

# Presidents and War

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By

**Elizabeth Sanders**

## Abstract

The institution of the American presidency became remarkably war-prone with the development of new resources and a long-term war rationale in the post-World War II era. Militaristic tendencies were augmented with changes in recruitment processes and media developments after the early 1970s. I delineate the logic of the increasing tendency to presidential uses of force for political reasons, supply some evidence from the Correlates of War data, and conclude with the consequences--both obvious, and more speculative-- of the presidential temptation to war, and the legal and constitutional changes that might be adopted to lessen that tendency.

## About the Author

Elizabeth Sanders is a Professor in the Department of Government at Cornell University. Her areas of interest include American political development, social movements, economic regulation, presidency, bureaucracy, foreign policy, monetary politics, parties and elections. She is the author of several books and articles, including, most recently, *Work that Counts, in Perestroika* (ed. Kristin Monroe, Yale University, 2005) *In Defense of Periodization in American Political Development, in Polity* (Summer, 2005), and *Historical Institutionalism*, chapter 3 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* (2006). Her most recent book, *Roots of Reform* won the Greenstone prize in 1999. She is currently working on a book on the presidency since World War II.

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# Presidents and War

## The People and their President<sup>1</sup>

In a recent post to the History Net discussion forum for diplomatic history (H-diplo) a scholar put this query to the list: How can we explain the apparent contradiction between US principles, as put forward in the declaration of independence and civic narratives, and US actions in the world-- which most observers interpret as bullying, self-interested and unprincipled? Do the professed principles apply only *within* the US, rather than universally?

My response to this question was that one must not confuse "the American people" and their executive branch decision makers. The former are, indeed, idealistic, peaceful, egalitarian, and inclined to diplomacy and multilateralism. Many polls document this, over many decades.<sup>2</sup>

Presidents, on the other hand, are inclined toward war and delight in exercising their commander in chief powers<sup>3</sup>, turning to them particularly (one suspects) when their domestic agendas are bogged down in Congress, when the economy is weak, when they need a public-distracting mechanism in time of scandal, or when an election is near. They utilize whatever rhetoric justifies their discretionary wars, cloaking them in urgency and essential values: the war must be fought in the service of American ideals, the survival of democracy, and the defeat of great, threatening evil.

Despite our current president's claims that the animosity of US enemies is directed toward the culture and institutions of the nation, polls and interviews in other nations do not support that argument. It is, rather, the actions directed by US presidents that are responsible for negative international attitudes toward "the United States" among both friends and foes.<sup>4</sup> However, the

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my research assistants Andres O'Hara-Plotnik and Hassan Shamji for their invaluable assistance on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Richard Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Richard I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> I use the word "delight" here because the evidence for it is apparent and abundant, from Roosevelt's proclamation that he was switching hats from "Dr. Cure the Depression" to "Dr. Win the War," to Bush's May, 2003 landing on an aircraft carrier decked out (pun intended) in flight suit and "commander in chief" button to announce to the cheering sailors that his mission was accomplished. For an argument about the inherent (perhaps hormonal) drive of presidents to make war, see Alexander DeConde, Presidential Machismo: Executive Authority, Military Intervention, and Foreign Relations (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Most recently, a poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org finds that "three out of four Americans believe that in order to stabilize Iraq the United States should enter into talks with Iran and Syria, and eight in ten support an international conference on Iraq. A majority also opposes keeping U.S. forces in Iraq indefinitely and instead supports committing to a timetable for their withdrawal within two years or less ." ("U.S. Public Opinion In Line With Iraq Study Group's Proposals," PIPA/WorldPublicOpinion.org, found online Dec. 6, 2006).

On international opinion of Americans and of official U.S. policies, see the polls reported by WorldPublicOpinion.org at [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views\\_on\\_countriesregions\\_bt/index.php?nid=&id=&lb=btvoc](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/index.php?nid=&id=&lb=btvoc); and the Pew Global Attitudes Project at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=247>; *ibid*, ID=802; and ID=804 (all accessed on August 15, 2006). The latter Pew polls suggest, however, that extremely negative opinions of the U.S. administration and its policies since the initiation of the war in Iraq have also begun to erode international opinion of the American people. The Pew poll of 16 nations in Europe, the Middle East and Asia released on June 23, 2005 reports that, although views of the American public are far more positive than views of

long presidential campaign to persuade the public that his actions represent the interests of the nation has been so effective that it is a well-established habit of media and public to speak of “we”, “us” and “the United States” when referring to presidential foreign policy.

That some, or most, of the public accept, for short or long periods, presidential initiation of overseas military interventions and the growing burdens of the support apparatus required for an active presidential militarism is a separate phenomenon in want of explanation, but that pattern should not blind us to the source of “United States” militarism, or lead us to favor cultural and economic explanations for phenomena that have a much narrower provenance. A recent chronicle of presidential wars, their rationalizations, and their outcomes can be found in Stephen Kinzer’s *Overthrow: A Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*;<sup>5</sup> A slightly earlier one can be found in Alexander DeConde, *Presidential Machismo*.<sup>6</sup>

International relations scholars, though still greatly influenced by realist assumptions --despite emergent theoretical competitors and challenges to realism’s unitary rational actor assumptions-- have long taken a more jaded view of American (and presidential) idealism than have historians. IR has mostly accepted that presidents of both parties engage in “diversionary” uses of force to distract public attention from domestic problems and create “rally” effects.<sup>7</sup> Even these scholars, however, tend to assume that, given the risks and costs of war, presidents will be more inclined to “threats and displays” of force, stopping short of actual combat.<sup>8</sup> The presidency of George W. Bush has probably disabused us of that notion. One suspects that even wars that kill and maim millions (like the Vietnam War) may have been initiated for personal political or ideological reasons that had little to do with rational assessments of national interest.<sup>9</sup>

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U.S. foreign policy, “[T]he United States remains broadly disliked in most countries surveyed, and the opinion of the American people is not as positive as it once was.... Roughly three-quarters of the publics in Germany (77%), Canada (75%) and France (74%) say Bush’s re-election has made them feel less favorable toward the U.S. And particularly in Western Europe, most of those who express an unfavorable view of the U.S. mostly blame Bush, rather than a more general problem with America.” It should be noted that this was a period in which there had been a modest rebound from 2003-4, due in large part to US assistance to Tsunami victims and approval for the government’s endorsement of democratization. Still, so negative was international opinion of the U.S. role in the world that “Majorities in every other country surveyed, aside from the U.S., favor another country challenging America’s global military supremacy. Americans strongly reject this idea, by 63%-26%.” The percentage favoring emergence of a military rival to balance US power ranged from lows of 51-58% (in Canada and Great Britain) to highs of 82-85% (in Jordan and France. Eighty-one percent of Indonesians (the highest percentage in the countries surveyed) worried that U.S. military might would one day be turned against them.

<sup>5</sup> (NY: Henry Holt and Co., Times Books, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> A good recent example of a multivariate test of the “diversionary hypothesis” is Benjamin Fordham, “Partisanship, Macroeconomic Policy, and U.S. Diversionary Uses of Force,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 42, no. 4 (1998), 418-39. The diversionary force hypothesis was initially proposed by Charles W. Ostrom and Brian L. Job, “The President and The Political Use of Force,” *American Political Science Review* (APSR) 80 (1986), 541-66.

<sup>8</sup> This is the reasoning embodied in the empirical tests of the diversionary hypothesis by data set pioneers Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1978), 11-12. See, for a recent exposition of the hypothesis, its assumptions, and a review of the literature, William D. Baker, “The Dog That Won’t Wag: presidential Uses of Force and the Diversionary Theory of War,” *Strategic Insights*, vol. 3, No. 5 (May, 2004), found online July 25, 2006 at <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2004/may/bakerMay04.asp#author>

<sup>9</sup> For the best single book on Vietnam decision-making, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: the Last Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001)

But individual-level explanations like the “diversionary war” (DW) hypothesis pay little attention to the larger institutional context of American militarism. An institutional focus includes, but is not limited to the election calendar, the nomination and campaign finance systems, the party system, and the bureaucratic resources the president controls...all of which empower and tempt the holder of the executive office to make war. A focus on domestic institutional context need not ignore the “realist” context of war—the threatening events that drive nations to military response—but sees far more discretionary agency in those events that presidents would have us believe. Only five times in its history has the United States Congress made a constitutional declaration of war, and even in the majority of those cases (the Mexican war, the Spanish-American war, and WWI) the presence of vital national interest is arguable. In the hundreds of other small and large wars (small, one must qualify, for the U.S., though not necessarily for the targets) arguments for the existence of reasonable alternatives to war are quite plausible.

## **Flawed Institutions and Moral Hazards**

Institutions are usually defined as the long-lasting rule structures that constrain human action. That definition must have been uppermost in the minds of the drafters of the United States Constitution, although “constraint” was to fall more heavily on some people than others. The most important actors in Philadelphia in 1787 intended to create a national government that could effectively regulate and facilitate interstate commerce and perform other functions for the national welfare, which powers were mostly vested in the legislature. However, the Preamble clearly sets out the intention to constrain the behavior of U.S. residents (insuring domestic tranquility) and of foreigners (providing for the national defense) -- purposes that are the domain of executive power. The Constitutional structure itself, with its separation and sharing of power, checks and balances, frequent elections, independent judiciary, and legislative power of impeachment speaks of a fear of official power, and the need to constrain government actors themselves, even while the founders were vesting new powers in the national government at the expense of the states.<sup>10</sup> The founders wanted both to create governmental capacity and to limit potential abuses of power.

Institutions could be constructed, they believed, with such cleverly designed constraints and incentives that desired results need not rely on the goodness of human nature (about which they were skeptical). Properly designed governing institutions could provide inducements and arrange for competing ambitions and mutual checking and surveillance, and the outcome would be good behavior<sup>11</sup> even (as Kant would say a few years later), for a race of devils.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See, for a brilliant analysis of the motives of key actors and factions at the Constitutional Convention, David B. Robertson’s *The Constitution and America’s Destiny* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005). According to Robertson, James Madison, who considered the president the chief representative and advocate for national (as opposed to local) interests, shifted to support for a more expanded presidential power after losing a struggle over state representation to the Senate.

<sup>11</sup> James Madison, *The Federalist No. 51*.

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace* in Carl J. Friedrich, tr., *The Philosophy of Kant* (New York: Random House, 1949), 453.

But the converse of that proposition is that, with the wrong incentives, and too few constraints, institutions can elicit bad behavior. And institutional development from the small seeds sewn in Article II HAS brought us to that point, this paper will argue. A rogue presidency, very far from what the founders intended or imagined, is having a destructive effect on other institutions, domestic and international, that have been painstakingly constructed over centuries<sup>13</sup> and threatens to embroil the world in virtually endless war.

The presidential war in Iraq, and the Bush administration's contempt for law and for international organization and opinion have produced, from the perspective of administration critics, highly negative consequences for both American and international security. But I will argue that the foreign policy of the administration merely brings into sharp relief a longer- term evolution in the relationship of the presidency to the world and to other domestic institutions, developments that were latent in both the explicit and inherent powers of Article II but needed several critical conditions to become manifest. Presidential power at least since the 1950s, and particularly since the end of the cold war, has gone off track into a realm of imperial expansion that is infused with moral hazard.

Presidents have diverse and abundant incentives to make war for personal or political reasons unrelated to the national interest, to a universal interest in peace, prosperity, and the expansion of human rights, or to the knowledge and intellectual growth of the American public. What is perceived as good for the president's personal power is often bad for other domestic and international institutions, and vice- versa. And the destructive effect of the presidency is not merely an outcome of partisan control of the White House or particular personalities. It is endemic in the Constitutional configuration of the presidency, interacting with changes in its resource base, recruitment processes, and the configuration of global military power. Presidential militarism and its correlated neglect of diplomacy and "soft power" will not be reversed by short- term partisan change. Only statutory and constitutional changes can modify the perverse incentives to destructive behavior now embedded in the institution of the American presidency.

These institutional pathologies are most apparent in foreign policy, because that is where the president has the least effective opposition, and the greatest conglomeration of resources, which are enhanced by secrecy, loyalty, and powerfully inflammatory rhetoric. Temporary corrections to these presidential excesses are won only with extraordinary expenditures of blood and treasure, since the most effective challenges to the president's war powers come in the immediate aftermath of presidential wars that incur so much death, debt, and social cost that breaches in loyalty, secrecy, and the onus of dissent open up to allow freer criticism and debate.<sup>14</sup> These moments seem to occur about every generation, with no cumulative learning.

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<sup>13</sup> The use of the term "rogue state" to apply to U.S. adversaries was popularized by U.S. leaders in defense of particular weapons systems (particularly the missile defense system) but has been used with increasing frequency to apply to the U.S. itself. For two recent examples by Americans, see William Blum, *Rogue State* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 2000); and Clyde Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Mermin, in *Debating Democracy* argues that the media do not begin to present arguments and information challenging the president's war policy until and unless prominent Washington politicians begin to dispute the president's framing of the war; failing that, the media seldom question the president's definition of the situation (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).



## The Logic of Institutional Temptation to War

The institutional and personal temptations to war-making (the one facilitating the other) are so abundant since World War II that it might be surprising to find any significant, non-random patterns that differentiate presidential uses of force by time period or domestic situation. Still, there are likely factors that might produce patterned variations. To summarize the most obvious assumptions and hypotheses about those temptations:

### 1. Power seeking

Presidents, one may assume, want as much power as can be gained productively (that is, without incurring costs, like political opposition, that can be counter-productive and lead to increased constraints on executive power).<sup>15</sup> However, human— and political— nature being what it is, there is no guarantee that presidents will recognize when they are about to over-reach and set in train events that will sap power. Determinants of the accuracy of perceptions regarding costs, benefits, and probabilities lie within the realm of personality and the structure and capabilities of the advice system. As for the match between personality and political situation, there is an intriguing suggestion in Stephen Skowronek's work on the presidency that a party in the different stages of regime emergence, development and decline may select a standard bearer of greater or lesser risk-taking tendency.<sup>16</sup>

### 2. Dominance in foreign policy

The realm of presidential action is less constrained in foreign policy than domestic policy. Article II makes the president commander in chief of the armed forces, and gives him the power to appoint and remove generals and department and agency heads, to appoint and receive ambassadors, and to make treaties and to command the military forces of the United States when called (usually by himself) into battle. As such, he stands at a pinnacle of information, much of it inaccessible to the public at the time of initiation of force, information for which he supplies the dominant interpretive frame. Thus presidents typically begin their terms with a domestic policy agenda, but with the increasing domestic policy difficulty that inevitably emerges, presidents usually welcome the transition to "Dr. Win the War."<sup>17</sup> Of course, the president's perception of institutional constraints in the form of partisan considerations may affect his war-making decisions. When his own party controls both houses of Congress, the president's war-making tendency will show less constraint than in divided government, and even a loss of seats without loss of control may result in delay or reliance on diplomatic measures short of war. Summarizing partisan patterns, William Powell and Jon Pevehouse write, "Historically, presidents emerging from midterm election defeats have been less likely to respond to foreign policy crises aggressively, and when they have ordered the use of force, they have taken much longer to do so.... the White House's propensity to exercise military force steadily declines as members of the

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<sup>15</sup> The classic statement of this fact, fleshed out with case studies on techniques and opportunities is Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*, Revised ed (Boston: Free Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> See note 27.

<sup>17</sup> As Franklin Roosevelt famously described his mission in 1943.

opposition party pick up seats in Congress. In fact, it is not even necessary for the control of Congress to switch parties; the loss of even a handful of seats can materially affect the probability that the nation will go to war.”<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Resource advantage

Military and intelligence resources in the executive branch have expanded exponentially since World War II, but diplomatic capability has remained a small fraction (less than three percent) of military expenditure,<sup>19</sup> reflecting the budgetary priorities of the president, and constituting a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy (in which alternatives to war have too few advocates and too little capacity behind them to dissuade the president from military force). Most of the intelligence budget is secret, and relations with his advisors in the war and intelligence agencies are protected by national security rationales, as well as executive privilege. Even the doctrines that express the president’s guiding policy principles, not to mention the thousands of executive orders he issues in foreign policy, may remain secret for years.<sup>20</sup> When there are both diplomatic and military options in foreign policy, the secrecy, speed, capacity, and loyalty with which intelligence and military agencies can execute a policy directive from the president make the use of force an attractive option. And while diplomatic powers face many constraints in the world arena, U.S. military power is, of course, hegemonic.<sup>21</sup> Of course, the preference for war has not prevented the expansion of resources for the exertion of “soft” power where it is a useful adjunct to war, or a cheaper means of control when conditions for the exertion of military force are unfavorable. But it is striking that presidents have invested so little time in rationalizing the defense and state department bureaucracies, or the intelligence agencies, so that they work more effectively in the service of the nation.<sup>22</sup>

### 4. Relationship to international corporations

As American finance, manufacturing and engineering firms became more internationally competitive, the cooperative relationship between presidents and elite economic actors was strengthened. Convinced, by the late nineteenth century that they must export and acquire

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<sup>18</sup> William g. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse, “When Congress Stops Wars,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 2007 (accessed on line Aug. 22, 2007, at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20070901faessay86506/william-g-howell-jon-c-pevehouse/when-congress-stops-wars.html>)

<sup>19</sup> See figure 4.

<sup>20</sup> A prominent example is the 1950 formulation of U.S. cold war policy in NSC 68, which was not declassified until 1975. On executive orders and presidential power in foreign policy see Kenneth R. Meyer, *With the Stroke of a Pen* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), chapter 5; and Philip J. Cooper, *By Order of the President* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2002), esp. chapter 6.

<sup>21</sup> Gareth Porter argues that the emergence of hegemonic military status “gave the United states a new freedom of action which translated into more aggressive and interventionist policies” and overcame previous reluctance to take military actions that might lead to a confrontation with the Soviet Union. Porter argues that this new institutional resource advantage (my terminology) was recognized by presidents and their advisors by the end of the Korean War, and spurred intervention in Berlin, Iran and elsewhere, ultimately providing the final US temptation to military intervention in Vietnam. *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 1-4. On military contracting ore generally, see P.W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> The most recent restructuring of military agencies, the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 was a congressional, not a presidential, initiative; likewise, it was Congress that insisted on thorough investigations into “what went wrong” on 9-11, and initiated the effort to restructure the intelligence and homeland security agencies. For an organizational analysis of 9-11 intelligence failures, see Amy Zegart

foreign markets in order to prosper, economic elites pressed new demands on the president for help in acquiring and protecting those markets, and from the McKinley administration on, there have been a number of natural congruencies among the foreign policy preferences of corporate leaders and presidents.<sup>23</sup> These include the achievement of “major player” status in world affairs and ultimately military hegemony, to facilitate access to markets and port facilities;<sup>24</sup> the spread of capitalist values (sanctity of private property; state enforcement of contracts; free trade; access to vital raw materials; control of labor relations); state support for a domestic defense industry; and generally, the maintenance of profitable investment opportunities and low inflation economic growth essential to both corporate boardrooms and presidential hopes for reelection. One might add a more recent congruence (since the Reagan administration, expedited in the Clinton administration): the development of international firms supplying private contract employees for overseas military interventions.<sup>25</sup> These firms, often called into being by executive branch policy choices, provide the president with personnel for the implementation of foreign policy goals whose deaths are not counted in the daily media enumeration of war casualties.<sup>26</sup> Because their positions are voluntary and well-paid the deaths and injuries of private contractors are less costly to the president than casualties among regular national and state guard forces, which receive much more public attention. The repeal of the military draft in 1971 may have diminished opposition to the Vietnam War among the nation’s youth (and their parents), and some liberal congressmembers at that time and subsequently have argued that the draft should be reinstated, in order to keep the potential costs of war visible among the middle and upper classes, and thus, presumably, to raise the barrier for less justifiable wars.<sup>27</sup>

## 5. Rally effect

Central to hypotheses about the diversionary use of force is the “rally effect.” Defined as a “sudden and substantial increase in the public approval of the President that occurs in response to certain kinds of dramatic international events that involve the United States,”<sup>28</sup> the rally effect reached its historic high after the 9-11 attacks, when President George W. Bush experienced a jump in his public approval rating from 51% to 86%, trumping his father’s c. 25% increase after initiating the first Iraq war in January of 1991, and Kennedy’s 15 % increase for the Cuban Missile confrontation.<sup>29</sup> Even unsuccessful military events (like the Bay of Pigs in 1961) are

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<sup>23</sup> See page 14 below.

<sup>24</sup> On the administration’s ambitious plans for opening the Iraq market and oil reserves to American and allied corporations, see Naomi Klein, “Bagdad Year Zero,” *Harper’s Magazine*, September, 2004 (available at <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article6930.htm>, accessed April 6, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> By December, 2006, there were almost as many private civilian contractor and subcontractor operatives in Iraq as military personnel. They were being used for security, training, planning, accounting, feeding, public relations, language translation, construction, and supply operations formerly provided mostly by military forces. Renae Merle, “Census Counts 100,000 Contractors in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, December 5, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Over 770 civilian contractors of U.S. firms have been killed in Iraq, according to Howard Witt, “America’s Hidden War Dead,” *Chicago Tribune* March 26, 2007 (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi0703260081mar26,1,5984421.story?coll=chi-news-hed>, Accessed April 6, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> See, for a recent example, “Rangel Argues for Military Draft at Kennedy School Appearance,” *Harvard University Gazette* February 13, 2003 (found online December 07, 2006, at <http://www.hno.harvard.edu/gazette/2003/02.13/10-draft.html>).

<sup>28</sup> Mark J. Heatherton and Michael Nelson, “Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism,” *PS Online* ([www.apsanet.org](http://www.apsanet.org)), January, 2003, 37 (rally percentages extrapolated from Figure One); and the formative statement by John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (NY: Wiley and Sons, 1973).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

followed by rallies, and in the ideal cases (from the point of view of presidential power), a significant portion of opposition party and independent voters are converted (for a time) to support for the president, and Congress becomes much less critical and more cooperative.<sup>30</sup> Though most rallies are short lived, there is little evidence that presidents anticipate the subsequent erosion of public support when initiating a military operation. They may attempt to sustain the rally by persuading the public that the danger is ongoing, and even start another war before the next election in order to reverse the inevitable decline of approval.<sup>31</sup>

## 6. Electoral incentives

The ultimate purpose of a planned rally effect is to win elections and it is generally assumed that the president is most concerned about his own reelection. Though other such orderings are logically possible, I posit the following prioritization of years in a presidential administration that are hypothesized to predict the president's temptation to discretionary uses of force: A: presidential election years; B. the first and second congressional election years of the president's term ; C. odd-numbered years; D. presidential/congressional election years when the incumbent is not running for reelection (either because he has announced that he will not, or because it is the last year of his legal term). The implication here is that the most peaceful years should be the last two of an eight-year term.<sup>32</sup>

However, one can imagine reasonable complications to the afore-stated elements of the logic. The first congressional election may be the most critical because it strongly affects the support he needs to accomplish the program he will take to the voters in his reelection year. But other congressional election years could also be quite important if his position vis a vis Congress is rapidly deteriorating, if he is threatened with impeachment, and/or embroiled in scandal (the Clinton case), or if the economy is doing badly. Further, the first year in office may be, for a newcomer, a time to prove one's mettle by initiating a small military conflict. Lyndon Johnson's August, 1964 bombing in Vietnam, George H. W. Bush's invasion of Panama in 1989, Clinton's

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<sup>30</sup> As Daniel Kahn wrote in the *Yale Herald* just over a week after 9-11, "Politicians of both parties had only praise for Bush following his Thursday address. 'We want President Bush to know—we want the world to know—that he can depend on us,' Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) said. 'We are resolved to work together, not as Democrats or Republicans, but as Americans.'" See "Tragedies transform Bush's Presidency," *Yale Herald* September 21, 2001, page 4 (found online at

<http://www.yaleherald.com/archive/xxxii/09.21.01/news/p4tragedy.html>) On the conversion of opponents and independents during rallies, a result both of framing and opinion leadership by the administration, as well as simple, instinctive patriotism see Richard Brody, *Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); and "Crisis, War and Public Opinion: The Media and Public Support for the President." in W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, eds, *Taken By Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994) , 210-227.

<sup>31</sup> As Richard Brody writes, "About a year after 9/11..., the accelerating decline in approval ended. News commentaries point to a "rally" in support for President Bush that accompanies the shift of attention to Iraq....The onset of the war and the initial euphoria over military success was accompanied by a ten percentage point gain in approval of the president's handling of the job." ("The American People and George W. Bush: Two Years of Rally volatility and Grinding Erosion," unpublished paper, April 1, 2003. Found online August 16, 2006 at <http://www.wws.princeton.edu/bushconf/BrodyPaper.pdf> 16-21).

<sup>32</sup> Several considerations contribute to the prediction of fewer resorts to force in the last two years. Besides the absence of electoral incentive for the president to make war, there is also the likelihood of weak support in Congress for a lame duck president whose party, typically, has steadily lost seats since the first presidential election; presidents often manifest a desire to create a more positive legacy as a "man of peace" in he last year; and in cases of disastrous presidentially-initiated wars, diplomacy will likely appear relatively more attractive to both president and public.

1993 bombing attack on Iraq (justified as a response to a plot to assassinate his predecessor), Kennedy's Bay of Pigs, and even Harry Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki could be examples of the phenomenon of "novice macho." For the sake of simplicity, however, let us assume the initially-positing ordering of annual temptations to use of force, though the number of reasonable complications to the electoral connection underlines the suspicion that, once state-of-the-art military resources became available and their use legitimated by public opinion (which the president has great power to affect), the incentive to war-making might be virtually omnipresent.

## 7. Recruitment

A major change in presidential recruitment took place in the late 1960s, when the Democratic Party led a shift from control of nominations by party leaders to presidential nominating conventions whose delegates are chosen by self-selected groups of enthusiasts in primaries and caucuses. Despite the roughly contemporaneous initiation of new public financing for presidential campaigns (matching funds for primaries and large grants for the general election) presidential hopefuls were, beginning in 1972, thrown onto their own energies and fund-raising capacity. Presidential recruitment now required great ambition and resourcefulness, rather than the considered judgment of party leaders among a visible pool of sitting, experienced office-holders, some of whom may not have relished the activities associated with early fund-raising and whirl-wind campaigning for the nomination. Primaries had, of course, existed since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but under the new rules the percentage of delegates chosen in primaries open to anyone claiming a party affiliation shot up from a two-party average of 36 percent in 1968 to 57 percent under the new rules in 1972, and has grown to 85 percent since 1996.<sup>33</sup> Most of the remaining delegates were chosen in caucuses of self-selected rank and file (in a handful of states), or represented a token number of party officials or "superdelegates" added (back) to the mix of delegates to restore a small measure of party official representation at the presidential nominating conventions. The net effect of these changes has been to take presidential recruitment away from the candidate's party colleagues and make it a process of self-promotion by those with burning ambition and access to a lot of money. My speculation is that this change has produced presidents who are even more power-driven, independent of their parties, and concerned with personal (as opposed to longer term programmatic and national) advantage; in a word, more "plebiscitary."<sup>34</sup> Once in office, they tend to appoint policy makers and implementers on the basis of personal loyalty and contribution to nomination victory, rather than expertise and party status. Such appointees, dependent on the president's favor, are probably more susceptible to "groupthink" (following the president's cues rather than providing independent advice)<sup>35</sup> than traditional partisan luminaries. In all these ways, the recruitment changes of the early 1970s may make the president more inclined to unilateral war making.

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen J. Wayne, *The Road to the White House 1996* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> The term was popularized by Theodore Lowi in *The Personal President* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

<sup>35</sup> Irving Janis, *Groupthink*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1982). For a view of the presidential cabinet from the party era, consider the Lincoln administration where ambitious party leaders (including the president's major political rivals) maintained their independence, even in war time. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

## 8. Political Time (regime cycle)

While hypotheses 1, 3, and 7 suggest an increase in presidential uses of force over time, plausible inferences from regime cycle theory complicate the expectation for a secular, punctuated rise in militarism. The explanation of presidential opportunity differentials developed by Stephen Skowronek,<sup>36</sup> indicate another source of variation in presidential war-making: the relationship of presidents to the dominant regime or its opposition, and the strength of the dominant regime. Skowronek suggests that among presidents, the “articulators,” or “faithful sons” of the same party that follow the “reconstructor” (realignment) president seem particularly prone to war making. Not only do they face increasing factionalism within the majority party (which might encourage war-making as a way to unify the party), but also their own ambition comes to compete “with the humiliations of regime service and personal self-effacement that are the trademark of the political project of the faithful son.” Further, “Enhanced resources for independent action and greater national responsibilities strain patience with the demands of regime maintenance...”<sup>37</sup> Thus, to the bellicosity he observes in articulating presidents James K. Polk and Theodore Roosevelt is added (in my own elaboration of Skowronek’s theory) the expanded resources of the post-WWII executive branch, capped by the plebiscitary reforms of the nomination process implemented in the early 1970s. And indeed, the post-war presidencies of Truman, Kennedy and Johnson, and the subsequent post-reform presidencies of the two presidents Bush-- articulators all-- do appear remarkably warlike.

Extrapolating further from Skowronek’s theoretical scheme, one might expect to find the lowest tendency to use of force among the LAST administrations of a failing regime, the “disjunctive” presidents (Hoover and Carter in the modern era) who simply do not have sufficient credibility and public support (even in their own parties) to undertake actions so controversial as the initiation of war. Likewise, “reconstructing” presidents (like F.D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan) would seem to have their hands full enough with the ambitious domestic reforms promised by the “party of repudiation” of the old regime; why take on war? And given their great popularity and the disrepute of the defeated regime, one imagines they have less need for military “diversions.” The fourth category, the “preemptive” presidents who represent the party of the old regime elected in some sort of fluke during a temporary disorganization of the regime party, yield no clear predictions. One may speculate, however, that the obstacles to domestic reform presented by the strength of the dominant regime party may make military action even more attractive. And the active military presidencies of Wilson, Eisenhower, Nixon and Clinton seem to support that speculation.

To summarize, then, the foregoing eight hypotheses suggest that, because of its independent presidency and mega-resources, the U.S. should have greater involvement in militarized disputes than other democracies, at least after World War II; that militarization should further increase after August, 1974 (that is, in the administrations in which the president has been nominated—or in Ford’s unusual case, looks forward to being nominated—under the reformed primary/caucus system for choosing delegates to the nominating convention); that use of force should be greater, *ceteris paribus*, in presidential re-election years, and secondly, in congressional election years, than in off-years, in that order (though we would not be surprised to find that the first odd-

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<sup>36</sup> *The Politics Presidents Make* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/ Belknap, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 329. In the former case, “While Polk was pressing Congress to enact his full-service agenda, he was simultaneously pressing a war that would crown the old program with personal achievement” (328).

numbered year of a new president's administration is MORE war-prone than OTHER odd-numbered years, and the last two years of a lame-duck president's administration are LESS war-prone than the average of other years); we should see, after WWII, a growing preference for military over diplomatic resources in presidential budget requests; and finally, articulators should be more war-like than other presidents, and disjunctive presidents the least war-like, with reconstructive and preemptive presidents falling between these two.

These hypotheses are non-committal about the effect on presidential uses of military force of the existence of an over-riding ideology that proclaims the need for permanent military preparedness. However, it is plausible to assume that the Cold War enhanced the war-proneness of presidents in the period 1946-1989. What should we see AFTER the Cold War? The fading of a convenient rationale for war coincides with the presentation of the United States as the only remaining super-power, and that situation may be seen as an increased opportunity to war-making by American presidents. Or, we may see, with the passage of time, that the "inter-war" period (1989-2001) was merely an interlude, and the anti-communist rationale for militarism was replaced within barely a decade by a war on terrorism which conferred on presidents of both parties an excuse for bellicosity on a par with the Cold War years. And of course both the Cold War and the war on terror may be seen as presidential constructions. That does not suggest that the threats in both ideological eras were not genuine, just that the mode by which presidents confronted them may have been particularly, and unnecessarily, reliant on military force, and that presidential rhetoric may have exaggerated both threats in the service of their own ambition.

## Evidence

If presidential government in the United States made discretionary military action more attractive here than in other democracies ONCE the resources and legitimation for an active foreign policy came into being, crude comparisons of national rates of engagement in militarized disputes may offer some confirmation of broad trends and country differences. Table One uses the data compiled by the Correlates of War Project (COW), *Militarized Interstate Disputes*, v. 3.02 (MID 3.02) and simply sorts the disputes in which the U.S., United Kingdom, France, and Russia/Soviet Union were involved during the 1816-2001 period. "Militarized Interstate Disputes" (MIDs) are defined by the COW project as "conflicts in which one or more states threaten, display, or use force against one or more other states."<sup>38</sup> They thus include many uses of armed forces in which no lives are lost, as well as small- and large-scale wars between states. Table One displays the counts of participation in militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), and the propensities for such disputes (defined by the ratio of MIDs divided by total years) for different eras in the US, France, and the UK, with Russia/Soviet Union added for comparison with another post-WWII super-power.

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<sup>38</sup> From the COW web site, <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>.

**Table 1: MIDs<sup>39</sup> and MIDs/Year for US, Russia, France, UK**

Country	MIDs (n)	1816-2001 n/yrs	(n)	1816-1945 <sup>40</sup> n/yrs	(n)	1945-2001 n/yrs
USA	345	1.855	127	0.977	218	3.893
Russia	341	1.833	146	1.123	195	3.482
France	174	0.935	121	0.931	53	0.946
United Kingdom	263	1.413	166	1.277	97	1.732
Total MIDs	1123		560		563	
<b>Post-WWII US MIDs by Era</b>	(n)	Propensity (n/yrs)				
1946-74	103	3.552				
1975-90	71	4.438				
1991-2001	44	4.000				

Table 1 provides some support for the hypotheses. While the U.S. rate of participation in militarized disputes is about the same as that of France, and predictably lower than that of the non-democratic Russian empire and the United Kingdom, the era's hegemon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. moves well ahead of the other major power democracies after World War II. Its militarism (almost four MIDs per year) is approached only by its non-democratic (for most of the period) super-power rival, the Soviet Union.

In sum, for the entire post-war period, having acquired both the means to involve itself in military conflicts and an enduring, presidentially-constructed ideological rationale for doing so, the U.S. became twice as militaristic as the U.K., nearly four times as militaristic as France, and 12 percent more militaristic than its super-power competitor.

The MID data set contains a large number of disputes that, while involving threats or mobilization of military units, are little more than posturing. One way to whittle down the MIDs to the more serious confrontations is to include only those disputes that result in fatalities. While it is ludicrous to count both World War II and the 1983 invasion of Grenada as equal disputes, the reduction does serve to separate major uses of force from mere displays or threats. Table Two repeats the country comparisons using the smaller set of MIDs with American fatalities.

<sup>39</sup> Table I includes all Militarized Interstate Disputes (including those with missing data for number of fatalities, labeled -9), as listed by the Correlates of War Project (Homepage: <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>), "Militarized Interstate Disputes (v3.02). This data set records all instances of when one state threatened, displayed, or used force against another."

<sup>40</sup> In this column, the end date is August 15, 1945; the next begins August 16.



**Table 2: MIDs with Fatalities<sup>41</sup>, Counts and Rates/Year for US, Russia, France, UK**

Country	MIDs (n)	1816-2001 n/yrs	(n)	1816-1945 n/yrs	(n)	1945-2001 n/yrs
USA	30	.161	6	0.046	24	.429
Russia	28	.150	16	0.123	12	.214
France	29	.156	17	0.131	12	.214
United Kingdom	17	.091	8	0.062	9	.161
Total MIDs	104		47		57	
<b>Post-War Fatal US MIDs by Era</b>	(n)	N/yrs				
1946-74 (29 yrs)	13	.448				
1975-90 (16 yrs)	9	.562				
1991-2001 (11 yrs)	2	.182				

The relationships in Table Two are similar to those in Table One. The U.S. moves from a relatively low rate of fatal confrontations<sup>42</sup> to the highest of the four countries in the post-war era. In those 56 years, U.S. militarism is two or three times as high as the other major power democracies, and twice as high as that of the Soviet Union.

In both Tables 1 and 2 there is evidence for the hypothesis that, within the highly interventionist Cold War period, there is a secular shift to greater militarism after the nomination reforms take effect (with Gerald Ford in August, 1974). In both the larger (all militarized disputes) and the smaller (disputes with fatalities) data sets, cold war militarism registers about a 25% increase in the reformed nomination period. This increase is also supported by older data compiled by John M. Collins in his 1991 compendium, *America's Small Wars*,<sup>43</sup> which found a secular increase from 15 "small wars" in the decade 1960-69, to 19 in 1970-79 (a 27% increase), and 23 in the Reagan reconstruction decade, 1980-89 (a 53% increase over the 1960s).

In both the MID data sets used in Tables One and Two, the end of the cold war registers a sharp drop in militarism (along with significant reductions in military spending, as indicated by Figure 1 below). However, one suspects that this is only the lull before a new era of higher militarism, with the emergence of a new rationale for military readiness after 9-11-2001. Although the MID data set ends in 2001, President George W. Bush's initiation of two major wars in his first three

<sup>41</sup> In the COW data, this includes only fatality levels scored from 1 (1-25 deaths) through 6 (over 999 deaths) on the U.S. side; In Table two, confrontations in which fatalities are unknown (scored-9) are excluded.

<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that the COW data counts only the deaths of soldiers and not civilians, and it is likely that deaths in the U.S. are reported more accurately than those in the target state.

<sup>43</sup> Washington, D.C.: Brassey's US, Inc. (Macmillan), 1991), 16. Collins counts a sharp increase in the number of small wars (area-focused low-intensity conflicts) from the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (an average of 4.5 small wars per decade in the years from 1899-1939) to 10 in the 1940s and 11 in the 1950s. (Ibid).

years would give him a militarism-with-fatalities ratio of .500 in his first term, comparable to cold war levels.

## Politics and Militarized Interstate Disputes

Table 3 displays the propensity to engage in militarized disputes by administration and party. For this table, only disputes with some level of fatalities are counted, in order to explore patterns of militarism with serious consequences (that is, beyond mere threats and displays).

**Table 3: Militarism in the U.S. Since 1897, By Administration and Party**

President	Party	Yrs in Office	Fatal MID's (excl. -9)	Propensity (excl. -9)	Fatal MID's (incl. -9)	Propensity (incl. -9)
McKinley (3/4/1897-9/14/1901)	R	4.50	2	0.444	2	0.444
T. Roosevelt (9/14/01- 3/3/09)	R	7.50	0	0.000	0	0.000
Taft (3/4/09- 3/3/13)	R	4.00	0	0.000	0	0.000
Wilson (3/4/13-3/3/21)	D	8.00	2	0.250	9	1.125
Harding (3/4/21- 3/2/23)	R	2.00	0	0.000	0	0.000
Coolidge (3/2/23-3/3/29)	R	6.00	0	0.000	1	0.167
Hoover (3/4/29-3/3/33)	R	4.00	0	0.000	0	0.000
F. Roosevelt (3/4/33-4/12/45)	D	12.08	3	0.248	3	0.248
Truman (4/12/45-1/20/53)	D	7.75	2	0.258	2	0.258
Eisenhower (1/20/53-1/20/61)	R	8.00	1	0.125	4	0.500
Kennedy (1/20/61- 8/22/63)	D	2.67	1	0.375	3	1.124
Johnson (8/22/63-1/20/69)	D	5.42	6	1.108	8	1.477
Nixon (1/20/69-8/9/74)	R	5.58	1	0.179	1	0.179
Ford (8/9/74-1/20/77)	R	2.42	2	0.769	2	0.769
Carter (1/20/77-1/20/81)	D	4.00	1	0.250	1	0.250
Reagan (1/20/81-1/20/89)	R	8.00	5	0.625	8	1.000
Bush (1/20/89-1/20/93)	R	4.00	1	0.250	1	0.250
Clinton (1/20/93-1/20/01)		8.00	1	0.125	1	0.125
<b>Total MIDs</b>			28.		46.	
Democrat Total			16.		27.	
Republican total			12.		19.	
<b>Dem. Propensity (MIDs/total years)</b>			<u>0.336</u>		<u>0.564</u>	
Dem. AVG (Sum Prop./# of Pres.)			0.374		0.646	
<b>Rep. Propensity (disp./total years)</b>			<u>0.209</u>		<u>0.338</u>	
Rep. AVG (Sum Prop./# of Pres.)			0.217		0.301	

The Correlates of War Project was sometimes unable to ascertain the precise number or level of fatalities, even in very serious conflicts; there are numerous -9 (missing data) entries in conflicts at levels 7 (“Show of Force”) through 16 (“Attack”). It is thus not unreasonable to assume that cases with missing data may actually involve fatalities, since reasonable certainty about a nonviolent outcome would be reflected in incident coding of zero fatalities. Table 3 presents both

data selections: MIDs with fatalities excluding missing data, and MIDs with fatalities including those conflicts with missing data in the “fatalities” column. While the counts vary significantly, the patterns do not. After the McKinley administration, the propensity to use force in confrontations that result in U.S. fatalities drops, but rises significantly after World War II. This pattern is understated by the decision of the COW Project to include only one entry for big wars that go on for years.

With or without the MIDs with unknown fatalities, the data in Table 3 reveal that Democrats are, across the entire century, significantly more likely to engage in serious militarized disputes than are Republicans. The first Democratic president of the modern era, Woodrow Wilson, not only intervened in Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, but sent American forces into Russia and, of course, prodded his reluctant party and nation into World War I. The Republican presidents of the interwar period were, by comparison, pacifists; and it was a Democratic president, Harry Truman, who took the opportunity presented him to rally the democratic world to a new structure of alliances and institutions and develop a founding ideology that would provide justification for countless military interventions—overt and covert—for forty five years.

Republicans begin to catch up with Democratic militarism (in terms of numbers of MIDs, if not casualty levels) in the Reagan administration.<sup>44</sup> And while Republicans have yet to match the fatality levels of the discretionary Korean and Vietnamese wars, the present administration resembles the pattern of Cold War Democrats much more than did earlier Republicans--evidence that the “war on terror” is indeed “the new Cold War.”

The first two rows of Table 4 confirm, in the smaller data set of disputes with fatalities, the secular increase in militarism that was inaugurated with the Spanish American War. The war with Spain resulted in momentous “imperial” responsibilities to govern the acquired territories and subdue the Philippine insurrection. The new era was spurred by the country’s rise to economic maturity and the belief that arose after the great depression of the 1890s among economic and political elites (and widely shared among other sectors of the citizenry as well) that the country had to export its economic surplus and have coaling stations and captured markets to facilitate the movement of capital and produce. Military strategists, presidents and upper class national officials concurred in the new expansionist ideology at the turn of the century and won a major victory with the successful overseas war to liberate peoples to whom the U.S. subsequently refused independence.<sup>45</sup>

In the data in Table 4 (both iterations, with and without the –9 category of fatalities), as well as the presidency figures of Table 3, Democratic militarism peaks in the Kennedy/Johnson administrations. The Republican peak appears later, in and after the Reagan administration. If the nomination reforms of the 1970s provide a spur to plebiscitary militarism it appears to be felt—in these data on fatal confrontations—mostly among the Republican presidents who dominate the era.

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<sup>44</sup> The highest (American) fatality level for the Reagan administration occurred as a result of the so-called peace-keeping mission in Lebanon from 1982-84, in which 241 Marines were killed.

<sup>45</sup> Warren Zimmermann, *First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002); Harold Faulkner, *The Decline of Laissez-Faire, 1897-1917* (New York: Rinehart, 1951).

But the post-reform and post-cold war periods are still too short for confident generalization. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton were unusual cases in that Carter was (as Skowronek labels the category) a “disjunctive” president at the end of his rope, trying desperately to keep the northern and southern wings of his fragile party together; and Clinton was a “preemptive” president, elected in a three-way election, facing a militant opposition in control of Congress after his first two years. If Carter had too little legitimacy to make war, even with his own party in control of Congress, the interloper, Clinton, hounded by a regime party that considered him an illegitimate rascal, in an era in which a 45-year long ideology justifying presidential militarism had suddenly vanished, could only take on small scale interventions for human rights and for keeping Saddam Hussein in his “box.”

The only “political time” hypothesis confirmed by these data is seen in the pattern for disjunctive presidents Hoover and Carter. Theirs is the lowest level of fatal military confrontations. The highest, surprisingly, is the reconstructive cell in the first row. The propensity for war is measured two ways in Table 4: the chance that a year will register a fatal militarized dispute, considering all years under one of the four Skowronekian types of administration, and the average annual propensity for war of presidents grouped in each of the four types, taking the sum of administration propensities to war and dividing by the number of presidents in that category. By the first measure, militarism is highest among the presidents inaugurating new regimes; by the second, reconstructors are almost tied with preemptives in one of the comparisons (line 4). One must note, of course, that these counts of MIDs treat all militarized incidents equally, regardless of scale. Roosevelt’s global war, forced on him by circumstances, counts equally with the much smaller discretionary war of McKinley, and the small-fatality interventions of Ronald Reagan in Lebanon, Nicaragua, Libya and Grenada.

Likewise, if one considered scale and cost, the discretionary wars of Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, and both Bushes would make articulators the leading militarists. And, given that the modal number of years since World War II had passed under articulating presidents, the contribution of this category of post-realignment partisans to militarism is clear.

**Table 4: Militarism by Era and “Political Time”**

Pre-WWII MID's with Fatalities (incl -9) (n)		Propensity MID's/ yrs			
1816-1897	6	.069			
1898-1940	13	.302			
<b>MID's with Fatalities, by Era, Party</b>					
		Mid #s and Propen- sities (excl. -9)		Mid #s and Propen- sities (Include -9)	
		Dem	Rep.	Dem	Rep.
1898-Aug. 1945 MID's <sup>1</sup>	(n)	5	2	12	3
1898-Aug. 1945 Prop. (MID's/total yrs)		.249	.068	.597	.103
1898-Aug. 45 AVG (Prop./# of Pres.) <sup>2</sup>		.249	.074	.686	.102
Sept. 1945-1974 MID's	(n)	9	2	13	5
Sept. 1945-74 Prop (MID's/total years) <sup>2</sup>		.577	.147	.834	.368
Sept. 1945-74 AVG (Prop./# of Pres.) <sup>2</sup>		.580	.152	.756	.339
1975-89 MID's	(n)	1	7	1	10
1975-89 Propensity <sup>4</sup>		.250	.603	.250	.862
1975-89 AVG <sup>3</sup>		.250	.697	.250	.885
1990-2001 MID's	(n)	1	1	1	1
1990-2001 Prop. (MID's/total years)		.125	.250	.125	.250
1990-2001 AVG (Prop/# of Pres.)		.125	.250	.125	.250
<b>MID's with Fatalities, Political Time</b>					
		Disjunctive	Reconstructive	Articulating	Preemptive
Propensity (omitting -9)		0.125	0.408	0.254	0.217
AVG (omitting -9)		0.125	0.439	0.249	0.290
Propensity (including -9)		0.125	0.529	0.381	0.531
AVG (including -9)		0.125	0.564	0.409	0.539
<i>AVE, Shifting Panama from RR to GHWB</i>			.522	.441	
MID Count Including -9		1	13	15	17
<i>AVG, Shifting Panama from RR to GHWB</i>			12	16	
Presidents in Category		Hoover	McKinley	T. Roosevelt	Wilson
		Carter	F. Roosevelt	Taft	Eisenhower
			Reagan	Harding	Nixon
				Coolidge	Ford
				Truman	Clinton
				Kennedy	
				Johnson	
				Bush I	
Years in Office		8	24.58	39.34	32

## The Electoral Connection

The MID data are particularly unsuited for testing hypotheses about electoral cycles and militarism. Actual interventions are often contained within long disputes, dated from their first appearance. Wars of several years are usually listed only once, when they start, and incidents causing fatalities are often hard to pinpoint. One such problem is the attribution of the MID with Panama to Reagan, rather than the president (G. H. W. Bush) who actually invaded that country in late 1989. Since this is an important use of force, and one incurring significant casualties, I added a line to Table 4 subtracting the fatal MID with Panama from Reagan's total and moving it to President George H.W. Bush (see italics).

Similarly, as Benjamin Fordham and Christopher Sarver have noted, it is not always clear who has initiated a conflict, and some important military interventions are excluded because they are not judged to comprise *interstate* disputes. There are also a large number of "disputes" in the data set that remain verbal, or which were initiated by low-level officials or private actors--hardly useful for assessing serious presidential efforts to produce rallies.<sup>46</sup> In view of the problems in the COW data, Fordham and Sarver have created their own data set of U.S military interventions, relying more on the Blechman and Kaplan data, with updates and modifications (for example, they include covert actions and disputes with foreign non-state actors). Subsequent analysis using this revised data set has employed sophisticated statistical procedures to explore the interaction of party (and presumed constituency policy preferences) and economic conditions with presidential use of force.<sup>47</sup> Fordham's article finds that, indeed, there is a differential incidence of force by presidents of the two parties, depending on whether the major problem in the economy is inflation or unemployment.

However, the Fordham and Sarver data set also contains many relatively trivial movements of armed forces that may be virtually invisible to the public, and thus of questionable significance as "political" uses of force. One way to address that problem is to include a screen for visibility: coverage of the incident in a major national newspaper. I have collected about a thousand New York Times articles, using the Proquest Historical Newspapers database, and intend to use these accounts in the near future to assess the visibility (and thus potential political capital) inherent in each of the proposed incidents of military force from 1946 to the present. With a newly constructed data set of visible uses of non-trivial military force, I intend to assess the electoral hypothesis ranking the discrete years of a presidential administration as an independent variable indicative of presidential political needs. Most other studies of the diversionary hypothesis have considered only presidential election years, or have demarcated the electoral cycle in inappropriate ways.

When constructing my own data set of presidential uses of force, I will follow Fordham and Sarver (and diverge from the COW practice) by also including major covert actions (like those in Iran, Guatemala, and Chile), IF the resulting regime changes receive publicity in the *New York Times* as the president appears to claim credit (without admitting involvement) for the results. Covert actions, initiated in the post-war period by Eisenhower, provide the president with an

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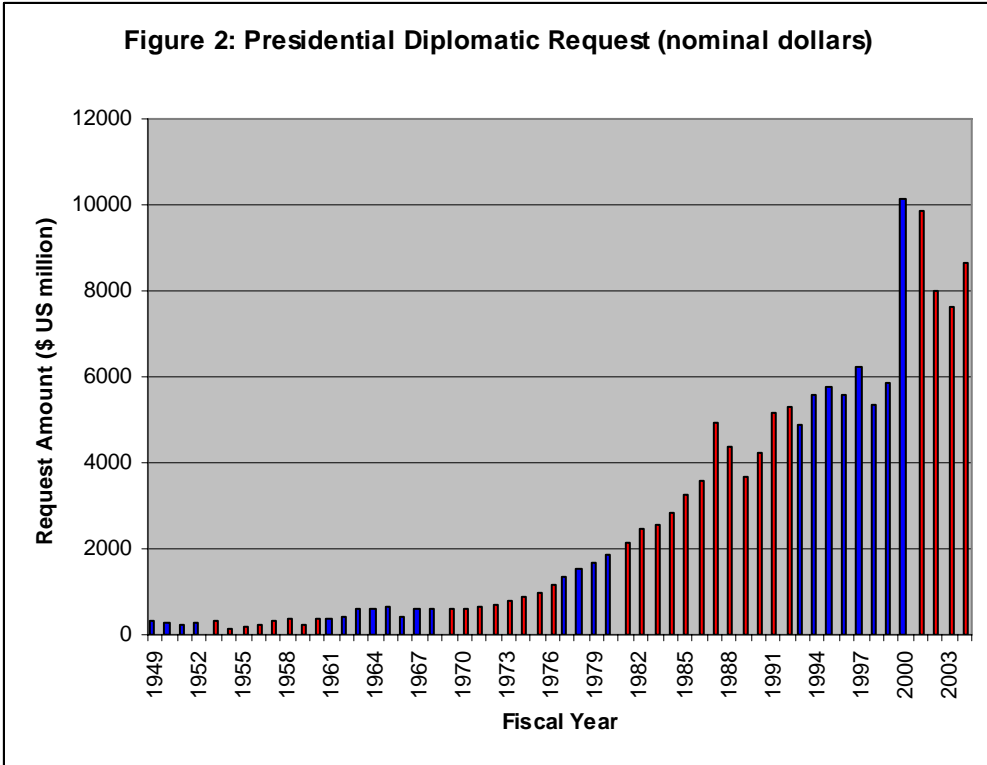
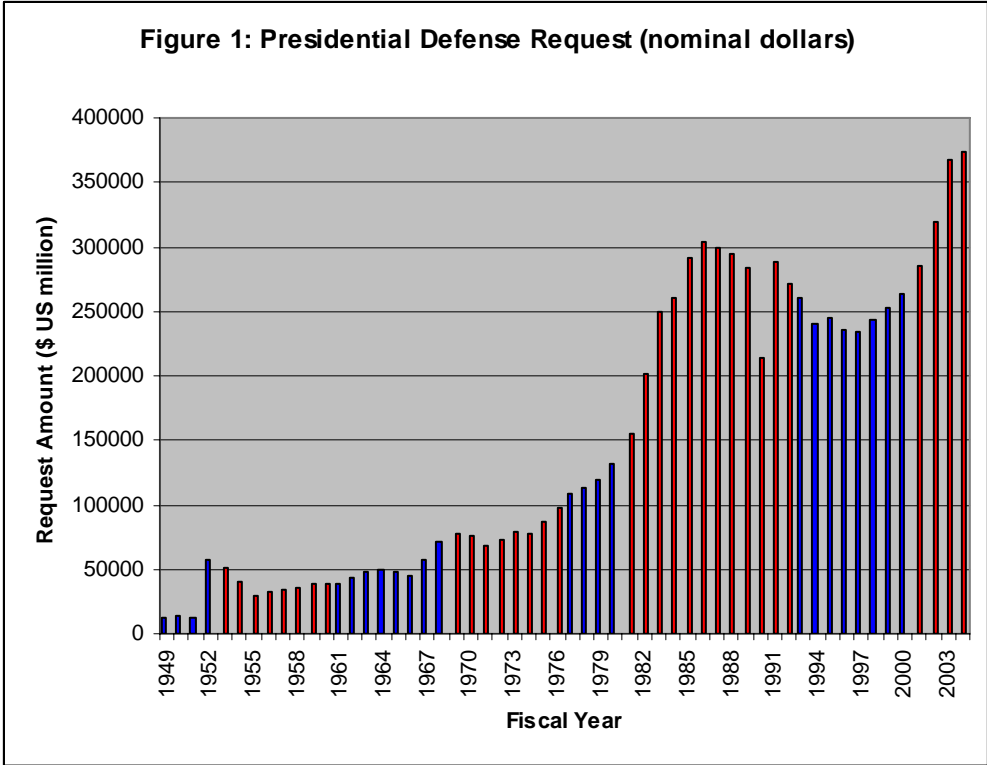
<sup>46</sup> Benjamin O. Fordham and Christopher C. Sarver, "Militarized Interstate Disputes and United States Uses of Force," *International Studies Quarterly* 45 (2001), 455-466.

<sup>47</sup> See note seven.

economical method of intervention carrying fewer risks than overt military interventions. As Eisenhower discovered, it could be quite easy to effect the overthrow of a pesky regime-- so easy that he employed it twice in countries that experienced, as a result of his actions, very high costs that are with us still; and he gave the go-ahead for the Bay of Pigs intervention whose plans his successor, President Kennedy inherited and executed.

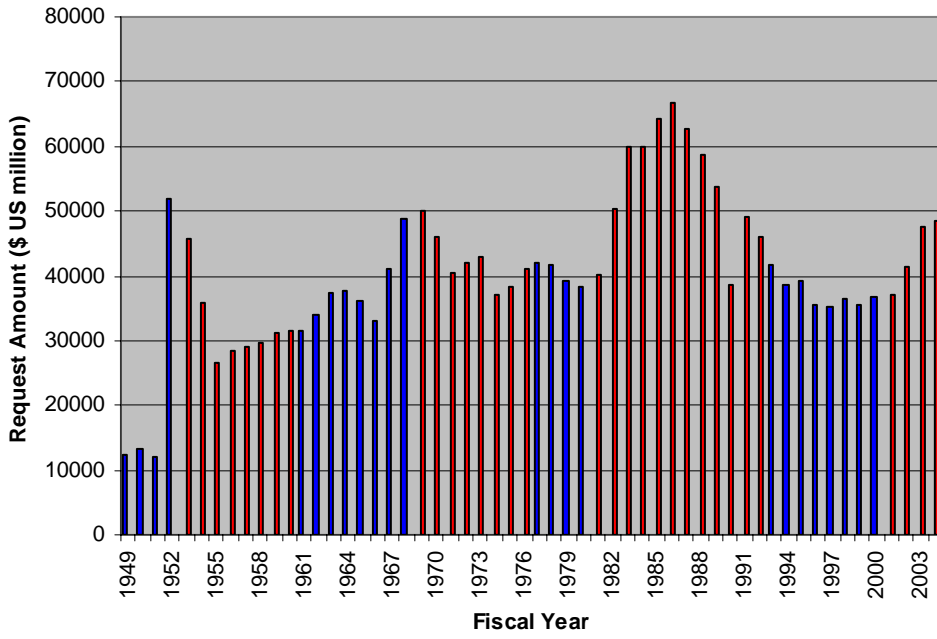
### **Military versus Diplomatic Budget Requests**

As their military and intelligence resources for overt and covert military actions grew, the attractiveness of peaceful dispute resolution through diplomacy faded. Figures 1-5 display presidential budgetary requests for Defense Department and State Department funding, in both actual and inflation-adjusted dollars. Despite the different trend lines (punctuated with Korean, Vietnam, and post-9-11 elevations in military spending, compared to a gradual rise in diplomatic budgets), the ratio of diplomatic to military budget requests remains virtually the same at the beginning of the sequence, in the late-1940s, and the end, in 2004: the presidential request for diplomatic resources is just over two percent of his request for military resources.

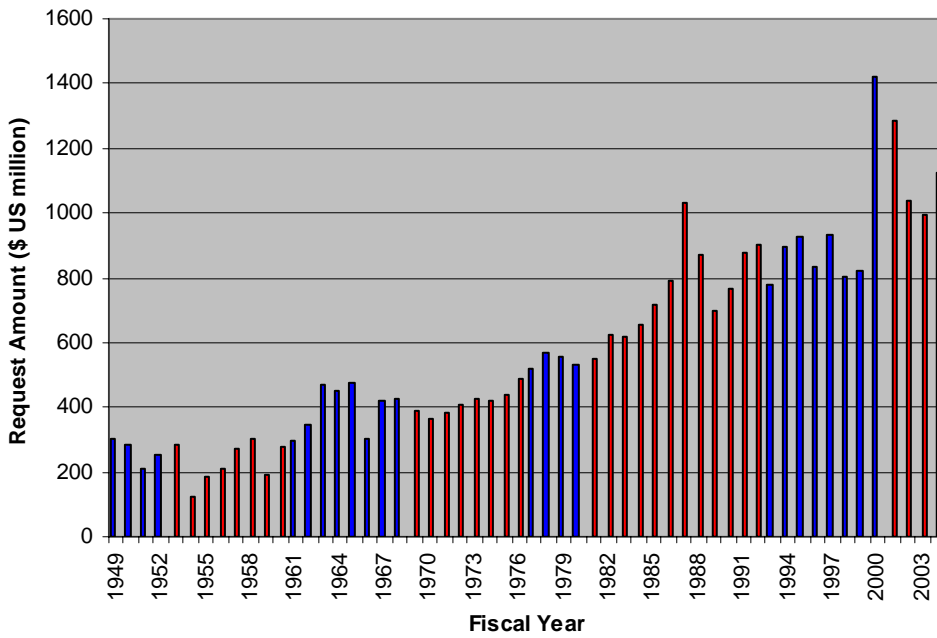


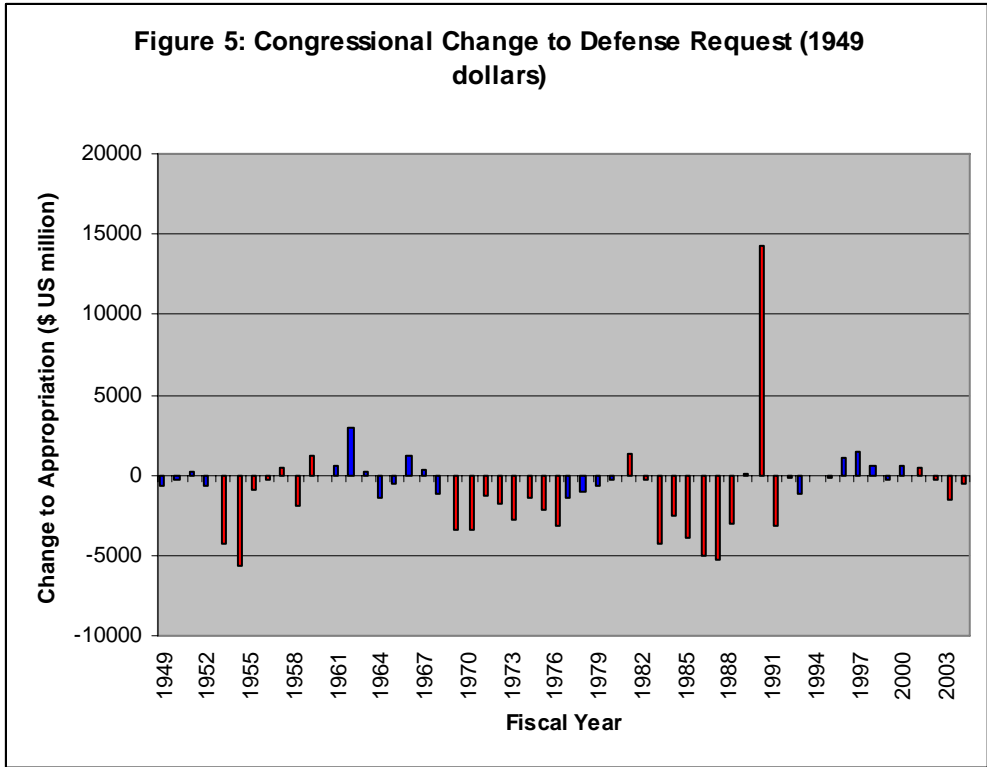


**Figure 3: Presidential Defense Request (1949 dollars)**



**Figure 4: Presidential Diplomatic Request (1949 dollars)**





Congressional response to presidential budget requests ( Fig. 5) is clearly affected by party. In the post-Korean and Vietnam eras, and again in the Reagan years, Democratic congresses generally constrained presidential defense budgets; in the Clinton years Republican congresses sought modest additions to presidential budgets for military spending. However, it is not plausibly within the power of Congress to effect a reorientation of presidential foreign policy emphasis from war to diplomacy.

**Consequences**

If the arguments presented here are correct, a set of executive branch institutions has arisen since World War II, at the behest of the president, and justified on the basis of presidential foreign policy doctrines, that encourage and facilitate presidential war-making. These tendencies have been augmented further by the “plebiscitary” aspects of party nomination reforms since 1972. Clearly there are serious consequences here for American political development, world peace, and the development of international institutions for non-violent dispute resolution and the fostering of international law and human rights.

Nationally, military spending has consumed the lion’s share of national budgets, leaving fewer resources for domestic social and infrastructure needs and, in the years of peak spending, deforming the domestic economy. And most importantly, millions of lives have been lost, lands and infrastructure destroyed, and millions of other lives darkened and impoverished by mental and physical injuries, and the loss of loved ones.

These pathologies inhere in the very nature of executive power, of course. The American founders wanted precisely to avoid the pathologies of monarchical identification with national interest, the pursuit of war for ego-gratification, booty, or dynastic motives. Democracy offers a constraint on such motives, with more or less effectiveness across time and different national institutions, but cannot abrogate them. Richard Nixon's famous justification of his executive prerogatives to David Frost ("When the President does it, that means that it is not illegal") did not travel far from "L'etat, c'est moi."

Despite the costs, Americans have become so accepting of loose interpretations of executive power in the realm of war powers that media and opposition party routinely comment on candidates' fitness for commander in chief responsibilities, and find them wanting if they seem insufficiently bold. Such expectations probably lie behind Hilary Clinton's votes for the war in Iraq and for condemnation of Iran in a resolution that could have been interpreted as preparation for war. Barack Obama was criticized (by Clinton, and Republicans) for his remarks in favor of diplomatic engagement with Iran and other "enemies," and even in an era of disenchantment with the outcomes of presidential war policy, such challenges to "war mettle" are sure to be heard again as the election nears.

A little-noticed effect of presidential preoccupation with war, and its acceptance in American political culture, may have been to unbalance gender relations in the United States, reducing the numbers of women in elective office, mitigating against the kinds of public policy favored by women, and perhaps against the Democratic Party women disproportionately favor.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the facts that the U.S. was host to a pioneer feminist movement, and has a very high percentage of women working outside the home, women hold only 16% of seats in the U.S. Congress, far below the percentages in almost all other democracies. The U.S. ranks about 60<sup>th</sup> in the world in women's political representation, with less than half the percentage of the Scandinavian countries. And of course, no woman has yet served as president of the United States, in contrast with the profusion of female prime ministers in other industrial democracies, and even in developing countries. In a composite measure of the gender gap in well-being (which ranks countries according to gender equality in economic well-being, political empowerment, education, and health), the U.S. ranks only 17<sup>th</sup> among democracies<sup>49</sup>

Could it be that the presidentially-constructed emphasis of American foreign policy on war has handicapped female candidates for both Congress and the presidency because women are not trusted to govern in times of war? The number of women entering Congress surged in the relatively peaceful, post-cold war 1990s. However, it dropped precipitously after 2000. Perhaps the post-cold war era of peace and military reconversion enhanced women's political representation because the issues with which women are associated gained more attention at the

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<sup>48</sup> Of the 70 women in the current (109<sup>th</sup>) House of Representatives, 50 (70 %) are Democrats; eleven of the 16 women in the Senate (69 %) are Democrats.

<sup>49</sup> Augusto Lopez-Claros and Saadia Zahidi, "Women's Empowerment: Measuring the global Gender Gap," World Economic Forum, on line at [http://216.239.51.104/search?q=cache:hYT8w9Ps99MJ:www.weforum.org/pdf/Global\\_Competitiveness\\_Reports/Reports/gender\\_gap.pdf+gender+gap&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=5&lr=lang\\_en&client=safari](http://216.239.51.104/search?q=cache:hYT8w9Ps99MJ:www.weforum.org/pdf/Global_Competitiveness_Reports/Reports/gender_gap.pdf+gender+gap&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=5&lr=lang_en&client=safari)

expense of security issues. After 2001, not only did female candidates become weaker competitors, but the percentage of the public finding women emotionally and otherwise fit to hold high office experienced a significant decline.<sup>50</sup>

These patterns provide some evidence that the militarization of American society, led by the president, imprints governing institutions and makes them less welcoming to "feminine" values. And the political under-representation of women, in turn, yields a Congress more favorable to military than social policy.<sup>51</sup> The very low percentage of American women in the national legislature compared to other countries is otherwise difficult to account for. Awaiting further study, we merely speculate that, following the logic presented here, the "militarization of institutions" [promoted by presidential preferences in foreign policy] produces an electoral gender bias diminishing the representation of women in government, which, in turn, maintains the large defense establishment and militates against congressional restraint of presidential war powers.

Institutional pathology in the presidency thus has many complex political, social, and economic consequences. History and institutional logic suggest that remedies will only be found in the interludes between disastrous wars, or through legal and constitutional changes. Possible such changes include a reversal of the 1968-72 "reforms" of the nomination process and changes in campaign finance laws, in order to bind presidents more closely to their parties; sharp cutbacks in defense spending and more transparency in military and intelligence agencies; increases in diplomatic capacity and reorganization of the State Department to enhance its effectiveness; amendment of the Constitution to give the president one six-year term (removing the largest electoral incentive to war-making); or even a constitutional shift to parliamentary government.

Serious pathology demands drastic remedy.

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<sup>50</sup> David W. Moore, "Poll Analyses, June 10, 2003" Gallup News Services (found online December 7, 2006 at [http://www.ms.uky.edu/~stari/STA200/pool\\_example2.htm](http://www.ms.uky.edu/~stari/STA200/pool_example2.htm))

<sup>51</sup> Gender gaps in American national politics (affecting candidate and policy preferences) have been documented since 1980. The new Homeland Security committee in the House has NO women, and there are very few on the Armed Services Committees.