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Sustaining the Fight: A Cross-Sectional Time-Series Analysis of Public Support for Ongoing Military Interventions

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What determines a democratic public's willingness to tolerate the human and material costs of sustaining ongoing military operations to victory? Although much literature has addressed the factors that affect public attitudes toward the use of military force, few studies adopt either a theoretical perspective or a research method explicitly designed to answer this question. In particular, existing research tends to focus on the costs of war fighting, while ignoring both the tangible and intangible costs of withdrawing from a foreign military engagement. I argue that many of the factors that the public uses to estimate the cost of prosecuting a war—troop strength requirements, whether or not troops are engaged in ground combat and, most importantly, casualties—are also measures of the extent of a state's commitment to achieving its war aims. If the public treats the cost of the state's military commitment simply as an expense, support for sustaining an operation should decrease as the cost of commitment increases. If, however, citizens have a tendency to see military commitments as investments that put the country's reputation on the line or can only be redeemed if the state is victorious in the war, an increase in commitment could actually strengthen the public's determination to sustain the fight. Employing a cross-sectional time-series design with data from 12 U.S. and British military interventions, I explore whether the costs of continuing to prosecute a war or the costs of withdrawing have a greater effect on public willingness to sustain ongoing military operations. The results suggest that public concern about the costs of withdrawing from a conflict can be a more important determinant of willingness to persevere than sensitivity to the costs of war fighting. As a result, there is a considerable disconnect between what the public claims it would support in hypothetical scenarios and the types of military operations the public actually shows a willingness to sustain once they are underway.

Keywords cost tolerance, public opinion, sunk costs, use of force, war outcomes

Introduction

In order to attain its political objectives in war, a state, no matter how militarily strong, must have sufficient *tolerance for costs* to allow it to use as much force as necessary for as

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long as is necessary to destroy either the adversary's capacity or will to resist (Clausewitz, 1976 [1832]; Kadera & Morey, 2008 [this issue]; Rosen, 1972; Stam, 1996; Sullivan, 2004). Observing a number of cases of failed major power interventions intended to defeat insurgent movements, Mack (1975) concludes that "In every case, success for the insurgents arose not from a military victory on the ground... but rather from the progressive attrition of their opponents' *political* capability to wage war" (p. 177). In theory, public tolerance for the costs of war varies along a continuum from unwillingness to absorb any human or material costs in pursuit of an objective to the acceptance of any and all costs that must be borne in order to prevail. For political leaders, both overestimating and underestimating the level of costs their political constituency is willing to bear can contribute to poor policy outcomes. When decision makers underestimate the price the public would be willing to pay to attain a particular objective, they may commit insufficient forces, employ less effective military strategies, or terminate military operations prematurely in an (unnecessary) effort to minimize costs. Leaders' beliefs about the public's level of cost tolerance can act as a constraint on the number of troops and resources a state commits to foreign military operations, military strategy and battlefield tactics, the level of risk to human life to be tolerated, and the duration of military operations, regardless of how closely those beliefs conform to reality. Of course, *overestimating* the price the public would be willing to pay is also dangerous. When political leaders overestimate public cost tolerance *ex ante*, they are more likely to initiate wars they will not have the political capacity to sustain to victory.

The question, then, is what determines a public's willingness to tolerate the human and material costs of sustaining ongoing military operations to victory? Although there is a rich literature on the factors that affect public attitudes toward the use of military force, few studies adopt a research method explicitly designed to answer this question. The existing research is limited to studies that consider one military intervention at a time, studies with pooled cross-sectional data that ignore the effects of time and changes in the values of key explanatory variables, and studies that analyze support for hypothetical uses of military force. While all of these research designs have improved our understanding of the factors that shape public attitudes toward the use of force, they may not be able to accurately predict what proportion of the public would prefer sustaining the fight to withdrawing from the conflict after troops have been deployed because they have not tried to measure the effects of factors that vary both from war to war and across time within wars simultaneously. At the same time, most studies of public support for ongoing military operations have not distinguished between respondents' willingness to continue prosecuting the war and other public attitudes that may or may not be highly correlated with support for sustaining a war effort, such the belief that a war has been "worth the cost," support for the government's handling of the war effort, or even overall executive approval rates.

Employing cross-sectional time-series data from 12 U.S. and British military interventions, I explore how the extent of a state's military commitment affects public support for sustaining ongoing military operations. In particular, I am interested in whether the public responds to the commitment of lives and resources to a war effort as if these costs are *expenses* or *investments*. If the public treats the costs of a military operation—in terms of troop commitments and actual or anticipated casualties—as expenses, all else equal, support for sustaining an operation should decrease as the cost of the commitment increases. If, however, citizens have a tendency to see military commitments as investments that put the country's reputation on the line or can only be redeemed if the state is victorious in the war, an increase in commitment could actually strengthen the public's determination to sustain the fight.

Do people support sustaining the fight under the conditions they believe they would and call for withdrawal when conditions match those they consider unacceptable in prewar

or hypothetical scenarios? The results of this analysis suggest that public concern about the costs of withdrawing from a conflict can be a more important determinant of willingness to persevere than sensitivity to the costs of war fighting. As a result, there is a considerable disconnect between what the public claims it would support in hypothetical scenarios and the types of military operations the public actually shows a willingness to sustain once they are underway. Although survey respondents tend to favor stand-off uses of firepower over ground combat *ex ante*, I find that both the American and British populations are significantly more likely to support sustaining operations that involve ground forces than interventions that rely solely on air strikes or sea power. While support for a proposed use of force declines as estimates of troop requirements increase in survey questions, public support for sustaining foreign military engagements *increases* as the number of troops committed to an actual war effort increases. And, despite the prevalent view that “unilateral U.S. armed involvement is anathema to the people and politicians alike” (Sobel, 1997, 38), public support for continuing a war effort is consistently higher in both Britain and the United States when the country uses military force without assistance from allies.

Previous Studies

Recent research adopts a rationalist perspective on the determinants of public support for the use of military force. Although there is disagreement about which factors are most salient, scholars have found considerable evidence that support or opposition to foreign military operations resembles a rational cost/benefit analysis in which individuals consider the value of the issues at stake, the probability of success, and estimates of the human and material cost of the military effort (Eichenberg, 2005; Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; Gartner & Segura, 1998; Gelpi et al., 2005, 2006; Jentleson, 1992; Larson, 1996; Larson & Savych, 2005; Jentleson & Britton, 1998).

Not surprisingly, much of the research on public support for the use of military force abroad has focused on the human cost of war fighting and, in particular, on the effect of casualties. Historian Joanna Bourke observes that the “characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing” (Bourke, 1999). But when soldiers are sent abroad to fight for their country, it is soldiers dying that commands the attention of the public at home (Gartner, 2008a, this issue). Gartner and colleagues (2003) note that “wartime deaths. . . represent *a*, if not *the*, most visible cost of a nation’s involvement in war” (p. 467). While the conventional wisdom that the American public is casualty-phobic can be rejected, there is still a general consensus that, under most conditions, aggregate support for foreign military operations declines as casualties rise (Eichenberg, 2005; Gartner, 2008a, this issue; Gartner, Segura, & Barratt 2003; Gartner & Segura 1998; Larson & Savych, 2005; Larson, 1996).¹ Studies have found evidence that soldiers’ deaths affect both individual and aggregate levels of support for a war (Boettcher & Cobb, 2006; Eichenberg, 2005; Gartner & Segura, 2000, 1998; Klarevas, 2001; Larson & Savych, 2005; Larson, 1996; Mueller, 1973), presidential approval rates (Eichenberg et al., 2006; Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; Gelpi et al., 2005/06), public perceptions of a war’s progress and likelihood of success (Boettcher & Cobb, 2006; Voeten & Brewer, 2006) and the tenure of elected leaders (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Gartner et al., 2003).

It is less clear, however, that public pressure for war termination inevitably builds as casualties mount. Many studies include public opinion on the president’s handling of the

¹Most scholars have focused on the effect of cumulative casualties (Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; Larson & Savych, 2005; Larson, 1996; Mueller, 1973), but others have found that temporally and geographically proximate casualties have a stronger effect on individual support for or opposition to a war effort under some conditions (Gartner, 2008a, this issue; Gartner & Segura, 1998; Gartner et al., 1997).

war effort and/or whether initiating the war was the “right” thing to do in their measures of public support for a war (cf. Gartner & Segura, 1998; Gelpi et al., 2005, 2006; Jentleson & Britton, 1998; Voeten & Brewer, 2006). But, as Larson (1996) points out, both those who prefer withdrawal or de-escalation of the military campaign and those who believe the campaign should be escalated can express disapproval of a war effort. Some have even argued that casualties have most often led to pressure for escalation of the war effort to victory, rather than to demands for withdrawal (Kull & Destler, 1999; Schwarz, 1994).

The latest studies have encouraged a more nuanced view of the relationship between casualties and public attitudes, arguing that willingness to tolerate the human costs of war is conditional on an individual’s perception of the importance of the issues at stake (Larson, & Savych, 2005), the likelihood of success (Gelpi et al., 2005), elite consensus (Larson 1996), uncertainty about future casualty patterns (Gartner, 2008a, this issue), or contextual information like the number of enemy casualties (Boettcher & Cobb, 2006). Using original data collected on individual attitudes toward six hypothetical scenarios, Feaver and Gelpi (2004) conclude that casualty tolerance is positively correlated with an individual’s subjective belief in the importance of a particular military mission and confidence that the military effort will be successful. Larson and Savych (2005) report that belief in the salience of the issues at stake in a military operation is the most significant predictor of individual support for or opposition to recent U.S. military operations.

Despite these advances in our understanding of the factors that shape public support for the use of military force, we still may not be able to predict aggregate levels of public support for sustaining a military commitment after it has been initiated. There are no empirical studies that explore how both the attributes of a military intervention and events on the ground affect public attitudes about continuing to prosecute a war over time within actual military operations. This is due in large part to data limitations, which I will discuss in the section on research design. But it may also be the result of an assumption that the public will withdraw its support for sustaining a military operation when the expected costs of persevering outweigh the expected benefits, just as they appear to deny their support for initiating military operations in which the costs are expected to exceed the benefits. However, I will argue that some of the key factors that increase cost estimates and depress prewar support for a proposed military operation, also increase concerns about the perceived costs of *withdrawing* from a military engagement once it is underway.

Support for Sustaining the Fight

While support for prospective or hypothetical uses of force abroad is contingent on the expected utility of military intervention being greater than the expected utility of the status quo, once troops are committed, a return to the prewar status quo is generally not an option. Instead, the expected utility of sustaining military operations must be weighed against the expected utility of withdrawing. But extant theories tend to focus on the costs of *war fighting*, ignoring the costs of *withdrawing* from a foreign military engagement.

Total military victory and unconditional surrender are rare (Smith, 1998; Wagner, 2000). In order to terminate a war, states must make some concessions to their adversary’s demands, lower their own demands so that a negotiated settlement with that adversary is possible, or, in the case of a state fighting on foreign soil, abandon the war effort and unilaterally withdraw (Filson & Werner, 2002; Goemans, 2000; Slantchev, 2004; Sullivan, 2004, 2007; Wagner, 2000; Werner, 1998). As a result of concerns about the losses associated with withdrawing from a military engagement once it is underway, some individuals who would not have supported *initiating* the use of force at a given set of cost and risk parameters may nonetheless support *sustaining* an ongoing operation with those

parameters. This could mean that war initiation simply boosts the level of public support for a military operation from its prewar level, producing a rally effect that erodes as costs mount, similar to the more well-documented effect of war initiation on presidential approval rates (Baker & Oneal, 2001; Brody, 1991; Chapman & Reiter, 2004; Jordan & Page, 1992; Mueller, 1973). However, in addition to a reluctance to make the tangible concessions that must be made to end a foreign military engagement, citizens are likely to have significant concerns about the intangible effects of withdrawing from a conflict.

The intangible effects of withdrawing from a war effort include anticipated damage to the state's reputation and influence and the psychological pain of failing to redeem the country's human and material investments in a war effort by attaining the benefits of victory. After sinking blood and treasure into the war effort, the public may fear that terminating a war short of victory will affect the state's reputation for strength or resolve and reduce the country's influence in future conflicts (Fearon, 1994; Guisinger & Smith, 2002; Iklé, 1991; Schelling, 1966; Sullivan & Gartner, 2006; Taliaferro, 2004; Tang, 2005). Gelb and Betts (1979) note that Johnson and Nixon both feared domestic criticism for damaging the nation's credibility in the fight against communism if they withdrew from Vietnam. Similarly, Daniel Ellsberg (1972) argues that the United States remained in Vietnam because U.S. presidents could not survive a withdrawal. In his own analyses of America's reluctance to cut its losses and end its involvement in Vietnam even after it was clear that the war would eventually be lost, Maoz (1990) writes: "Clearly, the American people wanted to end the war, but every poll, and indeed Nixon's election. . . , made it equally evident that they saw their country's aims as honorable, and did not relish America's humiliation" (p. 284).

But public aversion to seeing the country lose a military contest it initiated does not appear to be limited to the American experience in Vietnam. In their study of attitudes toward the use of military force, Feaver and Gelpi (2004) conclude that civilians in the United States are more "defeat-phobic" than "casualty-phobic." Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995) have found evidence that defeat in a crisis or war can significantly increase a leaders' risk of being removed from office. And Arena (2008, this issue) finds that defeat in war lowers the reelection prospects of democratic leaders as long as the political opposition was opposed to the war, thereby giving voters the opportunity to choose a candidate or party that is not implicated in the failed war effort.

Extant theories of public support for the use of force generally do not anticipate that citizens are especially concerned about the effects of war termination on their country's reputation. Moreover, rationalist approaches assume that individuals ignore sunk costs when weighing the costs and benefits of continued engagement in a foreign military intervention. However, psychologists have known for some time that commitment to a course of action often rises as the emotional or tangible sacrifices already made in following the course of action increase (Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Brown, 1965; Festinger, 1957). A significant body of research provides evidence that the public uses information about the cost of a conflict to date, particularly in terms of casualties, to estimate future costs (Gartner, 2008a, this issue; Gartner & Segura, 1998). There is also strong evidence that, all else equal, higher cost estimates translate into lower levels of approval for a war effort (Gartner & Segura, 1998; Larson, 1996; Mueller, 1973). However, citizens may see the lives and resources committed to the fight as not only costs, but also as investments that can be redeemed if the nation prevails in the conflict (Mitchell, 1981; Teger, 1980). Kriesberg (2003) summarizes a common observation in the conflict resolution literature: "Having sunk resources into a fight, sinking more and more resources seems justified in order to attain the goal of the struggle and so justify what has already been expended in money, honor, or blood. This ever-increasing commitment and allocation of resources may go much beyond the original

value of the goal, but the combatants are trapped into continuing and even escalating the struggle” (p. 161).

Military Commitment: Expense and Investment

Many of the factors that the public is expected to use to estimate the cost of prosecuting a war—troop strength requirements, whether or not troops are engaged in ground combat, and, most importantly, the pattern of casualties to date—are also measures of the extent of a state’s commitment to achieving its goals. Both the perceived cost of withdrawing from a conflict without achieving the state’s war aims and estimates of the cost of sustaining the fight are expected to increase with the magnitude of the state’s commitment to the war effort. Whether the costs of continuing to prosecute a war or the costs of withdrawing have a greater effect on public support for sustaining a military campaign is an empirical question I explore in this analysis.

Public support for proposed and hypothetical uses of military force is consistently lower when survey questions mention large troop commitments, a risk of casualties, or the use of ground troops to carry out a particular mission (Kull & Destler, 1999; Eichenberg et al., 2006; Jentleson & Britton, 1998). Large troop commitments mean a greater financial burden for the state; more families, friends, and employers impacted by foreign deployments; and more significant opportunity costs in terms of troops that become unavailable for other military missions. Putting boots on the ground, rather than relying on standoff power projection (e.g., air strikes or a naval blockade), amplifies these costs and dramatically increases the risk that soldiers will be injured or killed. And both politicians and military leaders appear to feel constrained by an accepted wisdom that the American public will not tolerate significant casualties (Eikenberry, 1996; Everts, 2002; Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; Klarevas, 2002; Kull & Destler, 1999; Larson, 1996; Larson & Savych, 2005). In a 1996 essay in *Foreign Affairs*, Luttwak warns that the United States “is spending far too much on casualty-prone units in all the services, in an age when political opposition to casualties effectively makes these units unavailable for combat” (33).

Following the logic of a public that makes rational expected utility calculations in deciding whether or not to support a foreign military intervention, public willingness to sustain military operations should decline as the actual and anticipated costs of operations increase. All else equal, the percentage of the public expressing support for sustaining an ongoing military intervention should be lower when military operations involve large troop deployments or engage ground troops in combat. And support should decline as casualties rise.

Hypothesis 1: Holding the expected benefits of military operations constant, the percentage of the population expressing support for sustaining a war effort will decline as the number of soldiers deployed increases or ground troops are engaged in combat.

Hypothesis 2: Holding the expected benefits of military operations constant, the percentage of the population expressing support for sustaining a war effort will decline as casualties rise.

These hypotheses conform well to what many argue is an “article of faith” among political and military decision makers: U.S. military operations must be conducted so as to minimize the risk of casualties in order to sustain public support (Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; Record, 2000). However, significant acts of commitment, like deploying large numbers of military troops to a conflict, committing ground troops to combat, or sacrificing lives in pursuit of the state’s war aims, are public displays of intention that may make cutting losses and withdrawing from the conflict difficult to accomplish without significant damage

to the state's reputation for strength and resolve. The greater the commitment, the greater the perceived loss of credibility and influence associated with terminating the commitment without achieving the state's political objectives (Fearon, 1994; Iklé, 1991). At the same time, citizens may view the sunk costs of a military engagement as investments that can only be redeemed if the state prevails (Maoz, 1990; Boulding, 1984; Teger, 1980). According to this perspective, only victory can justify the sacrifices that have been made and the marginal costs of persevering can seem bearable relative to the losses that have already been endured (Kriesberg, 2003; Brockner & Rubin, 1985; Mitchell, 1981). As commitment increases, sunk costs climb, and the desire to redeem those sunk costs with a favorable intervention outcome is expected to increase (Iklé, 1991; Pape, 1996).

These arguments suggest that the public's perception of the cost of withdrawing without attaining the intervention's political objectives might actually increase when ground troops are committed and as the number of troops deployed abroad or even killed in action increases. If the perceived costs of withdrawing have a greater effect on support for sustaining the fight than the estimated costs of persevering, aggregate public support for sustaining a foreign military intervention should *increase* with the state's level of military commitment, even after controlling for *ex-ante* levels of public support for a military intervention.

Hypothesis 3: Holding the expected benefits of military operations constant, the percentage of the population expressing support for sustaining a war effort will increase as the number of soldiers deployed increases or ground troops are engaged in combat.

Hypothesis 4: Holding the expected benefits of military operations constant, the percentage of the population expressing support for sustaining a war effort will increase as casualties rise.

Research Design

There are serious data constraints on studies of public support for ongoing military interventions. Many studies focus on explanatory variables that vary across time (e.g., duration or casualties) or explore the effect of differences in individual characteristics or individual *perceptions* of the costs, benefits, or likelihood of success within a single military intervention (Boettcher & Cobb, 2006; Gartner & Segura, 1998; Gelpi et al., 2005, 2006; Klarevas, 2002; Larson, 1996; Mueller, 1973). However, within individual military interventions there is typically little variation in factors like the state's principle policy objective (PPO) or whether the intervention is undertaken with or without allies.

Comparing across cases of military intervention, scholars can explore the effects of variation in spatial variables like the issues at stake, but there are not enough cases for cross-sectional multivariate analysis because there are only a small number of military operations for which there are reliable public opinion data. Several scholars have attempted to solve the small-*N* problem by pooling all available polling data from multiple interventions into a single dataset on which to conduct multivariate regression analyses (Eichenberg, 2005; Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson & Britton, 1998). Eichenberg, for example, creates a dataset from 1992 opinion poll questions for 22 cases in which the United States contemplated, threatened, or used force between 1981 and 2005. Jentleson & Britton (1998) pool data from 126 survey questions about public support for the use of military force in six cases. Sixteen questions ask about support for possible uses of force in Rwanda and North Korea. The remainder of the questions measure mean public support prior to, during, and even after uses of force in Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti. However, pooling data from across the course of multiple conflicts without controlling for when during each conflict public support was measured, or accounting for changes in the values of the variables across time,

TABLE 1 Percentage of respondents supporting the use of force prior to and during 12 U.S. and British military interventions

Intervention	Prewar support	Average intrawar support	Highest level of support	Lowest level of support	N
U.S. in Korea (1950–1953)	0.61	0.48	0.81	0.24	16
U.S. in Vietnam (1962–1973)	0.71	0.39	0.56	0.24	16
U.S. in Lebanon (1982–1984)	0.38	0.44	0.64	0.18	14
U.S. in Grenada (1983)	0.62	0.61	0.68	0.52	7
U.S. in Panama (1989–1990)	0.31	0.75	0.82	0.55	5
U.S. in Iraq/Kuwait (1991)	0.66	0.80	0.85	0.76	7
U.S. in Somalia (1992–1993)	0.72	0.56	0.86	0.33	15
U.S. in Kosovo (1999)	0.50	0.52	0.57	0.38	10
U.K. in Falklands/ Malvinas (1982)	0.71	0.79	0.86	0.71	5
U.S. in Afghanistan (2001–2002)	0.83	0.81	0.89	0.74	6
U.K. in Afghanistan (2001–2002)	0.74	0.68	0.70	0.65	6
U.K. in Kosovo (1999)	0.65	0.66	0.76	0.55	5

makes it impossible to draw inferences from the results. Eichenberg's results, for example, suggest that the number of casualties actually suffered in a conflict is positively correlated with public support for a war. But his dataset contains measures of public support from prior to and multiple points during each of the interventions *before* all of the casualties were incurred.

Table 1 displays aggregate public support for twelve American and British military interventions conducted between 1950 and 2002. It is clear from this table that there are significant disparities between prewar and intrawar support and between the highest and lowest levels of intrawar support for most operations. Moreover, because of large variations in the length of these interventions, the number of polling questions available for each case varies drastically. In Eichenberg's (2005) study, 385 of 1092 questions (35%) are from only 2 of his 22 cases. Fifty-five percent of Jentleson and Britton's questions are about public support for U.S. interventions in Somalia and Bosnia.

Another common approach has been to analyze the effect of question wording on the percentage of respondents expressing support for a proposed or ongoing military operation. Eichenberg (2005), Jentleson (1992), and Jentleson and Britton (1998) analyze correlations between factors like whether or not a question mentions casualties or the use of ground troops and variation in the aggregate level of support for an operation. When the questions refer to the *potential* for casualties, a protracted conflict, or the use of ground troops we are in the realm of hypotheticals. When the questions bring attention to actual casualties, the duration of a conflict, or the principle policy objective, it is not clear what conclusions we should draw from the fact that public support shifts wildly in response to question wording as the attributes of a conflict and conditions on the ground remain constant. Rather than being reflective of actual determinants of public support for or opposition to the ongoing conflict, these shifts seem to be indicative of either a public that is largely unaware of the facts on the ground until the administrator of the survey enlightens them or is using cues in the question wording as to how they "should" feel about the conflict. Either way, variations in public support that are responsive to variations in question wording, even as the attributes of a conflict remain constant, are not convincing evidence of a "rational" or "prudent" public.

One goal of this project is to determine whether public support for sustaining foreign military operations varies in a way that is consistent with variation in support for hypothetical or proposed military operations. After a military intervention has been initiated, do people actually support sustaining the fight under the conditions they think they would and call for withdrawal when conditions match those they consider unacceptable in hypothetical scenarios?

Data

I test my hypotheses with panel data from twelve foreign military interventions conducted by the United States or Britain since World War II. A foreign military intervention is defined as the deployment of at least 500 combat-ready, regular military troops (ground, air, or naval) to territory beyond a state's internationally recognized homeland in order to participate in coercive and/or hostile action against a target government or nonstate group for the purpose of achieving immediate-term political objectives (Sullivan, 2007). These twelve interventions are the only military operations conducted by these states since 1946 for which there are reliable data on public support for at least five distinct points in time during the course of the intervention.² The dependent variable and each independent variable is measured at between five and sixteen points in time during the course of each intervention, corresponding to the dates for which public opinion polls are available.³ There are, therefore, 112 total observations and an average of 9.3 observations per case.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for each observation is the percentage of respondents indicating support for sustaining the military intervention in progress on a particular date. To measure this variable, I first compiled a data set of every survey question that asked a nationally representative population sample about their support for the continued use of military force in one of the twelve military interventions. Survey questions were gathered from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research's *iPoll* archive, MORI-SRI, Gallup International, Gallup Britain, *The Times*, and ICM Research. Because there are significant variations in the frequency with which surveys were conducted, the number of polling questions available for each case, and the way in which questions were worded, the value of the dependent variable is constructed by averaging responses from surveys taken by several different polling organizations and from questions worded in a fairly wide variety of ways. After removing questions that were worded in a highly suggestive fashion, I created between 5 and 54 data points for each case by averaging the level of support from every question

²I have sufficient data for 9 of the 13 major U.S. military operations since World War II. I do not have data for U.S. interventions in the Dominican Republic (1965), Cambodia (1970), Haiti (1994), and Bosnia (1995). I do not believe that there is anything unique to these four interventions that would bias my results. Unfortunately, there is considerably less data on British public opinion. However, there is no evidence that British public opinion is systematically different than American public opinion; a U.K. dummy variable is not significant in any of the statistical models.

³The number of public opinion polls available for the U.S. interventions in Vietnam and Korea is much greater than the number of polls available for any of the other interventions due to their length. While the average number of observations per intervention is approximately 8, there are 36 observations for Korea and 52 for Vietnam. When all of the available data for these cases is included in the analyses, these two interventions account for over half of the observations in the dataset. If all of the cases were left in the analysis, there is the potential that any results would be largely driven by these two rather exceptional cases. In order to correct the imbalance, I used a statistical program to randomly select 16 observations for each case. Although I only present the results from analyses in which these cases account for 32 of a total of 112 observations, I attain practically identical results in an analysis using all 192 observations (results not shown).

within a 3- to 10-day period that directly asked about support for sustaining or escalating the country's military commitment. The percentage of respondents supportive of sustaining a foreign military intervention varies from a low of only 18% (American public support for sustaining operations in Lebanon in February 1985, approximately 500 days into the intervention) to a high of 89% (support for the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan twelve days after the initiation of operations against the Taliban).

Statistical Method

Data that vary across both time and space present a number of challenges for specification and estimation. The difficulty of choosing the correct statistical method is compounded in this case because the "units" are sampled rather than fixed, the number of observations per case varies, and the time between observations is not constant. Because there may be no perfect method for dealing with such data, I estimate the models using random-effects generalized least squares but test the robustness of the results by estimating the models using ordinary least squares (clustering by case and weighting each observation by the inverse of the number of poll questions available for that case) and ordinary least squares with panel corrected standard errors (Beck, 2001; Beck & Katz, 1997). The random-effects model takes a weighted average of the effect of a variable across time within an intervention case and the effect of the variable on variation in public support between cases (Hardin, 1996). Unlike a fixed-effects model, this allows me to estimate the effects of variables that are constant within an intervention. Fortunately, the results are quite robust to changes in the estimation procedure, suggesting that the estimates are more than just artifacts of a particular statistical method.

Key Explanatory Variables

TROOPS is an estimate of the number of troops deployed to the area of operations on the poll date. The number of troops deployed at any one time varies from 1200 to 542,400. The natural log of *TROOPS* is employed in the analyses because a one unit increase in the number of troops committed is expected to have a diminishing effect on public support as the total number of troops deployed becomes larger.

GROUND TROOPS is a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not the intervening state had combat troops on the ground on the date of the survey. Ground troops had been deployed when public support was measured in approximately 87% of the observations.

CASUALTIES TO DATE is an estimate of the number of American or British troops that had died in the course of the intervention as of the date on which public support for sustaining the military intervention was measured. This variable varies from zero to 47,968. Data on troop commitments and casualties are drawn from the Military Intervention by Powerful States (MIPS) dataset (Sullivan, 2004).⁴

Control Variables: Costs, Benefits, and the Probability of Success

PRE-WAR SUPPORT measures aggregate public support for the use of military force immediately prior to the initiation of each intervention. Following a procedure analogous to the one used to construct the dependent variable, this variable is created by averaging the percentage of the public indicating support or approval for the use of military force from every survey question that asks about support for the military intervention within the 7-day period before

⁴The full data set is of all major power interventions in the post-World War II era. Data are available online at <http://tsulli.myweb.uga.edu/>.

troops are deployed. Data come from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research's *iPoll* archive, MORI-SRI, Gallup International, Gallup Britain, *The Times*, and ICM Research.

Including a control for the initial level of public support for a proposed intervention allows me to minimize endogeneity concerns by controlling for the possibility that pre-war support both predicts subsequent levels of support and drives political decisions about the nature and magnitude of an intervention. At the same time, this variable directly tests whether there is a correlation between the initial level of support for an operation, which is presumably based on cost-benefit analyses of the proposed intervention, and actual levels of support for the ongoing operation when the intervention is no longer in the realm of the "hypothetical."

UNILATERAL is a dichotomous variable indicating that the intervening state was fighting without allies. Prior to the initiation of a foreign intervention, public support for the use of military force tends to be significantly higher when the public expects the intervention to be undertaken with the assistance of allies (Eichenberg, 2005; Sobel, 1997; Kay, 2000; Kull & Destler, 1999; Kull, 1995). Multilateral interventions may be more popular because fighting with allies is expected to lower costs, because the public believes allied assistance increases the probability of success, or because the willingness of allies to assist in the war effort increases the perceived legitimacy of the mission. However, like the commitment of ground troops and large troop deployments, intervening without the support of allies may magnify concerns about the effect of abandoning the war effort on a state's reputation for strength and resolve and bolster public support for sustaining the fight. The intervening state was receiving assistance from allies when public support was measured in approximately 85% of the observations.

CASUALTY RATE records the average number of soldiers killed in action per day in the 2-week period immediately preceding the date on which public support for an operation was measured. In addition to some awareness of cumulative casualties, poll respondents may be most cognizant of the rate of casualties in a fairly short window of time right before they are asked whether or not they support sustaining the military intervention (Gartner & Segura, 1998). I do not assume respondents know how many soldiers are dying per day, only that they will have a rough sense of whether casualty rates are relatively high or low from media reports and public debate. Although it is difficult to anticipate how individuals use information about events on the ground to make judgments about the progress and likely outcome of a military intervention, there is some evidence that the public uses information about cumulative casualties or casualty rates as indicators of how well or how poorly a military operation is going (Boettcher & Cobb, 2006; Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; Voeten & Brewer, 2006). An increase in the rate at which friendly troops are killed in action, or a sudden spike in casualties, may decrease public optimism about the progress and eventual outcome of a military engagement. The daily casualty rate varies from 0 to 83.2 (U.S. in Korea in December, 1950). The median number of casualties per day across all observations is only 0.08.

DURATION is a count of the number of days that have elapsed from the initiation of the intervention to the date on which public opinion was surveyed (*poll date*). The public may also use the length of a military engagement as a measure of the progress of a campaign (Voeten & Brewer, 2006). All else equal, I expect the public to become less optimistic about the eventual success of a military intervention as time goes on. Duration varies from zero (when the dependent variable measures support on the day troops were deployed) to 3,307 days.

FOREIGN AGGRESSION is a dichotomous variable indicating that the principle policy objective (PPO) of an intervention is to counter, contain, or deter an aggressive and/or expansionist adversary. There is strong evidence that individuals are more likely to support a military

operation and to tolerate casualties if they believe in the importance of the issues stake (Eichenberg, 2005; Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; Gelpi et al., 2005, 2006; Jentleson & Britton, 1998; Jentleson, 1992; Kay, 2000; Larson & Savych, 2005). While there is no consensus about how to anticipate the utility the public will assign to various missions, most scholars adopt objective categories similar to Jentleson's (1992) distinction between "foreign policy restraint" (FPR) objectives and "internal political conflict" (IPC) objectives. Jentleson found that average public support was generally higher when a U.S. military operation had an objective he considered foreign policy restraint, and when a polling question implied that the objective was foreign policy restraint rather than internal political conflict. Results from a follow-up study by Jentleson and Britton (1998), and from studies by Eichenberg (2005) and Kay (2000), also provide some evidence that the FPR/IPC distinction is correlated with public support for or opposition to the use of military force.

Based on this research, I expect prewar levels of support for interventions targeting aggressive foreign adversaries to be higher than prewar levels of support for foreign military operations aimed at internal political change. But even after controlling for the level of support for an intervention prior to initiation, support for sustaining military interventions against aggressive foreign adversaries is likely to remain high because withdrawing from a FPR intervention means backing down from an attempt to restrain an aggressive adversary.

FOREIGN AGGRESSION is zero when the state intervenes in a predominantly internal conflict over political authority. The U.S. interventions in Vietnam (1962–1973), Iraq (1991), Kosovo (1999), and Afghanistan (2001), and the British interventions in the Falklands/Malvinas (1982), Kosovo (1999), and Afghanistan (2001) are all coded as targeting foreign aggression. U.S. interventions in Lebanon (1982–1984), Grenada (1983), and Somalia (1992–1993) are coded as interventions into internal political conflicts. The U.S. intervention in Korea (1950–1953) is coded as targeting foreign aggression while the primary objective was to expel North Korea from South Korea, but changes to internal political conflict in October 1950, when the U.S. changes its primary war aim to reunifying the country (Ciment, 1999; Clodfelter, 2002; Weiss, 1999). The U.S. intervention in Panama (1989–1990) is coded as targeting foreign aggression while the primary political objective is protecting U.S. citizens and rights of passage in the canal zone, but changes to internal political conflict in December 1989 when the United States decides to remove Noriega from power (Bercovitch & Fretter, 2004; Brogan, 1998; Clodfelter, 2002; Weisburd, 1997).

Results

Table 2 compares four model specifications, all estimated with random effects generalized least squares regression.⁵ Model 1 is a baseline model that predicts aggregate American or British public support for sustaining a foreign military intervention based on prewar support for the use of military force and the number of American or British soldiers who have died in the conflict as of the date that the polls were conducted. Although cumulative casualties are a significant predictor of public support, this model only explains 16% of the variation across time within interventions and 49% of the variation in public support across military interventions. Model 2, which includes measures of the level of military commitment made by the intervening state and the nature of the state's primary political

⁵The appendix contains descriptive statistics, a correlation matrix for all the explanatory variables, and Table A.2 comparing the results of models estimated by two alternative methods. Model 4b is estimated with OLS with panel correct standard errors (PCSE) and panel-level heteroskedastic disturbances. Model 4c is estimated with ordinary least squares clustering on intervention and weighting each observation by the inverse of the number of observations available for that case. The coefficient and standard error estimates from all three models are remarkably consistent.

TABLE 2 Aggregate support for sustaining military operations: Results comparing four different model specifications

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Prewar Support	0.330 (0.311)	0.102 (0.106)	0.103 (0.099)	-0.037 (0.093)
Casualties to Date	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	
Ln(Troops)		0.030** (0.015)	0.030** (0.015)	0.038*** (0.013)
Ground Troops		0.066 (0.063)	0.066 (0.061)	0.142** (0.068)
Unilateral		0.147*** (0.031)	0.147*** (0.031)	0.126*** (0.020)
Foreign Aggression		0.144*** (0.035)	0.143*** (0.032)	0.161*** (0.052)
Daily Casualty Rate			0.000 (0.001)	0.001** (0.000)
Duration				-0.000*** (0.000)
Year				0.003*** (0.001)
Constant	0.447** (0.208)	0.122 (0.140)	0.123 (0.143)	-6.160*** (1.733)
R ² within	0.16	0.26	0.26	0.37
R ² between	0.49	0.84	0.84	0.92
Observations	112	112	112	112
# of interventions	12	12	12	12

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

objective, explains 26% of the variation across time and 84% of the variation in support for sustaining military interventions across intervention cases. In Model 3, I add the daily casualty rate. Finally, Model 4 substitutes a count of the number of days that have elapsed from the initiation of the intervention for cumulative casualties and adds a control for the calendar year in which public support for sustaining the military operation was measured. I do not include both *DURATION* and *CASUALTIES TO DATE* in one model because the variables are highly collinear. This model explains approximately 92% of the variation in public support for sustaining foreign military operations across cases and accounts for 37% of across time variation. A BIC goodness-of-fit test for non-nested models suggests that duration is a much better predictor of public willingness to sustain the fight in these military operations than cumulative casualties.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, public support does appear to decline as casualties mount. Cumulative casualties have a significant effect on public willingness to continue fighting in every model in which the variable is included. However, the substantive effect of casualties is small. In Models 2 and 3, support for sustaining a military intervention declines by less than one percent for every one thousand soldiers killed in action. The duration of a military intervention as of the day public support is surveyed also has a statistically significant effect on the percentage of the public inclined to support continuing a war effort. Model 4 predicts

that support for sustaining a foreign military intervention will decrease by approximately 1% every two months. The average military engagement will have majority support until approximately two years and nine months of fighting. I will use Model 4 when discussing the substantive effects of the variables because the duration measure appears to capture the effect of cumulative casualties, but have greater explanatory power than casualties alone. I will discuss the possible explanations for the finding that cumulative casualties has little substantive effect on public support for persisting in a war effort below.

Discussion

While it is not surprising that public support for a military intervention declines over time, the *lack* of a relationship between prewar support for the use of force and support for sustaining a military intervention after initiation is remarkable. There is no evidence that prewar levels of support for a military intervention have any effect on intrawar levels of support for sustaining that intervention. This finding has interesting implications. The absence of a correlation between prewar levels of support for an operation, when the intervention is still in the realm of the “hypothetical,” and actual levels of support for an ongoing operation, suggests that there is a considerable disconnect between what people think they want and what they will actually support after troops have been committed. While we might expect the public to rally when the nation goes to war, there is no evidence that the level of support for the use of military force simply increases after initiation. Instead, public willingness to persist in a war effort appears to be based on a calculation that is fundamentally different than the calculation that determines support and opposition to proposed uses of force. Members of the public appear to base their support for sustaining a military intervention on considerations beyond their prewar estimates of the value of the issues at stake (i.e., benefits), the probability of success, and the cost of the military effort.

The results presented in Table 2 provide strong evidence that the extent of the military commitment is one of the factors that determines public opinion about the utility of maintaining a foreign military intervention. Hypotheses 1 can be rejected and Hypothesis 3 is supported. The percentage of respondents expressing support for sustaining the state’s military commitment *increases* as the number of troops deployed increases and when ground troops are engaged in combat. Model 4 predicts that, all else equal, public support for maintaining a military intervention will be at about 45% when only 1200 troops have been deployed. A slight majority of the public will be willing to continue fighting when 4500 troops have been committed and almost 58% of the public is supportive when the median number of troops (25,000) have been deployed. Support for sustaining an intervention is also 14% higher on average in interventions that involve ground troops compared with military interventions that employ only air and sea power. In fact, the model predicts that a solid majority of the public (59%) will support sustaining operations at the mean duration and troop commitment level when ground troops have been deployed. Support drops to just below 44% for sustaining interventions that do not involve a ground troop commitment but are average in every other way.

Perhaps more surprisingly, U.S. and British leaders can also anticipate higher levels of public support when they use military force *without* the support of allies and when casualty rates increase. When all other variables are set to their mean values, 67% of the public is expected to support sustaining a unilateral military intervention. The model predicts that only 55% of the public will support persisting in a multilateral military intervention at mean casualty and troop commitment levels. While cumulative casualties have a statistically significant but small negative effect on willingness to sustain a military intervention, the

casualty rate in the 2-week period before a poll was conducted has a substantively small but significant positive effect on support for sustaining the fight. When the casualty rate increases from an average of one soldier dying a day (the median) to an average of twenty three soldiers dying a day (the 90th percentile) support for continuing military operations is expected to increase by less than 2%.

It is possible that decision makers are more like to commit ground troop, deploy large numbers of troops, or initiate an intervention without the support of allies when public support for the use of force is high. However, the number of troops deployed, the deployment of ground combat troops, and unilateral intervention are all positively correlated with support for sustaining foreign interventions even after controlling for initial levels of public support. Prewar levels of public support for an operation may affect decisions about the nature and magnitude of an intervention, but this does not seem to be the reason for the positive correlation between the level of commitment and support for sustaining operations.

Despite a common perception that democratic publics have become less and less willing to tolerate casualties, willingness to sustain military operations appears to have increased over time. In 1950, about 45% of the population could have been expected to support sustaining the “average” military intervention (i.e., mean troop commitment levels, casualties, etc.). By 1990, predicted levels of support jump to 57%. And by 2006, Model 4 would predict that 63% of the public would be in favor of continuing to prosecute a war when its attributes approximated the mean of the model’s other covariates.

Finally, support for military action that targets aggressive and/or expansionist adversaries is approximately 16% higher than support for sustaining military interventions into predominately civil conflicts over political authority. When all other variables are set to their mean values, only 47% of the public will support sustaining interventions into civil conflicts, but 66% of the public will be willing to persist in foreign military operations that target aggressive foreign adversaries.

Support for Sustaining Operation Iraqi Freedom

It is unlikely that the model presented above includes every variable that influences public willingness to sustain ongoing military operations. But the model is useful to the extent that it can predict aggregate levels of support for foreign military interventions based on objective attributes of a conflict, rather than knowledge about individuals’ subjective beliefs about a military mission’s utility, cost, and likelihood of success. The current military intervention in Iraq, Operation Iraqi Freedom, provides an excellent opportunity to test the ability of the model to predict public support for an ongoing military operation not included in the original sample. Academics, the media, and policymakers have all focused considerable attention on the erosion of American public support for the current war in Iraq. But the more puzzling phenomenon might be that a solid majority of the public remained committed to sustaining military operations in Iraq for almost three years despite the fact that the human and material costs of the intervention far exceeded initial expectations and U.S. forces failed to find any evidence to corroborate the major justification for the war—an Iraqi WMD program (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003; Kull et al., 2003, 2004; Record & Terrill, 2004).

The American public certainly did not give much indication that it would tolerate a large, extended U.S. ground occupation of Iraq. In the months leading up to the U.S. intervention in Iraq, public support for the use of military force varied widely, but in predictable ways. Approximately 72% of the public expressed support for the use of special forces or commandos to remove Saddam Hussein’s regime and between 66% to 68% of the public

favored air strikes.⁶ But public support for the use of ground troops was more equivocal. In January, just 51% of the public responded favorably to the prospect of a “large number of U.S. ground troops,” in February only 40% supported military action if it resulted in “thousands of American casualties,” and in March just 47% approved of intervening “without significant UN or international support.” None of the major polling organizations even asked if the public would support invading Iraq if the regime was not developing weapons of mass destruction, but just 52% of those polls supported “military action” against Iraq if the UN did not concur with the Bush administration’s assertion that Iraq had chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the administration was able to persuade a substantial proportion of the public that removing Saddam Hussein was vital to U.S. national security and in the seven days leading up to the March 19 initiation of U.S. Operation Iraqi Freedom polls showed an average of 61% of the public in favor of the military intervention (Kull et al., 2003, 2004).

Once the United States initiated military operations on March 19, 2003, public support for the intervention shot up and for several months approximately 70% of the public expressed their approval of a military engagement that was not sanctioned by the United Nations and involved large numbers of ground troops and a substantial risk of American casualties. Figure 1 displays actual and predicted levels of support for sustaining Operation Iraqi Freedom. The first line connects data points marked by diamonds indicating the percentage of respondents who expressed support for keeping U.S. troops in Iraq in nationwide polls conducted by several prominent polling organizations between July 2003 and August 2007 (ACTUAL SUPPORT). A second line shows the percentage of the public indicating that “. . . considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States” they thought the “war with Iraq was worth fighting” in polls conducted by the same polling organizations. A final line connects triangular data points indicating the predicted level of support for sustaining an intervention with the characteristics of OIF based on Model 4 from Table 2 above.

Not surprisingly, the model of support for sustaining foreign military interventions does not perfectly predict levels of support for Operation Iraqi Freedom. In particular, the model predicts the linear trend of support exceptionally well, but misses the volatility of actual public attitudes and appears to begin systematically overestimating public willingness to sustain military operations after January 2007. But model predictions are close enough to suggest that public support over the course of an intervention does vary in predictable ways and that the variables in the model capture important determinants of public commitment to sustaining foreign military interventions. Even without accounting for significant political or military developments on the ground in Iraq, changes in domestic political conditions in the United States, or shifts in the tone or intensity of media coverage of the war in Iraq, the predicted level of support for sustaining military operations in Iraq is rarely more than 5 points from expressed levels of support. The results also demonstrate that Operation Iraqi Freedom is not a unique case. Levels of public support for sustaining OIF could be anticipated based on patterns of public support revealed in military interventions conducted by both the United States and the United Kingdom—before, during, and after Vietnam—and both before and after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

⁶All public opinion data on Operation Iraqi Freedom comes from surveys retrieved between September 25 and October 3, 2007 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut (<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>). Surveys were conducted by the Associated Press, ABC News, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, Gallup, Newsweek, the New York Times, Pew Research Center, Time Magazine, USA Today, the Washington Post, and Zogby International.

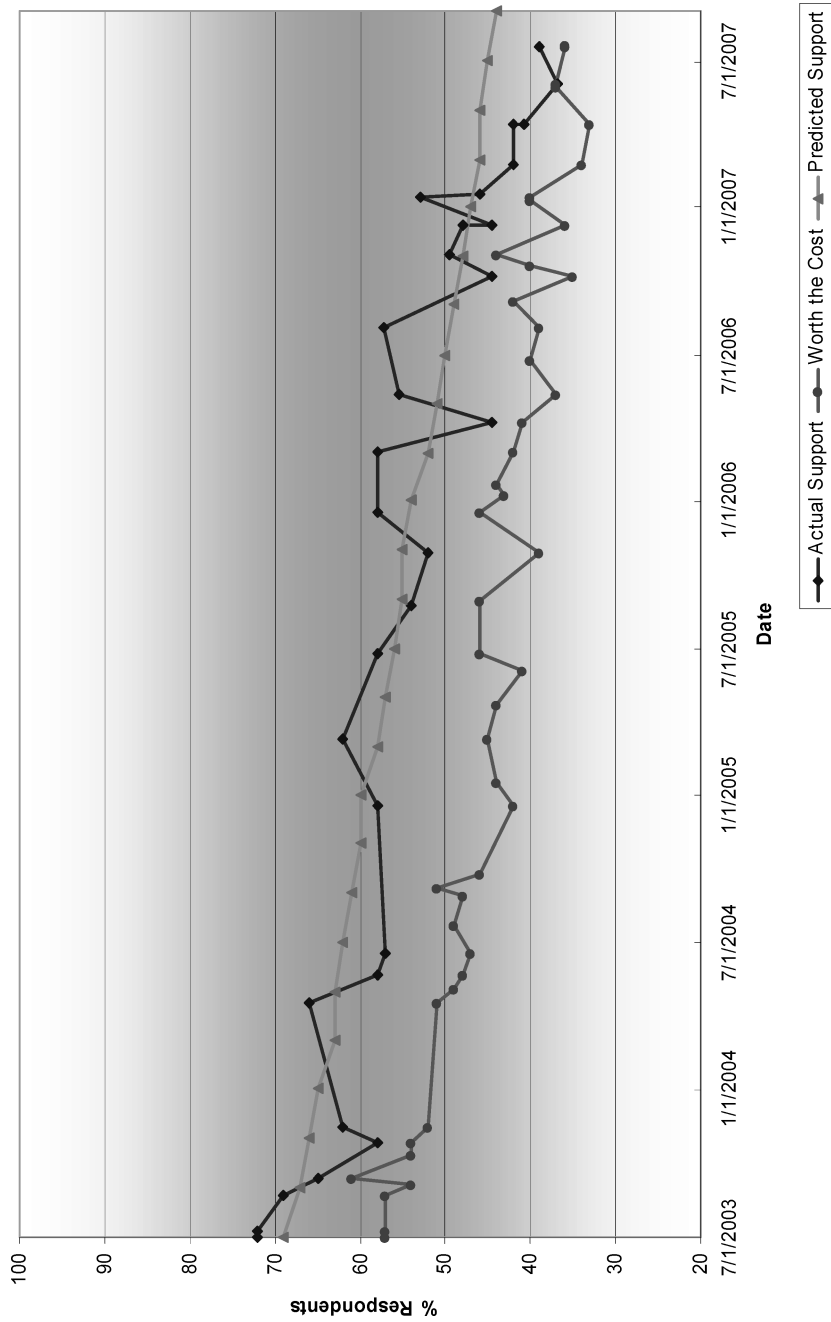


FIGURE 1 Public support for sustaining Operation Iraqi Freedom.

A second trend is also apparent in Figure 1. For most of the duration of the conflict, a significantly greater proportion of the American public has expressed a willingness to maintain military operations in Iraq than has expressed a belief that the war has been worth fighting. Although it is difficult to draw conclusions from the aggregate data, the fact that individuals are willing to sustain a war effort long after expected costs outweigh expected benefits suggests that public concern about the costs of withdrawing from a conflict can be a more important determinant of willingness to persevere than sensitivity to the costs of war-fighting. A significant proportion of the population appears unwilling to cut its losses and withdraw from a conflict in which they acknowledge the costs have *already* outweighed the expected benefits. Future research could explore whether individuals are concerned about the tangible losses associated with terminating military operations, worried about potential damage to America's image or reputation abroad, or compelled by a psychological need to avoid an outcome that would suggest lives and resources had been sacrificed in vain.

Figure 1 illustrates that there is a significant percentage of the American public that believes military operations in Iraq have not been worth the cost but is nonetheless not supportive of withdrawing from the conflict. This phenomenon may help account for the apparent contradiction between the results of this study—which finds that cumulative casualties have a substantively insignificant effect on support for sustaining military operations—and the results of a vast literature that consistently finds that casualties have a significant negative effect on wartime public support. As a number of scholars have suggested, it appears that disapproval of a war effort, which can encompass beliefs that initiating the use of force was not justified, that the costs have outweighed the benefits, or that the government is poorly managing the war effort, do not necessarily translate into calls for withdrawal (Larson, 1996; Kull & Destler, 1999; Schwarz, 1994).⁷

Conclusion

When individuals are asked to express their support or opposition to *hypothetical* or *proposed* military engagements, they are more likely to support the use of force when the military intervention would be short, when it would not involve ground troops, and when it would be undertaken with the support of allies (Eichenberg et al., 2006; Kay, 2000; Klarevas, 2002; Kohut & Toth, 1994; Kull & Ramsay, 2000; Kull & Destler, 1999; Kull, 1995; Richman, 1993). Studies that have gauged the effects of *question wording* on support for military operations have also found that people *believe* they prefer quick, multilateral interventions that do not require the deployment of ground troops (Eichenberg, 2005). Sobel (1997) claims that “unilateral U.S. armed involvement is anathema to the people and politicians alike; intervention must be a multilateral effort” (p. 38). And, according to Eichenberg, “Clearly, Americans are more leery of committing troops than they are of using airpower” (2005, 158). However, once an actual military intervention has been initiated, I find that the public is significantly more likely to support sustaining operations that involve ground troops than interventions that rely solely on air, long-range, or sea power and that public support is higher when a state uses military force without assistance from allies. Moreover, the public is significantly more willing to sustain a foreign military engagement when 75,000, 100,000, or even 500,000 troops have been committed to the fight than they are to support continuing military operations that involve fewer than ten thousand troops. Neither the risk of casualties nor the danger of getting bogged down in a prolonged ground engagement dampens public support for sustaining the fight.

⁷It may also be that the casualty patterns in some wars create a high degree of uncertainty about future casualties so the public has difficulty using cumulative casualties to date to predict future costs (Gartner, 2008a, this issue).

What explains public willingness to sustain large-scale ground combat operations without the assistance of allies? One could argue that the causal arrow points the other way; perhaps political leaders are more likely to commit ground troops, to deploy more troops, and to intervene without allies when public support is high. Although this is an intuitively appealing explanation for the results, it is not supported by the data. Unilateral intervention, relatively high troop levels, and ground troop commitments have a positive effect on public support for ongoing military operations, even after controlling for initial levels of public support. In fact, interventions that are initiated without the support of allies are associated with lower prewar levels of support, but greater public support for sustaining operations once they are initiated.

I argue that, as a result of concerns about the tangible and intangible losses associated with withdrawing from a military engagement once it is underway, a significant number of individuals that would not have supported *initiating* the use of force at a given set of cost and risk parameters will support *sustaining* an ongoing operation with those parameters. But the public response to war initiation is not simply a temporary burst of enthusiasm analogous to the brief rally effect presidents frequently enjoy when they initiate the use of military force. Instead, public willingness to persevere in the face of mounting costs appears to vary with the extent of the state's military commitment.

The results of this analysis have a number of implications. This is the first empirical study to use cross-sectional time-series data from actual military operations to explore how the attributes of a military intervention affect public attitudes about continuing to prosecute a war over time. The existing literature on public attitudes toward the use of force tends to assume that prewar and intrawar support are determined by the same basic calculation. However, this assumption ignores the costs and psychological impact of withdrawing from military interventions once troops are committed. Empirically, I demonstrate that neither researchers nor policymakers should draw inferences about support for sustaining ongoing military operations from prewar opinion data. In fact, some of the key factors that increase cost estimates and depress prewar support for a proposed military operation also appear to strengthen the public's determination to persevere once a military engagement is underway.

U.S. policymakers often express the belief that they are constrained by the need for public support for the use of force abroad (Feaver & Gelpi, 2004). Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, for example, has stated that experience has led the U.S. to conclude that it is unwise to use troops in combat without substantial domestic support (Holsti, 1996). The Powell Doctrine on the conditions under which the United States should use military force emphasizes using overwhelming force and only committing troops with the full support of the American people (Powell, 1992, 1993). But the results of this study suggest that the Powell doctrine is redundant. Policymakers may have only a limited ability to rally support for the use of military force prior to initiation. However, if overwhelming force is committed, public support for sustaining the troop commitment is likely to follow.

The results of this study add to a growing body of literature that rejects a common perception that democratic publics are casualty-phobic (Feaver & Gelpi, 2004; Gelpi et al., 2005, 2006; Larson, 1996; Larson & Savych, 2005). But democratic leaders are still well-advised to proceed with caution. Although their constituents may prefer persevering to withdrawing from a costly military intervention, wars that exact high tolls in blood and treasure may still adversely affect the political fortunes of decision makers. As the case of Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrates, the public is capable of continuing to support a war effort even as more and more individuals come to believe the war has not been worth the cost.

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APPENDIX TABLE A1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Intrawar Public Support	0.566	0.178	0.18	0.89
Prewar Support	0.616	0.138	0.31	0.83
Casualties to Date	832.66	15348.07	0	54302
Ground Troops	0.866	0.342	0	1
Ln(Troops)	10.08	2.18	7.09	13.20
Unilateral	0.152	0.360	0	1
Foreign Aggression	0.518	0.502	0	1
Daily Casualty Rate	8.18	16.19	0	83.22
Duration in days	543.56	885.87	0	3307
Year	1986.848	17.038	1950	2006
		Casualties to date	Ground	Ln (troops)
Prewar	1.0000			Ln
Casualties to date	0.2156	1.0000		(troops)
Ground	0.1882	0.2140	1.0000	
Ln(troops)	0.3983	0.6692	0.2525	1.0000
Unilateral	-0.186	-0.2298	0.1663	-0.2418
Aggression	0.3916	0.1093	-0.379	0.2667
Daily casualties	0.1251	0.4961	0.1992	-0.1396
Duration	0.2071	0.8856	0.2061	-0.1574
			0.2329	0.4443
				1.0000
				0.0970
				1.0000
				0.2329
				0.4443
				1.0000

APPENDIX TABLE A2 Sustaining military operations: Results comparing three methods of estimation

Variable	Model 4a Random-effects GLS	Model 4b Heteroskedastic PCSE	Model 4c OLS clustered pweights
Prewar Support	-0.037 (0.093)	0.013 (0.094)	0.027 (0.079)
Ln(Troops)	0.038*** (0.013)	0.032*** (0.006)	0.032*** (0.005)
Ground Troops	0.142** (0.068)	0.153*** (0.032)	0.119* (0.057)
Unilateral	0.126*** (0.020)	0.126*** (0.023)	0.137*** (0.022)
Foreign Aggression	0.161*** (0.052)	0.137*** (0.031)	0.120*** (0.024)
Daily Casualty Rate	0.001** (0.000)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)
Duration	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)
Year	0.003*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)
Constant	-6.160*** (1.733)	-7.467*** (2.154)	-8.543*** (1.657)
Observations	112	112	112
Number of interventions	12	12	0.74
R ²			

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.