to appease the U.S., French elites began referring to the Indochina War as part of the international war against communism rather than purely a colonial war.²⁴⁷

If anything, China was important for French decision-making because it created a concern for a set of forces different from those at work in this hypothesis. China's presence never sparked great power competitiveness for the French. And interestingly, China's role in Indochina likely pushed France away from perpetual war and toward moderation, caution, and restraint. Once China began its active, indirect involvement in Indochina in 1949, instead of fearing the expansion of Chinese influence in the region—which was largely an American concern—French governments worried that the conflict would spin out of control and potentially turn into World War III.²⁴⁸ And French elites desperately wanted to avoid the next major world war.²⁴⁹ They pessimistically

²⁴⁷ While the U.S. attempted to pressure France into specific policies, France also tried to force the hand of the Americans. Referring to Indochina War as an international war was done in part to remind American officials that France was doing Washington's dirty work of containing the spread of communist elements in Asia. The tacit argument was that the U.S. should grant France much more war assistance, since it was really America's war against communism in Indochina. Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 136.

²⁴⁸ American involvement in the war eventually became the subject of intense internal debate within France. Pierre Mendes-France, for example, argued that those who supported war hoped that the U.S. would save the mission by intervening militarily. But, he feared, if the Americans escalated their level of commitment, this might trigger the Chinese to act similarly, paving the way for World War III. Mendes-France argued that France had to end the war before it got out of control. See Georges Bidault, *Resistance: The Political Autobiography of Georges Bidault* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), p. 194-195.

²⁴⁹ A cursory review of Western European history in the 1950s reveals this point. For instance, the main impetus to the formation of the European Community was the thought that active, earnest efforts should be made to prevent the next major world war. A prevalent and galvanizing idea at the time was that the nation-state was responsible for the horrors and destructiveness of recent wars; reducing the importance of the state, so went the logic, was a good way to stop wars from recurring. Toward this end, war-weary France and Germany placed their production of coal and steel—essentials for warfare—under a supranational entity, and followed this up with gradual steps toward economic integration with Western European countries that further eroded state sovereignty. For an overview of the history of the EU, see Desmond Dinan, *Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration* (New York: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2005).

predicted a chain of potential events: Chinese military arms and training would eventually turn into a massive escalation of force in which China placed boots on the ground, which could trigger the U.S. to place boots on the ground, which could then lead to the Soviets to send troops into the conflict, and so on until all of the first and second tier powers from the East and West were engaged in an armed, bloody struggle. Not surprisingly, then, French war strategy was guided, bounded, and constrained by two separate principles: Its forces aimed to achieve political and military victory but sought never to let the war at any stage escalate so far out of hand that it could metastasize into a worldwide struggle.

Third, and most important, even if we accept that this hypothesis is indeed a major explanation for why France failed to cut its losses in Indochina, which is a dubious claim, it totally fails to account for French foreign policy prior to 1950, before the Chinese (and Americans) became indirectly engaged in the war. The reason that this is such an important point is because, if the final four years of the war were lopped off, the Indochina War would still be considered a costly, protracted war.²⁵⁰ So what explains French foreign policy up to 1950? We have to look elsewhere for a much more comprehensive understanding of French wartime policymaking.

4.4.3 Strong, But Non-Vital, French Interests

A final rival explanation for French behavior pertains to the interests at stake in the war. In brief, the more vital the interests at stake, the longer the powerful are expected

²⁵⁰ In other words, if the Indochina War was fought from 1946 to 1950, it would still fulfill the cost (political, economic, military) and time requirement ($N > 2$ years) that this dissertation employs to distinguish costly, protracted small wars from those that require a reduced level of effort. See section 3.2.3 for a review of the operational definition of various types of small wars.

to remain engaged in conflict (so as to secure, protect, and advance their desired policy ends). National defense and homeland security are primary examples of vital state interests; and the Iran-Iraq War and World Wars I and II, among many others, are instances in which states fought long and hard for their self-preservation. Contrariwise, the expectation is that states should not fight so hard and for so long when intrinsic or extrinsic interests are on the line.²⁵¹ Certainly, these types of non-vital interests often are very important and valued by states, but here independence and sovereignty are not in jeopardy. So why risk accruing potentially high political, military, economic, and material (most notably, casualties) costs by fighting indefinitely for interests that are secondary or tertiary in terms of importance?

Surely, strong interests were on the line for France, as one would expect given eight years of warfare, but the French homeland was never directly threatened by the Viet Mihn. The Viet Mihn lacked the capability to pose a danger to France—consistent with the definition of small wars—and French elites did not perceive the homeland at stake in the

²⁵¹ Michael Desch offers a typology of great power interests in the periphery, which is appropriate for a discussion about the Indochina War, that specifies homeland defense, intrinsic interests, extrinsic interests, and a residual category of state interest that fails to fit the other three categories. Intrinsic interests refer to areas outside the homeland that are valued because of their capacity to enhance the power base of the great power. Examples include areas that have large cohesive and well educated populations, strong economies, healthy industrial bases, natural resources, high levels of technological sophistication, or a large standing military forces. Great Britain struggles in South Africa over access to large gold mines reflect intrinsic interests. In addition, French nationalist perceptions of Algeria as a direct, vital cog in maintaining its international prestige and honor similarly reflect great power intrinsic interests in the periphery. By contrast, extrinsic interests are areas beyond the homeland which have little intrinsic interest but still offer political and strategic value. Typically, these are areas which great powers must control, have access to, or deny to others, for two main reasons. First, they are areas proximate to great power homelands or intrinsic areas of interest. Or second, such areas might facilitate defense of its intrinsic interests or even its homeland. See Michael Desch, “Why Realists Disagree About the Third World”, in Benjamin Frankel ed. *Realism: Restatements and Renewal* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1996); Desch, “The Keys that Lock Up the World : Identifying American Interests in the Periphery, *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Summer 1989). For another conceptualization of great power interests, see Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 419-429.

conflict. In fact, the willingness of French governments to outsource the war to the Americans and Vietnamese, rather than send more French nationals into Indochina, was likely evidence of widespread recognition—among both elites and the public—that national defense was not on the line.

There were some French economic interests connected to the war in Indochina, though they were far less important than concerns about French great power status. Prior to World War II, 70 percent of French imperial trade (rice, rubber, and anthracite) had been with Indochina, and some French elites hoped to revive the economic profitability the pre-war days.²⁵² Indeed, members of the MRP expressed optimism about the French empire as a vibrant economic bloc, and this sentiment allowed French ministers to propagate a myth of the economic potential of Indochina for years after the conflict began.²⁵³ But big business quickly recognized that Indochina likely would not yield substantial profits—by 1950 exports were 1/10th of those in 1939 and trade deficits skyrocketed—and politicians eventually learned that there were few economic advantages to remaining heavily engaged in the area.²⁵⁴ Instead, at bottom, symbolic politics—a set of concerns outside of the tangible homeland defense, intrinsic and extrinsic interests—was at the heart of the war. Indeed, Indochina was consistently valued because governments and the public believed that it was a key to restoring France’s great power status, prestige, and honor. Keeping the French empire intact was widely seen as a primary way to recover

²⁵² Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p.143.

²⁵³ Ibid, pp. 143-144.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 143-144.

national greatness, eliminate the horrors and humiliation of World War II, and forestall or even prevent France from becoming marginalized in the cold war superpower rivalry. Specifically, it would enable France to be viewed as a powerful state by others in international relations and somewhat level the playing field, helping France to compete more effectively with the U.S. and the Soviets on political and economic issues. And as a result, French governments were very reluctant to dismember the French empire.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 134-135.

CHAPTER 5

SINO-VIETNAMESE WAR

5.1 Case Summary

Despite the longstanding relationship between China and Vietnam, the conflict between these two countries in 1979 was largely rooted in contemporary security issues. Surely, over the last three thousand years China has periodically exercised informal as well as formal control over all or parts of Vietnam, and this history has left traces of antagonism and suspicion between both sides.²⁵⁶ In addition, among other things, there have been enduring border, land and sea territorial disputes involving Vietnam and China. But more importantly, it was the regional and international security dynamics of 1975-1979 that created ripe conditions for conflict between China and Vietnam. Let us turn to these dynamics.

The early portion of the aforementioned four-year period was key in shaping future Sino-Vietnamese relations. Specifically, on April 30, 1975, the U.S. pulled its troops out of Vietnam. And in July 1976, Vietnam officially unified the north and the south, making it a more coherent and viable political and military entity. In this

²⁵⁶ Steven J. Hood, *Dragons Entangled: Indochina and the China-Vietnam War* (Armonk, NY: East Gate, 1992), chapter one.

environment, Hanoi was emboldened to forge stronger ties with Laos and Cambodia.²⁵⁷

As Vietnam embarked on its post-war reconstruction and stabilization, it needed external assistance. During 1975-1979, for various reasons, China was not in a position to compete for friendship, and the Soviets willingly granted Vietnam economic and military aid. Over time the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship was solidified through a series of high-level diplomatic meetings and economic, security, and political agreements, which alarmed China.²⁵⁸ In China's view, it was witnessing an intersection of big and small power hegemony, with the Soviets providing cover for Vietnamese ambition and aggression.²⁵⁹ Meantime, China believed the U.S. under President Jimmy Carter was appeasing the Soviets by pursuing and maintaining great power detente.²⁶⁰ Viewed in these terms, this meant that there was no external actor capable and willing to help China constrain the rise of Soviet-inspired communist movements in Asia. By early 1979, China was insecure, isolated, and gradually encircled by states in the region.

²⁵⁷ See King C. Chen, *China's War with Vietnam, 1979* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), Appendix A for the text of the Vietnam-Laos Treaty of Friendship that was signed July 18, 1977.

²⁵⁸ Notably, coming off the disastrous cultural revolution, China's economy was a fraction of the Soviet Union's in the mid-1970s, and so Beijing simply was not *capable* of competing for Hanoi's affections. But over time, as the Vietnam-China hostilities rose in intensity, Beijing was also less *willing* to offer carrots to Vietnam in exchange for reduced dependence on the Soviets.

²⁵⁹ Indeed, China noted the following: "Soviet big power hegemonism and the Vietnamese authorities' regional hegemonism have dovetailed and served each other on the common basis of aggression and expansionism....Emboldened by Soviet backing, the swell-headed Vietnamese authorities regard the great Chinese people as susceptible to bullying....We sternly warn the Vietnamese authorities: Draw back your criminal hand stretched to Chinese territory." See Anne Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance, 1970-1979* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992), pp. 218-219.

²⁶⁰ Robert S. Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China's Vietnam Policy, 1975-1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 82-83.

China's decision to use force was conditioned by three broad factors. First, Beijing sought to punish Vietnam for failing to heed China's suggestions on particular policy issues, such as Vietnamese-Soviet relations, Vietnamese-Cambodian relations, Sino-Vietnamese border disputes, and the treatment of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam.²⁶¹ In other words, the war was in part an act of revenge against ignoring or even flouting China's policy preferences. Second, China aimed to increase the costs that Vietnam would face in pursuit of its favored policies. In particular, Beijing sought to deter Vietnam from carving out its own sphere of influence in Indochina and acting on the behalf of the Soviets, thereby extending the tentacles of the Soviet Empire into China's backyard.²⁶² Third, China aimed to signal to the Soviets that Moscow would pay a price for expanding its influence into Indochina in a bid for world hegemony. As Robert Ross points out, "By attacking Vietnam, Beijing signaled Moscow that it was willing to incur the risk of conflict escalation and of a military engagement with the Soviet Union. It clearly hoped that in future situations, Soviet decision-makers recognition of Chinese propensity to take risks would caution Moscow from using its 'Cuba of the East' to further its 'expansionist' objectives."²⁶³

The proximate cause of the war was Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978. Vietnamese-Cambodian relations during 1975-1979 were strained. In the mid-1970s, citing a violation of national sovereignty, Cambodians demanded Vietnamese

²⁶¹ Ibid, p. 224.

²⁶² Ibid, p. 225.

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 225.

troops stationed in their country to withdraw. At about the same time, the rise of the Khmer Rouge created further tensions, as the Pol Pot government sided with China and against Vietnam on many policy issues. Furthermore, there was a suspicion among the Khmer Rouge that Vietnam's pledge to create an Indochina federation was a tool to wedge greater influence in Laos and Cambodia. Against this backdrop, by the late 1970s, Cambodia and Vietnam were engaging in sporadic border violence, which eventually escalated into a major military conflict, in which Vietnam tried to oust the Pol Pot government and install its own puppet administration.²⁶⁴ Beijing viewed these actions as evidence of Vietnam's regional ambitions and of Vietnam working in concert with the Soviet Union to threaten and contain China.²⁶⁵ In response, China opted to punish Vietnam on its own terms rather than actively come to the defense of the Khmer

²⁶⁴ A *People's Daily* article asserted: "Social-imperialism is a past master in conjuring up a 'peoples insurgence' as a pretext for invading and subverting a sovereign state. The Vietnamese authorities are well-versed in this trick and have been playing it all along....Moscow and Hanoi are bent on strangling the new-born Kampuchea in its cradle...both Hanoi and Moscow are determined to destroy Kampuchea." See Hood, *Dragons Entangled*, p. 47.

²⁶⁵ Another *People's Daily* article assessed the situation: "It has become quite clear that the border conflict between Vietnam and Kampuchea is by no means accidental. This conflict, together with the Vietnamese authorities' anti-China acts, including the persecution and expulsion of Chinese residents in Vietnam and the using of the question of overseas Chinese to disrupt the relations between China and South East Asian nations, forms a component part of the whole plot. In this plot, the Soviet superpower with its own hegemonistic aims provides cover and support for the Vietnamese authorities' regional hegemonism, while the Vietnamese authorities serve as a junior partner for the Soviet Union....People have seen one expression of this style in Cuba, and now see another manifestation in Vietnam. This is a phenomenon demanding close attention throughout the world." See Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, p. 207.

Rouge.²⁶⁶ Throughout the fall and winter of 1978-1979, China escalated its warnings to Vietnam over the outstanding issues involving these two countries, and it even went so far as to issue threats to invade northern Vietnam. The failure of these coercive threats to produce substantive changes in Vietnam's policymaking led an angry and exasperated China to use of force in 1979.

The Sino-Vietnamese War is a clear example of a powerful state paying a hefty price and then backing down before it became ensnared in a protracted and much more costly struggle. China invaded Vietnam on February 17, 1979, and eventually penetrated about 25 miles into Vietnamese territory. China encountered unexpected fierce resistance, and began drawing down its forces in early March, after declaring its mission a success. Anywhere from 10,000 to 40,000 Chinese troops were killed in battle. And China's image was somewhat tarnished by its support for the brutally repressive Khmer Rouge.

5.2 Unit of Analysis

Chinese politics in the mid-1970s was in a state of flux. After the death of Mao Tse-Tung in 1976, a prolonged power struggle emerged within the Chinese leadership. Initially, the so-called "gang of four" climbed to the top of the political ladder. They held a narrow base of support, which left their grip on power vulnerable to internal challengers.²⁶⁷ Meantime, Hua Guofeng was working his way up the Chinese political hierarchy. Hua was better able to consolidate support among the various political,

²⁶⁶ Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, pp. 211-212

²⁶⁷ Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), p. 66. See also Deng Xiaoping, "Answers to the Italian Journalist Oriana Fallaci," in Orville Schell and David Shambaugh eds., *The China Reader: The Reform Era* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 29-37.

economic, and military factions, and he eventually took advantage of being viewed internally as a more palatable option than the gang of four.²⁶⁸ By 1977, Hua, in coordination with the military, forced out the gang of four and tried to restore confidence—both domestically and internationally—in the Chinese state.

But like his predecessors, Hua suffered from some flaws that quickly undermined his position of political dominance. Hua's support internally was lukewarm at best. He was widely seen as a bland, drab bureaucrat whose career ascended during the Cultural Revolution, an unpopular period of Chinese history by 1977.²⁶⁹ Hua faced pressure from the military and from the Communist Party to rehabilitate former Chinese officers and bureaucrats and officials, such as Deng Xiaoping, who were purged during the Cultural Revolution.²⁷⁰ Hua did not possess much leverage against these exhortations because his own base of support, much like the gang of four, was limited in number and prestige.²⁷¹ And in the end, Hua had little choice to revive Deng's career because Hua began lifting ideas from Deng's economic writings in the mid-1970s, which only served to legitimize Deng as an important political figure.²⁷² As these formerly-purged officials moved back into the state, they placed Hua's position in jeopardy. To them, Hua's rise came at their

²⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 67-70.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 64-65.

²⁷⁰ At the time, there was also pressure from below, from the Democracy Movement of political activists who saw in Deng a potential sea change in Chinese politics. It is doubtful that the Movement had much influence over Hua. Nevertheless, it is important to point out since it suggests widespread support for Deng.

²⁷¹ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*, pp. 87-88.

²⁷² Ibid, pp. 76-80, 86.

expense, and they were willing to transfer their political loyalties to another politician. Sure enough, once Deng was restored to all of his former political positions, he took advantage of this.

Deng used his political revival to entrench and expand his bases of support. Certainly, Deng was popular in the Party and within the military ranks, much more so than Hua. But he also managed to outflank Hua by cultivating and promoting the work and creativity of scientists, business leaders, academics, artisans, and other intellectuals—all of whom had lain dormant during the Cultural Revolution.²⁷³ This created an atmosphere of good feelings and national pride, and enhanced Deng's political popularity. Under these conditions, by the fall of 1978, Deng was able to place allies and sympathizers in important Party positions and deliberative bodies, including within the Politburo, so that Hua's influence was rapidly squeezed out of the policy process.²⁷⁴ By December 1978, Hua was merely a titular figure in Chinese politics, retaining his Party and state titles but holding no real power.²⁷⁵ At this point, China was left with a political coalition fronted by Deng, with support from leading members of the military and the Party—many of whose current and future destinies were intimately tied to Deng's leadership. It is this group that was the prime decision making body in China at the beginning of the war in February 1979.

²⁷³ See Deng Xiaoping, *Speeches and Writings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987), pp. 40-61, 78-84.

²⁷⁴ King, *China's War with Vietnam*, pp. 78-79.

²⁷⁵ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*, p. 98; and King, *China's War with Vietnam*, p. 76.

5.3 Evidence of Model's Hypotheses in the Sino-Vietnamese War

5.3.1 *Elite Appointment, Centralized Power*

In the mid- to late-1970s, China was a closed, nondemocratic state. Elites worked their way up the political ladder through a combination of appointment and merit. The public played a small role in Chinese politics. But with the rise of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China experienced a brief period of civic and political activism, a new found sense of shadow pluralism that was tacitly approved by the state. Additionally, it was the Democracy Movement, a group of youth activists who publicly criticized past injustices at the hands of despotic rulers and pressed for political reform, that gave Deng a groundswell of support, routinely praising his rehabilitation and his political ascent. This was the domestic setting in China immediately prior to the war in February 1979.

Given the structure of the regime, it is not surprising that the decision to cut costs was not tied to domestic political concerns within China. There is no evidence that internal political concerns fostered this type of caution and prudence in Chinese foreign policymaking. China's burgeoning economic modernization program was the main domestic variable that was relevant to war termination. Some war skeptics and critics believed that devoting resources to a conflict in Vietnam could harm China's economy precisely at a time when it was finally moving in a positive direction.²⁷⁶ And given Deng's keen interest in rebuilding China's economy, these arguments likely resonated

²⁷⁶ William J. Duiker, *China and Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1986), pp. 82-83.

within the top echelon of China's domestic and foreign policy apparatus.²⁷⁷ But more importantly, though, the decision to cut losses focused almost solely on international political considerations. For example, China dreaded the possibility of losing face regionally and internationally, if it fought a very costly and losing war.²⁷⁸ China was concerned about the reaction of the Soviets, if Beijing broke its commitment to a short, limited war and became an occupying force in Vietnam.²⁷⁹ China also worried about a long-term conflict damaging its freshly minted normalized ties with the U.S.²⁸⁰ And relatedly, Beijing feared the prospect of driving Vietnam even further into the arms of the Soviets for a prolonged time interval.²⁸¹ The last two concerns are intertwined because they both address an underlying reluctance to engage in self-defeating behavior that could have resulted in China becoming ostracized by its friends and supporters and encircled by its rivals and challengers.

The structural character of and trends in China's political system was important to the war, but really only in paving the way for military conflict to occur. In particular, the resolution of the power struggle in post-Mao China, led to the rise of a single leader, Deng Xiaoping, who favored militant, punitive measures in response to Vietnam's

²⁷⁷ Deng Xiaoping, *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 40-42, 59-60, 71-74; and Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*, pp. 99-100.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 109.

²⁷⁹ Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, chapter eight.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, chapter eight.

²⁸¹ Ibid, chapter eight.

assertiveness and aggression in the region.²⁸² And buttressing and reinforcing the shift in Chinese foreign policy, by the end of 1978, Deng cultivated rather strong and durable ties to officials within the Party, which only eased his ability to push his policy preferences through the state. Furthermore, relative to Hua, Deng was in a much more favorable position to turn his punitive policy preferences into action, mainly because the military supported his position of power.

Once war broke out in February 1979, a segment of the public reacted negatively to the invasion. This observation, however, merely highlights a correlation between the relevant variables of this hypothesis, and does not indicate any causal linkage to the decision to terminate the conflict in March. Simply put, public disenchantment with the war did not push Chinese elites into cutting losses in Vietnam. Anti-war sentiment among the public dovetailed with the burgeoning political activism within China in 1979.²⁸³ Specifically, tacit support from the state in late 1978 emboldened the Democracy Movement to expand the scope of its substantive concerns and demands.²⁸⁴ The Sino-

²⁸² Now, as for why Deng supported using force against Vietnam, there are several interpretations. Gerald Segal speculates that perhaps Deng, having won a series of political battles, was flush with overconfidence after winning the power struggle. Or maybe Deng was looking for a quick victory to enhance his position and allow him to further consolidate his support. See Segal, "China's Recovery from Defeat in 1979," in George J. Andreopoulos and Harold E. Selesky (eds.), *The Aftermath of Defeat* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 143-158.

²⁸³ Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); Peter R. Moody, Jr., *Chinese Politics After Mao: Development and Liberalization, 1976 to 1983* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Hsi-Sheng Ch'i, *Politics of Disillusionment: The Chinese Communist Party Under Deng Xiaoping, 1978-1989* (Armonk, NY: East Gate, 1991); Orville Schell, "The Democracy Wall Movement," in Orville Schell and David Shambaugh eds., *The China Reader: The Reform Era* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 157-165; Wei Jingsheng, "Democracy: The Fifth Modernization," in Orville Schell and David Shambaugh eds., *The China Reader: The Reform Era* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 165-174. and Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*.

²⁸⁴ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*, pp. 93-97, 101.

Vietnamese War in early 1979 simply gave the Movement additional fodder to criticize and attack the policies and actions of Chinese elites. And so public wallposters and banners, which originally addressed the demands for democratization and liberalization, began to sharply criticize China's militant policies against such a small, little country as Vietnam. These activities likely also reflected the heightened expectations in and subsequently the deep disappointment with Deng. After all, Deng initially condoned the Movement, calling the public expressions of political grievances a "good thing" and professing support for "socialist democracy" and "democratic reform," yet he did not follow these statements up with continued support.²⁸⁵ In this view, he was no different than any prior opportunistic, ruthless, and authoritarian Chinese leader.

Deng immediately responded to the increased public pressure on the state. The Democracy Movement was acceptable to Deng as long as it aided his political career, but once it squarely placed a critical eye on his policies, they were no longer useful. In fact, at this point, the growth of the Movement to multiple urban areas around China, at least to a small extent, threatened the government, as well as the entire political system by advocating a multiparty democracy and operating autonomously from the Party.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ See "Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," in Orville Schell and David Shambaugh eds., *The China Reader: The Reform Era* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 26-29; and Deng Xiaoping, *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 65-69, 75-78.

²⁸⁶ By early 1979, the Democracy Movement was growing in size, scope, and enthusiasm, spreading from Beijing into other large cities, provincial centers, and campuses. The Movement was mainly comprised of small groups and their activities were relatively uncoordinated. Mostly, the Democracy Movement remained localized. Meisner points out an interesting observation: it was acceptable for Deng to liberalize cultural and intellectual life because these people posed no threat to the govt—they did not join organizations outside of the party, did not join the Democracy Movement, and many were apolitical because of their distrust of politics (due to their experiences during the cultural revolution). Furthermore, this group was needed in Deng's program of economic and technological modernization and development. By contrast, the young,

Moreover, with the increasing urgency and vigorousness with which it sought to air its demands for political change, the Movement was associated with social and political unrest.²⁸⁷ Seen in this light, the Democracy Movement was a roadblock to Deng maintaining and consolidating his grip on political power. It should not come as a surprise, then, that through a series of moves the Movement was eventually decapitated and extinguished.²⁸⁸ Its best known figure, Wei Jingsheng, was arrested and accused of passing military secrets about the war to Vietnam. Deng presented two speeches in March that defended the war and attacked the Movement for undermining the stability of China. The press picked up on Deng's comments by complaining of rampant "anarchism" and "ultrademocracy" in China. The secret police was enlisted to restrict political activities, monitor the contents of and seize wallposters and political publications, and arrest political demonstrators. The crackdown lasted for the next two years.

5.3.2 Short-Term Decisiveness, Long-Term Gradualism

The Sino-Vietnamese War is an example of foreign policy decisiveness. China invaded Vietnam, exacted some measure of revenge, paid a price, and then withdrew its forces after about a month of military conflict. It did not let itself get bogged down in an endless guerilla war pockmarked with incremental levels of involvement over time.

radical Movement activists were troublemakers and disposable—they did not possess valued skills and were seeking to undermine the position of the Party in Chinese society. See Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*, chapter five.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 104.

²⁸⁸ Schell, "The Democracy Wall Movement," pp. 160-165.

China's decisiveness derived in part from the relatively minor substantive debates within the Party. Certainly, there were debates about Vietnam within the Party, but the negotiating space was not particularly wide. Disagreements were not especially deep, wide, or intense. Importantly, in such situations, while a final decision on any particular debate might not satisfy everyone, it is unlikely to alienate and disenfranchise members of the elite. The result is that a final decision does not automatically carry additional baggage that can undermine its effectiveness. There are likely few contingents within the political elite with an axe to grind, acting as a hard brake on policy, seeking major concessions, or working to stimulate dissent and opposition to the policy. Rather, elites will likely support war policy, at least weakly, until something radical and untenable occurs. This effectively de-emphasizes and at times removes the two-level game that states, particularly democratic ones, have to deal with once wars begin, and which often results in incrementalism and gradualism.²⁸⁹ Domestic politics in China closely resembled this characterization.

Let us think back to chapter two to understand the implications of the above argument.²⁹⁰ There, I claim that the three-fold balancing game of competing interests and demands in democracies, which include the public, elites, and the military demands of the war, is multifaceted and complex and serves as an obstacle to cutting costs in small wars. Additionally, nondemocracies are likely in a better predicament, with a more streamlined

²⁸⁹ See Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two Level Games," *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 427-460.

²⁹⁰ See sections 2.2.2.1.2 and 2.3.2.1.2 in chapter two.

policy process that must balance the dual needs and imperatives of the war with the preferences of unelected political elites. But here, we find that China was in an even more favorable position than I expected. Absent a deep and meaningful divide between Chinese elites on the issue of Vietnam, the state really only had to confront and adapt to the exigencies of the war. Let us turn to the specifics of these domestic political dynamics below.

The Vietnam debate was split into camps. The first argued that Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia was directly linked to Sino-Soviet relations. In short, it was an effort to spread the influence of a Soviet-Vietnamese axis and directly challenge China's position in the region.²⁹¹ From this perspective, Vietnam was a severe, direct national security threat. The second camp claimed that the Cambodian crisis was a mostly independently inspired act of Vietnamese expansionism.²⁹² In this view, Vietnam was a serious security threat that created trouble in China's backyard; but absent a conspiratorial role for the Soviets—a great power with tremendous military muscle—Hanoi's moves were not seen as urgent and existential. Overall, the debate was not a stark contrast between committed hawks and doves or other ideological combatants.²⁹³ Both sides agreed that Vietnam was a problem that posed a threat to Chinese interests in Southeast Asia, and

²⁹¹ Duiker, *China and Vietnam*, pp. 82-83.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 82-83.

²⁹³ Yet, at the same time, it would be careless to overstate the extent of homogeneity within China's elite, as Robert Ross does detect the presence of some Chinese officials who opposed the invasion of Vietnam. But these differences were quickly ironed out. Even as Ross points out, by December 1978, "the influential Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee...adopted the hardline that 'the grave danger of war still exists. We must strengthen our national defense and be prepared to repulse at any moment aggression from any direction.' See Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, pp. 230-231.

that China's prestige was on the line. Once this was established, the act of punishing Vietnam, however defined, did not cause much dissension. And once the skeptics got on board with the war, once the differences were ironed out, they exerted limited pressure on the policy thereafter. Hence, Deng and his advisers could adjust and tinker war policy, including quickly withdrawing from Vietnam after four weeks of battle, without concern of the fallout of their decision.

That said, four points of clarification need to be made. First, as will be discussed below, given the internal distribution of power in China, admittedly, it is questionable as to how much influence war skeptics or war hawks could have placed on the leadership.²⁹⁴ Political opponents operated in a system in which their power was severely circumscribed. Second, at least minimally, China's decision making was aided by the absence of public elections. The absence of the public in politics meant that there was one fewer actor that could shape, if not distort, Chinese foreign policy. Third, the narrow negotiating space and the resulting elite behavior described above was to an extent likely related to ideological conformity, a situation in which elites see the world, their country's place in the world, and any outstanding issues and problems in roughly similar terms.²⁹⁵ After all, all key policy officials were members of and worked through the same

²⁹⁴ For a discussion about the internal distribution of power in China in the late 1970s, see section 6.3.4 below.

²⁹⁵ In other words, these elites are likely "representing" foreign policy problems and issues in relatively similar terms. According to Sylvan and Voss: "How do the game theorist's options and utilities come about? Why were blockade, air strike, and invasion initially chosen as potential options? To answer these questions, we contend that one should understand how the problem to which the options are a response has been represented." See Donald A. Sylvan and James F. Voss, *Problem Representation in Foreign Policy Decision Making* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 3-4.

ideologically-committed political party. Now whether this conformity is forced or induced by the Party or results from career pressures and personal ties to leaders like Deng, a question of causal regression, this is a topic that demands an extended empirical analysis elsewhere. Fourth, all of this is not to say that China in 1979 was entirely invulnerable to massive inter-Party rancor and discord. It is possible that a protracted war would have fractured the elite within the Party. But the main point is that the war was terminated before that could even come close to happening.

However, if we take a longer-term snapshot of the Sino-Vietnamese dispute, we do find traces of incrementalism in Chinese policymaking. On the long-term tense relations between both countries, Deng nicely captures the notion of gradual escalation in Chinese foreign policy: “We tolerated patiently until the Vietnamese had taken ten steps. When they took the eleventh step, we took our first retaliatory step. When they take the twelfth step, we will take our second step.”²⁹⁶ There was considerable thought and preparation put into Sino-Vietnam relations, and the war was not a random spike in tensions between both countries. Rather, it was one point, albeit a significant one, on a long-term trend of strained relations between China and Vietnam. From 1975 to the end of 1978, China had exhaustively searched for creative ways to push Vietnam into eschewing tight ties with the Soviet Union. Sometimes that meant punishing Vietnam, other times it meant praising and validating Vietnam. But in general, it is evident that China gradually and incrementally escalated its and pressure on Hanoi during these three

²⁹⁶ Min Chen, *The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts: Lessons from the Indochina Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1992), p. 142.

years. In 1975, after the Vietnam War, China was concerned about the growing power and influence and ambition of Hanoi, given the recent unification of the north and the south, yet Beijing took careful steps not to alienate the Vietnamese leadership. Initially, China can be viewed as wooing Vietnam, seducing it to avoid reaching out to the Soviets any more than it already had during the prior thirty war-torn years. In fact, on several occasions, China issued public statements declaring support for Vietnam's "victory" in war against the U.S. and for the government in Hanoi.²⁹⁷ In 1976, as Vietnamese-Cambodian relations began to sour, China served as a mediator in the dispute, attempting to get both parties to peacefully resolve their differences. China desperately did want not war to break out, because it knew the Soviets were in a much better position to offer economic and military assistance. Finally, at this point, China even pushed Vietnam to repair its relationship with the U.S., with the hope of potentially paving the way to trade ties and normalized relations with the Americans and reducing Hanoi's dependence on the Soviets.

But as Hanoi cultivated stronger, more durable partnerships with Moscow, China began to replace its benign, conciliatory approaches to Vietnam with more punitive and coercive measures. For instance, China began to reduce its foreign aid to Vietnam, opting not to compete with the Soviet Union for Vietnam's friendship. China's media refrained from reporting on visits by Vietnamese officials. By 1978, China terminated its reconstruction projects in Vietnam, and started to voice its displeasure with Vietnam's

²⁹⁷ Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, chapters two-four.

role in the region, serving as a Cuba-of-the-East surrogate for the Soviets. As one example of the more heated rhetoric, Deng stated:

Everybody knows what Cuba is like. We cannot but keep vigilant attention on the Cuba of the East. As for the answer to this question, it depends on how far Vietnam will go. First of all, to what extent it will carry on with its aggression against Kampuchea. We will decide on the way of dealing with it in accordance with the distance it will go with its policy hegemonism.²⁹⁸

Eventually, Beijing issued harsh deterrent warnings to Vietnam, informing Hanoi that it would suffer consequences if did not retreat from its anti-China, pro-Soviet policies.

Indeed, China stated: “We wish to warn the Vietnamese authorities that if they...continue to act in this unbridled fashion, they will decidedly meet with the punishment they deserve....Don’t complain later that we’ve not given you a clear warning in advance.”²⁹⁹

China even went on a diplomatic offensive in the region as a means to put further pressure on Vietnam. When Vietnamese-Cambodian relations headed down the path of war in late 1978, this time China did choose sides. But it did not send forces into Cambodia. Instead, it gave verbal and military assistance (weapons and ammunition) to prop up Pol Pot, one last signal of China’s frustration and anger. Hence, a multidimensional view of China’s foreign policymaking reveals a complex picture of decisiveness in the war and of gradualism and incrementalism in the three-year period prior to war.

²⁹⁸ Hood, *Dragons Entangled*, p. 48.

²⁹⁹ Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, p. 224.

5.3.3 *Cautious, Non-demonizing Language*

Chinese officials used cautious, non-demonizing, and rather vague language to describe Vietnam and the conflict between both countries. Certainly, China and Vietnam had a longstanding somewhat tense relationship; and by the late-1970s, a number of specific issues served to aggravate relations between Beijing and Hanoi.³⁰⁰ That said, by 1979, China viewed Vietnam as a frustration, an irritant, and a rival, and not an enemy.³⁰¹ As such, Chinese officials, notably Deng, argued that military action was necessary to teach Vietnam a lesson, to punish Vietnam for prior misdeeds. On this topic, Deng asserted: “The role of the Vietnamese play will be even worse than the Cubans. We call the Vietnamese the Cubans of the Orient. If you don’t teach them some necessary lessons, it just won’t do.”³⁰² China did not believe that Vietnam should be eliminated or fought to the death. And by extension, it was not a war that required an extreme and urgent justification for a significant mobilization of national resources. It is not surprising, then, that Beijing refrained from using inflammatory rhetoric.

The cautious, rather vague language facilitated China’s prospects of waging a short, decisive war against Vietnam. The commitment to teach Vietnam a lesson was

³⁰⁰ These issues included the status of the ethnic Chinese; border concerns; and land, and sea territorial disputes; see section 6.4.3 below for further discussion of China’s interests at stake in the war.

³⁰¹ The Soviet Union was the enemy, pushing and cajoling and exhorting the Vietnamese into deviant behavior. Vietnam was merely an aggressor behind the main and more powerful and threatening one. “The facts in the last few years show that Hanoi’s armed provocations along the Sino-Vietnamese border are a logical development of its quest for regional hegemony and constituted a link in the Kremlin’s strategic dispositions for world hegemony.” This quote, and numerous other quotes in this chapter, illustrates that China saw the Soviet Union as the driving force behind the mischief in the region and by extension China’s insecurity. See Hood, *Dragons Entangled*, p. 60.

³⁰² Min, *The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts*, p. 152.

non-specific and vague. As outlined above, we know what China aimed to punish Vietnam for, but what qualified as sufficient or proper punishment? And how long would or should it have taken for Vietnam to learn its lesson? China's language provided no answers to these questions. Almost any military action—regardless of the intensity, duration, and scope of military engagement—could be seen as successfully teaching Vietnam a lesson. For in practice, China declared its intent to impose some ill-defined cost on Vietnam. This fact provided Chinese political leaders with considerable policy flexibility. Indeed, it was relatively easy to withdraw from conflict and declare victory, even when military fighting did not proceed as anticipated or desired. Given the vague commitment, it was difficult for political opponents, and others predisposed to critique government policy, to say that results had not been achieved, desired outcomes were not attained. In this respect, vague and non-demonizing language can be a useful tool to minimize political future political costs. As evidence, China invaded Vietnam, withdrew its forces a short time later, and then proclaimed that its objectives had been reached, despite paying a hefty price in battle.³⁰³ And in the aftermath of the armed struggle, Chinese officials suffered few political costs.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Edgar O'Ballance, *The Indochina War, 1945-1954: A Study in Guerilla Warfare* (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1964), pp. 224-225.

³⁰⁴ We can argue that one political cost from the war was the protests and demonstration of the Democracy Movement that followed the invasion in February 1979. However, there are two caveats. One, as stated already, the protests were mainly a product of the lax oversight and restrictions of the Movement's activities in 1978 rather than of the war. Two, members of the Democracy Movement vigorously criticized the outbreak of the war and likely supported the timely end of the war. See section 6.3.1 of this chapter for a reference to the Democracy Movement and its activities.

Four main arguments have been put forward to explain China's language and its behavior. First, it is possible that China was aware of the limits of its military power, and so the commitment to a limited, restricted war would prevent the military from getting bogged down in Vietnam and exposing its weaknesses. Second, the concern about Soviet reprisals, even if such action was not very likely, might have tempered any inclination to escalate its rhetoric—and by extension, the level of tensions and hostility in the region. Third, because China, by 1979, was opening up to the rest of the world, at least economically, though a series of gradual liberal reforms, it is possible that Deng did not want to risk engendering the opprobrium of the international community. In this view, bad press and harsh reactions from world leaders could have destabilized China's rebuilding and modernizing economy. And finally, Chinese rhetoric and behavior might have been constrained by the large presence of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. Hanoi had already taken a number of actions designed to repress and discriminate against the ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam; a major, large-scale invasion carried the risk that Hanoi would resort to further brutal and harsh tactics against these peoples.³⁰⁵ Ultimately, whatever the reason, or combination of reasons, the crux of the evidence indicates that China's foreign policy decision making was underpinned by some sense of rationality and judiciousness. For at bottom, Deng and his coterie did not oversell the war and make the conflict more difficult to execute domestically than it needed to be.

³⁰⁵ See section 5.4.3 for a further discussion of the ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam at the time of the conflict.

5.3.4 *Limited Number of Veto Players*

By the beginning of the war in February 1979, there was only one veto player capable of exercising decisive influence over policymaking: Deng Xiaoping. He controlled and influenced the policy process. Deng's views on a host of issues, from economic modernity and liberalization and political reform to China's standing in the world and the use of force, were represented in Chinese domestic *and* foreign policy. And regarding the latter, which is most pertinent to this dissertation, Anne Gilks states: "by the late 1970s Deng Xiaoping had come to dominate foreign policy making. His primacy was evident at the Third Plenum, where his arguments in favor of a self-defensive counter attack on Vietnam were carried."³⁰⁶

Moreover, Deng was the decisive political figure in China, acting as the major point player in international diplomatic affairs. In 1978, Deng made a number of visits to ASEAN countries to improve relations with members, counter the diplomatic offensive already waged by Vietnam and the Soviet Union, and isolate Vietnam from the region.³⁰⁷ He negotiated with the U.S. over normalizing relations in December 1978. It was Deng who visited Washington a month later, in January 1979, meeting with President Carter and his staff, to solidify improving relations, inform them of China's intent to wage a "defensive" war against Vietnam, and mollify any American concerns about Chinese

³⁰⁶ Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, p. 222; In addition, see Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*, p. 98. Meisner writes: "While the Third Plenum emphasized 'collective leadership' and discouraged 'publicity' for individual leaders, the latter admonition did not apply to Deng Xiaoping. Precisely at the time the Party was promoting the principle of 'collective leadership,' Deng Xiaoping was gathering in his own hands as much actual power as Mao Zedong had ever enjoyed."

³⁰⁷ Charles McGregor, "The Sino-Vietnamese Relationship and the Soviet Union," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 232 (Autumn 1988), pp. 33-35.

belligerence, and potentially to enlist tacit approval for China's planned invasion.³⁰⁸ On his way home from the U.S., Deng similarly stopped in Japan to notify officials there of imminent war in Vietnam. There, Deng stated: "Vietnam must be punished for its actions [because] if we remain inactive, the military actions in Cambodia might be spread to ASEAN."³⁰⁹ Certainly, other Chinese officials were dispatched on various diplomatic missions, such as Wang Donxing's visit to Cambodia in November 1978, but it was Deng who oversaw and at times performed most of the important foreign policy matters.

A small number of veto players effectively streamlined Chinese foreign policy, which offered two ancillary benefits. First, a limited number of veto players allowed China to articulate its foreign policy views consistently and clearly to the rest of the world. There were no mixed messages about China's relations with Vietnam emanating from different parts of the political and military establishment in Beijing. After the Third Plenum, which resolved many of the internal discussions and debates about Vietnam, Chinese elites spoke with one unified voice, both at home and abroad, about the need for Hanoi to change its policy in the region or risk suffering some consequences. And as the war drew near in January 1979, Chinese elites clearly emphasized the restrained method by which the war would be conducted by China.³¹⁰ This created a sense of transparency

³⁰⁸ Deng described his mission to the U.S. as aiming "to work out some clear outline as to the question of how to jointly resist the expansion forces of the Soviet Union in various parts of the world and how to prevent the Cuba of the East from swashbuckling across the Indochina Peninsula at random." See Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, pp. 227-228.

³⁰⁹ Min, *The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts*, p. 151.

³¹⁰ For further detail about the language China used about Vietnam and the war, refer to the previous section, 6.3.3, and to section 6.4.2 of this chapter.

about Chinese policymaking and likely reduced the propensity for foreign countries to misunderstand China's generalized stated aims. Importantly, this probably helped to diffuse Soviet concerns about China's intervention and pushed leaders in Moscow to take the use of force off of the table.³¹¹

Second, "the limited number of decision makers and leadership control over competing societal interests clearly [allowed] Chinese statesmen great diplomatic flexibility, in contrast to the often more limited maneuverability of their counterparts in more open, democratic societies."³¹² As discussed in chapter two, in political systems with a relatively small number of veto players, there are by definition few actors who can obstruct foreign policy change at any particular decision point.³¹³ Those who hold political power have a free hand to maintain the status quo or move in a different policy direction at their discretion. So when Hanoi began cooperating much more closely with the Soviet Union in the fall of 1978, China decided to put more pressure on Vietnam to change course, thereby ratcheting up the rhetoric and intensity of the Sino-Vietnamese dispute. Deng was able to adapt to the regional and international political conditions at the time and support escalating tensions with Vietnam as a means to protecting Chinese national interests. There was no countervailing force to block or hinder his actions. In fact, Deng managed to pack the Politburo, the key decision making unit, with allies and

³¹¹ However, it is true that Soviets had military advisers in Vietnam, contributed economic and military assistance to the war effort, and had a naval task force stationed off Vietnamese waters when the war began. And in early March 1979 its presence was joined by a flagship of the Soviet fleet. So it would be inaccurate to say that the Soviet Union was a completely passive observer.

³¹² Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, p. 255.

³¹³ See section 2.3.3.1.1 in chapter two.

supporters, which significantly undercut the prospect of resistance to his suggestions and proposals.³¹⁴ Relatedly, when China decided to withdraw its forces in March 1979, with no vehicle (either inside or outside of the Party) to provide effective checks and balances on Chinese leadership, it was the decision of Deng and his coterie that ruled the day.

All of this begs the question about the precise role of veto players in China's ability to cut its losses in Vietnam. I fully recognize that policy change requires a domestic political mechanism, usually the decision by a political coalition or leader to enact such change. In this case, consistent with my hypothesis, the structure of Chinese domestic politics, which funneled power into the hands of a small number of officials, allowed or permitted Deng to wage war, as it was his decision, but also to do so in a limited, restricted and speedy way. Here, Deng was the mechanism that engendered policy change toward timely war termination. And as mentioned above, given the power of Deng, he was able to manipulate Chinese politics by empowering like-minded officials, which crucially produced a political setting in which it was relatively easy to select and change policies, since many elites likely saw the Vietnam problem in roughly similar terms. Hence, the existence of one veto player contributed to the relatively rational, expedient policies that were enacted by China.

5.3.5 Rapid Pace of Policy Change

Much like section 5.3.2 of this chapter, we can look at this hypothesis in two ways. If we view the war as one part of a long-term spike in hostility and tensions between China and Vietnam, then the Chinese policy process did not move swiftly. On

³¹⁴ King, *China's War with Vietnam*, pp. 78-79.

the other hand, if we look at the crisis strictly as the outbreak of force, which was confined to a four-week period, then China did indeed move quickly to make policy change. Because this dissertation is solely interested in the behavior of powerful states in wars, and because of spatial constraints, let us focus on the latter interpretation.

The position of the Party in Chinese politics was one reason China to made timely, rational decisions was the primacy of the Party in Chinese politics. All policy decisions were filtered and streamlined through various parts of the Party apparatus. As such, the role of the Party did not rule out or completely stifle conjecture, analysis, and policy debate. To the contrary, senior and leadership level workshops, committees, and meetings were forums in which Chinese elites discussed and debated policy programs. And in the Party workshop in November and the Third Plenum in December 1978, which provided the foundation for China's eventual Vietnam strategy in 1979, there was lively debate among elites.³¹⁵

The logical underpinning for the role of the Party in Chinese society was offered by leaders and officials dating back to Mao. They routinely asserted that the Party was necessary to guarantee the stability and unity that was required for China to emerge from its revolutionary period and move toward a consolidated socialist state.³¹⁶ By 1979, Deng and his followers continued with this claim, yet also folded in two additional arguments in support of the Party's primary position in China. First, to them, class struggles were a

³¹⁵ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*, pp. 97-103.

³¹⁶ Ibid, chapter two.

thing of the past; China was a single class society.³¹⁷ As a result, there was no basis for a pluralistic, multiparty, democratic system. A single Communist Party was sufficient to attend to the needs of China's people. Not surprisingly, this reasoning was used as a justification to clamp down on the protestors and demonstrators who pursued more political and civil liberties in 1978. Second, the Party was needed as an engine to innovate, develop, and modernize the socialist economy—essentially, a method to help make China as rich and strong as possible.³¹⁸ This logic emerged from Deng's inclination to place economic affairs on an equal, if not at times more important, footing as political socialism.

The crux of this discussion is that it is relatively easy to make policy and subsequently shift gears on the fly when there are fewer impediments in the domestic political arena. In this case, Chinese leaders made decisions via a coherent and tightly interconnected entity. As a single-party nondemocratic state, they did not have to be concerned about multiple parties, the electorate, or any other actor outside of the Party, with the lone exception of the military. Deng and his associates coordinated with the military on high level strategic aspects of the war. But the military supported Deng. Moreover, believing that the armed forces had been neglected for years, some officials within the military saw the war—regardless of how well it performed—as a potential lightning rod for reform and modernization, which did occur thereafter in the 1980s.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ “Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China,” pp. 22-23.

³¹⁸ Deng Xiaoping, *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 50-51, 76-77.

³¹⁹ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era*, pp. 108-109.

Consequently, getting the military on board to support the use of force, fight the war, and eventually withdraw its forces really was not a task that required much time and effort and debate. In such an domestic political environment, consensus building was not a major component of the policy making process. The bulk of the decisions about the war were made by the Party, which consisted of people who viewed foreign policy issues and problems through a very similar political ideological lens. And so when debates did occur within the Party, these discussions were neither intractable nor interminable. Thus, this part of the institutional context, then, really did not serve as an obstruction on foreign policy change. Instead, much like the veto player argument, it enabled Chinese elites to act on their political incentives (as outlined in hypotheses 5.3.1, 5.3.2, and 5.3.3) to make and alter foreign policy.

5.4 Evidence of Alternative Explanations in the Sino-Vietnamese War

5.4.1 Contiguous Combatants

Proximity was important in this case, but it mattered in a way that differed from the expectation of the first alternative hypothesis. To Beijing, the fact that Vietnam was situated so close to China was relevant to its decision to use force. Key leaders did not want a country in its backyard flouting Beijing's policy preferences, demonstrating aggression, and working to undermine China's place in the region. Furthermore, China despised the notion of a Soviet proxy, a Cuba of the East, on its border. Despite all of this, China did not wage an interminable hot war with Vietnam. China had relatively limited war goals. It simply sought to punish Vietnam for perceived violations and slights and troublemaking; China did not seek to eliminate or even defeat an inter-state threat,

which would have required a larger and costlier military effort. Indeed, Beijing looked at Vietnam as reckless and a nuisance, but not as a viable threat to China's homeland territory. Surely, prior to the winter of 1979 China and Vietnam had a history of border disputes, with Vietnamese troops entering into Chinese territory and at times purportedly killing Chinese military and police officers. That said, China did not view Vietnam as capable of seizing and holding parts of mainland Chinese territory. So even though the small war involved contiguous combatants, homeland defense was not at stake for China in the Sino-Vietnamese War.

5.4.2 Soviet Dominance, Regional Implications

A major component of the Sino-Vietnamese War was the perceived role and ambition of the Soviet Union in the region.³²⁰ As the Soviet Union developed stronger ties to Vietnam and Laos, granting economic, political, and military assistance to their communist governments, Beijing viewed this as salient evidence of Moscow pursuing hegemony in China's sphere of influence. Each country that the Soviets were able to dominate was seen as a corresponding loss of power and influence in the region, leaving China increasingly isolated.³²¹ At bottom, Beijing feared being surrounded and encircled

³²⁰ See Gerald Segal, "Sino-Soviet Relations after Mao," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 202 (Autumn 1985), pp. 1-53; Min, *The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts*; Hood, *Dragons Entangle*; Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*; Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge eds., *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam, and Cambodia, 1972-1979* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Charles McGregor, "The Sino-Vietnamese Relationship and the Soviet Union," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 232 (Autumn 1988), pp. 1-94; Herbert J. Ellison ed., *The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982); Anne Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*; Golam W. Choudhury, *China in World Affairs: The Foreign Policy of the PRC Since 1970* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 125-162.

³²¹ The entire series of moves by the Soviets during the mid- to late-1970s were viewed through this lens. The Soviets were scheming to fill in the power vacuum created by the Americans; and they were also aiming to squeeze China out of parts of Asia and fill in that resulting gap. And the Soviet attempt to create

by the Soviets and their allies in the region—essentially, a method to keep China in check and insecure. In an effort to galvanize support for their cause, Chinese leaders repeatedly warned Vietnam, Laos, and any other country willing to listen, that the Soviet Union posed a threat not just to China but to the entire region. According to this logic, “Soviet socialist imperialism” in parts of Asia was just as dangerous and menacing as American and French imperialist maneuvers in Vietnam. Indeed, “Soviet social-imperialism is the behind-the-scene provocateur and the supporter of the Vietnamese authorities in ostracizing Chinese residents and attacking China.”³²² As one example among many, China pointed to Moscow’s push for a regional collective security bloc, which was just a tool, according to Beijing, for the Soviets to subvert the sovereignty of Asian nations and extend their influence over these governments.³²³

an Asian collective security bloc was one example of this, from China’s view. See Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, chapters five through eight.

³²² Min, *The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts*, p. 143

³²³ The argument made by China can actually be seen as a forerunner to very similar ones made by American realist scholars in the last fifteen years about the persistence of NATO in the post-cold war world. Scholars such as John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz have tried to explain why NATO has continued to function when its founding mission principle ceased as relevant with the fall of the Soviet Union. Both Waltz and Mearsheimer believe that international institutions are merely instruments employed by the great powers to pursue, if not extend, their interests. In this vein, NATO was a tool used by the U.S. to institutionalize its expanding influence in Central and Eastern Europe. See Waltz, “Structural Realism After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 5-41; and John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 5-49. Leaders in Beijing had a very similar interpretation of Soviet desires for a collective security bloc: it was a vehicle designed to enhance the influence of Moscow in Asia, and by extension contain and encircle China. Beijing stated: “Moscow has long been seeking a dominating position in Southeast Asia and trying to bring the region into its ‘system of collective security in Asia.’ Now it is resorting to the same trick in dealing with the conflict between Kampuchea and Vietnam. Obviously, Moscow itself has stirred up troubles and added fuel to the conflict, yet it, by every possible means, spreads rumours to slander to China. By doing so, Moscow vainly hopes to divert people’s attention and cover up its strategic purpose of establishing domination in the region.” Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, p. 186. Furthermore, one can also read the comments made by Chinese leaders and the arguments presented by the realists as describing opportunistic behavior by great powers. In particular, both refer to instances in which powerful states sought to fill in newly-created power vacuums around the world. As stated by Huang Hua in his speech before the UN

The Soviet Union played a dual role in the decision making calculus of the Chinese leadership. On the one hand, as mentioned above, the singular decision to “punish” Vietnam was motivated by Hanoi’s close ties to Moscow. And on the other, the looming presence of the Soviet Union as Vietnam’s big brother was crucially important in shaping China’s policymaking before and during the conflict. In particular, Beijing took a number of measures—both in terms of its policy language and the execution of its policies—to soothe the Soviets and reduce the likelihood of Soviet reprisals. Importantly, as Ross indicates:

[T]he PRC announced that its invasion of Vietnam was for the pursuit of limited goals and would be limited in duration. China would not threaten the existence of the Vietnamese regime and would not insist on a Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea before withdrawing from Vietnam. Thus Moscow knew from the start that Soviet use of force against China was not required to ensure the stability of the Vietnamese leadership or of the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship.³²⁴

And during the conflict, China maintained its position of limited goals and limited engagement: China did not seize territory, it did not topple the government in Hanoi, and it began drawing down its forces after about four weeks of battle. In this case, the specter of provoking the Soviet Union and getting involved in a major great power war constrained Chinese policy. Beijing did not want to fight a bloody and losing direct war with the Soviets. So despite the presence of Chinese insecurity and regional power

general assembly: “The Soviet leadership hankers after the so-called ‘Asian collective security system.’ Now that the European Security Conference has been a success, as they say, we Asian countries should learn from its example....the purpose of the Soviet Union is not the preservation of Asian security; rather it is to ‘fill the vacuum.’To put it bluntly, the idea of a so-called ‘Asian collective security system’serves as a means by which it seeks to divide and control the Asian countries.” See Ross, *The Indochina Triangle*, p. 57.

³²⁴ Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, p. 229. One of example of this stance: “We do not want a single inch of Vietnamese territory....After counter-attacking the Vietnamese aggressors as they deserve, the Chinese forces will strictly keep to defending the border of their own country.” Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, p. 230.

competition at the root of the Sino-Vietnamese War, these factors did not promote a long-term militarized conflict.

As the other superpower during this period, a brief word must be mentioned about the role of the U.S. in Chinese decision making. China was highly critical of the U.S. commitment in the 1970s to detente with the Soviet Union. From China's perspective, detente was seen as appeasement of the Soviets, an unwillingness to stand up to Soviet expansion around the world.³²⁵ Once the U.S. began withdrawing troops from Vietnam, even though China supported Vietnam during the war, Beijing was concerned because China now had to face the encroachment of Soviet power and influence into Asia by itself. The Americans were no longer there to lend a helping hand. When Jimmy Carter took office in 1976, Beijing was even more worried about regional dynamics. The Carter administration was viewed as dovish and possibly naive, placing an emphasis on morality over power politics.³²⁶ As Vietnam and the Soviet Union developed tighter and stronger relations, fearing a power vacuum in the region, Beijing put pressure on the U.S. to take a more assertive role in the region and to increase defense spending. According to Deng: "What should especially put people on the alert is that where one superpower has to withdraw after suffering defeat, the other superpower, with unbridled ambition, is trying

³²⁵ And this approach, from the Chinese perspective, played right into the hands of the Soviets. Hua warned: "In particular, the superpower that hawks 'detente' while extending its armed expansion and war preparations and attempting to bring more countries into its sphere of influence and play the hegemonic overlord." Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, p. 98.

³²⁶ Ibid, p. 83.

to seize the chance to carry out expansion.”³²⁷ By 1978, China began to see favorable developments in American foreign policy. The U.S. sold aircraft to Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore, slowed the withdrawal of troops from South Korea, and encouraged Japan to establish good and friendly relations with China. At long last, “hardliners” were increasing their influence over American foreign policy. Indeed, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski visited China in May 1978 and used tough talk in describing the nature of the Soviet threat.³²⁸ At this time, American officials were becoming concerned about a host of issues that similarly troubled Beijing, including the status of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, Vietnamese-Soviet relations, and the prospect of Vietnamese militancy in Cambodia.³²⁹ By the end of 1978, the U.S. announced plans to normalize diplomatic relations with China. These trends in U.S. foreign policy, while not decisive influences in Chinese policymaking before and during the Sino-Vietnamese War, helped China feel less vulnerable, less alone, and a bit more protected in case hostilities did escalate to the point that the Soviets intervened on the behalf of Vietnam.

³²⁷ Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, p. 49. In fact, this was a sentiment expressed as early as July 1975 in the *People's Daily*: “Of the two Superpowers, Soviet revisionist social-imperialism has especially wild ambitions, an even bigger appetite and evil claws stretching further....At the same time, the U.S. forces of aggression have greatly declined in the whole area of Southeast Asia. Soviet revisionist social-imperialism, with the idea of taking advantage of the situation, has tried to squeeze into this area in a vain attempt to replace the United States. We must pay attention to this.” See also Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, p. 129.

³²⁸ Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*, p. 174.

³²⁹ Ibid, p. 201.

5.4.3 *Strong Chinese Interests*

While homeland defense was not on the line, China still had a number of important and strong interests at stake in its relationship with Vietnam. By 1979, Beijing was concerned about such intrinsic interests as its shared border, the contested nature of various land and sea territories, and the status of the ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam.³³⁰ Note that I classify the border, land, and sea claims as an intrinsic interests rather than matters of homeland defense, even though these issues were viewed by China to be a part of its own homeland. In the context of the Sino-Vietnamese War, which, after all, is the topic of this chapter, classifying this batch of interests as homeland security would be misleading and inaccurate. The border, land, and sea territories were contested issues, with each side submitting its own claims to various parts of these areas, in a relatively stable state. There was no threat by Vietnam to invade or seize claimed territory, thereby altering the status quo on the ground. In addition, as will be discussed shortly below, ultimately the war was not about these issues; instead, they were ancillary ones that were heightened and intensified by the Sino-Soviet rift. To repeat, homeland defense was not stake for China in its war with Vietnam. Let us turn to China's interests in more detail.

China had three main intrinsic interests at stake in its relationship with Vietnam.

First, China and Vietnam shared a 796-mile border, but both sides disagreed over where

³³⁰ Among other sources, see Selig S. Harrison, *China, Oil, and Asia: Conflict Ahead?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Pao-min Chang, *The Sino-Vietnamese Territorial Dispute* (New York: Praeger, 1986); Pao-min Chang, *Beijing, Hanoi, and the Overseas Chinese* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1982); Marwyn S. Samuels, *Contest for the South China Sea* (New York: Methuen & Co., 1982); Chi-kin Lo, *China's Policy Towards Territorial Disputes: The Case of the South China Sea Islands* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Hood, *Dragons Entangled*; and Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*; Takashi Tajima, "China and South-east Asia: Strategic Interests and Policy Prospects," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 172 (1982), pp. 1-38.

parts of the borderline sits.³³¹ The Sino-French treaty of 1887 demarcated the border between contemporary China and Vietnam, but confusion arose in part because of the document's vague language and references to imaginary points on a map.³³² Further, shifting rivers and the changing nature of the landscape, the dearth of land markers, and the mutual suspicion that locals on both sides have moved the markers that do exist only added to the confusion and tension over the border dispute. Second, China and Vietnam disagreed over the national borders in the Gulf of Tonkin, and both China and Vietnam laid claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands.³³³ The contested nature of the Gulf and the islands has much to do with the energy supplies, in and around these areas, that China and Vietnam so desired. And third, China was concerned about the ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam. Hanoi, backed by ordinary citizens, resented that the Chinese residing in the country held what was perceived as a disproportionate percentage of wealth and influence in Vietnam's economy.³³⁴ So in the mid-1970s Vietnam began cracking down on the Chinese, nationalizing industries that were owned by Chinese, closing Chinese businesses, and forcing them to relocate to government sanctioned economic zones in the south—all of which robbed the Chinese of their ability to earn a living and created a considerable refugee crisis, in which hundreds of thousands poured over the border into China.

³³¹ Hood, *Dragons Entangled*, pp. 111-118.

³³² Ibid, p. 114.

³³³ Ibid, p. 119.

³³⁴ Ibid, pp.136-144.

The evidence indicates that the above set of interests became much more important, serving as major sources of inter-state tension, only when Vietnam pursued closer ties with the Soviet Union in the late 1970s—a separate extrinsic interest.³³⁵ In other words, Vietnamese-Soviet ties can be seen as a crucial condition that sparked and aggravated other, ancillary issues at stake in China’s relations with Vietnam. As mentioned above, China discouraged and opposed strong Vietnamese-Soviet relations because they were viewed as threatening, a sign that the Soviets intended to encircle and contain China’s actions in the region. As these relations grew stronger and more intense, the border dispute, the land and sea territorial disputes, and the status of the ethnic Chinese all became more publicly prominent issues, becoming major sources of propaganda campaigns between Vietnam and China. But one must keep in mind that these issues were present well before the start of the Sino-Vietnam War, and they were arguably no more contested or dangerous or threatening in February 1979 than they were in 1976. What changed in the intervening period was the strategic relationship that Vietnam built with the Soviets, especially after Vietnam joined COMECON in June 1978 and signed the Soviet-Vietnam friendship pact later the same year, which signaled to China that Hanoi had fully aligned itself with Moscow and turned away from Beijing.³³⁶

³³⁵ This is major argument that underpins much of both the Ross and Hood books. Robert S. Ross, *The Indochina Tangle*; and Hood, *Dragons Entangled*. For a review of extrinsic interests, see also Desch, “The Keys that Lock Up the World : Identifying American Interests in the Periphery, *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Summer 1989), pp. 98-99.

³³⁶ McGregor argues that it was the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty of friendship and cooperation that was the most decisive point in China’s relations with Hanoi. See McGregor, “The Sino-Vietnamese Relationship and the Soviet Union,” p. 32. Gilks claims that the treaty augmented Vietnamese power and institutionalized the relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, pp. 216-219. Article 6 was the key point that most rankled Chinese officials. It states:

Absent this trigger mechanism, it is highly likely that the border dispute, the land and sea territorial disputes, and the status of the ethnic Chinese would have continued as latent, simmering tensions that failed to bubble to the surface.

There are two ways to evaluate this alternative hypothesis. On the one hand, China cut its losses as costs mounted in March 1979 because the stakes were not high enough to merit a continual investment in the conflict. Although Vietnam was a contiguous conflict opponent, it did not pose an existential threat to China, nor was it viewed as capable of seizing and holding Chinese territory. Instead, China simply sought to punish Vietnam for what it viewed as various acts of hostility, antagonism, and truculence. Yet on the other hand, on a more macro-scale, of the four powerful states examined in the empirical chapters of this dissertation, China arguably had the most intense interests at stake. Further, based strictly on national interests, the Sino-Vietnam War is the case most likely to have resulted in a protracted struggle. Viewed in a comparative case study context, then, the evidence seems to violate the overall spirit of this alternative hypothesis.

“the two parties signatory to the treaty shall exchange views on all important international questions relating to the interests of the two countries. In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the two parties signatory to the treaty shall immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating that threat, and shall take appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and the security of the two countries.” See King, *China’s War with Vietnam*, p. 171. Further, in response to the friendship pact, Deng stated that it “is not only directed at China, but also constitutes an important component part of the Soviet Union’s global strategy in the Asian-Pacific region.” See Min, *The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts*, p. 147.

CHAPTER 6

DEVIANT CASES

Chapter six explores the democratic and nondemocratic “deviant cases” in my empirical research: The Iraqi Revolt of 1920 and the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. These two small war cases are “deviant,” in that they do not fit the general expectations of my two-step model. Remember, the general form of my model specified the causal linkages that promote perpetual small wars for powerful democracies and shorter, less costly ones for powerful nondemocracies. But the Iraqi Revolt of 1920 highlights a powerful, democratic Britain that quickly changed its governing strategy in Iraq, shifting from direct to indirect rule, as a means to reducing its material and political costs in the face of nationalist unrest.³³⁷ And the Soviet-Afghan War illustrates a powerful,

³³⁷ To be clear, shifting to indirect rule is the method by which Britain attempted to cut costs in Iraq. Note that, as early as the beginning of June of 1920, London planned to make changes to the existing relationship with Iraq by gradually moving toward indirect rule. Even before the Revolt, Acting High Commissioner Arnold Wilson was informed of the decision to entrust Sir Percy Cox with the responsibility of crafting indigenous laws and institutions in Iraq. So the Revolt did not cause the shift to indirect rule. This is the consensus of historians who have studied this case. However, the Revolt did do a couple of very important things. First, it sped up the process of empowering locals in practice, on the ground. In effect, the violence greased the wheel for domestic political consensus within Britain on the specifics of indirect rule. After all, this discussion was underway for about two years, and hardly any change was made to the status quo in Iraq. We need politics to produce and effect change on the ground, and without the violence it is doubtful that the announcement during the summer would have turned into concrete action by the fall. Second, the Revolt pushed the British to more deeply devolve power to the locals. The June announcement did not go as far as the ideas implemented in practice during November 1920 to January 1921, nor did it outline ideas for transferring more power over to the Iraqis over time. If implemented as stated, it arguably would have triggered more nationalist activity and violence.

nondemocratic Soviet Union that continued to invest resources in a protracted, stalemated struggle. This chapter investigates the domestic political processes and mechanisms that ultimately led to the “deviant” outcomes for both cases. What we should find is that, along with a change in the expected value of the dependent variable, there is also some fluctuation in the values of the independent and intervening variables of this study.

6.1 Iraqi Revolt of 1920

6.1.1 Case Summary

The Iraqi revolt of 1920 was the product of historical events and processes. The regions of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul were controlled by the Ottoman Empire for several hundred years, but fell into the hands of the British during World War I. Britain defeated the Ottomans and by 1916 united the three regions into one territory called Iraq. The British secured its grip over Iraq through a series of diplomatic maneuvers. Notably, in 1916, England and France negotiated the Sykes-Picot agreement, which split up the spoils of the Ottoman Empire. And in 1920, the League of Nations formally granted Britain provisional authority over Iraq, with the end goal of Iraqi sovereignty and freedom.³³⁸ But almost from the beginning, while Iraqis welcomed the departure of the Ottomans, they

³³⁸ Iraq was recognized as a quasi-independent state under article 22 of the League of Nations. This article indicated that parts of the old Ottoman Empire were eligible to receive provisional independence for a specified number of years under the guidance of mandatory powers like Britain and France. The plan was for these territories to gain complete, unconditional independence once they demonstrated the capacity to function on their own. See Daniel Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 6-7. For references on the mandates system, see, among others, Aaron M. Margalith, *The International Mandates* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1930); and Quincy Wright, *Mandates Under the League of Nations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1930). For a comprehensive review of the division of spoils from Prime Minister Lloyd George's perspective, see David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference, Vol. 1* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939); and David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference, Vol. 2* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939).

were apprehensive and skeptical of British motives.³³⁹ Their concern was that England, backed by its dominant military apparatus, would aim to tightly control political and economic affairs in Iraq and indefinitely occupy the country. Keep in mind that many parts of Iraq outside of the major cities, especially south of Baghdad, were already experiencing some freedom, as the tentacles of Ottoman administration in these areas were frequently superficial or even nonexistent. Here, tribal rules and customs prevailed.³⁴⁰ After the Ottomans left Iraq, expectations of complete autonomy without conditions in these areas and throughout the country were heightened.³⁴¹ But the League of Nations Mandate was interpreted by the locals as a sign of British intent to remain in Iraq for a prolonged period of time, which sparked the rise of anti-colonial, anti-British political groups in Baghdad, Karbala, and Najaf, among other places.³⁴² Mosques were

³³⁹ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 33, 36.

³⁴⁰ Amal Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in National Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1972), pp. 125, 127. Vinogradov claims that this occurred because the Ottomans could not deploy enough troops and resources into areas south of Baghdad, and so they resorted to subsidizing local sheiks—essentially, a method of outsourcing its authority—in return for keeping order.

³⁴¹ See Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered." And over time these sentiments were further heightened because of comments made by the British themselves. Initially, as a way of fomenting an uprising against the Ottoman Turks during the war, Britain made vague promises of supporting independence for Arab lands. Once the British military moved its way up from Basra to Baghdad in 1917, Lieutenant F.S. Maude proclaimed that the British came not as conquerors but as liberators seeking to free people from the tyrannical Ottomans. Britain would not impose alien institutions on Iraq. In addition, statements made by Lloyd George and the Anglo-French Declaration—both in 1918—indicated that Britain supported an indigenous independence movements in Iraq. Indeed, even Gertrude Bell, a colonial bureaucrat stationed in Baghdad, noticed the raised expectations: "it isn't often that people are told that their future as a state is in their hands." Liora Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East: Gertrude Bell and the Making of Modern Iraq* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 121. And Silverfarb claims that these events made it almost impossible for Britain not to breach faith when it eventually did decide upon direct rule after World War I. Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East*, pp. 5-6.

³⁴² Judith Yaphe points out that Iraqis thought the Mandate was ominous and patronizing, that it was European rule by another name. As a result, it was met with contempt, hostility, and resistance. Judith Yaphe, "The View from Basra: Southern Iraq's Reaction to War and Occupation, 1915-1925," in Reeva

used as meeting centers, and Shia and Sunni Iraqi nationalists pushed aside centuries of bad blood to debate about and coordinate resistance activities. Both sects felt marginalized in the presence of English rule. It was at this point that politics and religion began to fuse together, as prominent clerics gave sermons and political speeches rejecting the occupation of Iraq by a Christian nation.³⁴³ The British further complicated matters by attempting to manage and govern Iraq via direct rule. Certainly, Iraqis associated direct rule with colonialism and foreign domination.³⁴⁴ But in a practical sense, direct rule meant that posh administrative jobs were overwhelmingly held by British officials, not local Iraqis, which caused further resentment.³⁴⁵ In addition, there were vigorous local complaints about the amount of taxes that were levied and collected by the British, which

Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian eds., *The Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 27.

³⁴³ Some scholars, such as Elie Kedourie, see the Revolt largely in terms of a reaction against Christian occupiers. Shia leaders in Karbala and Najaf, as well as some who resided in Syria, propagated the idea of creating an Islamic state, and they influenced Shia tribesmen living along the Euphrates to take up arms against the British. See Reeva Spector Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars: The Militarist Origins of Tyranny* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 47; and Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered." In Karbala a leading Shia cleric, Ayatollah Muhammed Taqi al-Shirazi (in contemporary terms, it seems he was akin to al-Sistani, head of the Shia in Iraq and Iran) issued a fatwa declaring that "one who is a Muslim has no right to elect and choose a non-Muslim to rule over Muslims." In his view, service in the British administration was unlawful. See Yaphe, "The View from Basra," p. 27; and William Polk, *Understanding Iraq: The Whole Sweep of Iraqi History, from Genghis Khan's Mongols to the Ottoman Turks to the British Mandate to the American Occupation* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), pp. 74-75.

³⁴⁴ Yaphe, "The View from Basra," pp. 27-28

³⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 27-28. And the administrative jobs they did hold were in areas like sanitation and parks, public health, and road building—all of which failed to provide Iraqis with any kind of political training for future independence.

only made relations between the British and Iraqis even more tense and combustible.³⁴⁶

This was political climate in which the revolt of 1920 occurred.³⁴⁷

The relationship between the local Iraqis and British colonial authorities was peppered with violence dating back to 1919. British officials in Iraq were increasingly concerned about and vigilant of anti-Britain resistance movements, which at times caused death and destruction, and they responded with strong measures, such as arresting and at times executing religious figures and tribal chiefs, banning religious ceremonies and political meetings, and even using military force. But this simply triggered a cycle of violence and reprisals that intermittently continued until the end of the revolt. For each time England imposed what were viewed locally in Iraq as harsh penalties in response to nationalist actions, Iraqis became more resolute in opposing their occupiers, more willing to commit violence, and more determined to find sympathizers to their cause. In June 1920, a full-scale revolt had emerged in Mosul and gradually spread southward into the Euphrates River valley. Initial Iraqi victories and British troop withdrawals from parts of Iraq added momentum to the early stages of the fighting. But by November, the

³⁴⁶ Yaphe, "The View from Basra"; Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*; Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered. And even Arnold Wilson, the Acting High Commissioner recognized taxation as a point of contention among the Iraqis. See Arnold Talbot Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 310-311.

³⁴⁷ For the sake of time and space, I have limited this discussion to prominent events inside of Iraq. But Syrian nationalism arguably also played a role in the stirring of Arab nationalism and anti-British propaganda in the region as well as within Iraq. Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered," pp. 127-129; and Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, 47. In his memoirs, Wilson broaches the connection between unrest and nationalism in Syria and the violence in Iraq. See Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 310-311. And Joel Rayburn points out similarities between the blame that the British placed on outside or external factors, like Syrian nationalism, and the blame placed by American officials on external forces, like al-Qaeda, in Iraq. See Joel Rayburn, "The Last Exit from Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (Mar./Apr. 2006), pp. 29-40.

nationalists were overwhelmed by repeated aerial bombings and more than 100,000 British and Indian ground forces.³⁴⁸ And by early 1921, British forces finally quelled the nationalist, anti-imperialist violence and got the country under control. The revolt cost Britain more than 2000 fallen and wounded soldiers and over 40 million pounds, and sparked widespread discontent and anger among citizens living in Britain. Enough material and political damage had been inflicted upon the British to cause officials in Baghdad and London to speed up and expand the planned transition away from direct rule. And by the end of November 1920, the British had installed a provisional government consisting solely of Iraqis.³⁴⁹

6.1.2 Unit of Analysis

Unlike the French case in chapter four, here we can pinpoint a consistent, specific set of actors as the political front for Britain during the Iraqi Revolt. In this case, the Lloyd George government was in power in 1920. George rose to power in 1916, in the midst of World War I. At the time, there was rising discontent within England over the way the war was being fought, and parliament in turn pushed for a war committee independent of the cabinet and Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. In other words, Asquith

³⁴⁸ Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered," pp. 137-138.

³⁴⁹ In October 1920, Cox quickly began implementing indirect rule measures. A cabinet of Iraqis, who headed various bureaucratic departments, were appointed by the British and each member was supervised by a corresponding English official. Cox wielded considerable authority over the Iraqi government, including veto power over the decisions of the cabinet. Essentially, the old Sunni-dominated order of the Ottoman period was being reestablished: Ottoman administrative units were restored, as were the municipal councils. Iraqis began to replace the British in the government, and Sunni ex-Ottoman officers began to fill up the new Iraqi national army. Cox decided that the Sunnis were the group that he could work with best, since these were the locals who had some administrative experience from the Ottoman period. See Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East*, p. 8; Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), chapter one; Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 45; and Polk, *Understanding Iraq*, p. 79.

could remain as prime minister, but not run the war. Under these conditions, Asquith stepped aside.³⁵⁰ The governing coalition was then recast around Lloyd George, a member of the liberal party. Paradoxically, the ascent of George allowed conservatives to move into positions of power within the cabinet. Because many liberal ministers refused to join the new coalition, George had to look elsewhere for political support to round out his government.³⁵¹ The few liberals who did join were relegated to minor cabinet positions. By 1920, George's inner circle on conflict and colonial issues consisted of the following: Winston Churchill, head of the War Office; Alfred Milner, Colonial Secretary; and George Curzon, Foreign Secretary. These principle players were deeply divided on, among other things, the value of Iraq, how to combat the rebellion, and the organization of the British bureaucracy.

It is highly relevant to briefly discuss the dynamics within the coalition because they, too, contributed to England cutting its losses in a timely manner. Importantly, there

³⁵⁰ Paul Adelman, *The Decline of the Liberal Party, 1910-1931*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman Inc., 1995), pp. 17-23.

³⁵¹ Britain had an extraordinary spectacle. There was a Liberal prime minister backed by a Conservative government with only minor Liberal support. The bulk of Liberals, including Asquith, the leader of the party, sat on the opposition benches. George was a prime minister without a party. Because he was not the party head, he did not control the funds, the bulk of its supporters, nor the political machinery and organization of the Liberal Party. And at the time, there was massive split in the Liberal party. Indeed, the Liberals were left with a dilemma: were they one party with two wings or two separate parties? Opposition Liberals began putting up Liberal candidates against coalition Liberals in some areas, treating them as members of a rival party. Coalition liberals, in turn, responded by setting up their own political infrastructure in the country. More than 200 organizations were set up in 1921-22, and the coalition liberals started producing political publications. The problem was that the coalition Liberals lacked grass-roots support. Over time it became clear that their fate really depended on the Conservatives, who looked at electoral defeats and resignations in 1921 as a sign that the coalition Liberals were a rotting corpse providing few benefits. See Adelman, *The Decline of the Liberal Party*, pp. 23-24, 30-33; Robert Rhodes James, *The British Revolution: British Politics, 1880-1939*, Vol. 2 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), pp. 127.

was one member within the coalition—Winston Churchill—who actively campaigned for decisiveness in British policymaking and for a reduction in expenditures allocated to Iraq. Churchill's role was key because he continually voiced views on Iraq to Lloyd George, as well as other cabinet members, and so the idea of cutting costs was an available policy option once the rebellion emerged. In short, he primed the pump for a policy change that could occur only once the conditions in Iraq favored his ideas. Churchill supported the idea of running the Empire on the cheap, particularly by substantially reducing the number of active forces in the Middle East, including Iraq, and letting the Royal Air Force patrol areas.³⁵² In the summer of 1920, Churchill asked that London make an immediate and strong response to the violence in Iraq; otherwise, he recommended, Britain should soberly think about pulling back from the north and central parts of Iraq and concentrate its political and military affairs around the strategic port city of Basra.³⁵³ In Churchill's view, weak and ineffectual counter-measures would only allow the revolt to continue, if not grow, which in turn would impose even higher costs on Britain.

But Churchill encountered resistance from Curzon and Milner to his two-option proposal. Curzon and Milner emphasized that Britain ought not to capitulate its effort in

³⁵² Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-1922* (Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1984).

³⁵³ Admittedly, there were self-interested reasons underpinning Churchill's policy positions. He feared that in the event of a military disaster in Iraq, or a public outcry against the military spending in Iraq, he would be the scapegoat for the decisions. And in his view, these were decisions over which he had little control. In addition, self-interest bled into other views of his. Churchill was determined to exercise closer control over the distribution of the army's resources, and he bitterly resented the Foreign Offices directing impulse in Mesopotamia policy, which, he claimed, resulted in an extravagant use of army manpower. See John Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East: Imperial Policy in the Aftermath of War 1918-1922* (London: The Macmillan Press, LTD., 1981); and Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire 1918-1922*.

Iraq.³⁵⁴ To them, there were a host of strategic reasons to remain fully engaged. In particular, Curzon and Milner argued that, while Turkey's future was uncertain, Britain should not relax its grip over Iraq. They feared that Turkish imperialism would move back into Iraq if Britain experienced difficulties in pacifying the country, as this would create a power vacuum waiting to be filled by internal or external actors.³⁵⁵ But not only was Turkey a major concern, so was the threat of Bolshevism creeping into the Middle East. Milner, for example, spoke in pessimistic terms about an emerging Bolshevik Empire that could spread from Russia through the Persian Gulf via a series of national revolutions.³⁵⁶ In this context, Iraq was viewed as a bulwark against rise the of Bolshevism.³⁵⁷ Churchill also faced resistance from individuals within the government,

³⁵⁴ Curzon's views were a bit complicated. He is widely viewed as an strong imperialist and supporter of the Empire. Curzon believed that Baghdad was important to Britain's position in the Middle East. Yet at the same time he was reluctant to see any project aimed at extending the Baghdadi government into Kurdish areas in the north and into Mosul in the east. In August 1919, Curzon warned that Iraq should not be treated as a second India. And like Churchill, he was cautious about any scheme which would drain British resources for a prolonged period of time. In November 1919, he attacked Wilson's civil administration for being too expensive and for running counter to the spirit of the British-French declaration. See Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*.

³⁵⁵ Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*. And these views were not limited to Curzon and Milner. Sir Percy Cox, held similar concerns about the potential for other powers moving into Iraq. See Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, pp. 175-176.

³⁵⁶ Helmut Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil: Iraq 1910-1928* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), p. 72. British elites associated national revolutions, such as the Revolt in Iraq, as consistent with, if not directly tied to, Bolshevism.

³⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 72. An example of this logic is nicely represented in a quote from *The Yorkshire Post*. "Mesopotamia, with Syria on the west, Turkey to the north, Persia to the east and a back door opening on the great trade routes of the Indian ocean, is a centre from which a far-reaching influence may be exerted...There can be no question of the strategic value of Mesopotamia in the new conditions ruling in that part of the world...Mesopotamia runs, like a narrow wedge, up into a mass which is trembling on the brink of anarchy—Syria, Kemalist Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Persia, and beyond to Bokhara and Afghanistan. Where is there firm government, security, peace, sanity in these countries? On all sides is war or rumours of war, everywhere whispers of that new power, symptoms of the virulent fever, which we call Bolshevism. Alone in all the middle east Mesopotamia presents an example of stability...here is that last bulwark which may yet stem the tide, but if it gives way, what will hold back the flood? Assuredly, not the

including Curzon, who were reluctant to make concrete decisions about Iraq until the League determined its future direction. Ultimately, as the violence increased in Iraq in 1920, the competing views of Churchill and other cabinet members found a common front in the belief that the status quo in Iraq (under Arnold Wilson) was failing and that Britain should indeed aim to reduce its expenditures in the region.

6.1.3 Evidence of Model's Hypotheses in the Iraqi Revolt of 1920

As readers should recall from chapters two and three, the expectations of the two-step model change as we move to the democratic and nondemocratic deviant small war cases. With respect to the former, I expect powerful democracies to look and act like nondemocracies typically do. In brief, I hypothesize that the cases in which powerful democracies cut their losses in small wars likely occur when their domestic politics are streamlined and have fewer self-contained procedural obstacles.

6.1.3.1 Elections as a Force for Cost-Efficient Policy

Electoral pressures and public opinion contributed to cutting costs in Iraq. It was not the willingness of the George government to suffer audience costs in the face of tough decisions, nor was it the belief that the ruling elite would not be punished for costly, reckless policies. Instead, the perceived need to placate an angry and discontented British domestic audience motivated the George government to abandon direct rule and reduce expenditures to Iraq. In other words, consistent with the expectations outlined in chapter two, London changed policies to satisfy the will of the people and potentially save its hide. Interestingly, unlike the Indochina War, in which the nexus of democratic elections

mountain frontiers of India.”

and public opinion in part promoted a protracted and costly small war, these same variables in this case fostered a more efficient and rational foreign policy.

Britain operated as a majoritarian parliamentary democracy. It was guided by a winner-take-all principle for pluralities and majorities. The victors take all of the spoils and the losers are left out in the cold. In practice, this tends to winnow the number of vibrant and competitive political parties in democracies, concentrating political power in a small number of factions, precisely because under these rules voters tend not to cast their lot for third parties that likely will be excluded from representation.³⁵⁸ During the first half of World War I, the Liberal Party was the dominant force in British politics, holding a commanding position in parliament, the cabinet, and the office of prime minister. But frustration over the war effort provided ripe conditions for the Conservative Party to seize power by 1916.³⁵⁹ Lloyd George, a liberal, ascended to the prime minister position, while the conservatives dominated parliament and the cabinet. And both benefitted from England's victory in war. George and the conservatives were popular and widely seen as strong on national defense and as symbols of patriotism. In the next elections, in 1918, both the conservatives and George were willing to maintain the

³⁵⁸ See Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Richard Gunther, "Electoral Laws, Party Systems and Elites." The exception to the rule occurs in districts or regions where there is concentrated third party support, because in these cases we might find a few third party candidates acquiring seats in the legislature. But in general, the expectation holds, for this is a concentrated power system of democracy.

³⁵⁹ The Conservatives believed that the conflict vindicated their pre-war views about German competitiveness and the need for compulsory military service. During this time, the Conservatives were in a bit of a dilemma: they wanted to criticize the conduct of war that was being run by the liberals, but they did not want to seem unpatriotic; and they wanted to support the war but did not want to prop up the government.

domestic political status quo by keeping the coalition intact. George and the conservatives sought to take advantage of each other's popularity, and both identified many of same threats and obstacles to British prosperity and tranquility.³⁶⁰ So at the time, it was not a completely unnatural or ill-conceived political connection.

The conservatives capitalized on their new fame and prestige in the 1918 elections. Importantly, the 1918 Reform Act greatly expanded the electorate. The Act gave men aged 21 or older and—for the first time—females 30 or older the right to vote. Accordingly, from 1910 to 1918, the electorate swelled from 7.7 million voters, comprising 28 percent of the British population, to 21.7 million and 78 percent.³⁶¹ A sizable portion of the new voters cast their ballot for the conservatives.³⁶² Further, the Reform Act of 1918 worked to the conservatives' advantage in ancillary ways, such as via redistricting. As conservative membership expanded, many districts in their stronghold were subdivided into several new constituencies, thereby strengthening the conservatives base of power. The 1918 elections left the deeply divided Liberal Party in tatters, and Labor was at this point the principle political challenger. Not surprisingly, the

³⁶⁰ Stuart Ball, *The Conservative Party and British Politics, 1902-1951* (New York: Longman Inc., 1995), p. 61; Adelman, *The Decline of the Liberal Party*, p. 28; James, *The British Revolution*, p. 126. One such threat was the rise of labor and pro-leftist attitudes, which was feared, especially in the light of the Russian Revolution, the expansion of trade unions, and an expanded electorate. There was a brief push toward fusing the Conservatives and Liberal coalition into a Center Party, led by George. Supporters of this cause saw the Center Party as a large anti-Socialist bloc. But this was dropped in 1920, because of the lack of support from Liberal ministers and Conservative parliamentarians.

³⁶¹ James, *The British Revolution*, chapter four.

³⁶² New adult male voters were expected to be supporters of the Labor Party, which was a reason that the Conservatives were wary of expanding the electorate, but they were not all working class citizens, and even those who did fit in this class were susceptible to the post-war appeal of the Conservatives. And regarding the introduction of adult women into the electorate, the Conservatives generally benefitted. The Conservative Party consistently secured the largest share of the women vote during the interwar period.

Conservative Party secured and enhanced its grip on power by winning 382 of 523 parliamentary seats.

As a relatively free and open democracy, British elites expected to face periodic elections, and their punishment never went beyond losing public office. But the type and probability of punishment did not drive British elites to stand firm in face of conflict and violence in Iraq. Resoluteness and inflexibility over time, from 1918 to 1920, were widely seen as bad options. And as is typical of relatively free and open democracies, in which discontent could quickly turn into declining support and a new regime in power, elites were very sensitive to the public reaction to events in Iraq. As will be discussed in the next section in much more detail, ordinary citizens and the press voiced their dissatisfaction with the wastefulness and aimlessness of British policy in Iraq. In their view, the declining English economy, with more and more people out of work, could not withstand imperialism run amok. A key difference between the Iraqi Revolt and the Indochina War was that the British public was immediately engaged and activated in the events of the crisis. Unlike the French case, there was not a slow percolation of civic interest in Britain. Surely, most citizens did not know much about the demographics and cities and geography of Iraq, and likely few could locate Iraq on a map, but they knew enough about the Revolt to be angry about Britain's investment and role in the country, as well as in the Middle East in general. Moreover, from the beginning of the mass violence in 1920, there was not much vocal public support for the conflict or for continuing the high expenditures in Iraq. This is important to note because it means that Britain did not fracture and become polarized, which often happens in small wars, and under these

circumstances it is difficult to misinterpret or mischaracterize the intensity and content of public opinion. That is, in situations like the Iraqi Revolt it is difficult for elites to delude themselves or the public about the worthiness of the struggle. Indeed, public opinion squarely pointed in one direction, and elites could choose to ignore it, namely by continuing to rule Iraq with an iron fist, but they would do so at their own peril.

Finally, a point must be made about the connection between public opinion and the coincidence of multiple salient issues. The protracted nature of the Indochina War was aided by the presence of several important issues occurring at the same time. This allowed the public to become distracted and the French government to pursue the war without close scrutiny in the early war years. In the case of the Iraqi Revolt, however, multiple salient issues triggered the British public to respond immediately to the prospect of a costly military campaign. In particular, concurrent colonial conflicts in Iraq and Ireland, along with existing economic problems, pushed a war-wary nation to view a host of British actions, including those in the Middle East, as wasteful and unproductive.³⁶³ Really, then, the public perceived these events in an interconnected sense rather than occurring in a political vacuum, isolated and separate from one another. The public recognized that all of these events put an accumulated drain on the English state. In response, British elites did not want to have too many simultaneous open wounds that

³⁶³ The assumption among rationalists is that war by definition trumps all other issues. But they also implicitly assume that countries engage in one conflict at a time. There is no discussion of the decision-making processes—of standing firm or backing down—when countries are engaged in multiple conflicts at once. The rationalist logic is probably true for most countries in the world. But it is not applicable for first and second tier great powers, like Britain in 1920, that have the capability of at least fighting multiple minor military skirmishes at one time. Certainly, this point is relevant to the u.s. nowadays, as it fights two simultaneous conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan for the past four years. This will be a topic of discussion in chapter seven, when I explore the scholarly and policy implications of this dissertation.

would leave them vulnerable to even more domestic attacks, so solving the Iraq problem eventually became a priority. In addition, by 1920, London similarly saw these events as interconnected, particularly the relationship between conflicts Iraq and Ireland, which arguably reinforced the idea to quickly and judiciously deal with the violence and nationalism in Iraq.³⁶⁴

6.1.3.2 Short-Term and Long-Term Time Horizons

The case of the Iraqi Revolt is an interesting one because British officials viewed events through a mixed short-term and long-term prism. And quite frankly, the short- and long-term prisms contributed to policy decisions that were the opposite of what the deviant form of this hypothesis expects to observe. Short-term views—a fixture of democratic politics—should prolong crises, as it did for the French in the Indochina War; but here, the short-term perspective in part pushed Britain to cut its losses. Moreover, in speedy, efficient conflicts like the Iraqi Revolt, this dissertation generally expects *not* to find a strong presence of short-term time horizons.

³⁶⁴ Conflict raged in Ireland through 1920, though there were never more than 5000 British forces stationed there at one time. From January 1919 to July 1921, 176 police and 54 soldiers were killed and 251 police and 118 soldiers wounded. See James, *The British Revolution*, pp. 147-151. Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 151; Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, p. 69; Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power, and War, 1902-1922* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 193. Roger Adelson highlights the connection between Ireland and Iraq made by Churchill—a connection that seemed to lead him to believe that Iraq was not worth an endless and indefinite investment. From a draft letter in August 1920 that was never sent, Churchill wrote: “There is something very sinister to my mind in this Mesopotamian entanglement, coming as it does when Ireland is so great a menace. It seems to me so gratuitous that after all the struggles of the war, just when we want to get together our slender military resources and re-establish our finances and have a little in hand in case of danger here or there, we should be compelled to go on pouring armies and treasure into these thankless deserts. We have not got a single friend in the press upon the subject, and there is no point of which they make more effective us to injure the government.” See Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power, and War, 1902-1922* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 193.

Meantime, the long-term time horizons of British elites prevented England from completely cutting the cord to its empire in Iraq. The *presence* of long-term views is consistent with the expectations of this hypothesis, but the *causal impact* of these views is not. This dissertation expects long-term time horizons to enable foreign policy elites to make the tough and at times unpopular decisions to pull out of costly conflicts despite not securing their end goals. Let us turn to the evidence.

British elites were forced to adopt a short-term vision of Iraq because the press and political opposition was active and fairly mobilized from the beginning of the revolt. A confluence of domestic and international conditions activated members of the British domestic audience. England just emerged from a major great power war, and the British were war-weary, reluctant to see more of their sons and friends and neighbors hurt or killed in battle. In addition, in 1920 Britain was sliding into economic chaos. Of these two factors, it is the latter that informed the bulk of the criticism of Britain's Iraq policy.

In 1919, the post-war boom began to collapse and a host of economic problems surfaced. Unemployment rose, taxes increased, inflation soared, industrial competitiveness declined, and the deficit skyrocketed.³⁶⁵ A major factor was that more people were leaving active service duty and coming back home than what the British economy could employ. State subsidies somewhat helped initially, but in the end they served to put a major strain on Britain's finances. Moreover, during the war, Britain expanded the size of the state bureaucracy, but once the economy took a downturn, these departments and programs appeared costly and excessive. The British government faced

³⁶⁵ Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East*, p. 191.

strikes and protests from miners, railwaymen, and transport workers, and had to cope with rising anger and disaffection from multiple sectors in society. By 1920, England was in a full-fledged economic recession.

At this point, the George government could not argue that economic hardships and sacrifices were needed in the face of a conflict against a mortal threat or enemy to Britain's existence. Iraqi fanatics and insurgents did not pose the same magnitude of threat as the Central Powers did in World War I. George could not rely on patriotism to staunch the flow of protests and invectives. Relatedly, given the economic troubles in Britain, George and his cabinet could not justify maintaining a large and expensive military commitment to Iraq. The government publicly admitted that it cost 750,000 pounds a week to station British forces in former Ottoman territories; and on a few occasions it had to revise upward its budget expenses on Iraq.³⁶⁶ These events provoked widespread criticism of Britain's role in Iraq.³⁶⁷

What the public wanted was a bigger commitment to stabilizing and repairing the British economy. One way this could be done, citizens and the press contended, was through curbing wasteful expenditures, such as costly military commitments in Iraq. Ordinary citizens became frustrated with the high cost of Britain's empire, believed colonial affairs were secondary to events at home, viewed George as slow to react to the economic troubles, and clamored for further reductions in the number of troops on active

³⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 194.

³⁶⁷ Critics of British policy in Iraq were a motley group of anti-war pacifists, anti-imperialists, Laborites, and loyalists to T.E. Lawrence.

duty. During the 1919-1921 period, several grassroots anti-waste movements emerged, as they attempted to take advantage of the growing alienation from the British government.³⁶⁸ One of their main points of attack focused on British expenditures in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine and Iraq. English newspapers seized on such sentiments by publishing scathing critiques of government policy toward Iraq. *The London Times*, *The Daily Herald*, *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Daily Mail*, to various degrees, questioned the policy of direct rule and demanded that Britain cut costs in Iraq.³⁶⁹ And the press stepped up its criticism when more British forces were summoned to Iraq in the summer of 1920.³⁷⁰ Several newspaper articles were written by T.E. Lawrence, who claimed that existing policy in Iraq was not working, unstable, and monetarily costly.³⁷¹ He directed his harshest criticism at Acting High Commissioner Arnold Wilson, who actively supported Britain's position of primacy in

³⁶⁸ Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East*, pp. 191-192.

³⁶⁹ As one example, *The times* wrote: "If the government thinks that their policy in Mesopotamia during the past year has redounded to the glory of the Empire they are alone in their belief. Every sane critic of government expenditure must deplore the waste which still marks the War Office outlay at a time when the nation is financially embarrassed". The paper also called for the constant pressure of public opinion to criticize government expenses and its policy of direct rule. See Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

³⁷⁰ Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East*, p. 194.

³⁷¹ Lawrence was widely considered the leading authority on Middle Eastern affairs, because of his immense experience and travels in the region, and his thoughts on Iraq were taken seriously by the public and policymakers. Polk, *Understanding Iraq*, p. 78; Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, pp. 136, 138; In *The Sunday Times*, Lawrence wrote: "The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour. They have been tricked into it by a steady withholding of information...Things have been far worse than we have been told, our administration more bloody and inefficient than the public knows..." And he continued by stating: "How long will we permit millions of pounds, thousands of imperial troops, and tens of thousands of arabs to be sacrificed on behalf of a form of colonial administration which can benefit nobody but its administrators." See Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 193-194; and Rayburn, "The Last Exit from Iraq."

Iraq.³⁷² Lawrence argued that the violence and nationalism was a sure sign that Iraqis were discontented with Wilson's reluctance to hand over more political power to them.³⁷³ Imposing alien institutions on Iraq was bound to fail over the long-term; empowering the Sharifians, in his view, was a more appropriate direction of British policy.

As the harsh criticism continued, it eventually seeped into and affected policy debates within the British government and parliament, and within and between Britain's colonial administrations. The cabinet panicked in the face of mounting political pressure. It began slashing reform programs and government expenditures, including the Agricultural Act of 1920, which left farmers and conservative parliamentarians feeling

³⁷² Wilson was the Acting Civil Commissioner in Iraq between sept 1918 and June 1920. Wilson suppressed Iraqi participation in politics, claimed that the locals supported British direct rule, and thought that the rise of Sunni rule would lead to mass violence, chaos, and anarchy. look for more. He also thought that the extent of nationalism in Iraq was overstated. Wilson believed that Britain should go very slowly and gradually in its state-building efforts, especially in a country with so many ethnic and religious cleavages, and was reluctant to cede more political authority to local Iraqis. Picking a leader who would be acceptable to the Sunni, Shia, and Kurd populations was practically impossible, according to him, and no government would last for long without British forces propping up its rule. Wilson claimed he supported democratic institutions, but stated that introducing such measures would only lead to anti-democratic results. See Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917-1920*, pp. 314, 315, 320. In addition, Wilson appeared resistant to make changes to Britain's role in Iraq because this might jeopardize the collection of taxes, and the solvency of the government was important since its funds were used to subsidize the British civil and military administration in the country. Critics viewed Wilson as dismissive of the League of Nations and American policy positions and ignorant of local attitudes toward the British. He was also accused of doctoring reports on the state of Iraq that he sent to London, and of manipulating and distorted Iraqi public opinion. And obviously, Wilson's was attacked for staying the course on a failed policy. Interestingly, Wilson was aware of the public rebuke in several newspapers, as he pointed out in his memoirs. See also Rayburn, "The Last Exit from Iraq"; Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 15-16; Yaphe, "The View from Basra," pp. 26-27; Polk, *Understanding Iraq*, p. 74; Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*; and Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*.

³⁷³ On August 9, 1920, in *The Daily Herald*, Lawrence pointed out a number of problems with Britain's actions in Iraq. He was critical of the high expense of subsidizing the Royal Air Force squadrons and the jobs for all of the British political advisers. But the main thrust of his comments were that the British (and the French in Syria) neglected Arab nationalism in their political machinations. The uprising in 1920 shattered the myth that Iraqis were satisfied with British rule. Liora Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East: Gertrude Bell and the Making of Modern Iraq* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 136.

betrayed. And once the revolt broke out in the summer of 1920, the government ordered an immediate review of events in Iraq. It is right about at this point that Churchill's views on Iraq gained more traction, as other ministers fell in line with his position that the status quo was failing and unsustainable. Ultimately, the policy review resulted in bringing Sir Percy Cox back to Baghdad, with the express purpose of speedily moving toward indirect rule.³⁷⁴ The transition in power was in part guided by the desire to cut costs in Iraq and muffle British criticism. It became apparent to the government that direct rule backed by a large military presence would likely trigger more vigorous, more tenacious, and more numerous domestic opponents over time.

Meantime, debates in the legislature and in the colonies began turning an eye toward Iraq. Importantly, Lawrence had ties to and friendships with many Liberal and Labor officials in parliament, and their views on Iraq frequently reflected his published opinion pieces.³⁷⁵ Some parliamentarians focused their attention on the wastefulness of British policy, others attacked what they saw as Britain's failed policy in the Middle East. For instance, on June 23, 1920, former Prime Minister Herbert Asquith declared: "Whatever may be [Iraq's] possibilities of resurrection, reconstruction, or revitalization, it is certainly not a duty which it is incumbent upon us to take upon our already overburdened shoulders." In the colonies, criticism of Britain's Iraq policy began to mirror the attitudes of British citizens back home. As early as 1918, officials in the India

³⁷⁴ In the end, this allowed for a compromise approach between Lawrence's proposal of total independence and Wilson's vision of tight control. Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, pp. 138-139.

³⁷⁵ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 194.

Office expressed concern about Wilson's approach to Iraq, and more jumped on board by 1920, including Secretary of State Edwin Montagu.³⁷⁶ As another example, by the spring of 1920, Gertrude Bell, who was stationed in Baghdad and in communication with Lawrence, saw Arab rule with British guidance and assistance as a superior alternative to direct rule.³⁷⁷ And like Lawrence, she also viewed Iraqi nationalism as a force that could not be extinguished or significantly dampened through coercive measures or inducements. Eventually, Bell became a force for change in British policy, exhorting Wilson to loosen his grip over Iraq and meeting with tribal leaders to determine suitable candidates for a future Iraqi-controlled political administration.³⁷⁸

Despite all of this, Britain did not completely cut its ties to Iraq. Elites who looked at Iraq via a longer-term lens, beyond short-term election cycles, also helped to shape the contours of British policy. By 1921, with British oversight and assistance, Iraq contained an Arab government headed by King Faisal.³⁷⁹ Certainly, this was a good way to cut costs

³⁷⁶ And Under Secretary of State for India Arthur Hirtzel also was privately concerned about Iraq. In fact, he wrote with increasing urgency to Wilson throughout 1919 and 1920. According to Hirtzel: "What we want to have in existence, what we ought to have been creating in this time is some administration with Arab institutions which we can safely leave while pulling the strings ourselves; something that won't cost very much, which Labour can swallow consistent with its principles but under which our economic and political interests will be secure." Peter Slugett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), p. 37; and Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 194.

³⁷⁷ By 1920, Bell's views were influenced by and consistent with those of T.E. Lawrence regarding the power of Arab and Iraqi nationalism. The one major difference was that Lawrence believed that the British should completely withdraw from Iraq and leave the Arabs alone to rule as they see fit, while Bell saw a need for British guidance and tutelage. Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, pp. 112, 134; and Elizabeth Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell: From Her Personal Papers, 1914-1926* (London: Ernest Benn LTD., 1961), pp. 162-165.

³⁷⁸ Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered," p. 135; and Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell*, p. 148.

³⁷⁹ William Polk writes: "Faisal was the man France exiled as the king of Syria, whom the British had worked with during the Arab Revolt of 1916, and to whom they already began paying a subsidy." Polk, *Understanding Iraq*, p. 80. Hence, Faisal was known to the British, and they assumed they could

and placate the British domestic audience, yet it also was a vehicle to maintain Britain's presence in Iraq. By empowering the locals, it was hoped, Britain would gain the confidence and understanding of Iraqis and limit the violence—conditions which were more conducive to having British political and military personnel in Iraq. As mentioned above, officials like Curzon and Milner viewed Iraq as a crucial strategic asset in the Middle East. Wrong moves in Iraq could tempt the Turks to move back into the area. Moreover, prolonged unrest and instability, they worried, would lead Iraqis to invite the Turks to provide some peace and order. And both feared the rise of revolutionary Bolshevism into the Middle East. Note that some British officials relied on propaganda to discredit political opponents and drive home the point that England should not “quit Mesopotamia.”³⁸⁰ These ideas were frequently reflected and amplified in *The Yorkshire Times*, which published pro-imperialist views. The *Times* claimed that foreign policy critics sought to tarnish the honor and prestige of Britain and expose it to grave dangers.

6.1.3.3 Liberal Rhetoric, Limited Trapping

British officials did wrap liberal language around their plans for Iraq, but they were not trapped this rhetoric, which is consistent with the expectations of my third

manipulate him and use him as a puppet to stabilize control over the country and reduce its expenditures. However, this does not mean his selection was not fraught with problems. For instance, as an outsider, Faisal had no ties to any political faction in Iraq; as an Arab, he lacked Kurdish favor; as a Sunni, he lacked Shia support; and as a Hashimite from Arabia, Faisal was rejected by some Sunni Iraqis. Moreover, there were fears that Faisal might turn on the British, which would create lasting damage in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. For an overview of the internal discussions about Faisal, especially those that emerged in 1920, see Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, p. 75.

³⁸⁰ Newspapers like the *Manchester Guardian* echoed the call to quit Iraq, and this is exactly what historians have called the campaign: quit Mesopotamia. See Rayburn, “The Last Exit from Iraq.” Margalith argues that a movement within Britain demanded that the government withdraw completely from Iraq, forego any annexation of old Ottoman lands, and refuse the mandate from the League of Nations. See Margalith, *The International Mandates*, p. 130.

“deviant” hypothesis. The reason that the British were not trapped had much to do with their moderate ambitions or designs for Iraq. These ambitions or designs were in turn shaped by an emerging set of international codes of inter-state behavior.

Like the French in the Indochina War, British officials in this case used liberal propaganda as a tool to enhance Britain’s self-interest.³⁸¹ Rhetoric was used throughout the interwar period to spread the idea that the Empire was a bulwark against the enemies of democracy and liberalism. In 1920, radical, violent nationalism, as was found in Iraq during the Revolt, and Bolshevism were viewed as the primary enemies or threats to peace and instability in the world. One way to forestall the rise of these threats and protect Britain’s interests was via directly governing and administering, if not outright annexing, occupied lands. This was the initial approach Britain took in Iraq, copied after its experience in India. In fact, during World War I, the consensus of key British figures was that England would annex Basra, a major strategic and economic outpost.³⁸² And at the time, annexing more of Iraq was not ruled out. In addition, until the fall of 1920,

³⁸¹ In fact, we can see traces of such propaganda applied to Iraq even during World War I. Lloyd George ranted against the evils of tyranny in Mesopotamia, proclaiming that the despotic Turks had created a wilderness of the “Garden of Eden.” But there certainly was a self-serving element to this liberal solicitousness, as it in part reflected a desire to see the Ottoman Empire defeated and dismembered so the British could act more freely in the region. Indeed, George writes: “What will happen to Mesopotamia must be left to the Peace Congress when it meets, but there is one thing that will never happen to it—it will never be restored to the blasting tyranny of the Turk. At best he was the trustee of this far-famed land on behalf of civilization. Ah! What a trustee! He has been false to his trust and the trusteeship must be given over to more competent and more equitable hands, chosen by the Congress which will settle the affairs of the world.” See David Lloyd George, *The Great Crusade* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1918), pp. 156-157.

³⁸² Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p.9.

Britain attempted to manage Iraq through direct oversight, with the bulk of the political administration in Baghdad filled by British and Indian civil servants.

But by 1917, according to Toby Dodge, American policymaking began to nudge the British away from the notion that they had to tightly control and vigorously defend their new acquisition against any and all enemies. Certainly, there were a number of civil administrators and bureaucrats who did not want to apply the American perspective to their domains. That said, there were also a number of officials who recognized the new post-war international realities. We can attribute these new realities to the statements and influence of American President Woodrow Wilson. Beginning in 1917, through a series of speeches and statements, Wilson urged the international community to apply the concept of sovereignty to more parts of the world, even to those areas that had not previously lived under free and open conditions.³⁸³ Colonialism was to be discarded to the dustbin of failed historical experiments. A world without empire, and by extension the motives of expansionism and acquisition, could prevent great powers from waging destructive and costly wars.³⁸⁴ And the absence of great power war, so goes the logic, would only keep Americans safer and more secure. The hallmark of American pressure can be seen in Wilson's Fourteen Points, which he delivered to Congress on January 8, 1918. There, in point twelve, Wilson issued an ostensible directive to British actions in

³⁸³ Ibid, pp. xiii, 12.

³⁸⁴ The new units of analysis of the post-war era, according to Dodge, were independent states with open markets, engaged with each another. In this logic, the mandates marked the beginning of the end of a world order grounded in European imperialism, in territorial annexation and domination. And if markets were open, and if consumers across the world were allowed freedom of choice, then there was little room for notions of direct rule, managed oversight, and protected markets. Ibid, p. 5.

Iraq. He stated: “nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.”³⁸⁵

Clearly, by the end of 1918, British officials formally began to revise their views about the role of Iraq within the Empire; and by 1920, it is apparent that Britain did not have grand plans or designs for Iraq. Wilson’s views made it difficult for European powers, like Britain, to justify annexing territory they acquired at the end of the war. And eventually, British officials realized that they could not keep up the pretense of a “civilizing mission” in Iraq without actually devolving some authority to the locals. Indeed, a significant contingent within the George government accepted that Iraq would be important to Britain, not as formal part of the Empire, but as a part of its sphere of influence in the Middle East. In other words, it was sufficient to maintain a strong presence within Iraq, and this role was guaranteed to Britain as a mandatory power. In this context, it was easier to devolve power to local Iraqis than it would have been had the government believed that the only solution to was to jealously guard Iraq and rule it with an iron fist.

Consequently, British officials reconciled their plans of “Indianizing” Iraq with looser and less familiar forms of control.³⁸⁶ By 1918, when international opinions and attitudes, led by Wilson, pointed in a new (anti-empire, anti-colonial) direction, it became

³⁸⁵ Woodrow Wilson, “The Fourteen Points,” in Karen Mingst and Jack Snyder eds., *Essential Readings in World Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), pp. 26-28.

³⁸⁶ Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, pp.14-15. “Indianizing” refers to the British practice of tightly and strictly running its colonies, such as India, via direct rule.

clear that annexation was no longer a viable option. On January 5, 1918, Lloyd George asserted that Arab lands, including Iraq, were entitled to a “recognition of their separate national conditions.”³⁸⁷ The implication was that these lands were unique, with their own social and cultural traditions and particular demographics, and they would not be forced to squeeze into the political models advocated by the West. In the spring of 1918, Sir Percy Cox, the civil commissioner in Baghdad, was brought to London to help revise Iraq policy, given Wilson’s recent pronouncements.³⁸⁸ All of this was reinforced by the Anglo-French declaration of November 1918, which publicly committed both countries to encouraging and assisting the formation of indigenous governments in Syria and Iraq. At this point through the Paris peace conference in 1919, the discussion among policy elites focused on determining which locals would eventually be granted power and authority in Iraq. To them, the crucial task was to find someone who would support pro-British policies and help make British intentions appear benign to Iraqis. Although indecision and distraction prevented any further substantive policy changes from resulting from these discussions, this series of events indicate that a portion of the main leadership in London was aware of the limits of their actions in Iraq. And scaling back their ends in Iraq was running theme for British officials until 1932, when they finally divested themselves from the country.

³⁸⁷ George alluded to this idea a few days before Wilson presented his Fourteen Points to Congress. See David Lloyd George, *The Great Crusade* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1918), pp. 261.

³⁸⁸ Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, p. 13.

6.1.3.4 One Veto Player

There were three distinct links the British foreign policy chain, but one of the links mattered much more than the other two. This foreign policy chain connected (1) London with (2) British colonial offices in India and Egypt and with (3) the civil and military administration in Baghdad. But in practice, the government in London dominated and overrode the other two foreign policy links. The chief limitation on policy in this case came from any self-regulation by the government. Contrary to the French case in chapter four, the British party system did not work against and provide resistance to the government. Here, we find a liberal prime minister, Lloyd George, a conservative cabinet, and a parliament dominated by conservatives. Certainly, by 1922, the conservatives used George as a scapegoat for many of the domestic and international issues plaguing Britain. But from 1918-1920, domestic and international circumstances forged a relatively tight relationship between George and the conservatives that was based on mutual need. George needed the conservatives because he had lost the base of the liberal party; without conservative support, George would have fallen from power. And the conservatives attached themselves to George because the prime minister was so popular after the victory in World War I. Supporting George and the government's policies, it was believed, would benefit the conservatives. George was in power during the war and as a result he was viewed in Britain as a political star. Moreover, the prime minister was active in the peace negotiations, which further enhanced his status as a international statesman. The net result of all of this is that, in 1920, there was no effective counterweight to check and balance the actions and maneuvers of the government. In

other words, there really was only one veto player capable of exercising decisive influence on policy.³⁸⁹

The real world events in Iraq in 1920 reflect the what happens when there is only one effective veto player and that actor seeks foreign policy change in a mostly decisive and timely manner. For about two years, London was distracted and indecisive about its approach to Iraq.³⁹⁰ It was distracted because George was busy resolving the end of World War I. For a significant portion of 1919, George and other prominent members of his cabinet spent time at international peace conferences.³⁹¹ During this period, he was rarely in London conducting business as usual. And London was indecisive because the government itself was split over how Iraq would be best ruled. The government decided that issue of Iraq should be tabled until the division of old Ottoman lands was finalized and the League of Nations issued its mandate. In the meantime, the colonial offices in Egypt and India dispensed suggestions and criticisms to the Baghdad office, while Arnold Wilson, the Acting High Commissioner, executed policy in Iraq. Much to the dismay of

³⁸⁹ Much of the literature on the Iraqi Revolt blames Wilson's strict adherence to holding the status quo. But Slugett includes a quote that nicely captures the role of the British government in this situation. "The policy pursued in Mesopotamia may have been wise or unwise, but in any case final respons for it rests with H.M. government and not with their agent on the spot. If they were dissatisfied with the way their agent was carrying out their wishes, then they should have censured...or recalled him. By not doing so they have assumed respons for his views, and cannot, in fairness and decency, throw him over. if...Sir Arnold Wilson's policy, which was the policy of H.M. government, was not the brilliant thing we then thought it, the fact still remains that H.M. government was equally at fault and are bound in honor to take the blame (if blame there be) upon themselves and not to throw it upon their unfortunate subordinate officer who ex hypothesi merely did their bidding.." See Slugett, *Britain in Iraq*, pp. 24-25. Similarly, Wilson, perhaps not surprisingly, placed blame on the government in London. He stated: "Our orders were clear; we were not to build. We could not know what the peace conference would decide, but we could and did foresee that delay meant trouble."

³⁹⁰ D.K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 84-85.

³⁹¹ James, *The British Revolution*, chapter four.

local Iraqis, among others, Wilson held the political status quo of direct British rule.³⁹²

But once the status of Iraq was finalized, and as Iraqi nationalism became more visible, London took a more active and decisive role in Iraq, thereby putting the country in a new political direction. In October 1920, Wilson was deposed and replaced with Sir Percy Cox, who had the consent of the British government to implement plans to empower Iraqis. The George government, then, gets credit for quickly resolving the Revolt and remedying some of the issues that underpinned it. But on the other hand, because it delayed making a firm commitment about the fate of Iraq for two years, England's long-term status as a mandatory power was compromised. Indecision and distraction generated hostility and anger and nationalist sentiment inside Iraq, all of which could not be stopped or even subdued once they had been unleashed.

6.1.3.5 Speedy Processes, Many Consultative Actors

While the process of changing governing strategy in Iraq occurred rather quickly, this had little to do with the number and role of important consultative actors at work in British foreign policy. In less than four months, England transitioned toward a form of indirect rule in Iraq headed by King Faisal. During this period, England had a very dense network of committees and bureaucratic offices. This network was less about British democracy than the institutional framework that managed the British empire. In order to consolidate and maintain control over conquered territories, Britain created a vast and rather confusing maze of political institutions. In effect, this was a hub-and-spokes method to connect and bind colonies and protectorates and mandated territories to the

³⁹² Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, pp. 7-8; Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, p. 44.

home office in London. In the preceding hypothesis, I grouped British veto players into three disparate categories. However, we can subdivide these categories to obtain the total number of meaningful foreign policy actors. As an example, while the government in London let the status quo continue, which made its Iraq policy look directionless, the foreign and war offices and the treasury in London, colonial offices in India and Egypt, and the civil and military administration in Iraq all jockeyed for policymaking influence—and each were significant policy actors. In fact, Churchill noted the presence of so many different hands in Iraq, which in his view led to dysfunctional and inefficient Iraqi policies. He vehemently exhorted Lloyd George to reorganize all of the bureaus that handled Middle East policy into one streamlined and coherent unit.³⁹³

Furthermore, relations between and within various bureaucratic agencies were at times strained and hyper-competitive—characteristics that do not facilitate speedy policy decisions. Indeed, given the policy squabbles and rancor, it is quite surprising that the British were able to cut their losses in such a timely manner. First, there was considerable rivalry between the bureaucratic offices. For instance, the India Office viewed suggestions and recommendations from the Foreign Office and War Office as stepping on its turf. There was an informal but direct linkage between Delhi and Baghdad, as Wilson received a number of orders from the India Office.³⁹⁴ But as its turf was overrun by competing actors, officials at the India Office stepped up their criticism of the direction of military and political affairs in Iraq. Indeed, during the summer of 1920, haggling

³⁹³ Mejer, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, p. 71.

³⁹⁴ Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*, pp. 81-82.

between the India Office and the War Office—over the precise wording of what Cox would be tasked to do in Iraq—stalled movement toward indirect rule.³⁹⁵ In the end, the India Office devoted more effort to protecting its interests than to working toward an outcome that would be acceptable to the British and Iraqis. But the India Office was not the only bureaucratic agency that behaved this way. The evidence suggests that the War Office, Foreign Office, and the Treasury, among others, also jealously guarded their interests at stake in Iraq at the expense of inter-agency compromise and collaboration. Second, within Baghdad, Arnold Wilson had a rocky relationship with Lieutenant-General Sir Aylmer Haldane and Gertrude Bell. Wilson disliked being excluded from military affairs, which was Haldane's responsibility, and believed that Haldane was not receptive to his advice and counsel.³⁹⁶ In his memoirs, Wilson was also very critical of Haldane's organizational and military competence.³⁹⁷ Wilson enjoyed relatively smooth and stable professional relations with Gertrude Bell, as long as her views about Iraq

³⁹⁵ Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World*.

³⁹⁶ Secretary of State of India, Edwin Montagu, circulated several of his letters that warned of looming trouble among cabinet members. But he was dismissed, as they saw his letters as overstating the danger in Iraq. And apparently, Haldane simply ignored his advice, opting instead to rely on the more rosy picture painted by his intelligence staff. Haldane was also concerned about how his request for more troops, to deal with the emerging crisis, would be received in London. Wilson himself asked for troop reinforcements in June, and remarked that Haldane refused. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World*; and Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 275.

³⁹⁷ Wilson claimed that Haldane was slow to grasp "the nature of the task" because he did not get much information about events and politics in Mesopotamia, even though the information was available. Haldane simply was not curious enough to find out what was happening. Wilson also criticized the management and organization of military. He noted in certain incidents there was no extra water, a poor distribution of resources, and many exhausted soldiers. In addition, Wilson mentioned that Haldane was frail and not in good health. Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 270, 271, 276, 277, 279.

mirrored his own.³⁹⁸ But once she accepted that Iraqi nationalism was a potent force, and that Iraq would be best ruled indirectly, Wilson viewed Bell very suspiciously.³⁹⁹ In fact, by early 1920, he thought that Bell was subverting his authority, scheming behind his back, and passing along sensitive information to tribal leaders in Iraq and to the India Office.⁴⁰⁰ In turn, Bell began to distance herself from Wilson. Intra-office tensions did not improve until Percy Cox took the reins in October 1920.⁴⁰¹

6.1.4 Evidence of Alternative Explanations in the Iraqi Revolt of 1920

6.1.4.1 Distant Struggle

The expectations of the three alternative explanations change as we move to the democratic deviant case. Remember, the baseline form of the first alternative explanation hypothesizes that the powerful will likely fight long and hard in small wars because the

³⁹⁸ Until 1919, Bell's views aligned with Wilson's. She thought nationalism in Mesopotamia was virtually irrelevant to Britain's decision making. She, too, thought that Britain should go very slowly in crafting and building institutions in Iraq. After all, in her view, it took Britain several centuries to do the same task. Furthermore, Bell initially did not support Arab self-rule, believing that an Arab leader would only be a source of trouble and friction. Like Wilson, Bell thought that only the British could pull the country together. While the local Iraqis like the idea of arab self-rule in theory, in practice they could never agree to a single individual to lead the new Iraqi state. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 199-201; Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p. 121; Gertrude Bell, *The Letters of Gertrude Bell, Vol II*. (London: Ernest Benn LTD., 1928); and Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell*.

³⁹⁹ The first sign of disagreement between Wilson and Bell occurred in Sept 1918. They sparred over the possibility of bringing the vilayets of Basra and Baghdad together under one central administration. Bell opposed this because of what she perceived as vast cultural and economic differences between the two province. Sometime in 1919 Bell went through a radical change in thoughts. She began to see nationalism as a powerful force in the Middle East, especially as it pertained to nationalism in Syria and Iraq, and believed that empowering the locals was in the best interest of all involved. And over time we can read her letters as being increasingly sympathetic to the nationalist cause. See Gertrude Bell, *The Letters of Gertrude Bell, Vol II*. (London: Ernest Benn LTD., 1928); and Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell*. Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p. 123, Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, pp. 201-202.

⁴⁰⁰ In fact, as intra-office tensions increased, Wilson demanded Bell's recall "on the ground of her mischief-making". Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 204.

⁴⁰¹ Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell*, p. 173; Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 204.

venue of conflict is proximate to the homeland of these states. But for the democratic deviant case, in which a democratic Britain cuts costs, it is less likely that the powerful will battle so tenaciously because the scene of the conflict is located in remote, distant areas of the international system. The power projection capabilities of adversaries must be very advanced and sophisticated, and as a result distant threats and problems are usually less dangerous. Even today, less than a dozen states in the international system have the capacity to threaten directly via militarily means the homeland of far away foreign lands.

The evidence captures an association between these two variables in a way that is consistent with the deviant hypothesis, but does not adequately link the cause and effect relationship that underpins it. The Iraqi Revolt of 1920, like the Indochina War, was indeed a conflict in the periphery. The distance between Britain and Iraq was great, and the Iraqis posed little threat to harm British soil directly. The conflict, on the Iraq side, as is evident in the case summary above, was mostly fought by unorganized tribes who were mostly poorly equipped and trained, and lacked the ability seize or even attack distant lands. That said, there is little evidence to support the claim that proximity *caused* British officials to cut costs in Iraq. Certainly, the British opposed expensive military campaigns in far away lands, such as Iraq, but their opposition focused on the costs of these efforts, not on the venue of the conflict. Coming right after World War I, and given a depressed economy, a weary British nation would have criticized almost any costly military campaign that was not aimed at protecting Britain's sovereignty. Relatedly, another key fact is that it became apparent to many elites that Iraq was not going to provide England any kind of substantial returns on its high level of political and military commitment to

the country over the long-term. Iraq was costly in a dual sense—both then in present and the future. As a result, there was no viable reason to wait out the rough patch of violence and nationalism in Iraq; by the fall of 1920, it was time to cede more control to local actors. That said, it is possible that geographic distance is a background or antecedent condition under which foreign policy elites generally make more cost-efficient decisions in conflict.⁴⁰² Certainly, this will require further research; and as a first step toward this end, we will see if proximity played any role in cutting costs in the China-Vietnam case in chapter six.

6.1.4.2 Latent, Indirect Role for External Great Powers

When we consider the role of external great powers in the Iraqi revolt, the alternative explanation does not accurately capture the logic of British foreign policymaking. It was not that the absence of active and direct involvement by external great powers, and by extension the absence of great power competition, *lessened* the willingness of the British to fight long and hard in battle—the alternative explanation for the democratic deviant case; instead, it was the indirect and passive moves by a war weary U.S. that *prodded* the British cutting losses in Iraq. The U.S. did not, nor did any other external great power, contribute military assistance to either the British or the Iraqis during the revolt. However, if we accept Toby Dodge’s interpretation of events, which seems eminently reasonable, the U.S. was a factor in Britain’s choice to change course to indirect rule. As mentioned above, Dodge claims that, after World War I, the United

⁴⁰² In other words, perhaps not all cases of distance between combatants lead to rational decisions and cutting costs for the powerful, just as the Indochina War suggests, but maybe in the instances in which good results and good decisions are made, distance does lurk as a background condition.

States strove to create a new world order that emphasized sovereign states over colonies and protectorates. As such, the U.S. placed pressure in various ways on foreign states, like Britain, to dismantle their empires. Colonialism was out-dated and people worldwide had the right to chart their own destinies without interference from imperial powers. The hallmark of American pressure can be seen in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, particularly point twelve.

The role of the U.S. was an important factor among many international considerations in English policymaking. Certainly, the prospect of receiving a return on its investment (Middle East oil, forestalling Turkish imperialism and the rise of Bolshevism, and so on), the attitudes of Muslims in the region, and several other international strategic issues were salient factors in the British decision-making calculus. But so was the new world order set forth by American President Woodrow Wilson. As mentioned above, Wilson's proclamation effectively placed parameters on how Iraq would be treated and ruled by the British and eventually integrated into the international community. Essentially, this meant that British elites were forced to scale back their grand vision of Iraq as an integral asset *within* the Empire. Once that occurred, it was easier for the George government to transition to indirect rule and cut costs in Iraq.

6.1.4.3 Strong, but Non-Vital, British Interests

In the democratic deviant case, the third alternative explanation expects non-vital interests to create enough flexibility for elites to adjust policy before costs exponentially escalate. The evidence loosely seems to fit this hypothesis, at least in terms of a correlation between variables. Surely, the revolt in Iraq did not pose an existential threat

to Britain. British sovereignty was not in jeopardy; the Iraqis were not capable of striking British homeland territory, nor did they attempt to do so. For them, the conflict was largely rooted in themes like independence and freedom from imperialist control. Instead, there were a number of important, but non-vital or essential, issues at stake in the revolt for Britain. And given the public and elite debates about the wastefulness of Britain's role in Iraq, a likely sign that all sides in England by the summer of 1920 recognized the moderate stakes at best, it is possible that British interests also played a causal role in cutting costs.

In particular, there were a number of tangible, intrinsic and intangible interests at stake in the Iraqi Revolt. In part, these interests help us understand why the foreign policy debate focused on the merits of direct and indirect rule and largely omitted the option of completely withdrawing from Iraq. Let us look at the tangible interests first. As mentioned above, elites were concerned that, should Britain vacate Iraq, other great powers, such as Turkey and Russia, would move into the area and gain a strategic advantage. Similarly, Iraq was key because Britain sought to keep other great powers away from the Persian Gulf—an important British trade and naval waterway. Indeed, if we think back to World War I, part of the reason for initially occupying Iraq was the fear that Germany would move in to Basra and harm British commercial interests in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. In addition, Iraq was seen as a potential link in a chain that connected Egypt and India and bound the empire closer together. And having access to military bases in Iraq would enable the British to respond to crises and reinforce forces in places such as Egypt, Palestine, Transjordan, Sudan, and India. Furthermore, Iraq was

desired because Britain wanted to have its forces near both the Abadan oil refinery and the oil fields in southwestern Iran and the purportedly large quantities of exploitable oil in northern Iraq.⁴⁰³ Lastly, the notion of receiving a return on their investment was an important factor in the decision making calculus of British elites.⁴⁰⁴ While the revolt itself was costly to the British, we must not forget that there were extremely high costs associated with initially seizing Iraq from the Ottomans. During World War I, there were about 900,000 British and Indian forces fighting in Iraq, with almost 100,000 becoming casualties of war; the conflict cost the treasury about 200 million pounds.⁴⁰⁵ There was a concern that it would be hard to justify these expenses and argue that the fallen did not die in vain, if the government simply abandoned Iraq at the first sign of internal unrest.

The attitudes of Muslims in Iraq and within the region were an intangible interest for the British. Elites were concerned that employing harsh and stringent measures against troublemakers in Iraq could inflame anti-British attitudes among Muslims in Iraq and spread like a wildfire beyond the country and eventually into India. The British held

⁴⁰³ For a discussion about the relationship between oil and Britain's campaign in Iraq, see, among other sources, Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian eds., *The Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East*; Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East*; Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*; Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Oil in the Middle East: Its Discovery and Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Slugett, *Britain in Iraq*; and William Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil: Iraq, Turkey, and the Anglo-American World Order, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

⁴⁰⁴ Rayburn points out the disjuncture between words and reality in British reporting. In part, this happened because British officials were so worried about demonstrating to their domestic audience that they were actually reaping some benefits on their investment in Iraq. So reports indicated that Iraq was progressing internally and that it would be a model of democracy in the Middle East. See Rayburn, "The Last Exit from Iraq."

⁴⁰⁵ James, *The British Revolution*, p. 124-125.

control over India, which had a large Muslim population; a significant spike in anti-British attitudes could have made that area extremely difficult to manage and govern.

6.2 Soviet-Afghan War

6.2.1 Case Summary

The political landscape in Afghanistan *prior* to the Soviet invasion was pockmarked with instability, conflict, and violence. In April 1978, the Afghan army carried out a coup against the Daoud government, executing the leader and his family. As a result, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) rose to power, and was headed by Nur Mohammed Taraki in a new communist government. The PDPA had split into two factions in the 1960s and then unified about a year before the coup. One group, called Parcham, was led by Babrak Karmal; the other, called Khalq, was led by Taraki and Hafizullah Amin. Although both groups set aside their differences, the remnants of inter-factional rivalry and hostility never really disappeared. And in fact, the dynamics between both factions created both short-term and long-term problems, as the Soviets later discovered. In the new communist government, Karmal was given the second-in-command position of prime minister, with Amin serving as the deputy prime minister. But within a few months after the coup, the Khalq faction under Taraki and Amin began to assert its power up and down the Afghan government by ousting and executing Parcham members.⁴⁰⁶ Karmal was demoted to Czechoslovakia, where he was stationed as

⁴⁰⁶ "Political Letter from USSR Ambassador to Afghanistan A. Puzanov to Foreign Ministry." May 31, 1978. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; "Record of Conversation, Soviet Ambassador A.M. Puzanov and Taraki." June 18, 1978. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; "Information from CC CPSU to GDR Leader Erich Honecker." October 13, 1978. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*,

an ambassador. At around the same time, in mid-1978, a local rebellion broke out in parts of eastern Afghanistan and quickly spread throughout the country. It was a nationally-inspired, indigenous reaction to what was perceived as unjust and oppressive rule. The instability took another turn in September 1979, when a palace shootout occurred, resulting in the death of Taraki, and Amin seized power; it was Amin who was in power at the time of the Soviet invasion.

Given the above series of events, in retrospect, it is evident that the Soviets headed into a hornet's nest in December 1979. Why would they enter into such a messy situation? The Soviets militarily intervened in Afghanistan for two sets of reasons. First, the proximate cause, or triggering mechanism, was the decision-making of the Afghan government. Instability in the country was fueled by the Afghan government (under Taraki and later Amin), which implemented unpopular land and marriage reforms aimed at modernizing the country and sought to "clean" Islam. Furthermore, as the Taraki government vigorously cracked down on the rebellion, imprisoning and expelling and executing troublemakers, the anti-government movement and violence only metastasized. The rebellion intensified in 1978 and 1979, and the Soviets, in turn, increased the amount of military assistance to the government in Kabul, though they denied requests from Afghanistan for Soviet troops to help battle the rebels.⁴⁰⁷ At this point, Brezhnev stated: "and now for the question of the possibility of deploying soviet military forces in

www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴⁰⁷ "CPSU CC Politburo Decision and Instruction to Soviet Ambassador in Afghanistan." May 24, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; June 28, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Afghanistan. we examined this question from every angle, weighed it carefully, and I will tell you frankly: this should not be done. this would only play into the hands of the enemies—yours and ours.”⁴⁰⁸ But as Amin continued to make counter-productive policy and political decisions, which only inflamed the rebellion by activating latent rebels and motivating extant rebels to consolidate their bases of support, the Soviets became exasperated.⁴⁰⁹ And their frustration turned to anger when they learned that Amin had a number of Soviet-sympathizers and loyalists purged and killed.⁴¹⁰ In response, the Soviet Union decided to step up its involvement in the ongoing crisis. Specifically, Moscow ousted Amin, installed Karmal, who was viewed as compliant and pliable to Soviet demands, and prepared for a military battle to protect the communist government in Kabul.

⁴⁰⁸ “Record of Conversation Between L.I. Brezhnev and N.M. Taraki.” March 20, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In fact, the Soviets rejected requests on a number of occasions before the invasion at the end of 1979. See “Report of the Chief of the Soviet Military Advisory Group in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. L.N. Gorelov with H. Amin (excerpt).” April 14, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “Boris Ponomarev, Reports from Kabul (excerpts).” July 19, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴⁰⁹ According to Brezhnev: “Frankly, we are not pleased by all of Amin’s methods and actions. He is very power-driven. in the past he repeatedly revealed disproportionate harshness.” “Transcript of Brezhnev Summit in East Berlin (except on Iran and Afghanistan).” October 4, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴¹⁰ “Personal Memorandum, Andropov to Brezhnev.” December 1, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “Politburo Decree P177/151.” December 27, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “Andropov-Gromyko-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report on Events in Afghanistan on 27-28 December 1979.” December 31, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Second, there were more general causes of Soviet military intervention. As an example, the Soviets aimed to preserve, if not expand, their role in the region. Moscow did not want to get squeezed out of the area, particularly by the Americans, and possibly intended to use its foothold in Afghanistan to make even greater gains by exerting influence over the country's neighbors.⁴¹¹ As another example, the Soviet Union sought to preserve its influence in Afghanistan. According to a Politburo decree: "the intervention from without and terror unleashed by Amin within the country have actually now created a threat to liquidate what the April revolution brought Afghanistan."⁴¹² The 1978 coup ushered into power a communist government that was the latest in a string of perceived

⁴¹¹ Certainly, we should not exaggerate the expansionist plans of the Soviet Union. And most analyses doubt that the Soviet Union would use Afghanistan as a station to topple nearby regimes or invade proximate countries. Bennett claims that Brezhnev disavowed any expansionist plans. However, at the same time, Bennett writes, the Soviet Union, at least initially, expected domino effects from securing and maintaining a communist regime in Afghanistan. And he certainly points out how pleased Soviet officials were in response to the recent "victories" to their side in the mid- to late-1970s. By logical extension, one can only assume that the Soviets—at least key leaders in office through 1984—would have happily welcomed any ancillary geo-strategic benefits from a successful military campaign in Afghanistan. So while the Soviet Union probably did not have any overt expansionist designs initially, it likely had latent ones. Andrew Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition? The Rise, Fall, and Reprise of Soviet-Russian Military Interventionism, 1973-1996* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 203.

⁴¹² Similarly, according to the same Politburo decree: The situation right now appears that the foundations of the April revolution of 1978 and the democratic and progressive gains of the Afghan people are under great threat. The gross interference on the part of several powers into the affairs of Afghanistan is continuing, its scale is increasing, and armed formations and weapons are being sent into Afghanistan for counterrevolutionary elements and groups whose activity is being directed from abroad. The goal of this interference is completely obvious—the overthrow of the democratic and progressive system established by the people of Afghanistan as a result of the victory of the revolution." "Politburo Decree P177/151." December 27, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. See also "Andropov-Gromyko-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report on Events in Afghanistan on 27-28 December 1979." December 31, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

victories for the Soviet empire.⁴¹³ But the Soviets were concerned that several countries—of varying shapes and sizes— were willing and capable of reversing the communist takeover. And in fact, we can view the Soviet Union as coping with the tumultuous situation in Afghanistan partly in response to actions taken by and events ongoing in the U.S., Pakistan, and Iran, among other places.⁴¹⁴ By the late 1970s, detente was already breaking down: among other things, hardliners seemed to become more prominent in American foreign policy making, rhetoric out of Washington was more aggressive and confrontational, and, notably, the U.S. had normalized relations with China at a time when Sino-Soviet relations were poor. From Moscow’s perspective, all of this signified that the U.S. was re-intensifying its effort to contain, if not subvert, communist movements around the world.⁴¹⁵ By the end of 1979, Iran was engulfed in an Islamic revolution and potentially sought to export it to nearby foreign countries, which

⁴¹³ “By the end of the 1970s, the Soviets repeatedly referred to a growing list of countries in which they perceived ant-imperialist victories. This list included Vietnam, Angola, Laos, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Kampuchea (Cambodia), Nicaragua, Iran, and Afghanistan.” See Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 167-168.

⁴¹⁴ “CPSU CC Politburo Decision, with Report by Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev, 27 January 1980.” January 28, 1980. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “Report by Soviet Defense Minister Ustinov to CPSU CC on ‘Foreign Interference’ in Afghanistan.” October 2, 1980. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “Intelligence Note Concerning Actions by the US in aiding the Afghanistan Rebel Fighters.” September 1, 1980. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “Report of Military Leaders to D.F. Ustinov.” May 10, 1981. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “A Report by Soviet Military Intelligence.” September 1, 1981. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴¹⁵ “CPSU CC Politburo Decision, with Report by Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev, 27 January 1980.” January 28, 1980. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. See also Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 216-218.

made Tehran another candidate to take advantage of the instability in Afghanistan. As its neighbor to the east, Pakistan naturally had a vested interest in political events in Afghanistan, but as an ally of Washington, Islamabad was expected to influence the country in a way that benefitted the U.S. and harmed the Soviets.⁴¹⁶

Moscow foresaw a quick, easy, and cheap war that required a relatively small-scale military force, but a number of problems emerged over time—some of which they could not control, but many of which they could—that made the war costly and unwinnable.⁴¹⁷ From the start, the Soviet Union based its intervention on a very shaky foundation. It claimed it intervened and would remain engaged in Afghanistan as long as possible to repel foreign aggression, when all along a significant portion of the Afghan population viewed the Soviets as outsiders responsible for violence and bloodshed. The Soviets initially tried to wage a conventional war by using heavy equipment and machinery and trying to capture and hold cities. They believed that harnessing cities such as Kabul were the key to the conflict. Much to their surprise, this played right into the hands of the guerilla rebels and insurgents. The Soviets, as well as the Afghan army, had virtually no control over the countryside and smaller towns—where most of Afghanistan’s population resided—and this aided the Afghan rebels and other foreign rebels who later

⁴¹⁶ For additional “general” causes of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, particularly ones that emphasize Soviet perceptions, see Richard K. Herrmann, *Perceptions and Behavior in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), pp. 22-25, 157.

⁴¹⁷ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 185.

joined the fight.⁴¹⁸ They were able to cause destruction and at the same time avoid direct conflict and pitched battles with the Soviets by slipping in and out of population centers, which housed and fed them. The Soviet Union was also not equipped to deal with the rugged and mountainous land in Afghanistan. Soviet forces were unfamiliar with the terrain. And the jagged and narrow and sometimes impassable pathways made movement of troops and military equipment difficult, at times impossible, and vulnerable to attack. In addition, the longer the Soviets remained in Afghanistan, their presence made the war difficult to fight. The act of foreign troops occupying and bombarding a Muslim country, among some pockets in the world, became a source of tension and even a *cause celebre* for jihadism, which in the end turned Afghanistan into a magnet for disenchanting, radical Islamists and gave the country an endless and indefatigable supply of foreign fighters. And this influx of foreign fighters (as well as weapons) was facilitated by another blunder committed by the Soviets—their inability to seal the Afghan border.⁴¹⁹ This is simply a brief list of the most important blunders and problems, there were many other ones that helped make the war a catastrophe.

The Soviet-Afghan War clearly was a costly, protracted small war. The war lasted more than eight years, from the start of the invasion on December 25, 1979, until the final

⁴¹⁸ “Secret Special Folder [This Notation Omitted in the Gromov Book] CC CPSU.” November, 13, 1986. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “CPSU CC Politburo Meeting Minutes (excerpt).” November 13, 1986. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴¹⁹ “CPSU CC Politburo Meeting Minutes (excerpt).” November 13, 1986. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

withdrawal on February 15, 1988. Over 620,000 troops served in the war, with as many as 80,000 to 115,000 in Afghanistan at a time. Anywhere from 14,500 to 25,000 Soviets were killed in the conflict.⁴²⁰ Soviet forces were demoralized and enervated as a result of fighting such a long guerilla war. The war drained \$15 to \$30 billion from the state coffers. The war—which at best can termed a draw, and probably is more accurately considered a defeat—also tarnished Soviet respect and prestige in the world. And finally, keep in mind that war also contributed to two dramatic and profound events in international relations—the dissolution of the Soviet empire and the complete and utter failure of the Afghan state.⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ Most sources seem to list 15,000 to 25,000 Soviets killed in battle. And official Soviet statistics document 13,833 fatalities and 49,985 wounded. See Russian General Staff (Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress trans. and ed.), *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), p. 309. However, there are other sources that enumerate as many as 100,000 dead in the Afghan War. Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash, “The Afghanistan War and the Breakdown of the Soviet Union,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25 (1999), p. 696-697.

⁴²¹ One, the high costs from the war played a role in bringing down the Soviet empire. War literally broke the Soviet state. In short, the war left the Soviet state economically, politically, and militarily weak, and dissatisfied individuals in Soviet bloc countries who long sought freedom and autonomy recognized this fact and were willing to act on it. In this environment, there was little a weakened Soviet state could do to stop or counter the powerful wave of civic and political independence movements across parts of the empire that emerged from the underground and wanted their grievances addressed. See Reuveny and Prakash, “The Afghanistan War and the Breakdown of the Soviet Union.” Two, in the end, the Soviets were also responsible for undermining, if not completely destroying, the Afghan state. Even after the Soviets left Afghanistan, the weak and shaky Afghan government was plagued with the perception of being a Soviet puppet. But as the Soviet Union underwent its own political and economic turmoil in the early 1990s, it failed to help Afghanistan create effective and durable domestic political institutions and later withdrew the economic and military assistance that was vital for the Najibullah government’s continued rule. Not surprisingly, then, by 1992, Najibullah faced a fierce insurgency that eventually overwhelmed the Afghan army and displaced the communist government in Kabul from power. In the 1990s, Afghanistan became a much more dangerous, volatile, and radical country than before the Soviet invasion in 1979. In fact, Afghanistan became a failed state, lacking the basic domestic institutions capable of such tasks as routing out crime and criminal elements, protecting the integrity of its borders and territory, and providing political goods for its citizens. Afghanistan lapsed into, and still is, a haven for fanatical, radicalized militants who engage in drug- and weapons-trafficking and commit murderous atrocities. Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002); William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Edgar O’Ballance, *Afghan Wars: Battles in a Hostile Land, 1839 to the Present*

6.2.2 *Unit of Analysis*

This is a case in which the powerful was headed by a series of political leaders during war, much like the Indochina conflict in chapter four. In particular, there were four successive Soviet governments in office during the Afghan War. We might expect that the sheer length of the war, the structure of domestic politics, or even extreme political instability, among other factors, contributed the state of Soviet politics in the 1980s.⁴²² But none of these captures the rather simple explanation for the repeated transition in power: death of the Soviet general-secretary. Leonid Brezhnev, then Yuri Andropov, and finally Konstantin Chernenko, in order, died in the early to mid-1980s. For several reasons, the flux in Soviet leadership meant that not only was there turnover at the top of the Soviet political system, but that the number of important policy advisors varied over time and that who filled these positions was also subject to change. As a result, decisions about the war cannot be attributed solely to one actor or only to one set of actors. With this mind, for sake of succinctness, I will use the Soviet government as the unit of analysis. But when possible, throughout this case study, I do point out and discuss various specific Soviet political figures and their impact on war policy.

(London: Brassey's, 2002).

⁴²² These were salient factors that contributed to the destabilization of French governments during the Indochina War. Refer to chapter four for further detail.

6.2.3 Evidence of Model's Hypotheses in the Soviet-Afghan War

6.2.3.1 Transitions in Power and Military Conflict

During the Afghan War, the Soviet Union was without question governed by a nondemocratic state. Key policy positions were appointments made by individual leaders or via collective decision making. And these appointments were usually the result of patronage politics, domestic balance of power politics, merit, or some combination of these underlying motives. Notably, during this period, there were three transitions in power at the position of general-secretary—the lead position in the hierarchy of Soviet political power. Each transition in power sparked a process in which key soviet political elites collectively decided on a successor to the prior general-secretary. But coincidentally, what caused each transition in power was the death of the three sitting general-secretaries in relatively short time span. Brezhnev died in 1982, paving the way for Andropov to rise to power. Andropov passed away in 1984, and Chernenko took over until he too died in 1985. The third transition in power resulted in the ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev to the general-secretaryship.

This political instability made the Soviet Union look and act a bit like a shaky and unstable parliamentary democracy—much like France in the Indochina War—in which the possibility of a transition in power through orderly means is omnipresent. Both the Soviet Union and France, as examples, suffered through repeated turnover in office at the highest political positions in very short time span, but the process guiding it was streamlined and orderly, not chaotic and lawless. During the war, political instability in Moscow was not the result of coups, military takeovers, political assassinations, or any

other nefarious or coercive machinations. As mentioned already, individuals were promoted to the position of general-secretaries via orderly collective decision making procedures. But more importantly, the instability in Soviet politics led to policies that were similar to France's in the Indochina War. Soviet war policy appeared incoherent and irrational, and problems were particularly acute on the diplomatic and military fronts. For instance, the poor health and eventual death of Andropov stalled ongoing talks with UN negotiators—which were actually making progress at the time—for almost three years.⁴²³ It was not until 1987, under Gorbachev, that diplomatic talks picked up steam. Moreover, the constant turnover in power led to costly and unnecessary fits and spurts in Soviet military efforts. From 1982 to 1987—a period in which there were four different leaders in power—the Soviets went through redundant periods of escalation, de-escalation, escalation, and then finally de-escalation of force in Afghanistan.⁴²⁴ It is not surprising that the Soviets experienced similar outcomes in each of these periods.

Ultimately, the repeated transitions in power played a part in prolonging the Soviets' commitment to the Afghan War. There are a number of factors associated with this argument. First, leaving aside the health issues for a moment, the brief tenure in office for Soviet leaders imposed severe obstacles on their ability to learn the proper lessons of the war, namely, that their policies were not working and change was

⁴²³ Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 91-93, 97-98, 98-102; Riaz M. Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot: Negotiating Soviet Withdrawal* (Durham, NJ: Duke University Press, 1991), 107, 115-118. See also "CPSU CC Transcript of Politburo Meeting (excerpt)." March 10, 1983. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴²⁴ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 194-196, 228-229, 233-244, 282-293.

needed.⁴²⁵ Second, even if Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko learned these lessons, it is questionable if they would have had enough time to push through major substantive policy changes to cut their losses. Coming up with new policy ideas, deliberating about them with key people, galvanizing support for these ideas, and then enacting change all takes considerable time. Third, at least until the rise of Gorbachev, the transitions in power brought to the general-secretaryship relatively similar thinking leaders who held comparable hardline views (i.e., the use of force was an efficacious way to solve disputes; the U.S. sought to take advantage of a potential power vacuum in Afghanistan), which made it difficult for Moscow to see the war as a failing option.⁴²⁶ Fourth, by the time that Soviet leaders began to learn some of the lessons of the war, a number of massive mistakes had already been committed, and these were mistakes that could not have been undone and in the end made the war an uphill battle.⁴²⁷ As one example, this was

⁴²⁵ According to Bennett: "It was not only Andropov's incomplete learning, but that of Chernenko until 1984 and Mikhail Gorbachev until about 1987 that postponed a Soviet withdrawal. A combination of not only international pressures and domestic politics but also individual learning styles accounts for the incomplete penetration of new ideas into the top circles of the Soviet leadership." See Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 216. Bennett's work emphasizes learning ever so slightly over domestic politics. This case analysis, much like Sarah Mendelson's work on the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, highlights the domestic political processes and actors more than the individual learning styles of Soviet leaders. However, unlike Mendelson, I do believe that learning was an important part of this case, and therefore mention it when appropriate.

⁴²⁶ Certainly, Andropov was less of a hardline official than Brezhnev and Chernenko. Still, he did not go nearly as far as Gorbachev in ushering in new thinking in the Soviet Union. And on a host of key issues, Andropov held views in line with Brezhnev. See Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 233-242.

⁴²⁷ Right from the start, under Brezhnev's rule, the Soviets demonstrated an un-sophisticated understanding of Afghanistan. Prior to pulling the cord on Amin, they actually tacitly supported harsh repressive measures taken by leaders in Kabul. The Soviets were ignorant of the strong role of Islam in Afghan society and did not foresee how that could translate into conflict (holy war against infidels, martyrdom for those killed defending one's homeland). The Soviets did not completely grasp the gravity of the ethnic rivalries between Khalq and Parcham. In fact, the Soviets pushed reconciliation between Khalq and Parcham, which meant that governments included both abusers and abused at the same time, helping to make politics in Kabul unstable and unsustainable. The Soviets were unaware of the history of resistance to central control in Afghanistan. Moscow mistakenly viewed Afghanistan via the typical Soviet lens of class divisions, even

especially true on the issue of politics in Afghanistan. Initially, Moscow vigorously defended the ruling communists in Kabul. When it became apparent that the war was virtually unwinnable and a political solution was desperately needed, Soviet leaders shifted toward supporting a broad-based national reconciliation plan aimed at bringing more groups and sectors into the government. But by this point, the government was long seen as a puppet working for Moscow's interests, and as a result it was unable to draw enough new and diverse members to make a political solution effective and sustainable. And fifth, a steady stream of infirm leaders held the status quo. Poor health, to a degree, likely stunted their motivation, intellectual capacity and overall energy to stimulate and encourage changes to existing war policy.

6.2.3.2 Short-Term Time Horizons, Fluctuating Levels of Force

Additions and subtractions to Soviet levels of force in Afghanistan were not made in incremental steps, nor were they made in one-shot decisive shifts. Instead, we see that

though the country had very few workers. Moscow also made the Russian language compulsory in Afghan schools, Afghans use Russian textbooks, and sent contingents of Afghan students to the Soviet Union for school and training. While Afghanistan was not directly ruled, it was almost the case. The Soviets exercised a heavy hand in Afghan politics—to prevent the issue of unreliable clients (such as in Egypt and Somalia) from resurfacing. By the time of the invasion between 5000 and 7000 Soviet military advisors were deeply involved in running Afghanistan's military and civilian ministries. And Soviet management only became more intrusive after the invasion, and the number of Soviet advisors grew over time. By the time that the Soviets and the Afghans embraced a national front strategy under Karmal, it was too late. Bad blood between groups was entrenched. And few religious or tribal leaders wanted to participate in these national front plans. The government in Kabul was tainted, as it was widely seen as a puppet of Moscow. What the Soviets didn't understand is that they unified Afghan rebel groups not only via Islam but also through a new sense of nationalism that was based on anti-communism and antipathy toward the Soviet Union. "Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between Soviet Premier Alexi Kosygin and Afghan Prime Minister Nur Mohammed Taraki." March 17, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWIHP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; "Report of Military Leaders to D.F. Ustinov." May 10, 1981. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWIHP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 199-201, 203-204, 208, 231-232.

Soviet force levels fluctuated in fits and spurts, from one general-secretary to the next. In general, Soviet leaders were guided by a short-term calculus. It is as if they made decisions in a vacuum and without regard to previous events in the war. They were, in effect, desperately grasping at straws to find ways to subdue the rebellion and prop up the government in Kabul. While Soviet leaders probably were not actively seeking to win the war, they each were certainly looking to forestall a loss on their watch. This led to costly and unnecessary redundancy in Soviet policy. And overall, Soviet war policy lacked consistency over time, from one Soviet administration to the next.

Let us relate the above mentioned themes to each Soviet administration. First, under Brezhnev, the Soviets initiated a large-scale deployment and waged a rather aggressive war. The invasion itself was an offensive move aimed at toppling the existing Afghan government. By January 1980, the Soviets had 80,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan. And as it became evident that the PDPA forces were ineffective and suffered from low morale, the Soviets shouldered more military burdens on the ground.⁴²⁸ Moreover, during this time, the Soviets bombed and destroyed villages and crops, which created labor and food shortages and a growing number of refugees, in addition to the numbers of people killed and wounded.⁴²⁹ Second, Andropov pulled the brake on war, at least initially.⁴³⁰ In early 1983, the Soviets scaled back operations and began negotiating truces with Afghan tribal leaders. Relative to the previous year, casualties plummeted by

⁴²⁸ Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan* (London: MacMillan, 1986), pp. 102-105.

⁴²⁹ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 211.

⁴³⁰ Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, pp. pp. 118-134.

500 in 1983. But by 1984, in response to rebel attacks, Moscow once again engaged in large scale military maneuvers. Accordingly, Soviet deaths in war skyrocketed, surpassing the casualty toll for 1983 by 800. Third, Chernenko markedly expanded on this trend of force escalation.⁴³¹ Throughout the bulk of the war, the total number of Soviet troops remained fairly static, hovering around 85,000 to 110,000. In this case, as was evident during the Andropov period, escalation of force mostly referred to the size and number of large-scale maneuvers and offensives on the battlefield. During Chernenko's rule, the Soviets carried out some of the largest military campaigns of the entire war, including one that involved over 15,000 Soviet forces. The deadliest year of the war (1984) occurred while Chernenko was in office.⁴³² And furthermore, it was at this time that the Soviet Union began massive aerial bombing missions. Fourth, despite the rising death toll and lack of military and political progress, Gorbachev began his tenure by continuing the large-scale assaults. In 1985 and 1986, Moscow gambled that bombing raids and ground offensives would coerce the Afghan rebels into submission and push them to the negotiating table.⁴³³ But by the spring of 1986, Gorbachev transitioned away from this track and started to "Afghanistanize" the war, which effectively reduced the combat role of Soviet forces and gave the Afghans a more prominent position in the

⁴³¹ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 242-244.

⁴³² Ibid, p. 244.

⁴³³ Ibid, p. 293.

fight.⁴³⁴ The Soviets scaled back their ground missions and focused on air strikes and assaults until the end of the war.

On the political side, for at least the first half of the war, the Soviets managed to muffle and contain any criticism coming from within Moscow. Documented criticism appears to have been relegated to informal, private discussions, usually involving lower level Soviet officials, though there were exceptions to the rule.⁴³⁵ A number of Soviet officials were circumspect about the invasion and the war. For instance, in private talks with associates, Gorbachev voiced concerns about the war as early as 1983.⁴³⁶ We also know that, among others, a small contingent of military officials challenged existing Soviet war policy in 1981, petitioning Defense Minister Ustinov to seek a diplomatic solution to the hostilities.⁴³⁷ In this vein, then, we cannot say that the Soviets—either those involved in politics or in the military—held monolithic views on the war.⁴³⁸ Nevertheless, it is also true that, through the mid-1980s, high level Soviet officials disregarded or avoided criticism of the war. Key Soviet foreign policy elites did not seek counter

⁴³⁴ Herrmann, “The Soviet Decision to Withdraw from Afghanistan,” p. 236.

⁴³⁵ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 219-221.

⁴³⁶ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 101-102, 187-188.

⁴³⁷ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 221.

⁴³⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation Between Vadum Zagladin, First Deputy Head of the International Department of the CPSU CC and Gyula Horn, Deputy Head of HSWP CC Foreign Department on Debates Inside the Soviet Leadership on Issues of International Politics.” July 16, 1980. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Both of these are documents that illustrate differing views in Moscow on the war. See also Herrmann, “Soviet Decision to Withdraw from Afghanistan,” p. 229; and Mendelson, *Changing Course*, p. 120.

viewpoints, and on the rare occasion in which criticism worked its way up to the ministerial level, they did not integrate these arguments into their plans of action.⁴³⁹

Once the reform movement got underway, dissent and opposition to the war finally surfaced in Soviet politics. The debates and protests held in private emerged in high level, public settings. Certainly, we should not discount the impact of the changes in foreign policy that Gorbachev initiated prior to his widespread, systemic domestic reforms. Almost immediately, Gorbachev began to rethink the conventional wisdom on Soviet policy in Afghanistan, characterizing the conflict as a running sore.⁴⁴⁰ In fact, he ordered a review of policy toward Afghanistan in April 1985. And significantly, Gorbachev even admitted that the Soviets had made mistakes: “I would not idealize each step in Soviet foreign policy over the past several decades. Mistakes also occurred. But very often they were the consequence of an improvident reaction to American actions...”⁴⁴¹ It is conceivable that these moves signaled to Soviet political elites that it was now permissible to challenge the foreign policy orthodoxy.⁴⁴² But it was the domestic reforms that fully unleashed a public debate over the war. Moscow was no longer able to insulate itself from political pressure on the war. At this point, academics, intellectuals, policy experts, and Soviet officials of various ranks and levels of seniority (especially

⁴³⁹ See Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* especially chapters five and six; and Mendelson, *Changing Course*, particularly chapters three and four.

⁴⁴⁰ Mikhail Gorbachev, “Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress,” February 25, 1986.

⁴⁴¹ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 217.

⁴⁴² Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 269.

those in the Party and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) voiced their disapproval with the war and highlighted various problems with Soviet policy. Specifically, the complaints and critiques included the following: because of a host of political, economic, and cultural factors, it was folly to believe that communism would stick in Afghanistan; inter-factional disputes and hostilities in Afghanistan doomed Soviet efforts on a host of fronts; the war and support for the Afghan government was a drain on the Soviet economy; the war was a trap set by Western imperialists to spend the Soviets into the ground ⁴⁴³; and conflict could only be resolved by political and diplomatic means. The force of these criticisms, combined with Gorbachev's personal views on the war, spurred the Soviet Union to de-emphasize the role of military force in ending the conflict. As a result, Moscow turned back to diplomacy, reviving the Geneva peace talks, and placed additional pressure on Kabul to broaden its base of support and devise a national reconciliation plan.

This series of events during the reform movement reveals two interesting observations. First, once there was a paradigm shift toward politics and diplomacy over military force, there really was not a strong split between hardliners and doves. Sure, some military officials believed their ability to finish off the Afghan rebels was severely hamstrung by political elites. In their view, the war was in fact winnable but ultimately lost by political decisions in Moscow.⁴⁴⁴ But importantly, politics did not fracture into

⁴⁴³ According to Gromyko: "Concerning the Americans, they are not interested in the settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. on the contrary, it is to their advantage for the war to drag out." "CPSU CC Politburo Meeting Minutes (excerpt)." November 13, 1986. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWIHP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴⁴⁴ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 276

completing, diametrically opposed blocs. Instead, the hardliners were resigned to accept the realities of the war and of their waning influence in Soviet politics. Few objected to the idea of the withdrawal process, and most sought to simply place conditions on how and when the Soviets departed Afghanistan, not completely block or obstruct the cessation of war.⁴⁴⁵ Second, the evidence indicates that criticism did not prolong the war. Dissent and opposition helped to end it. Reformers and war critics spotlighted all of the problems with the war and forced Moscow to think about alternative ways to maintain and secure the influence of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

6.2.3.3 Soviet Propaganda in the Afghan War

Soviet war propaganda consisted of two disparate parts. First, Soviet leaders put forward an odd set of statements to justify the invasion of Afghan soil. At this stage, Soviet rhetoric mostly focused on events inside of Afghanistan. Certainly, this is not to suggest that the Soviets failed to comment on the various external players, such as the U.S., in the war. After all, around this time Brezhnev announced that Soviet forces would remain in Afghanistan as long as the external sources of aggression persisted.⁴⁴⁶ But the point here is that Moscow falsely claimed the invasion was actually triggered by Afghan leaders, who requested Soviet forces as a means to protect and secure themselves from a raging rebellion.⁴⁴⁷ Obviously, this statement was a cover-up for ulterior Soviet motives.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 257.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 198.

⁴⁴⁷ “Politburo Decree P177/151.” December 27, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWIHP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “Our Steps in Connection with the Development of the Situation Around Afghanistan.” December 27, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWIHP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson

And in fact, Brezhnev layered the false justification for war with another false argument: Amin's death was merely a coincident and not the result of Soviet actions. It is true that Amin had requested troops and cooperated with the Soviets on deployment plans. But he did not invite Soviet forces to topple him from power and install Karmal as head of government, and he was totally unaware of what the Soviets had in store for him.⁴⁴⁸

Second, war propaganda justified the continued engagement of Soviet forces. Here, the rhetoric mostly targeted not internal forces or actors within Afghanistan but instead the role of external provocateurs in the war. Specifically, the bulk of Soviet comments were framed around the role of the U.S. in Afghanistan, the region, and in the world more generally. It the U.S. that was viewed as the main adversary and opponent in the war. According to a Politburo memo: "The USA, its allies, and the PRC have set themselves the goal of using to the maximum extent the events in Afghanistan to intensify the atmosphere of anti-sovietism and to justify long-term foreign policy acts which are hostile to the soviet union and directed at changing the balance of power in their favor."⁴⁴⁹ Hence, it should not be surprising that once the war got underway and settled into a stalemate, Soviet statements squarely focused on the perceived

International Center for Scholars.

⁴⁴⁸ Herrmann reports that, "after the withdrawal of forces, Soviet commentators confirmed that Soviet troops had taken part in the attack on the presidential palace when Amin was ousted in 1979." Herrmann, "The Soviet Decision to Withdraw from Afghanistan," p. 47, footnote 85.

⁴⁴⁹ "CPSU CC Politburo Decision, with Report by Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev, 27 January 1980." January 28, 1980. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

machinations of the U.S. So while the first batch of propaganda was all about mythmaking, the second was primarily about demonizing the U.S.

Soviet rhetoric about the U.S. did not remain consistently heated and intense throughout the war; instead, it closely paralleled the emergence of the reform movement in the 1980s. During the first six years of the war the Soviets used tough talk, hardline language, in reference to the U.S. According to Moscow, the Americans were imperialists bent on world domination. And the U.S. was the main source of aggression and hostility in the world, especially in Afghanistan. But by early 1986, as Gorbachev began to consolidate his political power and the reform movement tentatively started to blossom, the language employed to characterize the U.S. reflected a hybrid of hardline and more conciliatory views. So at this point, the U.S. was still frequently called “imperialist,” but there were also nascent, vague appeals to common values, interdependence, and peaceful coexistence.⁴⁵⁰ And by the end of 1987, if not earlier, there was a clearly defined shift in rhetoric. As the hardliners became sidelined in Moscow and less vocal in politics, there was a more complete softening in Soviet comments. The Soviets effectively ceased describing the U.S. as its enemy.⁴⁵¹ Now, Moscow primarily talked about finding

⁴⁵⁰ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 263. To see a softening in Soviet rhetoric the U.S. in 1985 and 1986, look at, among other sources, the various speeches and statements made by Gorbachev, including Mikhail Gorbachov, *Speeches and Writings, Vol. 1* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987).

⁴⁵¹ Gorbachev himself directly takes issue with the enemy image of the U.S. He writes: “For our part the Soviet Union has no propaganda of hatred toward Americans or disregard for America. In our country you won’t find this anywhere, neither in politics or in education. We criticize a policy we do not agree with. But that’s a different matter. It does not mean that we show disrespect for the American people.” See Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), p 217, as well as pp. 215-218, for a broader discussion of the U.S. See also Mikhail Gorbachev, *At the Summit: Speeches and Interviews, February 1987-July 1988* (New York: Richardson, Steirman & Black, 1988).

common ground with the U.S. on a host of concrete issues. Gorbachev himself echoed these views in writing: “It is necessary to stop the arms race, to tackle disarmament, to normalize Soviet-American relations. Honestly, it is time to make these relations between the two great peoples worthy of their historic role. For the destiny of the world, the destiny of world civilization really depend on our relations. We are prepared to work in this direction.”⁴⁵²

To further put all of the evidence in context, two additional comments are required. One, at first glance, Soviet behavior might seem inconsistent with the expectations outlined in chapter two. There, I suggested that demonizing opponents is more consistent with fully democratic states that allow citizens the right to participate in politics.⁴⁵³ And while the Soviet Union possessed some domestic institutions that were similar in shape and form to those in democracies, free and open and competitive elections—the prime ingredients which necessitate elaborate war propaganda—were not one of them. However, the logic of the two-step model specified the behavior of the powerful vis-a-vis their much weaker small war combatants. War propaganda directed toward and about other great powers remains outside the purview of the model. Viewed in this light, we can see that Soviet rhetoric does not violate the logic or the spirit of this dissertation. Similarly, Soviet comments about Afghanistan, which housed their small war adversaries,

⁴⁵² Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 212.

⁴⁵³ See chapter three, particularly sections 2.2.2.1.3 and 2.3.2.1.3.

are very consistent with the two-step model. In this case, the Soviets mostly—though not completely—refrained from using strong, hardline, and demonizing language.⁴⁵⁴

Two, Soviet propaganda did not trap Soviet leaders into continuing the conflict, and the persistence of the demonizing language was largely not the result of political manipulation or trickery by Soviet elites. Certainly, there was somewhat of a self-serving aspect to promoting these views about the U.S., since they underlined and reinforced the position of hardliners in the Soviet political hierarchy.⁴⁵⁵ But in general, Soviet propaganda was a distillation of the dominant worldview of international politics in Moscow. In particular, it was mostly a reflection of Soviet beliefs about Washington and its strategic relationship vis-a-vis Moscow. Once this dominant worldview shifted—through an infusion of new people and new ideas in the policy process—a change in rhetoric followed.

6.2.3.4 One Veto Player

The mixed bag of latent democratic and overt nondemocratic institutions in the Soviet Union can be clearly seen in the issue of veto players. During the Afghan War, Soviet politics were circumscribed by informal checks and balances. The state

⁴⁵⁴ Herrmann discusses the prevailing Soviet images of Afghanistan, and he notes that the Afghan rebels were seen as “‘bad guys’ who personified evil. These ‘bandits’ opposed civilized behavior and clung to xenophobic and fanatically extreme practices. They were opposed to national progress and were driven by personal greed. Moreover, they were not nationalists. To the contrary, they were instruments of Washington, Beijing and Islamabad.” In part, this challenges the thought that the Soviets refrained from speaking about Afghanistan in Manichean terms. But this also suggests that the Afghan rebels were not the main enemy; instead, they happened to be the ‘bad guys’ behind the really ‘bad guys’. This is probably the major reason why the Soviets spent more time demonizing the U.S. and its allies than their Afghan opponents. Herrmann, “The Soviet Decision to Withdraw from Afghanistan,” p. 229.

⁴⁵⁵ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 216-217.

implemented manifold mechanisms by which a leader's power was somewhat constrained by other domestic elites. At first, this was a reaction to Stalin's rule, and later was a response to Khrushchev's ability to break free from the constraints that were put in place after the death of Stalin. What this meant in practice was that, after 1965, Soviet leaders could not consolidate their rule as deeply and effectively as their post-World War II predecessors.⁴⁵⁶ In particular, the Soviets tried to limit the ability of general-secretaries to promote whomever they wanted, whenever they wanted. Leadership of various state ministries (state, party, military, police, and so on) were parceled out to at least two Soviet officials. State bureaucracies were granted more autonomy and freedom to handle internal issues. And furthermore, the Soviets attempted to make it more difficult for general-secretaries to oust rivals and competitors for political power.⁴⁵⁷ All of this would seem to point to a political system with multiple spheres of power, especially with respect to policymaking.

Nevertheless, within the foreign policy arena, Soviet general-secretaries were the dominant force. And this was true for the ultra-hardline Brezhnev and Chernenko as well as for the more moderate Andropov and Gorbachev.⁴⁵⁸ They each were singularly able to

⁴⁵⁶ Philip G. Roeder, *Red Sunset: The Failure of Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 104-105.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 106-112.

⁴⁵⁸ Although a complete discussion is outside the scope of this case, it is worthwhile to mention that Andropov leaned in a moderate direction. According to Richard Herrmann, "many signs suggest that Yuri Andropov did not share Brezhnev's or Chernenko's commitment to Afghanistan. Andropov saw the war as harmful to Soviet-American relations, Soviet relations with the Muslim world, and Soviet relations with the Third World in general. He also felt it was too costly in terms of internal Soviet needs and made a number of diplomatic moves in the direction of compromise. Richard K. Herrmann, "The Soviet Decision to Withdraw from Afghanistan: Changing Strategic and Regional Images, in Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder eds., *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland*

control the foreign policy agenda, had decisive influence over the content of Soviet foreign policy, and were mostly able to push their favored policies through the state. Further, on foreign policy issues, there were few significant barriers to change. Often, criticism was muted and suppressed, usually only appearing in informal, off-the-record discussions and rarely reached leading policy officials. For example, Andrew Bennett points out that there were very few instances of Soviet officials and bureaucrats officially registering objections to the invasion or the way the war was being conducted in Afghanistan.⁴⁵⁹ Relatedly, other than a contingent of hardliners in the military, there really was no strong countervailing force within the Soviet Union to protest and challenge major foreign policy shifts set in motion by the general-secretary.

Yet, despite these realities, which would seem to facilitate policy change and cost-efficient policies, the status quo in Afghanistan persisted until the late 1980s. It was not until a Soviet leader supported and embraced the idea of policy change that change actually occurred. This is consistent with the expectations for the veto player hypothesis. Remember, in a state with only one veto player, politics can move in a number of directions and at variable speeds.⁴⁶⁰ Ultimately, it is up to this veto player—usually, but not necessarily, a political leader—to support and implement policy change. Otherwise, the status quo will hold. Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko did not support nor pursue

(New York: Oxford University Press), p. 240, footnote 6. And Sarah Mendelson writes: “while Andropov was not himself a new thinker, he created important permissive conditions for the institutionalization of new thinking. He encouraged the mobilization of an expert community galvanized by a belief in the need for reform.” Mendelson, *Changing Course*, p. 65. See also Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 233-242.

⁴⁵⁹ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 219.

⁴⁶⁰ Recall chapter two, sections 2.3.3.1.1 and 2.3.3.2.

major policy change in Afghanistan. And even during Gorbachev's first two years in office, when there some tinkering with Soviet military policy in Afghanistan, he was committed to the war. It was only when Gorbachev began adopting policy positions of change, on a whole host of domestic and foreign policy issues, including Afghanistan, that the Soviet Union began to publicly, meaningfully cut its losses. By 1986, Gorbachev stated: "We have been fighting in Afghanistan for already six years. if the approach is not changed, we will continued to fight for another 20-30 years....In general, we have not selected the keys to resolving this problem. What, are we going to fight endlessly, as a testimony that our troops are not able to deal with the situation? We need to finish this process as soon as possible."⁴⁶¹ At this point, various Soviet officials gradually echoed his views and eventually worked toward concluding a political and diplomatic settlement to the conflict. In this case, then, Gorbachev was the mechanism that was necessary to trigger major policy change.

6.2.3.5 Sluggishness and Delays in the Policy Process

Given that there was only one veto player in the Soviet Union during the Afghan War, one could reasonably expect the policy process to have moved rather swiftly. The China case in chapter five is one example of this. There, we saw one powerful actor dominating the foreign policy arena, and other, subordinate domestic political players simply approved, at times rubber stamped, the former's policy preferences. This does not accurately depict Soviet politics in the 1980s. Specifically, there were two factors that

⁴⁶¹ "CPSU CC Politburo Meeting Minutes (excerpt)." November 13, 1986. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

impinged on the Soviet policy process—both of which made the Soviet conflict unique and distinct from China’s war in Vietnam. In my view, while it is likely that neither factor directly caused the invasion of Afghanistan to morph into a costly, protracted struggle, both did contribute to the Soviets’ lengthy military engagement.

First, the consolidation of power in the aftermath of leadership turnover played a part in slowing down Soviet foreign policymaking, which in turn effectively delayed any potential move from the existing status quo in Afghanistan. Consolidating political power was an issue for Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev, as each took over after the death of the prior general-secretary and thereafter had to find ways to govern. Perhaps the administrations of Andropov and Chernenko are less relevant to this hypothesis, since, after all, both held political views—including those on the Afghan War—that were at least somewhat consistent with Brezhnev, the Soviet leader who started and remained committed to the war until his passing. Neither one looked to promote substantial policy change on the war.⁴⁶² That said, even if one or both Andropov or Chernenko did seek change, if they were reformers, they would have been constrained by the consolidation process, which takes time and patience before the status quo can be shifted and moved in various directions. We can see this most clearly and forcefully during the Gorbachev era.

It took two years for Gorbachev to lay a proper foundation for policy change on Afghanistan. He had to place himself in a position where he could see change pass through the state effectively, without major hassles and disruptions. For instance, it took time to drum up supporters within the existing political elite, plant sympathizers in state

⁴⁶² Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*, pp. 91-94.

agencies, and promote like-minded people up the political ladder.⁴⁶³ It also took time to incorporate new entities, like liberal think tanks, fully into Soviet politics, using them as vital sources of information and consultation.⁴⁶⁴ Sarah Mendelson makes a similar point: “In the early period of Gorbachev’s leadership, from March 1985 to November 1986, major policy changes in either domestic or foreign policy had been politically problematic to initiate. During this period, instead, the Gorbachev coalition had brought about major changes in the composition of political institutions and empowered an expert community....substantive changes did not come until 1987 and 1988, after Gorbachev’s political base and alternative sources of power and legitimacy had been established.”⁴⁶⁵

These actions were extremely important because Gorbachev had to cultivate and nurture conditions ripe enough for widespread, systemic change. Remember, policy change on Afghanistan was only one part of a broad and multifaceted effort to revamp Soviet domestic and foreign politics.⁴⁶⁶ According to Gorbachev: “When we call our

⁴⁶³ Mendelson, *Changing Course*, chapter five.

⁴⁶⁴ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 251-258.

⁴⁶⁵ Mendelson, *Changing Course*, p. 93.

⁴⁶⁶ A comprehensive discussion of the reform movement in the Soviet Union is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Among other sources, please see Roeder, *Red Sunset*, chapter six; Gorbachev, *Perestroika*; Mikhail Gorbachev, *Documents and Materials: Report by Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee* (Moscow : Novosti Press Agency Pub. House, 1988); Mikhail Gorbachov, *Speeches and Writings, Vol. 1*, pp. 1-110; Mikhail Gorbachov, *Speeches and Writings, Vol. 2* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987); Mikhail Gorbachev, *Selected Speeches and Articles* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987); Susan L. Clark ed., *Gorbachev’s Agenda: Changes in Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989); Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Archie Brown, “Political Change in the Soviet Union,” in Alexander Dallin and Gail W. Lapidus, *The Soviet System* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 111-124; Jerry Hough, “Gorbachev’s Endgame,” in Dallin and Lapidus, *The Soviet System*, pp. 201-222; Robert Legvold, “The Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy,” in Dallin and Lapidus, *The Soviet System*, pp. 421-431; Bruce Parrott, “Soviet National Security Under Gorbachev,” in Dallin and Lapidus, *The Soviet System*, pp. 503-543; George Hudson ed., *Soviet National Security Policy Under Perestroika* (Boston: Unwin Hyman,

measures revolutionary, we mean that they are far-reaching, radical, and uncompromising, and affect the whole of society from top to bottom. They affect all spheres of life and do so in a comprehensive way. this is not putting new paint on our society or dressing up its sores, but involves its complete recovery and renewal.”⁴⁶⁷ And as part of this effort, it was better to draw people to his side than unnecessarily provoke opposition and disenchantment, which would have only undermined Gorbachev’s position and his favored policies. Furthermore, it was crucial to initiate a sea change in the dominant political views within the state so as to create a bulwark against the military, which was resistant to change, particularly on matters related to the use of force.⁴⁶⁸ It would have been difficult for Gorbachev, by himself, without any institutional or factional support, to singularly advocate a withdrawal of forces and an end to the conflict without risking widespread dissent within the armed forces; and at worst, it might have even triggered a nasty standoff between military and civilian authorities.

1990); Michael McGwire, *Perestroika and Soviet National Security* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1991); Jiri Valenta and Frank Cibulka eds., *Gorbachev’s New Thinking and Third World Conflicts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990).

⁴⁶⁷ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 54.

⁴⁶⁸ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* chapters five through seven. Bennett exhaustively tracks and documents the beliefs of various military leaders prior to and during the war. However, keep in mind that not all sources on the war claim that the military was as pro-war and resistant to change as Bennett suggests. As one example, please see Russian General Staff (Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress trans. and ed.), *The Soviet-Afghan War*. Here, in the preface, we find an account that portrays the Soviet military leadership as constantly urging for withdrawal, but their preferences were trumped by those of Moscow. These claims, though, seem overstated. It is likely that the military was not uniformly pro-war and inflexible, and Bennett even admits this. He points out that, as early as 1981, Defense Minister Ustinov petitioned civilian leaders to rethink existing policies on Afghanistan. That said, the evidence appears to support the notion that the military *in general* was pro-war and skeptical about policy change.

Second, decentralized rule also induced time delays and sluggishness in the policy process. Toward the end of the Brezhnev administration and continuing through the next three Soviet general-secretaries, Moscow began to loosen its grip on political power.⁴⁶⁹ But it was the reform movement under Gorbachev that led to a significant flowering of political decentralization in the Soviet Union. Through Glasnost and Perestroika and a host of related reforms, many people, groups, and institutions and organizations were politically empowered.⁴⁷⁰ Moreover, in some cases, new groups were directly brought into Soviet politics. In fact, think tanks, policy experts, intellectuals had a direct pipeline to Moscow. For example, the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada (ISKAN) and the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) performed a number of important tasks for Gorbachev. Various policy issues were farmed out to both organizations, and in turn they wrote memos and briefs, prepared reports, crafted parts of Gorbachev's speeches, vetted information, and then passed their contributions on to relevant Soviet politicians.⁴⁷¹ All of this, however, folded additional time into the standard pace of Soviet policymaking. After all, as a result of their inclusion in Soviet politics, an extra organizational layer was added into the overall structure of the policy process. Foreign policymaking became more diffuse, complex and time consuming. So even though the substance of the ideas put forward by think tanks was often anti-war, or at least pushed against continued engagement in Afghanistan, simply the presence of

⁴⁶⁹ Roeder, *Red Sunset*, chapter five.

⁴⁷⁰ Mendelson, *Changing Course*, pp. 82-85.

⁴⁷¹ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 251-258.

these actors in Soviet politics arguably induced time delays in foreign policymaking, thereby helping to extend the shelf-life of the war.

6.2.4 Evidence of Alternative Explanations in the Soviet-Afghan War

6.2.4.1 Contiguous Combatants

The fact that Afghanistan sat on the border of the Soviet Union was an important part of the decision making process in Moscow. First, the fate of Afghanistan was viewed in zero-sum terms, with either the Americans or Soviets reaping the spoils of war. With this mind, it should not be surprising that the Soviets were concerned about the prospect of a American-backed government in its backyard. Failure to stabilize the communist government in Kabul, Moscow believed, would be tantamount to giving Afghanistan to the U.S., thereby greatly aiding America's efforts to frustrate and contain the Soviet Union. Second, Moscow feared the impact of a successful anti-communist, pro-Islamic movement in Afghanistan on its own Muslim population in the south. At worst, a victorious mujahadeen rebellion could embolden Muslims in the Soviet Union to throw off the shackles of communism and seek independence, causing the empire to unravel faster and deeper than it eventually did in the late 1980s. However, the role of this worst-case assessment in Soviet policy making is debated among Soviet experts.⁴⁷² Indeed, not only do some believe that this view was not strongly influential, but that an inverse argument was a more accurate and powerful explanation of Soviet thinking. This

⁴⁷² Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 199; Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985); Alexandre Bennigsen, "Soviet Muslims and the World of Islam," *Problems of Communism* (March/April 1985), pp. 38-51. For a wider discussion about the role of Islam in the Afghan War, particularly in the context U.S.-Soviet relations, see Herrmann, "The Soviet Decision to Withdraw from Afghanistan," pp. 227-228, 233-234.

argument stated that Moscow's somewhat hardline and culturally insensitive policies toward Muslims living in the Soviet Union were a model for the government in Afghanistan to replicate and use on its own Muslim population.⁴⁷³ And sure enough, from 1978 until early 1980, with Soviet consent and backing, consecutive Afghan governments implemented what were perceived as sterile communist, anti-Islamic reforms, many of which remained in effect until their repeal in the mid-1980s.

The above discussion begs the following question: How decisive was the notion of geographic proximity to the Soviet Union's decision to continue fighting a stalemated war? Specifically, was it as important as, or maybe even more important than, the set of domestic political variables discussed above? A brief counterfactual thought experiment can help answer these questions. Let us imagine a war with a different but very similar country. Assume that this was a country with which the Soviet Union, in its view, had a prior caregiving, mentoring relationship. In addition, assume that the Soviets were engaged with a country that was vulnerable, for whatever reasons, to American influence and had a sizable Muslim population, yet was not located on the Soviet Union's doorstep. Hence, in this scenario, we hold a number of crucial features constant, allowing only for the geographic distance variable to vary.

In this hypothetical, I believe proximity in broad terms would matter. It is reasonable to assert that the Soviets would have fought hard in any area in its perceived sphere of influence, which included contiguous territories and lands a bit farther removed from the Soviet Union proper, like Central and Eastern Europe. In short, the Soviets

⁴⁷³ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* p. 199.

would have defended their turf. And the zero-sum nature of cold war politics, in conjunction with the low probability that Washington would have sent ground forces or use nuclear weapons in these conflicts, likely would have given Moscow sufficient policy flexibility as well as an incentive to militarily prevent any government within its sphere of influence from moving away from the Soviet bloc. Although they were not long conflicts, the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 illustrate the basic point of this argument. But if the hypothetical venue of conflict was located outside the Soviet sphere of influence, Moscow would have been far less likely to engage in a costly, protracted small war. In these cases, given that there would be fewer and less intense vested interests on the line, the Soviets would have been less inclined to sacrifice blood and treasure. Instead, Moscow would have likely sought to influence and coerce governments via a number of ways, such as via diplomacy, economic and military assistance, threats, economic sanctions, and perhaps force, though with a very limited commitment. Notably, among other cases, the Soviet commitment to Africa in the 1970s and 1980s and Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s reflects this position. The punchline is that contiguity was probably less important than the relationship of the weak to the Soviet sphere of influence.

By logical extension, then, it seems that there are two distinct ways in which we can view the importance and power of the proximity hypothesis. First, a case can be made that proximity is more important than the domestic politics variables in the two-step model. Both sets of explanations are useful in that both lead us to the same outcome, but the proximity hypothesis does so in a much more refined and simplified manner. It is a

very parsimonious explanation of Soviet behavior in war. And many political scientists are guided by the rule that the most succinct and accurate explanation is the best—it yields the biggest bang for our buck.⁴⁷⁴ Second, on the other hand, the proximity hypothesis misses most, if not all, of the profound complexity in the case: namely, the numerous transitions in power, the variations in beliefs in elites over time, the reform movement, and, importantly, the individual and cumulative affect of these factors on the pace and conduct of the war. Furthermore, the proximity hypothesis cannot answer the following question: why did the Soviets fail to use maximum force to subdue the Afghans? After all, there were fairly recent prior examples of the Soviet Union quickly smashing political opponents in its sphere of influence. What made the conflict in Afghanistan so much different than the ones in Hungary and Czechoslovakia? What explains the variation? The two-step model adds insight into this variation and explains why the Soviets refrained from cutting their losses in the Afghanistan struggle. By opening the black box, my model offers a richer and more complete account of the war than the proximity explanation.

6.2.4.2 America's Commitment to Afghanistan

The superpower competition for power and influence around the world during the cold war led the Soviet Union and the U.S. to jockey for position in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s. As mentioned already, the Soviets viewed Afghanistan through a

⁴⁷⁴ See Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 29-30; Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 19; Jack S. Levy, "Explaining Events and Developing Theories: History, Political Science, and the Analysis of International Relations," in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman eds., *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), pp. 54-59.

zero-sum lens, fearing that the Americans would set up shop in the country if Moscow could not secure and stabilize the existing communist regime in Kabul. The Soviets saw Amin's tentative outreach to the U.S. as signs of a client state tilting toward the West and the Americans enthusiastically luring and embracing it.⁴⁷⁵ The bulk of the evidence does not support the notion that the U.S. sought to establish a foothold in Afghanistan. But it does indicate that the Americans intended to obstruct and impede Moscow from meeting its objectives, as well as to sap the strength of the Soviets, draining the empire of vital resources.⁴⁷⁶

The Soviet invasion in December 1979 elicited a number of responses from the U.S. The U.S. immediately condemned what it called "Soviet aggression" and recalled its ambassador from Moscow. Shortly thereafter, President Jimmy Carter halted grain shipments to the Soviet Union, ended the ongoing SALT talks, and boycotted the 1980 summer Olympics that were held in Moscow. But most importantly, the U.S. began assisting the Afghan rebels via a third party. Specifically, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) funneled money and weapons to Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)

⁴⁷⁵ "Andropov-Gromyko-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report on Events in Afghanistan on 27-28 December 1979." December 31, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴⁷⁶ The U.S. aimed to run the Soviets into the ground, in Afghanistan and at home. Significant increases in assistance to the Afghan rebels and sharp spikes in defense budgets were efforts to get the Soviet Union to compete with the U.S. at higher levels of commitment (economically, politically, and militarily). The hope was that this would, in the end, break the back of the Soviets, to get them to compromise on various issues on America's terms. It is part of the notion of building "peace through strength" that was popularized by Ronald Reagan. At the same time, let us think about what happened to Afghanistan after the war. The U.S. could have stepped up its involvement in Afghanistan, thereby filling the power vacuum created by the Soviets' departure. It did not. We can put forward a number of reasons to explain the behavior of the U.S. in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But surely, one is that the U.S. did not have expansionist motives.

Agency, which then distributed the resources to indigenous Afghanis.⁴⁷⁷ Thus, the U.S. used the Afghan rebels as a bulwark against the rise of a communist-aligned government. Aid to Afghanistan increased incrementally through the first four years of warfare, moving from \$30 million in 1980 under Carter to \$60 million under Ronald Reagan in 1983. The mid-1980s served as a turning point in the level of assistance to Afghanistan. In 1984, aid soared to \$140 million, and continued to skyrocket in the following years. By 1988, the U.S. earmarked about \$700 to Afghanistan.⁴⁷⁸ Additionally, the mid-1980s were important because during this period the U.S. began transferring Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, rockets, and mortars, which were designed to neutralize precisely the things that had been recently helping the Soviets make gains on the ground—air bombers and air reconnaissance.

Note that American assistance did not turn the Afghan conflict into a costly, protracted war. Significant amounts and forms of aid did not reach Afghanistan until the mid-1980s, well after the point in which we can safely say that the Soviets were engaged in such a war. U.S. aid did make it more difficult for the Soviet Union to fight a successful small war. The Stinger missiles played a role in halting and later reversing the military gains the Soviets had made by 1984. In fact, it is even possible to say that the

⁴⁷⁷ “Did the U.S. “Create” Osama bin Laden?” January 2005. *United States Department of State*, <http://usinfo.state.gov/media/Archive/2005/Jan/24-318760.html>. For a detailed discussion about the role of the CIA in the Afghan War, see Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

⁴⁷⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume 3* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990); Herrmann, “The Soviet Decision to Withdraw from Afghanistan,” p. 247; Mendelson, *Changing Course*, pp. 96-97.

sharp spike in American funds and weapons actually helped to *shorten* the war.⁴⁷⁹

Evidence suggests that it made some Soviet leaders realize in a relatively short amount of time—as early as 1986—that the war was unwinnable and that they needed to cut their losses.⁴⁸⁰ This interpretation cuts against the logic of this hypothesis, because here intense competition from the other great power pushed the Soviets to divest themselves of the situation, thereby foregoing a continued presence in the country. The Soviets were too war-weary, too depleted to overcome, as well as keep up with indefinitely, escalating levels of American assistance to Afghanistan.

⁴⁷⁹ Both Mendelson and Bennett claim that the “peace through strength” component of the Reagan Doctrine probably made it more difficult for the Soviets to disengage from the war. In short, it probably reinforced zero-sum views of the war and bolstered the positions of hardliners in Moscow. Mendelson even quotes from Soviet officials who contest the role of American aid in ending the hostilities in Afghanistan. See Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* pp. 249-250; and Mendelson, *Changing Course*, pp. 98-100. Certainly, if we think about when the U.S. began its assistance to the Afghan rebels, it is clear that it did not bring about a quick end to the war—though that probably was not the goal. The goal, as the Moscow correctly guessed, was to pin down the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. But let us move away from looking at American aid over the long-term and focus only the period in which the U.S. significantly ramped up its assistance. It is evident that the spike in the assistance to Afghanistan was almost perfectly correlated with Soviet moves to withdraw and was likely causally related to such action as well.

⁴⁸⁰ In 1986 and 1987, after U.S. aid to the Afghan rebels skyrocketed, Moscow became much more vocal about the costs of the war and the perceived desire of the U.S. to get the Soviet Union tied down in Afghanistan. Sure, part of this reaction can be attributed to the emerging domestic political climate that was challenging established Soviet thinking, but it strains credulity to believe that the spike in aid did not push the increasing number of Soviet officials to view the war with a critical eye. The problem with the work of Bennett and Mendelson is that both treat U.S. aid as if it was relatively static over time. But this was not the case at all. Aid by the mid-1980s had increased tenfold since the war’s inception. By 1986, Soviet officials—at a host of levels—were likely responding to the sharp escalation in U.S. aid to Afghanistan. To deny this argument, one would have to believe that the Soviets, particularly intelligence gathering groups like the KGB, were unaware of the amount of American aid being pumped into Afghanistan or that the Soviets were not updating their responses to new information. I find both arguments highly doubtful. We know that the Soviet intelligence agencies were fairly good at acquiring information and providing realistic foreign policy assessments; and from the extensive literature on learning in the Gorbachev years, we also know that Soviets were becoming more adept at fairly and objectively receiving and processing new information.

6.2.4.3 Intrinsic Interests

The Soviet Union's commitment to Afghanistan, as mentioned already, was viewed primarily through the prism of the superpower competition during the cold war. Afghanistan posed no threat to invade or threaten Soviet territory. But there possibly were Soviet homeland-related concerns attached to the war. In short, fears of contagion effects, of the potential spread of Islamic rebellion in Afghanistan to southern Russia, might have motivated the Soviets to remain militarily engaged, even when the war became stalemated. Extinguishing the rebellion in Afghanistan via force over time, according to this logic, would dampen the probability of like-minded copycat activities in the Soviet Union. However, as mentioned above, there is still widespread debate over how deep and salient this factor was in Soviet decision making. We do know that Afghanistan was valued because it was seen as intrinsically important in the context of Soviet-American relations. Failure to defeat the insurgency and adequately prop up its communist ally in Kabul, so it was thought, would provide ripe conditions for the U.S. to exert its influence in the country. The result of such a worst-case assessment would be an American client-state on the border of the Soviet Union—a good position from which to undermine Moscow's ambitions and objectives in regional and world politics.

An interesting puzzle emerges when we think about the Soviet and Chinese cases in the context of state interests. The Sino-Vietnamese and Soviet-Afghan Wars consisted of contiguous combatants, and the powerful side in both wars was primarily motivated by power competition. Yet one war persisted for over eight years and the other quickly concluded in a matter of weeks. And even more importantly, the longer, costlier

conflict—the Soviet-Afghan War—was the one in which the powerful had relatively weaker, less intense interests at stake. For in the Chinese case, Beijing not only was concerned about Soviet influence in the region, but also about the prospect of Vietnam spreading its wings and encroaching upon China’s turf. Afghanistan did not pose this kind of multi-pronged dilemma to the Soviets. Furthermore, while the Soviet Union and China both had secondary or tertiary homeland-related interests at stake in their small wars, there were arguably a larger and more complicated set of homeland factors and concerns connected to the Sino-Vietnamese War. As discussed in chapter five, while neither a proximate or general cause of war, nor a strong factor in the decision to cut losses after war began, the presence of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and the longstanding border and territorial disputes were all a part of the delicate and tense Sino-Vietnamese relations by 1979. By contrast, there just were not as many forces impinging upon the Soviet homeland in the Afghan War. The point of all of this is that it reinforces the thought that interests do not capture the variation in state behavior in small wars. By itself, state interests yield a unsatisfying and incomplete account of small wars. We have to look elsewhere to fill in these logical and empirical gaps. Domestic politics in the Soviet Union and China help us bridge these gaps and actually render a more complete picture of how and why the powerful act as they did in their small wars.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 The Verdict

7.1.1 Five Possible Verdicts

Chapter seven moves beyond what has been written and branches into several different directions. It is my hope that the evidence in the case study chapters was presented in such an organized, clear manner that the performance of the two-step model is basically self-evident to readers. Nevertheless, I begin this chapter with a succinct statement of verdict. That is, I pull together theory and evidence and state precisely how I see the model performing in each of the four cases.

I contend that there are five possible verdicts for the two-step model in each case study. Scholars should not necessarily lump the results of hypothesis tests into dichotomous categories of “pass” or “fail.” Sometimes, evidence does not so nicely and neatly lend itself to simple, decisive verdicts. A combination of supporting and contradictory data and case nuance frequently rears its head in political science, as well as in all social sciences. So even when we can say that a theory or model has passed or failed, it does not always do so in a very decisive way. And in addition, there are instances when the evidence provides mixed at best support. In these cases, we cannot

fairly or accurately say that “pass” or “fail” captures the net result of case analysis and hypothesis testing. We need to describe these cases in another way, using different language. Below is a description of the five verdicts.

1. *Strong pass*: There is strong evidence to support one or more variable in both links of the two-step model. Both links clearly, decisively passed an empirical test.

2. *Weak pass*: Both links pass an empirical test, but the evidence provides some reasons to be cautiously—not strongly—optimistic. In this case, like the strong pass category, we have one or more variable on both links that pass empirical tests. But at the same time, there is evidence, on at least one of variables that passed, which pushes and nudges in the opposing direction, toward failure. In these situations, we do have enough supporting evidence to override the disconfirming or contradictory data. Even so, the contradictory evidence must be taken into account when evaluating the model in its entirety. Another example is when we have only one variable on each link that has passed an empirical test.

The problem here is that the model is on a shaky foundation. Additional evidence or convincing reinterpretations of existing data could conceivably flip “passed” hypotheses, thereby turning them into failed tests. Should this happen, it would also jeopardize the status of the model, at least on the particular cases in which we have new or revised data.

3. *Inconclusive*: There are two potential paths. On the one hand, we might have one link that passes an empirical test, but at the same time find utter fuzziness and uncertainty on the other side. Or on the other hand, we might observe fuzziness and uncertainty on both sides of the two-step model. Either way, we simply cannot say that the model has

conclusively passed or failed. In short, we find evidence simultaneously working for and against the model.

4. *Weak fail*: Here again, there are two potential paths. We might find that either one link has completely failed or that both links have failed across the board. But there is some, partial evidence in support of at least one of the variables. The data is not enough to overcome any disconfirming evidence, but it is important to note, for it does add some nuance to how we interpret the viability of the model. And in addition, like the weak pass category, we do have to consider that additional evidence or reinterpretations of existing evidence could flip “failed” hypotheses and thereby change the status of the model on specific cases.

5. *Strong fail*: This is a case in which both links clearly fail. We do not have one variable on either link of the two-step model that has passed an empirical test.

7.1.2 Hypothesis Test Results

7.1.2.1 The Model

7.1.2.1.1 INDOCHINA WAR: STRONG PASS

The evidence found in the French case shows that four of the five hypotheses passed empirical tests. Electoral politics did pressure French political parties into maintaining a hardline stance well into the war. Politics did fracture between hawks and doves. And the French government had to play a balancing act between these two factions, while also considering the demands of the war on the battlefield. The multitude of veto players and the slow policy process also contributed to the length of the war. The role of propaganda in the war was the lone failed test. There was not much evidence of

French elites being trapped by their liberal rhetoric. Even so, this case perfectly reflected the doubly safety locks analogy I posed in the introduction. Both domestic political incentives and constraints moved in the same direction to doubly push the French state further and deeper into war over time and make it more difficult to change course during war, effectively locking the status quo in place.

7.1.2.1.2 SINO-VIETNAMESE WAR: STRONG PASS

The Sino-Vietnamese War mostly corresponds with the baseline story of nondemocracies in small wars. The Deng government was decisive in moving China quickly into and out of war with Vietnam. It refrained from using dualistic, demonizing language with respect to its war adversary. There was one veto player—Deng Xiaoping—who supported speedy war termination, communicated this intention to the international community, and managed to push his preferences through the state. The policy process, aided by a single-party dictatorship, moved swiftly and efficiently. However, it is possible to view this hypothesis in a more complicated, dynamic manner. If we see Chinese-Vietnamese relations in terms of crisis politics, in which relations were increasingly tense and hostile for more than five years, then the policy process headed in a cautious but slow direction. The type and probability of elite punishment was the one hypothesis that lacked support in this case. China did not cut its losses because leaders were worried about their future political destinies. Although the war did generate some public protest and opposition, it did not cause Deng to end the war. If anything, it halted

the brief period of relaxed freedoms and liberties in China and caused Deng to effectively dismantle the nascent Democracy Movement.

7.1.2.1.3 IRAQI REVOLT OF 1920: WEAK PASS

This is a case of three passed tests. But because at least one pass was among the incentives and constraints batches of variables, it therefore satisfied the minimal conditions for the two-step model to pass empirical testing.⁴⁸¹ British elites used liberal rhetoric to justify their campaign in Iraq, but there is no evidence that they were trapped by it. And the policy process was singularly dominated by a fairly rational, sensitive government London, which facilitated Britain's ability to initiate and sustain foreign policy change.⁴⁸² Furthermore, electoral incentives worked to push the British government away from a hands-on, direct approach to Iraq and toward indirect rule.

On the other hand, there was a sense of decisiveness in British foreign policy during the conflict, particularly when we consider the length of the struggle, but the underlying factors reveal a story that is at odds with the logic of this hypothesis. And remember, this dissertation tests for both associations and causality between independent and dependent variables. Specifically, this case illustrated a mixture of short-term and long-term time horizons. The short-term views pushed Britain to cut its losses, while the long-term ones moved London to forego completely cutting the cord on its presence and influence in Iraq. Finally, while the conflict was short and relatively painless, the foreign policy

⁴⁸¹ Recall chapter three, especially section 3.5 and Table 3.3, which listed the twenty-one conditions under which my model would "pass" empirical testing.

⁴⁸² London was "sensitive" to the costs and benefits of the war, and to the protestations among the media and public.

process was complex, multifaceted, and time consuming. In short, the two-step model is upheld by the evidence, but there is enough counter-evidence to dampen our enthusiasm about the passed tests.

	<i>Indochina War</i>	<i>Sino-Vietnamese War</i>	<i>Soviet-Afghan War</i>	<i>Iraqi Revolt</i>
Type and Probability of Punishment	Pass	Fail	Pass	Pass
Time Horizons	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail
War Propaganda	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass
Veto Players	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Pace of Policy Process	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail

Table 7.1: Hypothesis Test Results: The Model

7.1.2.1.4 SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR: STRONG PASS

The lone failed test here was on the time horizons variable. Soviet leaders did not incrementally escalate or de-escalate military force in Afghanistan. Instead, the use of military force in Afghanistan, and to a lesser extent the level of war mobilization and deployment, was adjusted in fits and spurts over time. And the war, as well as the reform movement, really did not fracture the Soviet state, which also cuts against logic of this hypothesis. But otherwise, this case strongly supports the hypothesized logic of the instances in which nondemocracies fight costly, protracted small wars. An analysis of the Soviet Union during the 1980s reveals that the state looked and operated much like democracies often do, particularly in the context of small wars. A burgeoning formal and

informal institutionalization of Soviet politics, in conjunction with punctuated instability in Moscow, led to the decay and ossification of the foreign policy process. And these two features reinforced each other, leading the Soviet Union further down the path of costly and reckless international behavior. Much like in democratic states, the structure of Soviet politics impaired learning, led to redundancy in war policy, induced sluggishness in the policy process, and made policy change difficult, among other things. It was only when the *liberal* reformers emerged in 1987 that the restraints on domestic and foreign policy were loosened and Moscow began actively searching for a way out of Afghanistan. Indeed, a Soviet report on the war affirms this point: “Practical implementation of the line of a political settlement of the Afghan problem became possible only in the conditions of perestroika, new political thinking, the course of the fundamental recovery of the international situation, of unbiased, realistic approaches to the resolution of regional conflicts.”⁴⁸³

7.1.2.2 Alternative Explanations

The three alternative explanations offered mostly unpersuasive accounts of events and processes—both in terms of cause-effect and correlational relationships—in the four case studies. And of those hypotheses that are labeled as “passing” empirical tests in Table 7.2, a good case could be made that the evidence disconfirms the logic for at least one hypothesis.⁴⁸⁴ In my view, the Sino-Vietnamese War nicely captures the role of the

⁴⁸³ “Report on the Current Situation in Afghanistan.” February 17, 1989. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴⁸⁴ This is particularly true for the interests hypothesis in the Sino-Vietnamese case. Please see section 5.4.3 of this dissertation for a further discussion of this hypothesis.

alternative hypotheses in foreign policymaking. There, the stars aligned to produce values on the three hypotheses (proximity, looming presence of a great power competitor, and very strong interests) that generate a clear expectation of costly, protracted warfare. But this was not the case. China cut its losses in Vietnam. And in addition, if we compare the values of the alternative hypotheses on the China case to those on the other three cases, it is also clear that the Sino-Vietnamese War was the mostly likely case to end up as a costly, protracted war.

	<i>Indochina War</i>	<i>Sino-Vietnamese War</i>	<i>Soviet-Afghan War</i>	<i>Iraqi Revolt</i>
Proximity	Fail	Fail	Pass	Fail
External Great Powers	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Interests	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass

Table 7.2 Hypothesis Test Results: Alternative Explanations

7.2 Implications

What have we learned? How has this dissertation added to our collective knowledge of international relations? Below is a list of sixteen implications that I have derived from my case analyses. Certainly, a number of these implications focus on small wars and regime type—the two crucial factors that are at the heart of this dissertation. But several other implications target more general themes, like conflict, domestic political institutions, and various branches of international relations scholarship. Some of the list includes observations that been directly tested; some of list does not. Instead, a few

happen to be common themes that emerged in the data. To gain more confidence in them, these observations should be tested in future research. Nevertheless, because these observations seem to be important and relevant to this dissertation and international relations in general, I have included them below. And after all, good research is interesting and compelling on its own merits, with respect to the goals and aims of individual research projects, but at the same it also provides enough fodder—especially in the form of testable claims—for future research. It is a prime way to stimulate a fresh, new research program within the scholarly literature. For organizational purposes, I group the implications into three categories—one that is focused only on the logic of the two-step model, one on the alternative explanations, and the last on important international relations insights beyond the narrow scope of the model.

7.2.1 *The Model*

1. *The electoral process can lead to cost-efficient foreign policies or it can foster reckless and harmful ones.* It can go either way. In the French case, national elections served to extend the conflict, as contestation between rival factions drove several to adopt hardline positions on the war in Indochina. In the British case, we see something different. An inflamed public, opposed to expense of the occupation of Iraq, pushed London to cut its losses. What the rationalists overlook is that leaders might see backing down, giving into domestic public opinion, as a prime way to save their hide. Whether this happens more often than standing firm is matter of future empirical research.

2. *Go Deep or get out.*⁴⁸⁵ Incrementalism is a recipe for an indefinite commitment to warfare and it allows states to bleed themselves gradually over time. It only forestalls the inevitable. In addition, incrementalism also enables the weak more than enough time to recover from any significant losses that it might have suffered in the early years of the war. In addition, the weak might use the time to adapt to war conditions, making it an ever fiercer foe.⁴⁸⁶ Furthermore, prolonged warfare, particularly nowadays for the weak, only radicalizes populations and risks destroying the institutional foundation of states. The Soviet case perfectly highlights this point. More decisive action might result in an embarrassing loss on the battlefield. But in the end, it would also likely save lives and facilitate an easier path to post-war reconstruction.

3. *The hypotheses about war propaganda are sound in logic, but somewhat difficult to verify in the real world.* It is now apparent that our ability to find support for these hypotheses is more or less difficult under manifold conditions. For instance, when leaders are “committed thinkers” (either ideologically or only on specific issues), when we know where they stand wars in progress, the burden in determining whether they were trapped markedly declines.⁴⁸⁷ In these instances, we can confidently say that wars continued, in

⁴⁸⁵ “Go deep or get out” is borrowed from a recent opinion piece from Stephen Biddle, which captures nicely the sentiment of this point. See Biddle, “Iraq: Go Deep or Get Out,” *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2007, p. A15.

⁴⁸⁶ Even the Soviets noticed this during the Afghan War. See “Secret Special Folder [This Notation Omitted in the Gromov Book] CC CPSU.” November, 13, 1986. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; “CPSU CC Politburo Meeting Minutes (excerpt).” November 13, 1986. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁴⁸⁷ Put another way, committed thinkers are those who have a stable and known set of core beliefs. The work of Nathan Leites and Alexander George on operational codes and Ole Holsti on belief systems captures this in part. As examples, see George, “The ‘Operational Code’: A Neglected Approach to the

part, because leaders, in various ways and to varying degrees, believed in these wars. The rhetoric reflects their views. The research burdens significantly rise, however, when leaders are uncommitted thinkers, when we cannot pin down their views. Here, it is difficult to determine when they believe in a cause, when they talk themselves into supporting some effort, or when their rhetoric pushes their foreign policy agendas further into sustaining the status quo. The rhetoric of these leaders could mean almost anything, and their effects are by extension almost impossible to forecast.

4. One veto player does not doom foreign policy, nor does it guarantee success; more than veto player makes it more difficult for states to navigate the rocky terrain of war.

The China and Soviet cases illustrate different war outcomes with one veto player dominating the foreign policy apparatus. Policymaking in political systems with one veto player can move in many directions, and at varying speeds over time. Ultimately, it is up to the veto player to pursue and carry out foreign policy change. On the other hand, in systems with multiple veto players, if they each do not walk and talk in relative sync, then any one veto player can pull the breaks on policy change, thereby leaving the status quo intact. The French case clearly highlights the many barriers to change when we observe several dominant spheres of influence within a state.

5. It would be wise for democratic governments to learn how to manage the various inputs on foreign policy and streamline the policymaking process. In short, they must find ways to prevent protracted and unnecessary policy debates, meetings, and fact finding

Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13 (June 1969), pp. 190-222; Holsti, "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 6 (September 1962), pp. 244-252.

missions. This would enable states to make quicker decisions when situations demand policy change. The tricky part, however, is that governments must do these tasks without disenfranchising constituencies and causing domestic turmoil.⁴⁸⁸ Yet at the same time, should democratic governments actually streamline their policy processes, they have to resist any temptation to rush headlong into initiating or changing policies.

7.2.2 *Alternative Explanations*

6. *Proximity, external great powers, and state interests can at times play important but not decisive roles in extending the commitment of the powerful to costly small wars.* The case analyses clearly show that three alternative explanations do not adequately account for the variation in behavior between democracies and nondemocracies in costly small wars.

7.2.3 *Ancillary Implications*

7.2.3.1 Domestic Politics

7. *Cutting costs requires novel, bold leadership.* The French and Soviet cases clearly spotlight the problems that occur when there is a dearth of bold, fresh leadership in power. Leaders must see wars for what they are and in terms of how they are progressing in reality—not through the frequently distorted lens of domestic politics. The powerful need leaders who are open to change—to new ideas, people, policies, and so on. Relatedly, at times, leaders must be able to think outside of the national political orthodoxy.

⁴⁸⁸ Streamlining the policy processes almost by definition means that various access points to the foreign policy process are narrowed or denied or filtered through intermediary entities. Ultimately, how ruling governments go about streamlining their policy processes will determine the level of costs imposed on it in response to these structural changes. Outright denying domestic groups access to power would certainly be problematic, and over the long-term could counteract any potential gains made by speeding up the pace of policymaking.

Creativity and innovation are keys to stimulating policy change. In addition, leaders must be able to adapt to fast-moving situations, in that they quickly learn from these situations and apply that new knowledge to policy. They should be willing to listen to opposing views. Dissenting views enables leaders to rationally weigh costs and benefits, and, if necessary, rethink their positions.

8. *Liberalism is a stronger, more important force for cost-efficient foreign policy than democracy.* A growing scholarly literature argues the merits of liberalism for both domestic and international politics. John Owen writes about peace between liberal states.⁴⁸⁹ Fareed Zakaria claims that it is better to cultivate and nurture liberal political and economic cultures in nondemocracies before attempting to proceed with democratic reforms.⁴⁹⁰ Relatedly, Jack Snyder and Edward Mansfield, as well as a host of comparative political scholars, believe that the presence of liberalism (ideas, institutions, and so on) enhances the likelihood that democratic reforms will stick over the long-term.⁴⁹¹ The Soviet case connects to this literature. Liberal reformers, or new thinkers, and liberal ideas spurred the Soviet Union to cut its losses.⁴⁹² By contrast, various institutions in the Soviet Union that looked and operated like those in democratic states only led to obstructionism and gridlock. Absent the infusion of liberalism into Soviet politics, the

⁴⁸⁹ John M. Owen, IV, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹⁰ Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 6 (November/December 1997), pp. 22-43.

⁴⁹¹ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Prone to Violence: The Paradox of the Democratic Peace," *The National Interest*, No. 82 (Winter 2005/06), pp. 39-45.

⁴⁹² For a similar interpretation of the Soviet case, see Sarah E. Mendelson, *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

status quo—perhaps in both Moscow and Kabul—would have likely held for a longer period of time, leading to higher costs and more destruction in Afghanistan.

9. *Consolidating domestic political power can prolong small wars that are already in motion.* The French and Soviet cases depict governments that were in constant transition during warfare. And the repeated turnover in power in both countries disrupted the policy process. In particular, it hampered the ability of leaders to respond quickly and efficiently to ongoing conflicts. For in these instances, leaders often had to construct new cabinets, build and enlarge bases of support within the legislature, create new positions and domestic institutions, and woo political opponents before even talk about policy change could occur. Furthermore, it is possible that new administrations might not develop new ideas, such as policy change, until they have been in office and immersed in the minutia of policy matters for some time. I do not doubt that there is some on-the-job learning that is required and essential to policy change, and this can be prevented when leaders serve short terms in office. When governments are turned out of office, it is crucial that there is some level of coordination from one to the next. This will cut down on policy redundancy and hasten the learning that is required to perform high level political jobs.

10. *An activated, skeptical public can undercut any momentum to wage costly, needless small wars.* The British case directly addresses this point. From the beginning, many British citizens were aware of the conflict and were opposed to a costly, prolonged occupation of Iraq. All of this was due to several factors—in part because of an active, critical media, in part because the public was already war-weary, and also because of the economic turmoil in Britain by 1920. The net result is that the public did not act as a

cheerleader for British actions in Iraq. Instead, it acted as a brake on direct rule. By contrast, the French case shows what can happen when an activated, skeptical public is not fully present. There, the public was distracted and disinterested. And as pointed out in chapter four, a sizable contingent of French citizens were not even fully aware that a conflict was taking place in Indochina. The public really did not become an active force in debates about the war until the early 1950s, which by then the war had already been in motion for at least five years.

7.2.3.2 Colonial Administration

11. The powerful must exercise caution when farming out policy to overseas

bureaucracies. Governments should not grant these agencies unlimited autonomy to influence policymaking. In both the French and British cases, policymaking from the home office was undermined by officers in the field. In some cases, this resulted from overconfidence and hubris; in others, it stemmed from political fighting among bureaucratic rivals. Without effective oversight, colonial administrations, overseas war offices, and bloated embassies can be a force for harm rather than good.

12. Large military and civilian administrations can serve as a flashpoint for anger and

resentment in foreign populations. The French, British, and Soviet cases bear this point out. Each country had a large colonial administration that dominated local politics.

Notably, in the British case, Iraqis were furious that English officials filled most of the political positions while they were relegated to minor and unimportant duties in the state. It is awfully difficult for the powerful to claim that it has benign and altruistic motives as it constructs lavish facilities for its own use and ships thousands of officials to these war

zones. At a minimum, these actions send mixed messages. And at the worst, they signal that the powerful plan to hunker down and occupy these countries; and such actions could spark opposition and add fuel to the fire that rages in small wars. As an example, the overarching presence of the powerful in the three cases mentioned above tainted the legitimacy of the governments in Iraq, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, making each appear as puppets of their great power masters, and created a built-in reason not to seek a political compromise and resolution to the hostilities. This should lead policymakers to seriously question whether large overseas civilian and military bureaucracies contribute positively to the objectives of the powerful.

7.2.3.3 War Policy

13. *There is no reason to assume that the powerful will wage only one war at a time.* If you think back to chapter two, you will remember that a rationalist argument of war hypothesizes that boots on the ground will be the primary issue on which voters will cast their ballot.⁴⁹³ Embedded in this logic is a tacit assumption that there is only one ongoing war at a time. This might be true for most states in world, given that most lack the capabilities to wage multi-front wars. But this need not apply to strong, modern first world great powers. This was clearly evident in the British case. England was involved in other conflicts concurrent with the armed struggle in Iraq. In cases like this, the rationalist argument offers no assistance to scholars or policymakers. For here, perhaps all concurrent conflicts are of equal importance to the electorate, but this need not be so. It is conceivable that one war conflict receives less public and elite attention, to the point that

⁴⁹³ Refer to section 2.2.2.1.1.

voters do not cast their ballots with these situations in mind. And if we cannot *a priori* determine which conflict is the most salient one, then we cannot hypothesize whether leaders will stand firm or back down once these conflicts are in motion.

14. *Democracies seem to resist relinquishing their acquisitions.* While Britain managed to move from the status quo rather quickly in Iraq, it did not completely let go of its various strategic ambitions in the country and the region. In fact, it took Britain twelve years to leave Iraq after the revolt. On this point, Britain had much more in common with the French in Indochina than with either of the two nondemocratic cases.

15. *Does it make sense to broaden the base of support of indigenous governments as a method of subduing and muffling civil wars and insurgencies?* In light of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, this question should be asked. Moscow believed that making the Afghan government more diverse and representative of the population would have pacifying effects on the internal rebellion. Moscow was wrong. Perhaps the work of Barbara Walter sheds valuable insight into this issue. Under civil war conditions, Walter contends that polities will remain weak and unstable until one side decisively wins.⁴⁹⁴ Only then is there an actor who can enforce agreements and make commitments binding. Afghanistan became relatively more stable when the Taliban came to power in the 1990s. Perhaps contemporary Iraq will follow the same path. Relatedly, this implication also suggests that the powerful should completely and lucidly understand the historical, political, cultural conditions of countries they seek to influence and manipulate.

⁴⁹⁴ Barbara Walter, "You Can't Win with Civil Wars," *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 2007. See also Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

16. *Does outsourcing wars to indigenous armies really work?* With similar unfavorable results, France attempted to “Vietnamize” the Indochina War, and the Soviet Union tried to “Afghanistanize” the conflict in Afghanistan. The temptation to do so is understandable. By shifting the burden, it diffuses costs. But there are severe pitfalls as well. This form of outsourcing means that the powerful at times replace trained, organized, sophisticated forces with untrained, unorganized, and very unsavvy forces. In fact, in these situations, local forces frequently become targets—in part because they have sided with the enemy, but also because they are so unprepared to take over meaningful combat duties. So just because the powerful may reduce force levels, the conflict may remain as violent and uncontrolled as ever. Moreover, outsourcing really papers over the major political issues at the heart of this type of small war. It does not solve the main issue of bringing opposing local factions together to hammer out a political resolution to the conflict. In fact, it is conceivable that outsourcing could severely aggravate tensions and hostilities between indigenous groups, potentially blocking national reconciliation efforts, because this calls for large numbers of local forces to against one another on the battlefield. This is something to keep an eye on in the current war in Iraq.

7.3 U.S. Engagement in Iraq, 2003 to the Present

While it might be a bit unusual to briefly include some biographical detail in the text of a dissertation, I believe there is merit in doing so at this point. For clarification, this dissertation *did not* emerge from the events in the current war in Iraq. Rather, it was the result of discussions with Randall Schweller, my dissertation advisor, dating as far back as the summer of 2001. And these discussions were based on various historical

costly small war cases, most of which seemed to involve democracies. It just so happens that the Iraq War came along at the same time that I was researching and writing this project. The Iraq War has persisted for almost five years, with no end in sight, and has cost the U.S. thousands of lives—not to mention the countless number of Americans hurt and wounded in battle or accidentally—billions of dollars, tarnished its image internationally, and has contributed to the polarization of American political elites, among other things. It perfectly fits the description of a costly, protracted small war. With all of this mind, a few words are necessary.

We can see the war in Iraq as two distinct phases. An in fact, we can two the cases of this dissertation—the British and Soviet cases—as a template by which we track the manifestation and progress of the war. The first phase of the war mirrors the British experience in Iraq during the summer of 1920. The Iraqi Revolt was a case in which the British employed decisive force against its opponent, then moved away from direct rule and toward indirect oversight, as more Iraqis became directly involved in politics. Similarly, in March 2003, the U.S. swept through Iraq, toppled the Hussein government, and ran political affairs in the country via the Coalition Provisional Authority. But because local clerics, notably Ali al-Sistani, began to chafe against what was seen as American occupation and control, the U.S. turned the reins over to local Iraqis.⁴⁹⁵ The second phase of the war has looked much like the Soviet experience in Afghanistan during the 1980s. After appearing to establish control in Iraq for much of 2003, U.S. forces began to face an emerging two-sided insurgency consisting of both indigenous and

⁴⁹⁵ Fareed Zakaria, “Bowing to the Mighty Ayatollah,” *Newsweek*, January 26, 2004.

foreign militants.⁴⁹⁶ This insurgency has morphed into a widespread, protracted struggle that the U.S. has found difficult to contain and subdue. Despite recent military successes in Iraq, it is far from certain that the U.S. will be in a better position in the end than the Soviet Union prior to its disengagement from Afghanistan in 1989.⁴⁹⁷

A cursory examination of the events and processes at work in the Iraq War reveals evidence in support of the two-step model. Let us look at the coalition incentives variables first. First, electoral processes appear to have reinforced the status quo in Iraq. George Bush has maintained a firm stance on America's commitment to the war.⁴⁹⁸ And his rhetoric has routinely become more strident around election-time, in both 2004 and 2006. Even the Democrats were a bit loathe to criticize the war in 2004, precisely because the war was still moderately popular and such remarks played into the perception that they were soft on national security issues.⁴⁹⁹ Electoral pressures from the right and the left, then, sustained the war for three plus years. After the Republicans suffered through a disastrous showing in the 2006 legislative elections, it was arguably this group that

⁴⁹⁶ Roughly speaking, on the one hand, we find indigenous Sunni and foreign Sunni al-Qaeda militants battling American and Iraqi forces and committing atrocities against Shia Iraqis. Yet at the same time, we also see Indigenous Shia, often with support from Iran, violently lashing out against Americans and Iraqi forces and Sunni Iraqis. Now that the surge has taken some traction in parts of the country and made headway toward reducing Sunni violence, the Shia militias are seen as the primary concern. Ann Scott Tyson, "U.S. Planners See Shiite militias as Rising Threat," *The Washington Post*, October 22, 2007, p. A1.

⁴⁹⁷ The fact remains, as of February 2008, national political elites in Baghdad have made little progress toward a number of measures that are key to reconciliation between Shia and Sunni sects. The government has yet to pass legislation on sharing oil revenue, outlawing Shia militias, and a host of related key issues.

⁴⁹⁸ Misha Schubert, "Bush Defiant: Iraq to the End," *The Age*, November 18, 2006, p. 1; Denis Staunton, "Bush Holds Firm on Iraq as Democrats Take Congress," *The Irish Times*, January 4, 2007, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁹ Chaim Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Summer 2004), pp. 5-48.

pressured President Bush to soften his position on Iraq—namely, to begin discussing a potential withdrawal of some American forces in the not-too-distant future.⁵⁰⁰ Second, the U.S. has mostly avoided incremental shifts in the level of force deployed to Iraq. Force levels have stayed in the 135,000-160,00 interval, with slight movement up or down mostly depending on overlaps between military units traveling to and from Iraq. But the war has certainly fractured elite politics and public opinion. Sharp increases in force levels have been effectively ruled out in debates about the war. And the “surge” can be viewed as a compromise approach to the war: not large enough to engender even more criticism of Bush and the war, but still enough to leave hawks and Bush supporters temporarily placated and hopeful.⁵⁰¹ In addition, as the democrats have acquired more political power in the legislature, Bush has had to formulate war plans—particularly on issues like war spending bills, devising benchmarks to measure progress in the war, and so on—increasingly with his political opposition in mind.⁵⁰² So while incrementalism has not been the guiding principle of the war, the Bush administration in some ways has operated under a short-term time frame. Third, almost all quarters of the Bush administration has spoken about the Iraq conflict in dualistic, Manichean terms. In

⁵⁰⁰ Noam M. Levey, “The Nation; Two Republican Senators Break with Bush on Iraq and Call for Troop Withdrawal Plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 2007, p. A12; Noam N. Levey and Julian E. Barnes, “Redeploy Troops, Say GOP Senators; Given Warner’s and Lugar’s Clout, their Iraq Proposal—though not a Mandate—is a New Obstacle for Bush,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 2007, p. A1; Noam M. Levey, “The Nation; One More Republican Breaks Rank; Sen. Pete V. Domenici Says Bush’s Strategy in Iraq is not Working and Calls for One That Will Start Withdrawal,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 2007, p. A12.

⁵⁰¹ As one example of the pro-hawk crowd who was appeased by the surge, see William Kristol, “Why Bush Will Be a Winner,” *The Washington Post*, July 15, 2007, B1.

⁵⁰² Michael Gawenda, “Bush Deal with Democrats on the Cards,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 3, 2007, p. 8.

addition, though not in these specific terms, American officials have frequently mentioned a liberal, civilizing aspect to the war.⁵⁰³ Despite this, there is not much to suggest that George Bush has been trapped by this propaganda. There is enough evidence to suggest that Bush is likely a true believer in the war effort.

The institutional constraints variables also highlight support for the two-step model. Until January 2007, the U.S. was led by one veto player, with no real effective domestic political counterweight. Both the executive and legislative branch were led by the members of the Republican Party. These actors largely controlled war policy. They also have held committed, hardline views on the war. As of today, we can now say that there are two veto players in U.S. foreign policy. And we can see that the additional veto player has only reinforced the status quo on Iraq. The Democrats hold political power in the legislature, but do not have a large enough advantage in either the House or Senate to override a presidential veto.⁵⁰⁴ So in other words, they can initiate moves to shorten the war, or alter the conduct of the war, but they, in turn, are rebuffed by the executive branch, the other veto player in American politics. We must also keep in mind that the overall institutional framework of American democracy has also played a hand in the war.

⁵⁰³ That is, the U.S. has toppled a tyrannical, brutal leader and ushered in a new period of freedom and liberty for Iraqi citizens. They no longer have to fear the coercive hand of the state. And while there is currently widespread violence in Iraq, the country as a whole will be better off in the long-run. These arguments highlight the humanitarian element to the war and paints the U.S. as an altruistic actor who looks out for the best interests of others. And they have been echoed in various sources. Notably, see, among others, Michael Mandelbaum, "David's Friend Goliath," *Foreign Policy* (January/February 2006), pp. 50-57; Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *The National Interest*, No. 70 (Winter 2002/03), pp. 5-17.

⁵⁰⁴ Michael Gawenda, "Bush Vows to Use His Veto, Whatever the Cost," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 30, 2007, p. 12; Edwin Chen and Holly Rosenkrantz, "Bush Vetoes Timetable for Iraq Pullout; Second Use in Office," *National Post*, May 2, 2007, p. A11.

While the Bush administration is known as an insulated, tight-knit group, it has operated within the confines of a open, decentralized democratic political system. After all, it has convened with policy experts and member of Congress, the military, and put together a blue-ribbon commission on Iraq.⁵⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Congress has held numerous open sessions devoted solely to discussing Iraq. And there have been a host of congressional committee hearings related to Iraq. I do not think these processes have dramatically slowed U.S. policymaking, yet they are still relevant to the pace and conduct of the war. In effect, they are important in that they have slowly created a sea-change in American thinking about Iraq. It is this thinking—specifically, the low approval for the war—that has gradually nudged the Bush administration to openly broach the topic of troop withdrawal. And in the end, the sum of these processes could serve to taper America’s commitment to the war.

As a final note, from only a quick scan, we can see that a number of the implications listed above are relevant and meaningful to the Iraq War. More specifically, by my count, ten implications are directly connected to the war (Nos. 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15), and another one (No. 11) could be relevant in the future.⁵⁰⁶ A complete overview of the association between these implications and the Iraq War is beyond the

⁵⁰⁵ In the spring of 2006, President Bush put together a bi-partisan commission with the express purpose to study the events in Iraq and propose recommendations to deal with the ongoing struggle. See James A. Baker and Lee Hamilton (co-chairs), *Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 2006).

⁵⁰⁶ Considering that the U.S. is building the largest embassy in the world in Iraq, implication No. 15 could ring true in the future. For a description of the embassy, see Jane C. Loeffler, “Fortress America,” *Foreign Policy* (September/October 2007), pp. 54-57. Furthermore, there have been rumblings about the U.S. seeking permanent military bases in Iraq. In response, Iraqis have vehemently rejected this. See Peter Graff, “Iraq Rejects Permanent U.S. Bases,” *Yahoo! News*, December 11, 2007, http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20071211/wl_nm/iraq_bases_dc.

scope of this dissertation. That said, a few points should be made. First, like the Soviets in Afghanistan, Washington has continued to push Iraqi leaders to formulate a national reconciliation plan that, among other things, welcomes Sunnis back into the public sphere. This plan has not worked so far. Second, much like the French and the Soviets, the U.S. has desperately tried to give Iraqis more control over security affairs. But local Iraqis have been ill-equipped, unorganized, and often targets of insurgents. Many have even defected to the insurgency. And military officials concede that the training effort has not gone as smoothly and efficiently as they had anticipated.⁵⁰⁷ Third, a number of books over the last few years, including a prominent tome by Larry Diamond, have detailed the many mistakes and blunders made by American officials in Baghdad.⁵⁰⁸ Fourth, it has now become common to hear critiques of the role of the press prior to the invasion of Iraq. The conventional wisdom is that the press acted more as a cheerleader than a critic and skeptic of the mission. This created an environment in which American citizens largely approved and cheered the war. Finally, it is arguable that George Bush is not the type of bold, novel leader who can initiate and pursue change in response to mistakes committed on his watch. After all, during an open, prime-time televised White House

⁵⁰⁷ For a small sampling of articles on this point, see Glenn Kessler, "Weapons Given to Iraq Are Missing; GAO Estimates 30% of Arms Are Unaccounted For," *The Washington Post*, August 6, 2007, p. A1; Bryan Bender and Farah Stockman, "Officials Grapple with Ethnic Split in Iraqi Forces," *The Boston Globe*, April 11, 2006, p. A1; Damien Cave, "On Patrol, Iraqis Prove Eager, Erratic and Green," *The New York Times*, August 10, 2006, p. A1; Bryan Bender, "US Officer Spells Out Iraq Police Training Woes," *The Boston Globe*, December 13, 2006, A1; Graham Allison, "Will Iraq's Army Show Up?" *The Boston Globe*, January 17, 2007, p. A7; James Glanz, "Hindered by Delays and Corruption, the Iraqi Air Force is Flying Again, but Barely," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2007, p. A6; Walter Pincus, "U.S. Officers Detail Problems with Iraqi Soldiers; Lack of Discipline Cited in Military Journal," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2006, p. A12; Bryan Bender, "Iraq Struggles to Provide for its Troops," *The Boston Globe*, July 22, 2006, p. A1.

⁵⁰⁸ Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, Inc., 2005).

briefing, Bush is on record as saying that he could not think of one mistake that he had made during his tenure in office.⁵⁰⁹ Moreover, his rhetoric is routinely peppered with language that clearly values resolve and consistency and determination—traits that are not conducive to change. And the relative closed nature of the Bush administration, with many like-minded thinkers in his inner circle, can only reinforce his hesitancy and reluctance to change directions in the war.⁵¹⁰

7.4 Where Do We Go From Here?

I am sure that this dissertation could serve as a springboard to future research in a host of different directions. In particular, I believe there are six avenues that could yield fruitful results—both from a scholarly and policy perspective. First, further research could tease out in more detail my arguments about the connection between special interests and foreign policy. I limited my discussion about special interests in chapter two, mostly because this dissertation did not intend to closely track the relationship between interest groups and foreign policymaking. The topic of special interests is related but ultimately ancillary to the heart of the two-step model. I needed to briefly discuss special interests in

⁵⁰⁹ “President Addresses the Nation in Prime Time Press Conference,” April 13, 2004, *The White House*, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/04/print/20040413-20.html. In response to a question about mistakes that Bush might have made on his watch, he responded: “I wish you would have given me this written question ahead of time, so I could plan for it. (Laughter.) John, I’m sure historians will look back and say, gosh, he could have done it better this way, or that way. You know, I just -- I’m sure something will pop into my head here in the midst of this press conference, with all the pressure of trying to come up with an answer, but it hadn’t yet. I would have gone into Afghanistan the way we went into Afghanistan. Even knowing what I know today about the stockpiles of weapons, I still would have called upon the world to deal with Saddam Hussein. See, I happen to believe that we’ll find out the truth on the weapons. That’s why we’ve sent up the independent commission. I look forward to hearing the truth, exactly where they are. They could still be there.”

⁵¹⁰ David J. Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006).

order to give readers a complete picture of what the unit of analysis might look like in the case studies. Future research could begin to set forth a conceptual framework for thinking about special interests in the context of foreign policy, thereby complementing the existing work completed scholars in the fields in American and comparative politics. As an example, following on my arguments in chapter in two, we could specify the full spectrum of potential interest groups and their likely stakes in perpetuating warfare. Furthermore, for better or worse, much has been discussed about the connection of special interests to the current Iraq War in the popular press and blogosphere. The Iraq War could serve as a case study in which we can ground and perhaps reroute the popular wisdom about special interests in more objective, logical terms.

Second, it would be useful to move away from studying the behavior of democracy and nondemocracy as ideal-type regimes and shift toward investigating the same phenomena with respect to various democratic and nondemocratic sub-types. This is something that should be done, if possible, across all research projects that are linked in some way to regime type specifically and domestic political institutions more generally. There has been some movement in this direction, but much more needs to be done.⁵¹¹ In

⁵¹¹ We do see some work in this vein on the democratic peace. For example, Miriam Fendius Elman explores the “foreign security policymaking” of Westminster parliamentary, coalitional parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies in a fairly recent *Security Studies* article. See Miriam Fendius Elman, “Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Theories of Democratic Peace,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Summer 2000), pp. 91-126. But there are a host of interesting topics to which my idea could be applied: from issues related to conflict and violence, such as terrorism, to the softer side of international relations, such as the level and type of engagement with the international community (via diplomacy, international institutions, trade relations, and so on). Furthermore, very little research in the international relations literature has linked nondemocratic political institutions to nondemocratic foreign policymaking. Given that the main troublemakers and pariahs in the world—at least from a Western perspective—are nondemocratic states such as Iran and North Korea and Pakistan, it is unfortunate that the scholarly community has not explored this topic more exhaustively. With this in mind, among the various contributions of this dissertation to international relations scholarship, I believe that the nondemocratic

particular, scholars should explore in more detail how specific domestic political institutions intervene between—and thereby shape and at times distort—foreign policy inputs and outputs. This dissertation briefly touched upon presidential and parliamentary sub-types of democracy in chapter two, but this only came in the context of the first hypothesis (type and probability of elite punishment) of my two-step model. I did not explore either democratic sub-types in the remaining four hypotheses. Moreover, I did not tease out any theoretical principles and ideas for any nondemocratic sub-type regimes in chapter two. Instead, I hypothesized about nondemocracies in general sense.

Future research on my dissertation topic should examine presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential democracies; and autocratic, collective, totalitarian, theocratic, among others, nondemocratic states. Investigating these sub-type regimes could yield a number of important and interesting findings. It could help us determine if there are any differences in wartime policy among democracies and among nondemocracies, particularly on two crucial points: the role of domestic political institutions in the policy process, and the outputs produced by these institutions over time. It might reveal that some of the variables are more or less relevant to specific regime sub-types. Relatedly, additional research on regime sub-types might help us refine our expectations of the behavior of different sorts of democracies and nondemocracies in small wars. For instance, it might enable us to specify the two-step model in contingent way, dependent on the political system of states. Thus, it could be possible, because of

logic in chapter two and the nondemocratic case studies in chapters five and six are timely and important. But again, this is just a start; much more theorizing and research needs to be done.

these efforts, to formulate several models, with each applicable to a specific regime sub-type. All of this could be a boon to policymakers. Certainly, the sum of these research tasks will illuminate and enrich our understanding of the manifold critical forces (leadership, organized factions, public opinion, political institutions, political wrangling, and so on) in domestic politics that can often hamper quick and decisive policymaking when it is needed most urgently. Understanding these obstacles might help them to avoid these pitfalls in the future. But just as important, sub-type specific models of small wars can serve as ready-made templates that policymakers can apply to their own situations. Among other things, they, can rationally, objectively forecast their state's performance in future small wars. The bottom line is that these expectations can help policymakers calibrate their views on war in a way that corresponds much closer to reality, thereby avoiding the delusions that they often operate under.⁵¹²

Expanding the number of cases would be another valuable avenue to pursue.

Looking at more costly, protracted small wars and more cost-cutting cases surely would highlight various aspects of the two-step model. As is obvious, in general, more empirical

⁵¹² Particularly in the two costly, protracted small wars, the French and the Soviets, from the outset, misperceived their conflicts as cheap and quick to carry out. This is an argument that is popular in the international relations literature and prominently represented in research related to the offense-defense balance, debates about offensive and defensive realism, and causes of inter-state war. But the French and Soviets also divorced themselves from reality in disparate, yet similar, ways. For example, just a few days after the invasion of Afghanistan, a Soviet report put forward a good dose of wishful thinking and overconfidence: "broad masses of people met the announcement of the overthrow of H. Amin's regime with unconcealed joy and express their eagerness to support the new administration's program. The commanders of all key formations and units of the Afghan army have already announced their support of the new leadership of the party and the government. Relations with soviet soldiers and specialists continue to remain friendly overall. The situation in the country is normalizing." "Andropov-Gromyko-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report on Events in Afghanistan on 27-28 December 1979." December 31, 1979. *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, www.CWHIP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

data will reveal more things about the model as a whole and the individual hypotheses in particular. Additional data might show us that, as the domestic and international political conditions change from case to case, some of the failed tests might actually pass and that some of the passed tests now fail. We might be able to more conclusively determine if one or more of the variables are simply irrelevant to the model and should be discarded. Or perhaps one or more of the variables are just too hard to test, and thus are better connected to theory than to the real world. More evidence would also help to verify that the hypotheses are continually passing, and passing for the right reasons—for the reasons consistent with the logic specified in chapter two. Furthermore, the more the model is tested and succeeds these tests, the more that we can be confident in it.⁵¹³ It is a good thing when the number of successful empirical tests increases, case by case over time. But it is also very beneficial when the model passes empirical tests in diverse political conditions. For here, we can see that the model is not bound by time or space or environmental conditions. And lastly, supplemental empirical data could expose certain parts of small wars that are ancillary to the model but still important to our understanding of international relations. The above point (in section two of this chapter) about the importance of liberalism vis-a-vis democracies in small wars is an example of this. It was not directly or even indirectly connected to the model, but it appeared in the data for the Soviet-Afghan War.

⁵¹³ See Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Discovering a method by which to weight the five variables is a fourth potential track for future research. Or in other words, further theoretical research and testing would assist in determining the rank order of importance of the model's variables, from most to least important or relevant to small wars. This could be a useful step toward streamlining the two-step model, making it more parsimonious. For example, this strand of research could tell us that one or two variables are far less important than the others. And by extension, then, it could help the project to respecify the model, absent these irrelevant or trivial variables, in such a way that it can retain its explanatory power, but with fewer moving parts—thereby helping the project to deliver a bigger bang for its buck. Moreover, there is a clear policy component attached to this research agenda. Zeroing in on the most important domestic obstacles in small wars can enable policy leaders locate early warning signs of trouble in small wars. For instance, let us assume that the pace of policy change consistently appears as a variable that is associated with costly, protracted wars. By identifying this variable, we know that it is in leaders best interest to streamline the policy process as quickly as possible, for this can enhance a state's ability to quickly adapt and respond to its external environment.

Fifth, there would be value in investigating the causes of costly, protracted small wars and the conditions under which such small wars are terminated. Surely, these two research topics would complete our understanding of the entire life cycle of small wars, from start to end. Admittedly, the full life cycle of small wars is much too broad and complex to explore in a single article or manuscript—a major reason why I did attempt this in the project herein. But it is not unreasonable to complete research on these two

proposed topics in piecemeal fashion—article by article, manuscript by manuscript. And the results of such research can complement the findings and conclusions that have been derived in this dissertation on a gradual, incremental basis. Though the causes of war and war termination parts of the four cases were beyond the scope of this dissertation, I could not completely avoid these two topics. For example, in each case summary, I briefly discussed both the general and proximate causes of war, and at times touched upon the military and international political conditions which contributed to the end of war. As such, my tentative, preliminary thoughts on these two topics could serve as a foundation for future research.

And lastly, several of the implications derived from the case studies could be used as hypotheses in future research. Specifically, Nos. 2, 4, 10, 11, 14, 15 can serve as the foundation for independently interesting research projects and make a direct contribution to the findings of this dissertation. Because this set of six implications cover quite a bit of theoretical ground, it would be impossible to fit all of them into a single research project. Again, I see value in exploring them further on a gradual, piecemeal basis.

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