Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam[1]

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During the last twenty years the United States has found itself involved in two lengthy wars on the fringes of Asia. Because of their militarily limited and politically complex nature, these wars are often seen to have put a peculiar strain on the American public: Compared to World War II, the enemy is less obviously "evil," progress in battle is more difficult to measure and comprehend, the American entrance into the war is less easily rationalized, and the end of the war is more likely to prove puzzling and unsatisfying. At the same time popular support influences the conduct of the conflict, since attitudes toward the war at home may be reflected in tactics on the battlefield.

Using poll data, this study will attempt to assess trends in support by the American public for the two wars and to compare the wars with each other and with earlier wars on this dimension.[2]

A number of hypotheses can be generated about what shape trends in support for a war should take. A most plausible proposition, at least for the wars in Korea and Vietnam, might suggest a continually declining level of support. As the war drags on, perhaps, more and more Americans become disillusioned with the war and their support changes to opposition.

An alternative hypothesis would suggest increasing support for the war. The public, horrified at the start by the thought of war, soon becomes propagandized by the government into supporting its war policy. Furthermore, as costs and casualties mount, opposition to the war becomes more difficult since such a position seems callously to write off the sacrifices of the combat dead. Thus the war might gain a certain "popularity" in order to justify these sacrifices.[3]

A third hypothesis is that no general trends in war support are likely. Rather the excitable American public swings capriciously from support to opposition and back again depending on the events of the hour. Thus, a military setback will send much of the public into opposition while good news from the battlefield or negotiating table causes support to blossom.[4]

As the results of this study will show, none of these three hypotheses is entirely adequate.

I. Measuring War Support: the "Mistake" Question

For the purposes of this analysis, it was necessary to find a poll question that tapped a sort of generalized support for the war and that was asked repeatedly in both wars. Only one question fit these requirements really well: Gallup's query during the Korean War, "Do you think the United States made a mistake in going into the war in Korea, or not?" and his Vietnamese War version: "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?"

There were several variations on this theme, especially during the Korean War. Sometimes the question was put in positive form: "Did we do the right thing?" rather than "did we make a mistake?" Sometimes added phrases helped to boost the percentage expressing support while at other times a variant seemed to lower support. Rather than obfuscating the patterns of support, these question variants, used with care, can help to broaden the trend analysis.

Whatever the variation, however, the question always asks for the respondent's general opinion on the wisdom of the war venture itself and thus it seems to be a sound measure of general support for the war. At the same time it says little about policy preferences at any given moment: Should the war be escalated or de-escalated? Nor does it give much indication of

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[2] The Survey Research Center data used in this report were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. Unless otherwise indicated all other data are taken from materials supplied by the Roper Public Opinion Research Center, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

[3] This is a possible interpretation of William Gladstone's observation that all English wars gained popular approval within eighteen months of their commencement. See Kenneth N. Waltz, "Electoral Punishment and Foreign Policy Crises," in James N. Rosenau (ed.), *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 272.

[4] Such fluctuations have been stressed by Gabriel Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1950). Clausewitz once observed that "Public opinion is won through great victories." Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority* (Chicago: Markham, 1970), pp. 15–16.

how the respondent feels the incumbent President is handling the war at the moment. For various reasons, questions like these are far less satisfactory than the "mistake" question for the purpose of this study. They receive separate examination in Section VII.

II. Elements of Support for the Korean War

The responses for the support question and its variants for the Korean War period are given in rather elaborate form in Table 1.[5] The basic question asked by Gallup (American Institute of Public Opinion—AIPO) is given in Column A. Included with it is the Survey Research Center (SRC) question asked in 1950 and 1952, "Do you think we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Korea last summer (two years ago) or should we have stayed out?" The positive-negative "right thing"—"mistake" comparison seems to make little difference, as can be seen in a comparison of responses to polls conducted at approximately the same time. The Minnesota Poll asked a support question quite similar to the AIPO-SRC version and, despite the limited sampling area, generated similar responses (as displayed in column D).

In the first years of the war, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) included an additional element in its formulation of the question: The respondent was asked if he felt the United States was right to send troops "to stop the Communist invasion of South Korea" (see Column B). Clearly, the added reference to the "Communist invasion" was an important cue to the respondents, for the NORC question generally found a 15 to 20 percentage point increase in "support" over that indicated by the AIPO-SRC version and a noticeable drop in the percentage without opinion.

The words "Communist invasion" seem to have sounded more of a clarion call than did the words "defend South Korea." When the AIPO question was first asked, it included these latter words (the items with the b superscript in Column A) but with no apparent impact on war support—compare especially the Column A entries for December 1950 and February 1951. This can also be seen in the responses to a question asked in Minnesota early in the war and documented in Table 2. *A desire to defend the Koreans was not a major motivating force in opinion on the war,* despite the leading tone of the question.

These data suggest somewhat conflicting observations. On the one hand, support for the war was clearly tied to the anti-Communist spirit in America at the time. To generate a sort of war fever, one merely had to toss the words, "Communist invasion" into the discussion. On the other hand, the antagonism toward Communism was not entirely built into the response to the war, because Americans had to be reminded of it before their anti-Communism was fully activated. To an extent these notions conform at the international level to the survey findings of Samuel Stouffer from the domestic level: While Americans were devotedly and illiberally anti-Communist in the early 1950s, there was in no sense a national anxiety over the issue.[6] There was concern, but not hysteria.

Another formulation of the question was asked by NORC in the last years of the war (and into the postwar period, a concern of Section X). In the NORC reformulation, the mention of the Communists was eliminated, as well as the reference in the AIPO-SRC version to the idea that the United States or "we" somehow "made a mistake" or "did wrong." The respondent was simply asked if he thought the war "worth fighting." This elegantly bland formulation (Column C) seems to have lowered "support" for the war substantially below that tapped by the other queries.

These findings suggest another manipulable element in measured war support: a loyalty to governmental policy, a reluctance to admit that "we" might have erred. Again, however, this element produces more response impact when it is explicitly included in the stimulus. It is clear that *support for the war comes not simply from those who find war a congenial way of solving problems, but also from those who support it because, right or wrong, it is "ours."* This theme, an important one, is developed at greater length in Section VII.

In summary, these considerations suggest that *it is clearly nonsense to designate the amount of "support" for the war by a single number.* The question, "How many people support the

[5] The data in Table 1 came from the following surveys. In column A: AIPO 460, 469, 471, 473, 474; SRC S-101; AIPO 476, 478, 487; SRC 1952 Election Study; AIPO 506, 507, 510. In Column B: NORC 287, 288, 295, 298, 300, 302, 307, 312, 314, 315, 320, 327, 348. In Column C: NORC 332, 333, 334, 339, 341, 347, 349, 365, 393. In Column D: Minn. 89, 92, 94, 95, 97, 99, 104, 111, 116, poll in *Polls,* Spring 1966, p. 76. For other analyses of some of these data, see William A. Scott and Stephen B. Withey, *The United States and the United Nations* (New York: Manhattan, 1958), pp. 77–81; Joel T. Campbell and Leila S. Cain, "Public Opinion and the Outbreak of War," 9 *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 318–29 (September 1965); Waltz, *op. cit.;* and Hazel Erskine, "The Polls: Is War a Mistake?" 34 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 134–50 (Spring 1970).

[6] Samuel A. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), ch. 3.

Table 1. Support and Opposition in the Korean War

A: "Do you think the United States made a mistake in going into the war in Korea, or not?" (AIPO)
B: "Do you think the United States was right or wrong in sending American troops to stop the Communis invasion of South Korea?" (NORC)
C: "As things stand now, do you feel that the war in Korea has been (was) worth fighting, or not?" (NORC
D: "Looking back over the Korean War since it started last June (in June last year, last year, two years ago, ir June of 1950) would you say *now* that you feel the United States (we) did the right thing in sending Americar forces to Korea?" (Minn.)

For each question the numbers represent, in order, the percentages in support of the war (Pro), in opposition (Con), and with no opinion (DK).

	A			B			C			D		
	Pro	Con	DK	Pro	Con	DK	Pro	Con	DK	Pro	Con	DK
July 1950				75[a]	21	4						
August 1950	66[b]	19	15									
Inchon												
September 1950				81	13	6						
China enters												
December 1950	39[b]	49	12	55	36	9				47[d]	42	11
February 1951	41	49	10	57	32	11						
March 1951	43	44	13	60	30	10				46[d]	38	16
MacArthur recalled												
April 1951	45	37	18	63	27	10						
May 1951				59	30	11						
Early June 1951	42[c]	41	17							39[d]	46	15
Mid June 1951	39	43	18									
Peace talks begin												
July 1951										46[d]	43	11
Early August 1951	47	42	11									
Late August 1951				60	30	10						
September 1951										52	35	13
Early December 1951				54	36	9				45	39	16
Early January 1952				54	34	9						
March 1952	37	50	13	50	40	10						
June 1952				55	38	7				41	43	16
September 1952	39[c]	41	20									
Early October 1952	36	46	18									
Late October 1952	37	42	20				31	56	12			
Eisenhower elected												
November 1952							34	58	8	48	38	14
Ike visit to Korea												
January 1953	50	36	14				39	53	9			
April 1953							36	55	9			
Late April 1953										52	36	12
Late June 1953							32	58	9			
Talks resume, truce signed												
August 1953							27	62	11			
Prisoner repatriation												
September 1953				64[e]	28	8						
November 1953							38	50	11			
November 1954							39	51	10			
September 1956							46	41	13			
March 1965										67[f]	16	17

[a] "Do you approve or disapprove of the decision to send American troops to stop the Communist invasion of South Korea?" (NORC)
[b] "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Korea, do you think the United States made a mistake in deciding to defend Korea (South Korea), or not?" (AIPO)
[c] "Do you think we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Korea last summer (two years ago) or should we have stayed out?" (SRC)
[d] " . . . that you feel it was the right thing or the wrong thing to send American . . . " (Minn.)
[e] "As you look back on the Korean war, do you think the United States did the right thing in sending troops to stop the Communist invasion, or should we have stayed out of it entirely?" (NORC)
[f] "Do you think the United States did or did not do the right thing by entering the Korean War in 1950?" (Minn.)

war?" has no simple answer. For popular "support" for the Korean War was noticeably raised whenever the respondent to oppose the war was required a) to admit the United States had made a mistake, or b) to oppose the halting of the Communists. Both a desire to support the country and its leadership, and a penchant for anti-Communism seem to have been important in determining support for the war. At any given point in time, support should be considered a chord, rather than a note.

III. Trends in Support for the Korean War

The support percentages for the questions in Columns A, B, and C of Table 1 are plotted in Figure 1. As can be seen, the chords progress in parallel fifths, making for consistently patterned, if inelegant, harmony.

Support for President Truman's reaction to the North Korean invasion was overwhelmingly favorable at the beginning of the war. In early July Gallup found 77 percent approving his "decision to send U.S. military aid to South Korea" despite the fact that 43 percent in the same poll felt this action would "lead to another world war."[7] Support remained high through the summer and into the fall of 1950 as the North Korean thrust was stopped at Pusan and reversed at Inchon. This high level of support was maintained probably because the public was convinced the war would be a short one. In July, only 14 percent expected the war to last more than a year.[8]

It was the entry of China into the war that apparently altered such perceptions and, with them, the basic support for the war. As the Chinese swarmed across the Yalu River, blunting and then turning the Allied "home by Christmas" offensive, the war took on a new and far more painful appearance.[9] By the time the "mistake" questions were again posed in the last days of 1950, support for the war had dropped some 25 percentage points.

More striking than the drop in support caused by the Chinese entry is the near-absence of further decline for the remaining two-and-a-half years of war. From early 1951 until the end of the war in summer, 1953, basic support for the war, seen not only in the A and B figures, but also in those from Minnesota in Column D of Table 1, remained largely constant. This despite the continually mounting casualties and despite a number of important events: the recall of General MacArthur; the beginning, breaking off, and then intermittent restarting of peace talks; the launching of offensives and counter-offensives; the 1952 campaign and election.

Thus, although there seems to have been an important shift of opinion on the war after one major event, events thereafter had comparatively little impact on support for the Korean War. The Chinese intervention seemed to shake from the support ranks the tenuous and those who felt they could support only a short war. The war was then left with a relatively hard core of support that remained generally constant for the duration, despite changes of fortune and climbing casualty figures. Notions about the shifting moods of the American public do not seem to fit these findings at all well.[10]

This is not to say, however, that events after the Chinese entry had *no* impact whatever on war support, merely that changes were small.

Table 2. Reactions to Truman's Korean Decision

On the whole do you approve or disapprove of President Truman's action in sending American military forces to help the people of South Korea? Why? (Minn. 84, August 1950, N=965)

Approve 75% Disapprove 19% DK 7%

Reasons given for approval	
Must stop Russia, the Reds, only thing to do, have to sooner or later	53%
Serving our own interests, keep them from coming over here	17
Help oppressed people, they needed help	10
Bound to help because of UN ties, UN action, etc.	7
Approve, but other nations should help too	2
We should have fought the Reds even sooner	1
Other reasons	8
Don't know why, no reason given	3
Reasons given for disapproval	
Not our business, let them fight their own battles	31%
Other nations should help too	13
We weren't prepared, not ready, not equipped	12
Don't like war, don't want war	5
Other reasons	34
Don't know why not, no reason given	6

[7] AIPO 458. See also Elmo Roper, *You and Your Leaders* (New York: Morrow, 1957), pp. 144–45 and the Minnesota data in Table 2.

[8] AIPO release, July 29, 1950.

[9] Most Americans, however, were probably not surprised by the Chinese entry into the war. In September 1950, Gallup asked, "The 38th parallel is the border between North and South Korea. Do you think Russia and Communist China will enter the fighting in Korea if the U.S. and her allies continue the fight north of this line?" Fully 64 percent replied affirmatively; 22 percent negatively. (AIPO 461.)

[10] See also William R. Caspary, "The 'Mood Theory': A Study of Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," 64 *American Political Science Review* (June 1970), 534–547. But see also the discussion in Section VII below.

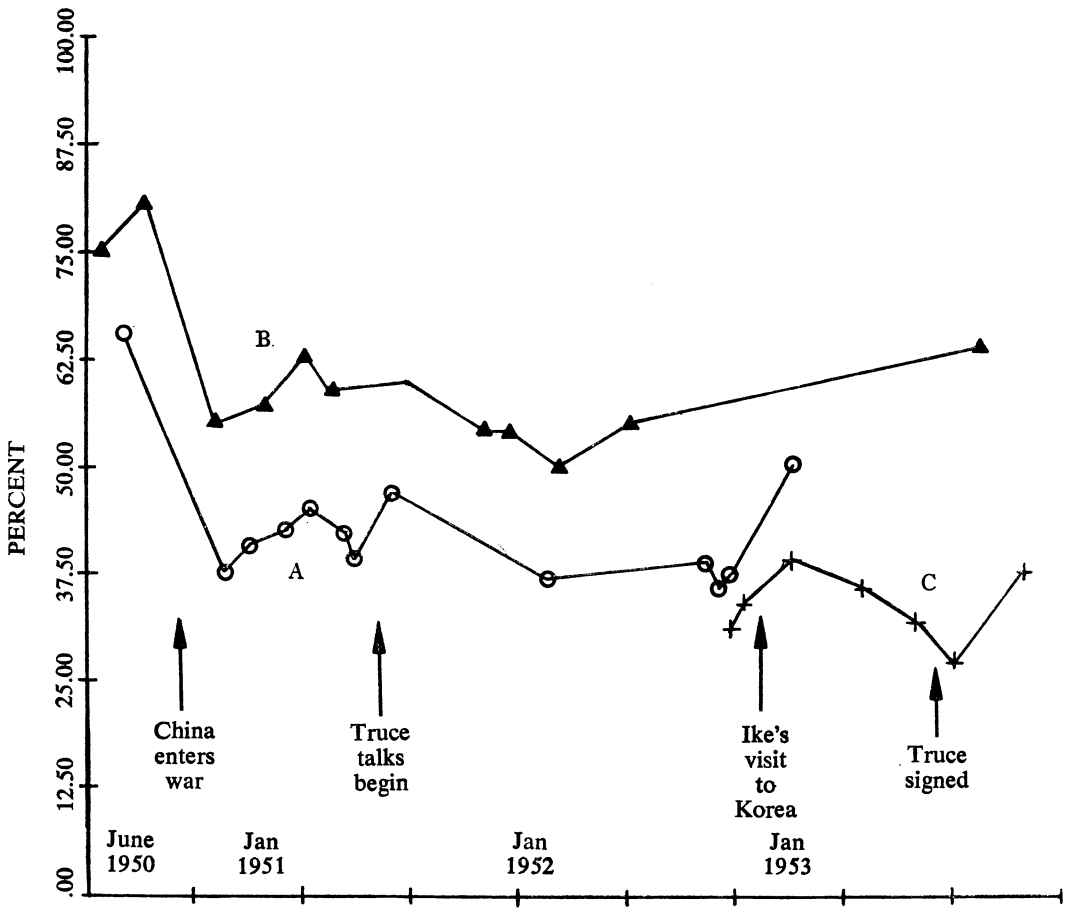

Figure 1. Support for the Korean War. (Letters refer to questions in Cols. A, B & C of Table 1.)

Support for the war rose somewhat and opposition declined in the A, B, and D figures in the first half of 1951 after the initial depression over the Chinese entry began to wear off and as the Chinese drive was itself blunted. By June, this marginal increase of enthusiasm showed signs of waning when the opening of peace talks, viewed by some with cautious optimism,[11] seems to have caused a rise of support (but a much smaller decline in opposition), evident in the A and D figures. And the election of General Eisenhower in 1952, together with his post-election trip to Korea may have generated some temporary enthusiasm, judging from the behavior of the data in the A, C, and D columns.[12]

IV. Trends in Support for the Vietnamese War

Survey trend data on war support are less rich in the Vietnamese War period than in the Korean War period, despite the increased popularity of polling in the decade separating the wars. Gallup was still there and asking the right questions for present purposes, but NORC had gone into more specialized polling, and the new Harris polling organization never really asked over any length of time an appropriate war support question.[13]

Table 3 displays the results of the relevant

[11] In July 1951 Gallup found 38 percent expecting the peace talks to be successful while 42 percent expected the fighting to start up again (AIPO 477).

[12] After the election and before the Korean trip, Gallup found the public held the view, by a 48 to 39 percent margin, that the trip "would bring and earlier end to the war." (AIPO 508). In January, 1953, the public was about evenly divided on whether Eisenhower would "find some way to end the Korean War within, say, the next year." (AIPO 511). See also Roper, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

[13] From time to time between 1966 and 1968 the Harris Poll reported a "war support index." Although it was not always clear from the news releases, however, the questions on which this index was based varied somewhat from time to time and usually tapped policy preferences (discussed in Section VII) rather than the sort of general war support elicited in the Gallup question.

Table 3. Support and Opposition in the Vietnamese War

A: "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?" (AIPO)
B: "Some people think we should not have become involved with our military forces in Southeast Asia, while others think we should have. What is your opinion?" (AIPO)
C: "Do you think we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Vietnam or should we have stayed out?" In 1964 and 1966 asked only of those who said they had been paying attention to what was going on in Vietnam (80% of the sample in 1964, 93% in 1966). (SRC)

For each question the numbers represent, in order, the percentages in support of the war (Pro), in opposition (Con), and with no opinion (DK).

	A			B			C		
	Pro	Con	DK	Pro	Con	DK	Pro	Con	DK
November 1964							47	30	23
January 1965				50	28	22			
May 1965				52	26	22			
August 1965	61	24	15						
November 1965				64	21	15			
March 1966	59	25	16						
May 1966	49	36	15						
Bombing of oil dumps									
September 1966	48	35	17						
November 1966	51	31	18				47	31	22
Early February 1967	52	32	16						
May 1967	50	37	13						
July 1967	48	41	11						
October 1967	44	46	10						
Bunker, Westmoreland visit									
December 1967	46	45	9						
Tet offensive									
Early February 1968	42	46	12						
March 1968	41	49	10						
April 1968	40	48	12						
GOP Convention									
August 1968	35	53	12						
Democratic Convention									
Early October 1968	37	54	9				30	52	18
Nixon elected									
February 1969	39	52	9						
September 1969	32	58	10						
January 1970	33	57	10						
March 1970	32	58	10						
April 1970	34	51	15						
May 1970	36	56	8						

questions from the Vietnamese period. The three questions listed are all quite similar in basic format to the AIPO-SRC questions from the Korean period listed in Column A of Table 1: All ask whether "we" or "the U.S." did the right thing; none added anything about stopping Communism. The AIPO question in Column B of Table 3 is separated out only because there is room. The SRC question in Column C, however, must be kept separate because it usually was asked only of those respondents who said they had been paying attention to what was going on in Vietnam. The support scores from Columns A and B are combined and plotted in Figure 2.[14]

Unlike the Korean War, the war in Vietnam had no clearcut beginning. From the standpoint of American public opinion Vietnam only became really significant in 1965 when it became in considerable measure an American operation with the massive influx of U.S. troops and with the beginning of sustained bombing by American planes. Before that, Americans were strik-

[14] The Gallup data come from *Gallup Opinion Index*, Nos. 6, 52, 56, 59, and 61.

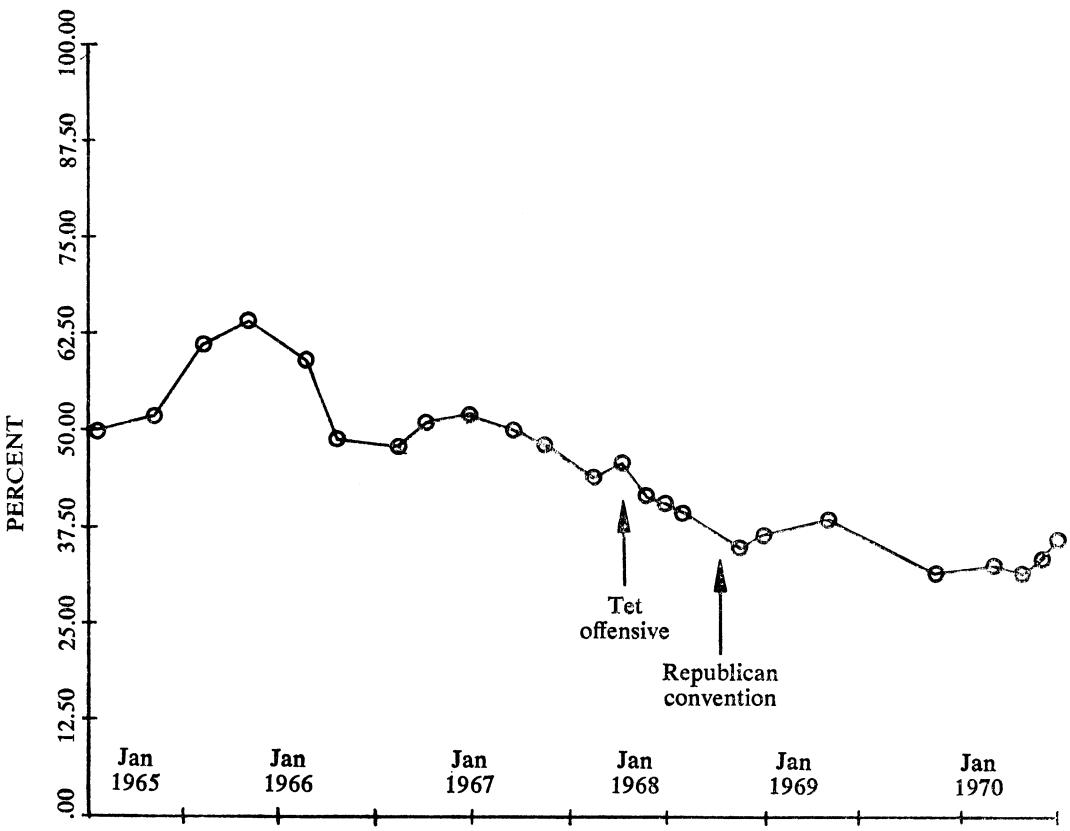

Figure 2. Support for the Vietnam War.

ingly ignorant of the war: In spring, 1964, Gallup determined that 63 percent of the public was giving little or no attention to developments in South Vietnam;[15] in June, SRC found fully 25 percent of its respondents willing to admit they had heard nothing about the fighting in Vietnam;[16] and, as noted in Table 3, SRC in its 1964 election study, after months of campaign debate over the war, escalation, and the incidents in the Bay of Tonkin, found that 20 percent still were paying no attention to what was going on in Vietnam.

Judging from the data in Table 3 and from the plot in Figure 2, support for the war in Vietnam rose very considerably as American troops joined the fighting during the last half of 1965. There seems therefore to have been at the time a fairly considerable "rally-round-the-flag" effect (a phenomenon of interest also in Section VII). At the same time, the percentage with no opinion dropped, suggesting that as the war began to gather more popular attention, people were led to form an opinion on it, rather than subjected to confusion and doubt through cross-pressures or value conflicts. It is also notable that, as the Vietnam war debate broadened over the next years, the "no opinion" percentage tended to decline somewhat further.

General approval for the war remained at its high level into 1966. Comparable support in Korea is found only in the early months of the conflict. By mid-1966, however, support had dropped to levels more familiar from the Korean case, though still on the high side. The Buddhist crisis and the frustrating South Vietnamese political instability of the time—Americans advocated summary withdrawal by a 54–28 margin if the internal fighting increased[17] —undoubtedly affected this change. In addition, the increasing disaffection of prominent American politicians and intellectuals, voiced in the Fulbright hearings of February and March, 1966, probably helped to make dissent respectable.

Also important was the fact that, as in Korea at the end of 1950, the war was increasingly expected to become a long, bloody affair, not one that American troops could bring to a

[15] AIPO release May 27, 1964.
[16] A. T. Steele, *The American People and China* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1966), p. 294.
[17] *Gallup Opinion Index*, No. 12, May 1966, p. 8.

hasty end. The percentage expecting a long war rose from 54 to 72 between the end of 1965 and mid-1966.[18] At the same time, U.S. casualties soon attained an order of magnitude comparable to Korea: Some 4,000 Americans had been killed in Vietnam by September 1966 and another 1,000 had died by the end of the year.

In the years after the middle of 1966, support for the war suffered a slow and somewhat ambiguous decline, while opposition grew at a slightly faster rate. Support dropped by 1969 to levels as low as any attained in Korea. And at the end of the year support for the first time finally reached levels clearly lower than those found in the earlier war. By that time, however, the war had been going on for more than a year longer than the Korean conflict, and American losses in Vietnam had well surpassed those suffered in Korea—casualties passed Korean War totals in early 1968 and combat deaths did so a year later.

As in the Korean case, events do not seem to have set up major perturbations in these trends. It is particularly notable how little the support for the war changed between the fall of 1967 and the spring of 1968, despite a series of presumably momentous events: the Tet offensive, the replacement of General Westmoreland, President Johnson's decision not to run again and his partial bombing halt, the opening of preliminary peace talks, miscellaneous offensives in the South, and the emergence of explicit challenges to the Johnson policy by prominent Democratic presidential candidates. Of course, the support question was not asked frequently enough to permit sorting out the various effects of each of these incidents, but the combined impact of all of them seems limited at most.[19]

It seems, then, that public support for and opposition to the war in Vietnam hardened somewhat as in Korea, to the point where events were less likely to make much of an impression. This is not to say that Americans became unaware of events in the war: The number believing the allies were "losing ground" in Vietnam rose 15 percentage points after the Tet offensive in 1968, and those who believed that the war would be over in less than two years dropped 13 percentage points.[20] But support or opposition as a matter of general policy seems to have changed only gradually.

V. A Comparison of the Wars: The Beginning

It is somewhat surprising that the wars in Korea and Vietnam generated about the same amount of support at the beginning—where the "beginning" of the Vietnam War is taken to be mid-1965. The Korean War, it would seem, was begun under far more dramatic circumstances with a rather clearcut Communist attack and an American decision made within a few days to come to the aid of the attacked under United Nations auspices. In Vietnam the greatly increased American involvement in 1965 was accomplished over several months and in piecemeal fashion, with the administration consciously trying to downplay its significance.

The comparability of war support at this point suggests that the principal motivating element in the public response to the Korean decision was similar to that in Vietnam—a desire to support the country's leadership in time of trouble, the "rally–round–the–flag" phenomenon. This reinforces the observation in Section II above that helping the besieged South Koreans was not a major factor.

It also suggests that as long as the President has the power to commit troops, proposals that suggest wars would be avoided if the public (or Congress) were required to vote on their desirability are naive. After the commitment, there is a strong tendency to support the leadership. Even votes taken before the commitment is made are likely to be heavily influenced by the position of the leadership.[21]

VI. A Comparison of the Wars: Trends in Support

As seen in Sections III and IV, support in both wars declined from initial high levels. The transitions were similar in the sense that

[18] Harris Poll, *Newsweek*, July 10, 1967, p. 22.

[19] It is tantalizing to suggest that perhaps an event that did noticeably decrease support for the war was the 1968 *Republican* convention, for a new low support score for the war was registered in August 1968 after the Republican convention but before the Democratic one. Perhaps the televised display of that respectable, conservative body denouncing the war, albeit in highly unspecific terms, served to convert to war opposition some conservatives who had been utterly unaffected by the anti-war agitation from the left. It should be acknowledged, however, that the trend was downward throughout the spring, and possibly this depth of support would have been reached by August anyway. In a report on some unpublished research based on a series of daily polls conducted during the last half of 1968, Richard Maisel notes that "public response to the Republican convention was greater than to the Democratic convention particularly for non-college graduates," 33 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 456 (Fall 1969).

[20] Gallup report, *New York Times*, March 10, 1968, p. 4.

[21] See also the discussion in Section VII. One might speculate that the impact of the Pearl Harbor attack was not as vital to public attitudes toward World War II as might be supposed. President Roosevelt might have been able to carry much of the public with him had he simply led the country directly into war without benefit of this dramatic stimulus. Popular attitudes toward World War II are discussed briefly in Section XI.

Table 4. Regression Results: War Support as a Function of the Logarithm of American Casualties

	Dependent variable			
	Percent support		Percent opposed	
	Korea	Vietnam	Korea	Vietnam
Mean	51.4	44.2	36.2	43.4
Standard Deviation	12.1	9.5	9.4	11.6
Intercept	114.46	121.68	−16.12	−52.05
Independent variables				
Log_{10} casualties	−14.89	−15.76	12.02	19.43
	(2.38)	(1.15)	(2.60)	(1.39)
NORC dummy	15.49		−9.45	
	(2.10)		(2.30)	
Standard error of estimate	5.21	3.00	5.68	3.65
R^2	.83	.90	.67	.91

The regression equations are displayed vertically. The number of items in the Korean case is 25: all items in Columns A and B of Table 1 except for that of September 1953 (which was taken after the war had ended). The number of items in the Vietnam case is 22: all items in Columns A and B of Table 3 after mid-1965 (which is when the war is taken to have begun for the American public). The NORC dummy variable in the Korean case takes on a value of 1 if the item in question comes from Column B of Table 1 and is zero otherwise. It reflects therefore the general added boost given to measured war support by the wording of that question. The figures in parentheses are the standard errors for the respective regression coefficients. To be regarded statistically significant a regression coefficient should be, conventionally, at least twice its standard error. All equations are significant (F test) at well beyond the .01 level.

events, particularly in later stages of the wars, seem to have had relatively little impact on the overall trend. But the pace of the transitions differed considerably: Support for the Korean War dropped precipitously after the Chinese entered the war, while support for Vietnam declined much more gradually.

But of course the wars also differed in the pace at which American casualties were suffered. As noted, Korea became an intense war in a few months while casualties in Vietnam mounted much more slowly. Support for the wars thus appears to be related to these casualty patterns, except that in the later stages of the wars the decline of support slowed despite continuously mounting casualties.

These observations can be formalized by viewing popular support as a function of the *logarithm* of the total number of American casualties that had been suffered at the time of the poll. As can be seen in Table 4, the regression equations so generated are strikingly similar for the two wars: *In each war, support is projected to have started at much the same level and then every time American casualties increased by a factor of 10 (i.e., from 100 to 1,000 or from 10,000 to 100,000) support for the war dropped by about 15 percentage points.* Results are not so neat when the dependent variable is the percentage opposing the war, but the patterns remain largely similar: Opposition to Vietnam is taken to have begun at a somewhat lower level than in Korea and then to have increased at a somewhat faster rate. Part of this difference is due to the generally lower frequencies of "no opinion" responses during the Vietnamese period.[22]

When one takes support or opposition for the wars in Korea or Vietnam and correlates either of them with 1) the casualties suffered at the time the poll was conducted or 2) the duration of the war at the time of the poll (the plots in Figures 1 and 2), one gets at least a reasonably good fit; indeed, this would be the case if one correlated support or opposition with *any* variable that increased (or decreased) continually during the wars. But in all cases, correlating the *logarithm* of the number of casualties suffered at the time of the poll gives the best fit —the difference is especially noticeable in the Korean case. Furthermore, and most important, because of the differing patterns under which casualties were suffered in the two wars, the equations relating support or opposition to the logarithm of the casualties are much more

[22] The similarities between the equations for the wars increase when one removes the NORC cases and the NORC dummy variable from the Korean consideration, thus comparing only questions almost identical for the two wars. The Korean equations then generate intercepts of 117.44 and −22.74 and regression coefficients of −15.51 and 13.40 for the approval and disapproval scores, respectively.

similar for the two wars than are the equations generated when the logarithm of the casualties is replaced as the independent variable by the simple casualty figures or by the duration figures. The plots in Figures 1 and 2, relating support to duration, do not look greatly similar; if the percentage support were plotted against the logarithm of casualties, however, the lines would be highly similar for the two wars.

What this suggests, then, is that *Americans, in the aggregate, reacted in similar ways to the two wars.* While they did weary of the wars, they generally seem to have become hardened to the wars' costs: They are sensitive to relatively small losses in the early stages, but only to large losses in later stages. Another way of looking at the trends is to see subgroups of the population dropping off sequentially from the war's support as casualties mount. In the early stages the support of those with considerable misgivings is easily alienated; in later stages the only advocates left are the relatively hardened supporters whose conversion to opposition proves to be more difficult.

VII. Other Possible Measures of War Support

Thus far this analysis has rested on an examination of the response to one sort of poll question about the wars. On this measure levels of support seem quite similar for the two wars. But it might be argued that these measures are insufficiently sensitive to intensity. Perhaps, of those who classify the war a "mistake," more are intense about their opposition in Vietnam than in Korea. These and other differences might appear if one were to look at other sorts of poll queries.

Unfortunately, while many other questions were posed by the polling agencies during the Korean and Vietnamese wars, none was asked with anything approaching the constancy and persistency of the "mistake" questions. Therefore when one tries to use these questions to compare wars, or even to analyse trends within a single war, one can draw only very limited conclusions. Both the conclusions and the difficulties will be discussed, belabored perhaps, in this section.

Two sorts of questions seem worth special examination in this respect: those that ask about policy preferences (Should the war be escalated or deescalated?), and those that ask the respondent how he feels the war is being handled by the administration.

1. *Questions about policy options.*[23] The importance of question wording has already been noted in Section II which contained a discussion of the responses to various forms of the "mistake" question during the Korean War. The wording of questions about policy options also varied during both wars, but with a caprice that all but frustrates careful analysis. *In fact, the only really firm conclusion one can reach is that question wording usually helps to determine in a major way the response generated.*

Table 5. Responses to Two Questions on the Chinese Entry into the Korean War

AIPO 468 Early December 1950: If the Chinese Communists continue to send hundreds of thousands of troops into Korea, far outnumbering our forces there, what do you think we should do?

28%	Withdraw
27	Use atomic bomb
25	Intensify against Red China
4	Strategic retreat
2	Negotiate
1	Miscellaneous
12	No opinion
99	

AIPO 469 Early January 1951: Now that Communist China has entered the fighting in Korea with forces far outnumbering the United Nations troops there, which one of these courses would you, yourself, prefer that we follow—

66%	A. Pull our troops out of Korea as fast as possible
25	B. Keep our troops there to fight these larger forces
9	No opinion
100	

Consider, for example, the responses to the questions in Table 5, posed by Gallup about a month apart during the Korean War. To begin with, the questions are framed in such a tendentious manner that the only safe inference is that the Gallup organization itself favored U.S. withdrawal from Korea at the end of 1950.[24] Beyond this, the change from an open-ended format to a strict two-way choice between withdrawal and American slaughter alters radically the proportion who are presumed to favor withdrawal—probably because it

[23] Questions about policy options by no means probe the same responses as the "mistake" questions. It is entirely possible, for example, to find the war a mistake but still prefer escalation as a strategy, or to favor withdrawal as a present strategy while finding the war not to have been a mistake. See Philip E. Converse and Howard Schuman, " 'Silent Majorities' and the Vietnam War," *Scientific American,* June 1970, pp. 17–25.

[24] Nevertheless, the questions are taken to have meaning for some analysts. See "Public Opinion and the Korean War," *Gallup Opinion Index* No. 3, August 1965, p. 26; S. M. Lipset, "The President, the Polls, and Vietnam," *Trans-action,* Sept./Oct. 1966, p. 24.

forces would-be escalators to choose between what are for them second-best alternatives. Of course the problems of question wording need not be this gross. It seems likely that the American public will respond in quite different ways to these three comparatively similar options: "withdraw immediately," "withdraw as fast as possible," and "begin to withdraw." Therefore if one wants to demonstrate the popularity or unpopularity of withdrawal, escalation, or any other policy or strategy, considerable power is in the hands of the author of the question.[25]

This is not to say that *all* questions are capable of extensive manipulation. Where opinion is intense and commitment is strong on an issue, wording changes are unlikely to make much difference. In a 1941 study, for example, it was found that even the most loaded questions about Hitler could not alter American opinion about him one way or the other; on other subjects, however, attitude was found to be highly sensitive even to minor wording changes.[26] The very sensitivity of opinion to changes in the wording of the stimulus question therefore can be taken as an index of uncertainty and indecision of public opinion on issues of war policy and strategy.

Some of the problems of question wording are minimized for present purposes if the same question was asked repeatedly in both wars: At least the biases and peculiarities of any given question would remain constant, as was the case with the "mistake" question. There is another problem, however. Questions about war policy are usually much more related than the "mistake" question to current happenings and policy changes in the war because events can substantially change their meaning to a given respondent. Those who favor escalation, for example, will support the present strategy when the war is being escalated, but will oppose it when the war is not being escalated.

Most important in this connection is the large number of citizens who are inclined to support the country's leadership no matter what it does. If the administration is using force, these people will respond like hawks; if it is seeking peace, they respond like doves. In the responses to the "mistake" question, therefore, these people are likely to wind up in the support column, although, as noted in Section II, the acquiesence of many of them sometimes can only be activated when the question specifically identifies the war with U.S. or "our" policy (Column A compared to Column C in Table 1).[27]

Demographically, these administration supporters for the two wars tend to be found disproportionately among the affluent, the better educated, and—contrary to the usual wisdom—the young. When the attitudes of people with these characteristics are assessed on issues of war policy, they are usually found to be at least somewhat more favorable to whatever happens to be the presidential policy than are the poor, the ill-educated, and the old. They are particularly likely to reject proposals for immediate withdrawal or for major escalation, such as the use of nuclear weapons in the Vietnamese War or the invasion of China during the Korean War. The attitude of these people probably stems in large part from their closer identification with the country and its leadership and from a susceptibility to social and political influences. But they are also more likely to know at any given point what the Presidential policy *is*, while the poor, the ill-educated, and the old are more likely to respond randomly to the survey stimulus as well as to select the "no opinion" response more frequently.[28]

The existence of the leadership-supporting group means that the administration, particu-

[25] The problems of varying question wording are also discussed for the Vietnamese case in Converse and Schuman, *op. cit.*, and in Milton J. Rosenberg, Sidney Verba and Philip E. Converse, *Vietnam and the Silent Majority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), ch. 2.

[26] See Hadley Cantril and associates, *Gauging Public Opinion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 45–46 and *passim*. It is worth noting that even party identification is quite susceptible to wording change. In the early 1950s, NORC asked its party identification question this way: "In politics today do you consider yourself a Democrat, or a Republican, or do you favor some other party?" Gallup used this question: "In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, or Independent?" The Gallup query rather uniformly garnered an eight percentage point higher estimate of "Independent" voters. Therefore proclamations about the percentage of the population belonging to various partisan groups should not be taken as entirely definitive.

[27] See also the discussion of the "mainstream" model in William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Knowledge and Foreign Policy Opinions: Some Models for Consideration," 30 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 187–99 (Summer 1966).

[28] For a more extensive analysis of the relationships discussed in this paragraph, see John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, forthcoming). On the Vietnamese case, see also Converse and Schuman, *op. cit.*, Rosenberg, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, ch. 3, and Erskine, *op. cit.*

A technical note is in order in this connection. Samples drawn by Gallup in the Vietnamese War period are more representative of the lower classes than those drawn during the Korean period. Major changes in sampling procedure seem to have been made in the polling for the 1952 election. Since upper status people have tended to support the wars more than lower status ones, the data in this paper may overestimate the popularity of the Korean War in comparison to the conflict in Vietnam. The bias, however, is likely to be a very small one. See Norval D. Glenn, "Problems of Comparability in Trend Studies with Opinion Poll Data," 34 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82–91 (Spring 1970), Converse and Schuman, *op. cit.*, and Rosenberg, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, ch. 2.

larly in the short run, has more flexibility in war policy than might at first appear—a proposition rarely noted by journalists or politicians but often by public opinion analysts.[29] The group tends to reject proposals for escalation and de-escalation in the abstract since they imply an alteration of "our" present course, but once the President has adopted the new policy many in the group will follow his lead.

Thus *one finds major shifts in public opinion on questions of policy after policy changes.* Table 6 illustrates this finding with an example from the Vietnamese period. The Harris poll reports that support for bombing the Hanoi-Haiphong area increased substantially after the bombing of military targets there was begun in 1966. Lest one conclude that administration-supporters are simply latent hawks, Table 7 illustrates a dovish shift after the partial bombing halt of 1968. Question H was asked after the bombing halt but before the North Vietnamese had responded by agreeing to preliminary talks. As can be seen, the shift in opinion is striking if the response is compared to the pre-halt response generated by question G, which is worded in a manner rather favorable to a bombing halt; and the shift is spectacular if any of the other early questions are used as the base of comparison.

After all these caveats and excursions, it should be clear that little of a firm nature can be said about how the wars compare on popular views on issues of policy and strategy. Nevertheless, opinion is not infinitely manipulable and a few rough regularities do seem to appear.

In general, it seems that the conclusions reached in Section VI about the similarity of support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam still hold when these other questions are examined. Most of the time, some 20 or 30 percent of the American public usually has supported a withdrawal from each of the wars, depending, of course, very much on circumstances and question wording. By 1969 or 1970, however, when a sort of withdrawal from Vietnam had become official policy, support for this option increased greatly. Sentiment for escalation is more difficult to assess, as the discussion of the bombing issue in Vietnam already suggests. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to make a case that the wars differed greatly on this slippery dimension.[30]

Table 6. Responses to Questions about the Bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, 1965–66

	% of those with opinion	
	Favor bombing	Oppose bombing
Do you think the administration is more right or more wrong in not bombing Hanoi or Haiphong?		
September 1965	30	70
February 1966	42	58
May 1966	50	50
——— Bombing begun ———		
Do you think the administration is more right or wrong in bombing Hanoi and Haiphong?		
July 1966	85	15

Source: Harris Poll, *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1966, July 11, 1966.

There does seem to be one area of escalation in which public opinion differs between the wars. The American public apparently may have been more willing to recommend the use of atomic weapons in the Korean War than in Vietnam. This readiness may be taken to indicate a greater frustration in the earlier war, but it probably better reflects a certain casualness toward the weapons in the early years of the atomic age, a casualness which diminished with the acquisition of the hydrogen bomb in enormous stockpiles and with the development of the missile.

2. *Questions about war leadership.* Besides the "mistake" question, one poll query posed repeatedly during the two wars might be expected in some degree to reflect support for the wars. This was the "presidential popularity" question: Do you approve or disapprove the way (the incumbent) is handling his job as President?"

If the responses to this question are taken to be stimulated in large measure by attitudes toward the war, one would conclude that, if anything, the war in Korea was somewhat more unpopular than the one in Vietnam. The popularity ratings of Presidents Truman and Johnson were in clear and rather steady decline during the terms in which the wars occurred, but President Truman managed to descend to a

[29] See Lipset, *op. cit.*, Waltz, *op. cit.*, and Sidney Verba, Richard A. Brody, Edwin B. Parker, Norman H. Nie, Nelson W. Polsby, Paul Ekman, and Gordon S. Black, "Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," 56 *American Political Science Review* 317–33 (June 1967).

[30] For data from Korea, see Scott and Withey, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 ff. Examples from Vietnam can be seen in items in the following reports of the *Gallup Opinion Index:* 2, 10, 13, 29; and in Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Jerrold G. Rusk, and Arthur C. Wolfe, "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election," 63 *American Political Science Review* 1086 (December 1969).

Table 7. Responses to Questions about the Halting of Bombing, 1967–68

		Favor bombing	Oppose bombing	No opinion
A. Should the bombing of North Vietnam be halted "to see if the Communists will come to the negotiating table?"	September 1967	48	37	15
B. Same as A.	October 1967	53	29	18
C. "Continue to bomb selected targets in North Vietnam as at present and keep military pressures on until we get word from North Vietnam that they will reduce their military efforts and agree to talk about a solution to the war. Do you favor or oppose this plan?"	October 1967	55	35	10
D. "Some people say that a halt in bombing will improve our chances in Vietnam for meaningful peace talks. Others say that our chances are better if the bombing is continued. With which group are you more inclined to agree?"	October 1967	63	26	11
E. Same as A.	December 1967	63	24	13
——— Tet offensive ———				
F. Same as D.	February 1968	70	16	11
G. "The North Vietnamese have said that if we agree to stop the bombing of North Vietnam, they will agree to peace negotiations. How do you feel—should we stop the bombing or not?"	March 1968	51	40	9
——— Partial bombing halt ———				
H. "Do you approve or disapprove of President Johnson's decision to stop the bombing of North Vietnam?"	April 1968	26	64	10
——— North Vietnamese agree to preliminary peace talks ———				
I. "Do you approve or disapprove of the President's decision to halt bombings of North Vietnam to get the Communists to start peace negotiations?"	April 1968	24	57	19

Sources: A, B, E: *Washington Post*, December 23, 1967, full text of question not given; C: *Gallup Opinion Index*, No. 29; D, F: *Ibid.*, No. 33; G: *Ibid.* No. 34; H: *Ibid.*, No. 35; I: *Washington Post*, April 8, 1968.

popularity rating a full 10 percentage points lower than that attained by President Johnson.

It is doubtful, however, whether the wars can be connected to presidential popularity in any simple way. Indeed, one study finds the Korean War had a substantial negative independent impact on President Truman's popularity, while Vietnam had no independent impact on President Johnson's popularity at all after other effects, including a general overall downward trend in popularity, had been taken into account.[31]

A related potential indicator of war support might be the question posed repeatedly during the Vietnamese war by the Gallup and Harris organizations: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Johnson is handling the situation in Vietnam?" The responses to this question closely parallel those generated by the presidential popularity question. This may suggest that the question does not adequately discriminate war support from presidential popularity: It may be that the "approve . . . President" part of the question activates most of the response, not the "handling . . . Vietnam" part. This impression is strengthened by some data from the Korean War. During that period NORC repeatedly asked their respondents whether they approved or disapproved "of the way the officials in Washington are handling our foreign affairs"—a large part of which presumably included the war in Korea. The responses fell into a pattern that closely paralleled the trend on the "mistake" question—a substantial decline of approval after the Chinese entry into the war and then something of a leveling off—*not* the continual decline of the Truman popularity trend line. Thus questions asking about the President and the war in the

[31] John E. Mueller, "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson," 64 *American Political Science Review* 18–34 (March 1970).

same breath may stimulate reactions to the President more than to the war.

VIII. The Similarity of Support for the Wars: An Explanation

In summary, then, popular support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam appears highly similar. As noted in Section V, both began with about the same amount of support as judged by responses to the "mistake" question. It was seen in Section VI that this support declined as a logarithmic function of American casualties, a function that was remarkably similar for both wars. While support for the war in Vietnam finally dropped below those levels found during Korea, it did so only after the war had gone on considerably longer and only after American casualties had far surpassed those of the earlier war. Furthermore, as found in Section VII, the conclusion that public response to the wars was quite similar is not weakened when other sorts of poll questions are examined.

This similarity of support might seem surprising, for grand proclamations about the extreme unpopularity of the war in Vietnam are common. James Reston once called it "the most unpopular American war of this century"; a study group for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence has declared that it "commands less popular support than any previous American international war"; and journalist David Wise has disclosed that in the Vietnam War, the nation entered "the most unpopular war in its history."[32] The poll evidence suggests that Vietnam has at least one rival for these unhappy distinctions.[33]

The Vietnamese War is seen by some to be more unpopular than the Korean War probably because *vocal* opposition as judged by demonstrations, petitions, and organized political campaigns was far greater during the later war. Of course all the anti-Vietnam demonstrators, petition-signers, and campaign workers together represent only a very small percent of the American adult population, and thus cannot be expected, by themselves, to exert a measurable effect in a cross-sectional poll. But one might expect their existence to be symptomatic of a much larger discontent. The data suggest, however, that *while the opposition to the war in Vietnam may have been more vocal than that in Korea, it was not more extensive.*[34]

How then, can one account for the increase in *vocal* opposition to the Vietnamese War?

1. *The intellectual left.* Most of the vocal opposition to the war in Vietnam seems to have come from the intellectual, non-union left, a group that has been called the journalistic-academic complex. It seems likely that, unlike the general population, this small group did view the two wars differently. Korea may have seemed to them an unpleasant but necessary episode in the cold war against Stalinist Russia. By the mid-1960s however, the Russian cold war threat had abated considerably while China was increasingly preoccupied with internal difficulties. Thus, for many in the intellectual left, the wisdom of an anti-Communist war in Vietnam was difficult to grasp.[35]

Some in the intellectual left may have been willing in 1965 to grant the Johnson administration's position that China posed a significant threat to Southeast Asia, a threat that must be opposed by American power. Within a year,

[32] *New York Times,* June 21, 1968; *ibid.,* June 6, 1969, p. 23; "The Twilight of a President," *New York Times Magazine,* November 3, 1968, p. 27. All three statements were made before Vietnam support fell below that of Korea.

[33] On the other hand one possible indicator, the morale of American troops, would suggest that the earlier war was the more unpopular. Social commentators during the Korean War were fond of attributing the low morale they discerned to miscellaneous notions about the crusading spirit of the American people who were unable to support a war unless there were some Great Ideal at stake. Vietnam is surely no more a crusade than Korea, yet morale apparently has been comparatively high. One seeks, therefore, more prosaic explanations for the supposed low morale in Korea: the men thrown into the Korean War, especially in its early stages, were very disproportionately World War II veterans extracted from peacetime preoccupations just when they were getting used to them. Bitterness under these circumstances is hardly surprising. The army desertion rate, incidentally, appears to have been considerably higher in Korea than in Vietnam. And it was much higher yet during World War II, when massive mobilization brought in less "select" recruits. See *New York Times,* February 14, 1968, p. 4.

[34] For indicators of this extreme difference in vocal expression, see James N. Rosenau, "The Attentive Public and Foreign Policy: A Theory of Growth and Some New Evidence," Research Monograph No. 31, Center of International Studies, Princeton University, March 1968, p. 17. That demonstrators have not been representative of the general public in their attitudes toward the Vietnamese War can be seen in the evidence presented in Sidney Verba and Richard Brody, "Participation, Policy Preferences, and the War in Vietnam," 34 *Public Opinion Quarterly,* 325–32 (Fall 1970).

[35] Hans J. Morgenthau is probably reasonably representative. At the time of Korea, he says, "Communism was monolithic. Since we were committed to the containment of the Soviet Union, we were also committed to the containment of Communism throughout the world—Communism being a mere extension of Russian power. I have been frequently criticized by supporters of our Vietnam policy because of this alleged inconsistency. I supported the Korean intervention, but I was from the very beginning opposed to the Vietnam intervention. The Vietnam intervention is of an entirely different character in its foreign policy from what it was twenty years ago." *The University of Chicago Magazine,* Sept.-Dec. 1969, pp. 17–18.

however, this point was considerably weakened with the reversed trend of events in Indonesia and with the beginning of the highly diverting Red Guard movement within China. For these individuals, the justifications for the Vietnam venture were no longer valid, and they could turn to opposition.[36]

In the poll data, it is difficult to measure this shift among intellectual liberals because no questions were consistently posed that would permit sorting them out from the rest of the population. The best one can do is to look at the responses of Jews as a sort of imperfect surrogate for the liberal position on the issue. A notable shift is evident: Jews strongly supported the Korean War but tended from the beginning to oppose the war in Vietnam.[37] In fact, Jews seem to be about the only subgroup of all those usually sorted by demographic questions in surveys whose position on the two wars differs. It is therefore not surprising to find the Vietnamese protest centered in places where intellectual liberals and Jews are found in striking disproportion—the better universities.[38]

The years between the Korean and Vietnamese wars had seen the gradual emergence of the intellectual left as a force with political, though not necessarily electoral, impact. This seems to have grown out of the opposition to Joseph McCarthy and then developed in the late 1950s with movements urging arms control measures such as atomic test bans, unilateral disarmament initiatives, and alliance readjustments. In the early 1960s it had as a major inspiration opposition to President Kennedy's fallout shelter program.[39]

Around 1963, the intellectual left moved from a preoccupation with international cold war issues to an alignment with the fast emerging civil rights forces. In part this shift was due to the attractive dynamism of the civil rights issue and of its aggressive and inspired leadership. And in part it was due, after the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, to the notable thaw in the cold war. That seemed to make international threats and issues less pressing. The near-evaporation of the arms control movement at that point is paradoxical, for the improved diplomatic atmosphere made it likely that pressure for arms control measures would finally prove effective.[40]

In its association with the civil rights movement, the intellectual left picked up and helped develop effective new techniques for political expression including passive disobedience, peaceful mass protest, the use of the media, and obstructionism. But as important legislative and judicial victories were won in the civil rights struggle; as the issue became more technical and cloudy; as Negroes showed themselves capable of handling their own movement and, in some quarters, became rather resentful of (even friendly) white interference; and as the movement developed into the destructive, but possibly cathartic and vital, riot stage—as these developments occurred, the civil rights issue became less attractive to the intellectual left.

Vietnam became at first a competitive cause, then a dominating one, until by 1968 it became virtually the sole preoccupation of the intellectual left. The new techniques of political expression, refashioned and redeveloped to fit the new cause, were put into action. The efficacy of the movement generated a certain attractive momentum, swelling the ranks.

Thus *the "new left" of the late 1960s seems, in this analysis, to be the old left with new methods of expression, a new vocalism.* It was not made up primarily of "young people" brought up in the shadow either of the bomb or of John Dewey. Young people are the most conspicuous element of any political movement presumably because of their physical energy and their lack of occupational and familial obligations. Thus, in 1964, it may be recalled, journalistic pundits professed to see an attraction of young people to the Goldwater movement.[41] In another area, the college campus, the new methods of protest were applied to perennial issues of student complaint and concern: student discipline, college management,

[36] For a discussion of the concern over a potential China-Indonesia anti-American axis in 1965, see C. L. Sulzberger, "Foreign Affairs: The Nutcracker Suite," *New York Times,* April 10, 1966, p. 8E.

[37] For some data, see Richard F. Hamilton, "A Research Note on the Mass Support for 'Tough' Military Initiatives," 33 *American Sociological Review* 439–45 (June 1968).

[38] For a further discussion of this point, see Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion.* A survey conducted for the President's Commission on Campus Unrest found that campus disturbances occurred most often at large, eastern, liberal arts colleges with high admissions standards. *New York Times,* November 5, 1970.

[39] See Robert A. Levine, *The Arms Debate* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

[40] Indicative of the change was the collapse of the *Journal of Arms Control* after a few issues in 1963. It proved to be the wrong journal at the wrong time on the wrong subject.

[41] In fact, as noted in Section VII, young people were more inclined to support both wars than their elders were, a point also noted for Vietnam by Erskine, *op. cit.,* pp. 134–35; Converse and Schuman, *op. cit.,* and Rosenberg, *et al., op. cit.* For an able dissection of the "generation gap" punditry, see Joseph Adelson, "What Generation Gap?" *New York Times Magazine,* January 18, 1970.

and college relations with the community.

As the Vietnamese issue itself faded in 1970 with declining American combat activity and with continuing withdrawals of U.S. forces from Vietnam, the intellectual left—except for a spurt of activity in connection with the Cambodian invasion in the spring of 1970—moved on to new arenas, most notably the environmental one.

In part, it seems the intellectual left is rather fickle about its causes. But in addition, the group seems to be a sort of vanguard, limited in size and energy. Thus it does not seem able effectively to fight full force on two fronts at the same time but must instead choose its priorities: So, in the late 1960s one commonly heard that the race issue could never be solved until the Vietnamese War was brought to an end. Nor does this analysis deny the political impact of the intellectual left's agitation on important elite groups, including those that finance political campaigns.[42] The message here is simply to warn against the assumption that intellectual agitation is the same thing as a mass movement.

2. *McCarthyism and the Korean War.* If there were any on the left who opposed the Korean War, their expression of dissent may have been smothered by the pall of McCarthyism.[43] In the early 1950s, a war opponent risked the danger of being labeled a Communist. In the 1960s the climate had changed enough so that such labeling was less likely to occur and, more importantly, less likely to be effective if applied.[44]

For academicians, an important element in the intellectual left, economic considerations in the 1950s may have reinforced these pressures, thus discouraging any inclined to oppose the Korean War from loudly voicing their point of view. The academic marketplace of the early 1950s was an extreme buyers' market: The generation born in pre-depression days, joined by somewhat older people whose graduate education had been postponed by World War II, entered the academic profession to find only the depression generation to teach. Thus job insecurity may have made political protest economically unwise and may have made the academic profession peculiarly susceptible to McCarthyite intimidation.

By the mid-1960s, however, the situation was reversed. The post-World War II babies were going to college while depression babies were entering the academic profession which then became a sellers' market. Thus academicians could protest, threaten to resign, speak freely and impertinently, always aware that jobs were open somewhere. In part, therefore, academic courage may have an economic base.

3. *The attentive public.* It may be the case, as James Rosenau has suggested, that the size of the attentive public has been increasing in response to advances in education, technology, and communication. These increases would not be enough to register markedly in public opinion polls, but they might show up in the increased scope of organized political protest.[45]

IX. TV

Many see Vietnam as a "television war" and argue that the vivid and largely uncensored day-by-day television coverage of the war and its brutalities has had a profound impression on

[42] See also John P. Robinson, "Public Reaction to Political Protest: Chicago 1968," 34 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 9 (Spring 1970). It is noted in this study and also in Converse, *et al., op. cit.,* that the anti-Vietnamese war protesters had an extraordinarily negative public image, even among doves. This phenomenon may have hurt the anti-war cause by associating the issue with an unpopular reference group. It is conceivable, therefore, that the war would have had somewhat *less* support in the general population if there had been no vocal opposition.

[43] It has been suggested that the politicians' fear of McCarthy was somewhat unrealistic. See Nelson W. Polsby, "Toward an Explanation of McCarthyism," 8 *Political Studies* 250–71 (October 1960).

[44] In this connection, one limited but suggestive finding might be mentioned. It has been noted that in the Korean War period the insertion in the war support question of the phrase "to stop the Communist invasion" boosted support strikingly. In February, 1967, Gallup asked his question about support for the Vietnamese War in a somewhat similiar manner. The mention of "Communist expansion" increased support not at all. Thus, anti-Communism may have become less viscerally related to public response to foreign policy than it was in the early 1950s. Unfortunately, the questions are not entirely comparable because Gallup added in his Vietnam version a negative formulation of the proposition. The question was, "Some people feel that the U.S. did the right thing in sending troops to Vietnam to try to prevent Communist expansion. Others feel that the U.S. should not become involved in the internal affairs of other nations. With which group do you agree?" *Gallup Opinion Index,* Report No. 21, March 1967, p. 6.

None of this is to suggest that Americans have suddenly become ardent civil libertarians. In 1966 only 35 percent agreed with the right "to demonstrate against the war." See Lipset, *op. cit.,* p. 24. This area seems to be one of the many in which opinions are quite sensitive to question wording, however. The Harris Poll seems to find considerably more tolerance for the right to undertake "peaceful demonstrations" (*Washington Post,* December 18, 1967). One study found that 46 percent of the American public thought the United States should "forbid" public speeches against democracy while fully 62 percent felt the government should "not allow" such speeches. Donald Rugg, "Experiments in Wording Questions: II," 5 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 92 (1941). See also Converse, *et al., op. cit.,* pp. 1087–88. 1105n, and Robinson, *op. cit.*

public attitudes. The poll data clearly show, however, that whatever impact television had, it was not enough to reduce support for the war below the levels attained by the Korean War, when television was in its infancy, until casualty levels had far surpassed those of the earlier war.[46]

X. Support for the Korean War after the Truce

Popular support for the Korean War seems to have behaved rather curiously at the war's end in mid-1953. The initial reaction to the truce, according to the NORC index in Column C of Table 1, was that noticeably fewer people found the war "worth fighting" during the truce than when the killing was still going on.

This phenomenon does not seem to be due to a specific resentment of the truce itself. Although some politicians and journalists at the time denounced the settlement as a sell-out, the public was found by NORC to prefer the armistice to continued fighting by a 75 to 15 percent margin.[47] The popular discontent may have derived from the widely held opinion that the armistice would not be successful and that the war would soon erupt again. A substantial majority held this view at the time of the truce and the view prevailed for several months thereafter.[48] The public had learned to be skeptical.

At any rate, by the last months of 1953, support for the war, as measured by NORC's questions in Columns B and C of Table 1, had risen to as high a level as any observed since China entered the war. Doubt over the wisdom of the war apparently had begun to be replaced by a need to rationalize the loss.

When the question represented in Column C was again posed a year later, in November 1954, however, it was found that support for the war had not risen at all. Only in 1956, substantially after the peak of the McCarthy period, when this question was last asked of the public did a majority of those Americans with opinions find the war "worth fighting." At that point opposition to the war on the toughest of the war support questions had dropped to a new low. Finally, years later in March 1965, when the Minnesota Poll asked if the United States had done the right thing by entering the Korean War, it was found that 67 percent thought it had while only 16 percent thought it had not.

Thus, as the population slowly became convinced that the Korean War was really over, the popularity of the war rose. But, although the anguish and uncertainty associated with the war did finally dissipate, this change took years.

XI. Korea, Vietnam, and World War II

To put the numbers from Korea and Vietnam in somewhat broader perspective it may be useful to look at poll data from World War II, presumably the most "popular" war in American history. In early 1944 Gallup posed a question comparable to the one under consideration here, namely, "Do you think you, yourself, will feel [in years to come] it was a mistake for us to have entered this war?" Only 14 percent answered affirmatively with 77 percent in the negative, a support rating far more favorable than those attained by the two later wars.[49]

Still, the full picture is not quite so clearcut. In 1967 Gallup posed an updated version of a question that had been asked frequently during World War II: "Do you feel you have a clear idea of what the Vietnam war is all about—that is, what we are fighting for?" Not surprisingly, great confusion was found—only 48 percent felt they knew.[50] The comparable question during World War II elicited a more confident judgment—but not as much greater as might be expected. In fact, in June 1942—six months after Pearl Harbor—only 53 percent of the public felt it had a clear idea of what the war was about. This proportion later increased but it approached 80 percent only in 1945, and at one point—in the spring of 1944—it dipped below 60 percent.[51]

[45] Rosenau, "The Attentive Public . . ."

[46] For an excellent discussion, see Michael J. Arlen, *Living-room War* (New York: Viking, 1969). The Harris Poll once reported, "For most Americans, television helps simplify the enormous complexities of the war and the net effect is that when they switch off their sets, 73 percent feel more hawkish than they did before they turned them on." (*Newsweek*, July 10, 1967, p. 22). The question on which this observation is based, however, was: "Has the television coverage of the war made you feel more like you ought to back up the boys fighting in Vietnam or not?" (Letter from Louis Harris Political Data Center, University of North Carolina, September 10, 1969).

[47] NORC 348.

[48] "Do you think the fighting in Korea is really over, or will the war there start up again in the near future?" (NORC 347, 348, 349, 351).

	Really over	*Will start again*	*Don't know*
August 1953	24%	58	14
September 1953	21%	62	16
November 1953	20%	59	20
January 1954	35%	46	19

[49] Hadley Cantril and Mildred Strunk, *Public Opinion 1935–1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 978.

[50] *Gallup Opinion Index*, Report No. 25, July 1967, p. 8.

[51] Cantril and Strunk, *op. cit.*, pp. 1077–78. Hadley Cantril, *The Human Dimension* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 48.

Sentiment for withdrawal from the Korean and Vietnamese Wars may be very crudely compared to an affirmative reply to the following query posed frequently during the Second World War: "If Hitler offered peace now to all countries on the basis of not going further but of leaving matters as they now are, would you favor or oppose such a peace?" Few supported the proposition in the early years of the war, but in early 1944—while Hitler still held France—it was endorsed by over 20 percent of the population and by about 15 percent thereafter.[52]

Thus World War II, although unquestionably much more highly supported by the public than the Korean and Vietnamese Wars, seems to have been rather less consensual than might be supposed. This may be partly because the truth about Hitler's death camps did not reach the American public until 1945. In mid-1943 only half the population thought that the death camp "rumors" were true. At the end of 1944 this proportion had risen to 76 percent, but few of these anticipated that the death toll would be greater than "thousands."[53] Therefore a major reason for supporting the war was largely unappreciated while it was going on.

In the post-World War II period Gallup twice asked, "Do you think it was a mistake for the United States to enter World War II?" In April 1946 only 15 percent answered affirmatively, about the same support rating as had been generated in 1944. However, a year and a half later, in September 1947, 24 percent thought the war a mistake.[54] This shift may reflect a certain disillusionment with the war as East Europe came under Soviet control and the cold war began with all its ferocity.[55] The Pearl Harbor hearings may also have had an impact.

XII. World War I?

If we allow this sort of "retrospective popularity" to count, it would seem that World War I was the most unpopular war of the century. In 1937 the American people were asked whether they felt it had been a mistake for the United States to enter World War I. Only 28 percent answered in the negative—a support score lower than any attained by comparable measures for the wars in Korea and Vietnam.

However the popularity of World War I seems to have been highly sensitive to events taking place at the time of the survey: Its popularity rose after the German invasion of France and soared at the time of Pearl Harbor.[56]

This finding should lead us to be cautious in predicting the final public evaluation of a major event such as the war in Vietnam. Events of the next ten years will not change the facts about Vietnam, but they may change how we recall and evaluate what happened there.[57]

[52] *Loc. cit.*

[53] Cantril and Strunk, *op. cit.*, pp. 383, 1070–71. The discovery of the death camps, however, seems to have had no immediate effect on American anti-Semitism. See *Opinion News*, March 1, 1948, p. 7. In the two decades since that time, however, anti-Semitism has diminished markedly. See Charles H. Stember and others, *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1966).

[54] Erskine, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[55] For parallel trends in American willingness to trust the Russians, see William R. Caspary, "United States Public Opinion During the Onset of the Cold War," 9 *Peace Research Society (International) Papers* 25–46 (1968).

[56] Erskine, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[57] It is possible that the events in Vietnam have harmed the retrospective popularity of the Korean War. Polls of students in international politics classes at the University of Rochester in 1966 and 1969 showed parallel drops in support for the two wars: 34 percentage points for the Korean War and 35 percentage points for the war in Vietnam.