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Fighting to win: Wartime morale in the American public

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ABSTRACT

The ingredients of wartime morale are the subject of lively debate, with casualties, prospect of victory, and elite cues representing the major points of view. This research covers the wars in Korea and Vietnam with expanded time series of public support and rare surveys that probed perceptions of victory during those military interventions. The prospect of victory affected wartime morale during both of those conflicts. It did so quite uniformly in the American public, cutting across elite cues such as partisanship.
Casualties left only a weak, if any, imprint on popular support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam. Wartime morale suffered during those interventions not so much because of battlefield casualties or the breakdown of elite consensus, but because the prospect of victory collapsed.

In a democracy no government can ask its citizenry to pay a higher price or bear a heavier burden than when it makes the decision to go to war. High public morale is indispensable for elected leaders in wartime. Once the public ceases to accept the sacrifices demanded by war, elected leaders face loss of power at the ballot box. Two wartime presidents, Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson, saw their popularity decline and their party lose the White House amidst discontent over war, one in Korea and the other in Vietnam, respectively. To many students of wartime opinion, these experiences prove the corrosive effect of casualties on popular support for war as well as the commanders-in-chief. Yet some presidents have managed to survive in wartime elections in spite of the casualty toll, with Bush in 2004 being the most recent case. What is more, a death toll of a magnitude incomparable to what was suffered in Korea and Vietnam did not doom Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Roosevelt in the wartime elections of 1864 and 1944. What saved them?

A growing body of scholarship has called attention to the prospect of victory as a key to wartime morale in the general public. Horrendous as the human toll of war may be, the public can be expected to accept those sacrifices as the price of victory. So long as the war is seen as winnable, public morale would tend to remain high, regardless of casualties. But when the prospect of victory collapses, so would public support for the war. As test cases we examine the wars in Korea and Vietnam with their enduring legacy of a corrosive casualty effect. We use some rare surveys that probed perceptions of victory during those wars. These surveys help us determine whether perceptions of victory affected mass support for American interventions in Korea and Vietnam, and whether this effect was mediated by elite cues.

We use aggregate time series, augmenting the spotty record of wartime opinion, to test for the effect of casualties on wartime morale during those wars. The test includes controls for exogenous shocks that had game-changing effects during those wars (the Chinese intervention in Korea, and the Tet Offensive in Vietnam). This part of the research relies on a statistical model (Kalman filtering) that is capable of handling the dynamic of public opinion when there are frequent and wide gaps in polling over time. Given its dominant status in the study of wartime opinion, we first turn to the casualty proposition and present our test before taking up the case for the prospect of victory.

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1. Casualties and wartime morale

Aversion to casualties is a major ingredient of the "democratic-peace" theory (Russett, 1993; Ray, 1995). In a democracy the general public is asked to bear the costs of war. Hence casualties suffered by the citizens themselves subject political leaders to a "domestic hazard that threatens the very essence of the office-holding *homo politicus* – the retention of political power" (Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, 1995, p. 852). In more fragile societies, the discontent unleashed by war may be directed not only against the political leaders but against the political regime itself. In democracies, it is liable to turn the wheels of electoral turnover.

The classic evidence for the corrosive effect of casualties on public opinion comes from John Mueller's study of support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam (Mueller, 1973, ch. 3). The climbing toll of U.S. casualties, so the finding, turned the public back home against both wars, quickly in the case of Korea and more slowly in Vietnam. Both Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson suffered unrelenting drops of their job approval while the wars in Korea and Vietnam piled up mounting casualties during their terms of office (Kernell, 1978; Ostrom and Simon, 1985). Vietnam casualties diminished support especially among the lower social classes (Hibbs et al., 1982), and in local areas that bore a heavy toll (Gartner et al., 1997).

Since then, an ever growing body of scholarship has confirmed the effect of casualties on presidential approval for the Iraq War (Eichenberg et al., 2006); a study of British opinion even found that civilian Iraqi casualties diminished support for Prime Minister Blair (Clarke et al., 2009, ch. 4). Others have pointed to institutional differences of the casualty effect. Systems like the United States, in which legislators respond to constituencies constituting a small share of the national populace, should be more willing to incur casualties (Koch and Gartner, 2005). Multinational work on the effects of casualties suggests that mounting casualties can be viewed as an investment by the public, with casualties increasing the vote share of incumbent governments, especially during shorter term conflicts and among weak partisans in the United Kingdom (Koch, 2011). Under the investment model, support could wane given plausible alternatives to conflict offered by the opposition.

Some of these qualifications notwithstanding, the case for a casualty effect is highly suspect when casualties are used in logged cumulative form (Mueller, 1973). As pointed out by Gartner and Segura (1998, p. 280), this measure has three serious flaws: "(a) it cannot help but be correlated with time, (b) it homogenizes conflicts with very different patterns of casualty accumulation, and (c) it underestimates the importance of turning points, decisive events and exogenous shocks to opinion."[1] Given the inherent trend, a cumulative measure is bound to correlate strongly with any other phenomenon that also exhibits movement over time, even without a predictable trend. So if public support for the war happens to be higher at the beginning than at the end it will be correlated with cumulative casualties. Of course, war support would be highly correlated with any other of many cumulative phenomena, from the sublime to the ridiculous. Spurious correlations are the bane of time series.

Though absolutely necessary, the required statistical correction is stymied in this case by a formidable obstacle: gaps in the polling series on war support during these wars. The gaps are both numerous and often too wide to be filled by interpolation. For the Korean case, polling data are missing for about one of every two months, while for the Vietnam case, two of three are missing.[2] Tests for autocorrelation that simply ignore the gaps (Gartner and Segura, 1998; Gelpi et al., 2009) prove of little help. The threat posed by autocorrelation or non-stationary behavior remains, leaving any findings about the effects of casualties suspect. This threat is no less serious for marginal casualty measures as for cumulative ones. Over time such figures tend to drift. During the Korean War monthly casualties spiked early and then receded, while during the Vietnam War they grew steadily until 1969, after which they receded at a steady pace. Such patterns imply a high degree of autocorrelation even in the absence of a global trend. What is needed is a test of the casualty proposition that can handle time series with frequent and wide gaps.

2. Data and method

Polling Americans on how they felt about the on-going wars in Korea and Vietnam was not a monthly exercise. The most widely used poll question was whether it was a "mistake" to have entered the fighting, with a "no" response counted as an expression of support.[3] Polls with this question cover barely half the months of the Korean War and barely one-third for the Vietnam War. So the first step of the analysis was to try to locate polls with related questions to fill as many monthly gaps as possible.

During the Korean War, several questions probed war support with other formats, some of which indicated higher support for the war, others lower. We have added those observations with an adjustment for the different

[1] It is curious to note that Mueller was unable to show that the Vietnam war made a dent in Johnson's popularity (Mueller, 1973, p. 224), notwithstanding Johnson's saying about Vietnam ("cost me 20 points in the polls"), which Mueller quotes. Even more curious is the omission of casualties or war support from the popularity model.

[2] For the Korean war, Mueller (1973, pp. 45–47, 61) reports using a total of 25 polls, which cover, however, only 20 months of the 39-month period of his analysis (June 1950–August 1953). For Vietnam (Mueller, 1973, pp. 54–55, 61), the total is 24 polls for a period (May 1965–May 1971) that spans 73 months.

[3] During the Korean war, the standard question of the Gallup organization (AIPO) asked, "Do you think the United States made a mistake in going into the war in Korea, or not?" During the Vietnam war, it asked, "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?" The results from polls using this type of question are listed in Mueller (1973, Tables 3.1 and 3.3, question A). We have used these data for the analysis in this paper, making minor corrections based on reports of these polls in the Roper Archive.

means of those measures.[4] The resulting series of public morale during the Korean War is charted in Fig. 1. For the Vietnam War, the standard "mistake" question, even with the addition of similar questions, does not even cover half of the time frame during which it was posed (November 1964–May 1971).[5] To get above that threshold, we augmented the Vietnam support series with questions about the presidential handling of the war.[6] The resulting time series of public support for the Vietnam War is charted in Fig. 2. As can be seen in both figures, quite a few gaps still remain in the series of popular support, roughly one-third for each war.

Rather than fill the remaining gaps through interpolation or imputation, we turned for help to Kalman filtering (Beck, 1989; Green et al., 1999; Little and Rubin, 2002, pp. 246–252).[7] This is a statistical procedure that is perfectly suited for estimating time series relationships with missing observations in the dependent variable. It is able to provide parameter estimates for the structural variables of a model along with estimates for autoregressive processes with gaps in the time series. The way Kalman filtering does so is by making optimal forecasts for the missing observations based on the available observations. Furthermore, it does so without inflating the case count, which would artificially inflate the statistical significance of any estimates.[8]

Popular support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam, as depicted in Figs. 1 and 2, fluctuates in a manner that does not appear to be stationary. It lacks a constant baseline, winding up substantially lower than where it started from. Standard stationarity tests, however, are stymied in this case because of gaps (missing data) in the time series, which sharply reduces the number of available observations for these tests. Moreover, shocks like the Chinese intervention in Korea and the Tet Offensive in Vietnam are bound to create systematic rather than random departures from the mean level of war support. The best way to test for stationarity under such conditions, we believe, is to take advantage of Kalman filtering (to cover the gaps) and apply an AR(1) model to the time series in the presence of shocks. If the estimate for the AR(1) parameter turns out to be not significantly different from 1.0 (unit-root), we are dealing with a non-stationary series. If, however, the estimate falls significantly below 1.0, the series would be stationary. The test for Korea produces an AR(1) estimate of 0.513 with a standard error of 0.186; for Vietnam the respective quantities are 0.725 and 0.126. Hence, we are able to reject the unit-root hypothesis in both cases. Subject to controls for critical shocks, support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam can be considered stationary.

3. Results

We begin with a replication of Mueller's analysis of the casualty effect on popular support during the Korean War (Table 1).[9] The OLS-replication does show a powerful and highly significant estimate for logged cumulative casualties.[10] This estimate, of course, is highly suspect without any control for autocorrelation. Applying an AR(1) control with the help of Kalman filtering sharply drops the statistical significance of casualties. We are no longer able to conclude with much confidence that casualties affected popular support for the war in Korea. Adding controls for game-changing events to the Kalman-model shrinks the parameter estimate for casualties in Table 2 to near-zero and leaves it without any significance. The diagnostics of the model, as provided by the Q-test, are satisfactory.

The Chinese intervention in the Korean War triggered a massive drop of popular support for the war in the American public. The entry transformed a military action against a small and obscure country into a war with a major power. What is more, it provoked a public dispute between the commander in the field, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, and the President over American strategy in the war

[4] The questions (as listed by Mueller, 1973, Table 3.1, with his designations) are: (B) "Do you think the United States was right or wrong in sending American troops to stop the Communist invasion of South Korea?" (C) "As things stand now, do you feel the war in Korea has been (was) worth fighting, or not?" (D) "Looking back over the Korean war since it started last June, would you say *now* that you feel the United States did the right think in sending American forces to Korea?" Percentages in support provided by these questions were entered with the following adjustments: (B) −18 points, (C) +8.8, and (D) −3.4.

[5] As listed by Mueller (1973, Table 3.3), one of these questions was asked by AIPO (Gallup): (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?" The other was asked by the Survey Research Center in its election studies, with interviews spread out over two months: (C) "Do you think we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Vietnam or should we have stayed out?" Results from these questions are very similar to those from adjoining months for the "mistake" question that they were incorporated without adjustment. Still the combination of questions A, B, and C yields observations for only 30 months.

[6] Public support for the Vietnam war and approval of Johnson's handling of the war in Gallup polls are highly correlated (0.8), and so are measures of Johnson's Vietnam approval in Gallup and Harris polls (0.8). The Gallup (AIPO) question asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Johnson is handling the situation in Vietnam?" The Harris question asked, "How would you rate the job President Johnson has done on handling the war in Vietnam – excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?" The report from the Harris polls combines excellent and pretty good in a single percentage.

[7] Given the lack of relevant variables covering the full time periods of interest, we were unable to make use of either the Stimson algorithm (1999) or King's imputation method (King et al., 2001).

[8] As Green et al. (1999) point out, Kalman filtering works best when the number of surveys in a time series is large (more than 25) and surveys comprise at least 100 respondents each. The augmented time series used in our analysis meet these criteria for both the Korean and the Vietnam wars.

[9] Mueller (1973, p. 61, Table 3.4) reports using 25 observation for the Korean analysis, taken from the data for questions A and B listed in Table 3.1. But as far as we can determine, those data supply observations for only 20 monthly time points, given the overlap of A and B for several months. Regarding the difference between questions A and B, Mueller adjusted for the effect of question B in his support model with the help of a dummy variable (NORC dummy). The mean-adjustment we applied in constructing the support measure (18) is quite close to Mueller's estimate for the NORC dummy (15.5).

[10] Consistent with we many other studies (e.g., Gartner and Segura, 1998), we used a narrower casualty measure (killed in action) rather than the broader one used by Mueller (killed, wounded, and missing). The casualty data were obtained from the National Archives and Records Administration: Korean war casualties: http://aad.archives.gov/aad/fielded-search.jsp?dt=194&tf=F&cat=WR27&bc=sl; Vietnam war casualties: http://aad.archives.gov/aad/fielded-search.jsp?dt=197&tf=F&cat=WR28&bc=sl.

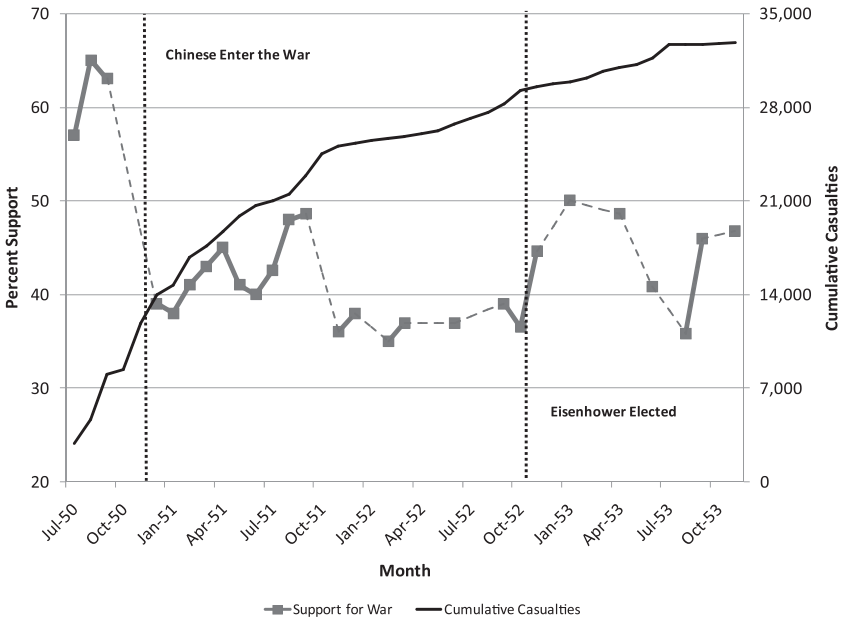

Fig. 1. Public support for the war in Korea, casualties, and key events. Note: Dashed portions of the time series for war support indicate missing observations.

(Spanier, 1959). Mueller himself acknowledges the impact of the Chinese entry on popular support, even noting that support "remained largely constant … despite the continually mounting casualties" (Mueller, 1973, p. 51). This is what the results in Table 1 have proved: with the Chinese intervention accounted for, casualties did not matter for public morale, neither before nor after it.

Even taken at face value, the OLS-estimate for the casualty effect would prove incapable of accounting for the change of war support in the wake of the Chinese intervention. While it grossly underestimates the level of support prior to the intervention, it grossly overestimates it in the first poll after the intervention. The casualty effect would have predicted a level of 52 percent for September 1950 (actual 63 percent), and one of 47 percent for December 1950 (actual 39 percent). By comparison, the Kalman-filter estimates for the casualty-events model predict support levels of 63 percent for September 1950 and 39.5 percent for December 1950, almost exactly the actual levels of support.

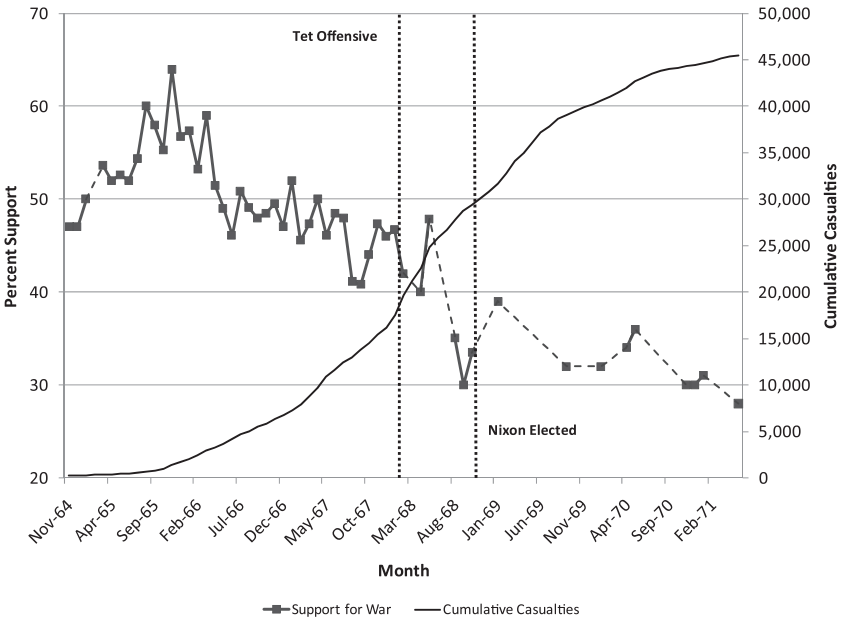

Fig. 2. Public support for the war in vietnam, casualties, and key events. Note: Dashed portions of the time series for war support indicate missing observations.

Table 1
Casualties and popular support for the Korean war: Time series estimates.

Variables	OLS	Kalman filter	Kalman filter and controls
Casualties (logged cumulative)	−20.54*** (4.59)	−16.03 (11.19)	1.64 (14.51)
Chinese Intervention 1950	–	–	−22.52** (11.44)
Eisenhower Election 1952	–	–	5.61 (3.71)
AR (1)	–	0.60*** (0.21)	0.47*** (0.19)
Intercept	132.18*** (19.77)	113.23** (48.85)	55.05 (53.05)
Root mean squared error	5.98	4.74	3.59
R^2	0.45	0.57	0.76
Number of observations	27	27	27
Ljung-Box Q (Lags)	–	2.5 (6)	0.93 (6)
Prob (Q)	–	>0.87	>0.99

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.
Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. The analysis covers the time period from July 1950 to November 1953, which comprises 41 months.

Besides the Chinese intervention, we also included change of presidents as a control in the wartime-morale model. There are compelling reasons why public opinion would change when the party control of the White House changes. The war in Korea was a major issue in the election of 1952 that ousted Truman's party and installed Eisenhower in the White House. The rallying of public opinion around the newly elected president may also rub off on sentiment about an on-going war, especially if he succeeds in settling the war quickly. The Eisenhower victory in the 1952 presidential election appeared to have sparked an uptick in support for the Korean War. But its significance is not very strong, which is consistent with Gartner and Segura's finding (1998, p. 290).

Turning to the Vietnam War, Table 2 reports a large and significant OLS-estimate for casualties. The statistical significance of the casualty estimate shrinks when autocorrelation is taken into account by way of Kalman filtering, but does not vanish this time. The diagnostics of the model, as provided by the Q-test, are satisfactory. The magnitude of the casualty estimate drops sharply once game-changing events are included in the model. Studies of the Vietnam War agree that the Tet Offensive, launched on January 30, 1968, was such an event (Karnow, 1983; Gardner, 1995; Herring, 2002). Even though American and South Vietnamese forces beat back the attacks, the ability of Communist forces to strike on such a massive scale came as a big shock to the public, triggering far-reaching consequences for policy as well. The Johnson Administration decided to retreat from the long-standing policy of escalation and bombing attacks on North Vietnam, while seeking to negotiate a settlement of the Vietnam War. Moreover, the President himself decided to withdraw from the race for reelection.

Table 2
Casualties and popular support for the Vietnam war: Time series estimates.

Variables	OLS	Kalman filter	Kalman filter and controls
Casualties (logged cumulative)	−9.63*** (1.12)	−9.22*** (2.19)	−3.56* (1.87)
Tet Offensive 1968	–	–	−2.85*** (0.92)
Nixon Election 1968	–	–	0.63 (3.66)
AR (1)	–	0.77*** (0.11)	0.54*** (0.18)
Intercept	82.26*** (4.33)	78.66*** (8.14)	62.54*** (6.21)
Root mean squared error	5.70	3.69	3.41
R^2	0.59	0.79	0.84
Number of observations	53	53	53
Ljung-Box Q (Lags)	–	8.6 (12)	7.9(12)
Prob (Q)	–	>0.74	>0.79

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.
Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. The analysis covers the time period from November 1964 to May 1971, which comprises 79 months. The "Tet Offensive" is represented by a variable with a growth parameter of 0.80, as determined by preliminary tests.

The parameter estimate for the Tet Offensive on Vietnam support may appear small – less than 3 percentage points. This, however, is only the estimate for the initial impact. Since the repercussions of this event took a while to materialize as the Johnson Administration altered its strategy, we have also specified a dynamic effect. Given the best fitting dynamic parameter (0.8), based on preliminary tests, the Tet Offensive precipitated a long-term decline of popular support for the Vietnam War, according to our estimate, of 14 percentage points.[11] What is truly remarkable about American support for the war in Vietnam is how well and long the public stood by it through three years of heavy fighting and mounting casualties. The percentage in support for the war was exactly same in November of 1967, on the eve of the Tet Offensive, as it had been in November of 1964, on the eve of large-scale U.S. intervention. It was only in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive that a majority of the American public turned against the War in Vietnam. The election of Richard Nixon in 1968, unlike the election of Eisenhower in 1952, failed to reverse the erosion of wartime morale in the American public. His efforts to seek an honorable end to the war in Vietnam did little to redeem the war in the eyes of the American public, his success in getting reelected in 1972 notwithstanding.

Taken at face value, the OLS-estimate for the casualty effect is ill-suited to deal with the dynamic of wartime morale during the Vietnam War. For the early period of the Vietnam War, it predicts a decline, from 59 percent in November of 1964, the beginning of the time series, to 51 percent in January of 1966. During that period, support increased from 47 to 57 percent. Likewise, in the aftermath of the 1968 Tet Offensive, the casualty effect (OLS-estimate) projects only a minuscule decline in support, from 41 to 38 percent between January 1968 and September 1969, while polls showed a drop from.47 to 32 percent.

In sum, casualties had little to no effect on wartime morale during the wars in Korea and Vietnam. The evidence of a casualty effect has proved to be largely spurious. At the beginning of those wars, to be sure,

[11] The cumulative effect equals the ratio of: −2.85/(1 − 0.80), which comes to −14.25.

popular support was high, while several years later it was low. During that time casualties accumulated, but so did many other things. Failure to account for the inherent nature of time series has promoted a false confidence in a casualty effect.[12] This analysis has relied on a model that is capable of handling the autocorrelation in time series, especially for series with frequent and wide gaps, as is the case for wartime opinion on Korea and Vietnam. Moreover, opinion over time, especially on war and peace, is subject to game-changing events. Controls for such events (the Chinese intervention in Korea and the Tet Offensive in Vietnam) neutralize the casualty effect. So if casualties matter little for wartime morale, what does?

4. Prospect of victory and wartime morale

Nations, as a rule, enter wars with the goal of winning, not losing them. Political leaders may be mistaken in their calculations about what it takes to win, but once they embark on a course of war they face the pressure from the mass public to secure victory on the battlefield. One way the inevitable toll of war, in blood and treasure, can be justified is by delivering victory. Seen from this perspective, casualties are the price a nation has to pay for victory. Historical experience, at least up until the intervention in Korea, had taught Americans to expect nothing short of victory over the enemy when the U.S. goes to war. Formal declarations of war, as in the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Spanish-American War, and World Wars I and II, added a measure of legal and moral justification for military action that would be expected to generate public support as well.

A growing body of scholarship has made the case that the expectation of success is a critical determinant of public support for military operations (Larson, 1996; Eichenberg, 2005; Gelpi et al., 2009). Some objectives, to be sure, strike the general public as more worthy than others and hence elicit more support. Public reactions to military interventions appear to be quite "prudent," based on the mission rather than knee-jerk reflexes one way or the other (Jentleson, 1992). Casualties are being balanced against the stakes of a given war, along with the prospect of success, in a cost-benefit type of calculus (Larson, 1996). Expectations of success, as Gelpi et al. (2009) have argued, predict casualty tolerance. Any effect of casualties on wartime morale may be contingent on how the public feels the war is going. The effect may be corrosive only when the public feels pessimistic about success as studies of the Iraq War have shown (Gelpi et al., 2009; Norpoth and Sidman, 2007). But subjective judgments of how well one's country is faring in war may be tainted by the very opinion that is of interest, namely approval or disapproval of that war, as Berinsky and Druckman (2007) have argued in an exchange with Gelpi and Reifler (2008).

[12] A cognitive explanation for why casualties may have little impact on public sentiment toward a war it that ordinary citizens just do not know the size of that toll. A recent study gauging perceptions of U.S. casualties in the Iraq war reported that these perceptions differed wildly and that sentiment about the war was nearly unrelated to the accuracy of the perceived casualty toll (Berinsky, 2007).

World War II would seem to be the classic case where the prospect of victory sustained high morale in the American in spite of a casualty toll that vastly exceeded the tolls of Korea and Vietnam. It was a "good" war, fought by the U.S. with an unwavering commitment to achieving the "unconditional surrender" of the enemy. Casualties were the inevitable price of victory. As polls conducted during World War II are getting attention, the conventional wisdom has been put to the test. While some have detected a casualty effect on public morale in World War II (Larson, 1996; Baum and Kernell, 2001; Kriner, 2006), others have affirmed the view that casualties did not matter then (Berinsky, 2007).

Whatever effect they might have had, it is unmistakable that Franklin Roosevelt's popular standing remained quite steady at or above the 70-percent mark throughout the war (Cantril, 1967, p. 48); after all, he was comfortably reelected in the wartime election of 1944.Only a handful of respondents in a 1944 poll thought U.S. entry in World War II was a mistake (Mueller, 1973, p. 63). If the question was so rarely polled, that was probably because there was little expectation that the answer would be different. A more commonly asked question showed that upwards of two-thirds thought they had a clear idea about what the war was about. Polls stopped asking whether the Allies were winning in late 1943 when the affirmative side topped the 95-percent mark (Cantril, 1967, p. 48). The prospect of certain victory helped keep American morale back home high and made the general public accept the inevitable toll on the battlefield as the necessary price for it. In contrast, did public morale collapse during the wars in Korea and Vietnam because the American lost faith in a victorious ending?

5. Data and method

Few polls probed the prospect of victory during the wars in Korea and Vietnam. It would be impossible to test the "victory" effect on wartime morale in the same fashion as was done for the casualty effect. What is possible is to rely on the cross-sectional data provided by the rare surveys that probed perceptions of victory along with other variables that bear on wartime morale. No opinion on a matter of foreign policy, of course, is determined by a single factor. A half century of research (reviewed in great detail by Holsti (2004), ch. 5) has examined the impact of such factors as gender, race, age, education, region, ideology, partisanship, the media, and elite leadership. For opinion on the wars in Korea and Vietnam, Mueller (1973, ch. 5) has charted the effects of many of those sources (also Rosenberg et al., 1970). Moreover, opinions on foreign policy issues, more generally, are capable of holding their own in contest with domestic-policy opinion when it comes to shaping the voting decision (Campbell et al., 1960, ch. 4, Lewis-Beck et al., 2008, ch. 4, and Aldrich et al., 1989), or with respect to presidential approval ratings (Nickelsburg and Norpoth, 2000). Furthermore, the public's views on foreign issue have been shown to affect policy decisions (Page and Shapiro, 1992) or preventing certain actions at odds with prevailing opinion (Sobel, 2001).

During the wars in Korea and Vietnam it was extremely rare for a poll to ask about perceptions of victory in conjunction with questions about support for the war, specific military actions, party identification, political information and the usual demographic sources of opinion. The one survey that did so for the Korean War was conducted by the Survey Research Center in June of 1951 (Belknap and Campbell, 1951–52). The survey focused heavily on opinions about the Truman-MacArthur dispute over strategy in Korea. It asked respondents to take sides in the dispute between MacArthur and Truman over strategy: "In the disagreement between President Truman and General MacArthur about how to carry on the War in Korea, who do you think was most nearly right?" To recall, Gen. MacArthur had advocated and pursued an aggressive strategy to defeat the enemy ("There is no substitute for victory"). President Truman favored a more defensive policy that was content to settle for a stalemate (derided by critics as "die for a tie"). Truman's decision to fire MacArthur made it clear that the U.S. would not pursue victory in Korea. For those Americans who preferred the pursuit of victory to stalemate, the war in Korea had become a lost cause.

During the Vietnam War the Gallup Poll probed perceptions of victory along with war support and other key variables in a survey conducted shortly after the beginning of the Tet Offensive of 1968.[13] The prospect of victory is gauged with the question: "Do you think the U.S. and its allies are losing ground in Vietnam, standing still, or making progress?" Even though neither "victory" nor "winning" appears in the wording of the question, it is safe to treat "making progress" as akin to "winning" the war. We would expect those who see the U.S. "losing ground" to turn against the war while those who see the U.S. winning it ("making progress") to maintain support.

6. Results

As shown by the results in Table 3, perceptions of victory strongly shaped support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam.[14] The vast majority of Americans who saw the U.S. making progress in Vietnam supported the war whereas the vast majority of those who saw the U.S. losing ground in Vietnam opposed it.[15] Translating the logit-estimates of Table 3 into proportions, seven in ten who saw progress supported of the war compared to only two in ten among those who saw a lost cause. Given such a strong relationship between perception of victory and wartime morale, it would not be surprising to see morale collapse as the prospect of victory dims. This is exactly what happened during the Vietnam War. As charted in Fig. 3, in November of 1967, most Americans were optimistic about success ("making progress"), but by June 1968, more of them saw the U.S. losing ground than making progress in Vietnam. The Tet Offensive and its repercussions shattered the faith of the American public in victory (also Johnson and Tierney, 2006). The loss of faith undermined popular support for the war, which explains the erosion of wartime morale in the aggregate that was demonstrated in a previous section.

As for the Korean War, where Americans stood on the Truman-MacArthur dispute closely pointed to how they felt about the war. Translating the parameter estimate for the Truman-MacArthur question in Table 3 into proportions, 70 percent of Truman supporters backed the war in Korea, but only 45 percent of MacArthur supporters did. This was not just a matter of personal choice, but related to the policies on how to pursue the war. Most Americans had a remarkably clear grasp of MacArthur's plan to enlarge the war and seek a quick end to it, as detailed in a May 1951 Gallup Poll. And they favored his side 2–1 over Truman's. It is well to acknowledge that the American public was

Table 3
Sources of support for the wars in Korea and Vietnam: Survey estimates.

Variables	Korean war	Vietnam war
Belief MacArthur was right in Korea	−0.584*** (0.100)	–
Belief U.S. is making progress in Vietnam	–	0.566*** (0.094)
Belief U.S. is losing ground in Vietnam	–	−0.701*** (0.113)
Gender	0.228* (0.093)	0.038 (0.083)
Race	−0.176 (0.206)	−0.244 (0.165)
Age	−0.065 (0.043)	−0.114*** (0.029)
Education	0.158* (0.068)	−0.028 (0.063)
Partisanship	0.131* (0.060)	0.074 (0.051)
Intercept	0.182 (0.231)	0.357 (0.211)
Number of Observations	777	1279
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	65.72***	128.40***
Percent correctly predicted	61%	66%

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Variables are coded as follows: Support for Korean war (0 = Should have stayed out, 1 = Right thing getting in), Support for Vietnam war (0 = Mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam, 1 = No mistake), Gender (1 = Male, 0 = Female), Race (1 = Black, 0 = White), Age for Korean war (1 = 18–24, 2 = 25–34, 3 = 35–44, 4 = 45–64, 5 = 65 and over), Age for Vietnam war (2 = 21–29, 3 = 30–39 = , …, 7 = 70 and over), Education (1 = Grade School, 2 = High School, 3 = College), Partisanship (1 = Democrat, −1 = Republican, 0 = Non-voter for Korean war, Independent for Vietnam war), Opinion on MacArthur-Truman Dispute (1 = MacArthur was right, 0 = Truman was right or Both/Neither). The Opinion on U.S. Prospects in Vietnam war is represented by two dummy variables, Making Progress and Losing Ground, with Standing Still being the excluded category. Sources: Survey Research Center, 1951 Minor Election Study, via ICPSR archive; and Gallup Poll #758, February 22–27, 1968, via the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

[13] Aside from this poll (The February 1968 Gallup Poll), to our knowledge, only one other poll during the entire war probed both perceptions of victory and war support in the same survey, a Gallup Poll in July 1967.

[14] The question in the 1951 SRC survey was: "Do you think we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Korea last summer or should we have stayed out?" The 1968 Gallup survey, in turn, asked: "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?" To express support for the war, a respondent had to answer yes to the first and no to the second. Most likely this difference in wording inflates support for the Korean war and deflates it for the Vietnam war, but the level of support is not of interest at this stage of the analysis. We do not suspect that it will affect the estimates for the effects of various factors on war support.

[15] These estimates are consistent with those obtained from the only other poll that gauged expectations of victory along with support for the war (conducted in July 1967). In the earlier poll, not surprisingly, the *Making Progress* alternative registered more strongly than it did in the post-Tet poll of February 1968, while the *Losing Ground* alternative did more weakly.

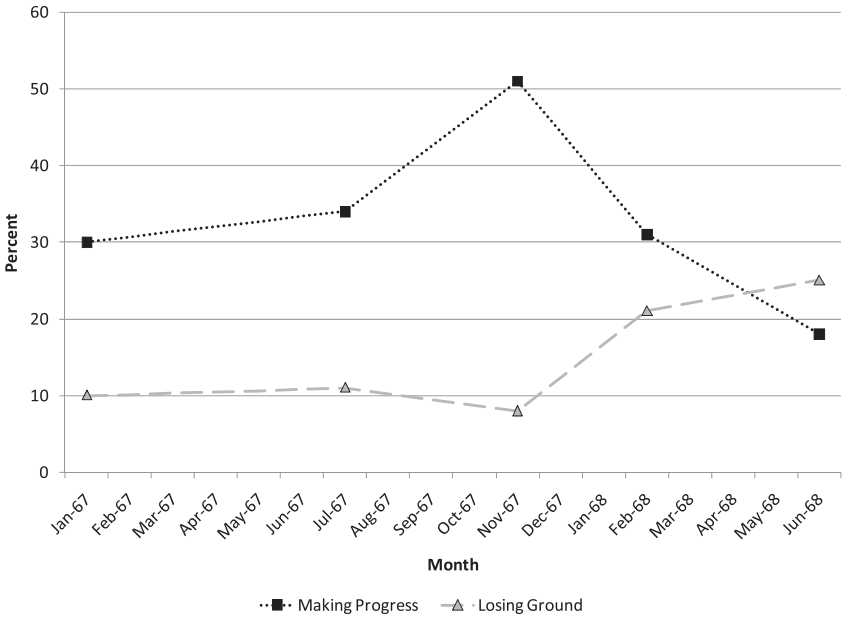

Fig. 3. Perceptions of victory in Vietnam. Note: Polls shown in this figure are the only ones that probed the question of whether the U.S. was making progress or was losing ground in Vietnam. The response category "Standing Still" is not displayed. Source: Gallup Poll (various dates), via the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

predominantly hawkish in its policy toward the war. In poll after poll during the Korean War, as meticulously tallied by Mueller (1973, pp. 75–80), proponents of a stronger stand consistently outnumbered those in favor of pulling out. Truman's rejection of a policy that enjoyed widespread public support was sure to undermine popular support for the war.

Our analysis of the how the prospect of victory shaped public morale in the wars in Korea and Vietnam has controlled for group differences along the lines of gender, race, age, education, and partisanship. Only a few of these factors turn out to have substantial effects. Education distinguishes supporters and opponents to a significant extent only in the Korean War survey. The stronger tendency of the college educated, compared to those with only a grade school education, to be supportive of military action during the Korean War seems to have dissipated during the Vietnam War. This would undercut the claim that education creates a "follower mentality," making the highly educated susceptible "to leadership appeals on international policy (Mueller, 1973, p. 123)." Black Americans tend to be less supportive of both wars than whites, especially during the Vietnam War, where the effect is mediated by perceptions of victory.

Most remarkable perhaps is the age effect. It sharply separates supporters and opponents during the Vietnam War, regardless of controls for any other factors. Even more stunning is the direction of the age effect. The young proved more eager to back the war than did the old. The finding certainly runs counter to popular wisdom, but it is consistent with previous survey evidence (Mueller, 1973, pp. 136–139; Rosenberg et al., 1970, ch. 3). In spite of the fact that nearly all the Vietnam protesters were young, it must be remembered that protesters made up only a small portion of the young. In a milder form the tendency of the young to be more supportive of the war also materialized during the Korean War. So it may be less a generational than a life-cycle phenomenon. While occupational class divided Americans over the Vietnam War in a study by Hibbs et al. (1982), there is no evidence for the expected effect in the 1968 Gallup survey. Those with blue-collar jobs prove as supportive of the Vietnam War as do those with white-collar jobs, and just as hawkish (also Mueller, 1973, pp. 130–135). And both groups express the same degree of faith that the U.S. is making progress in Vietnam.

7. Opinion leadership and wartime morale

With information scarce and foreign affairs often remote from the lives of ordinary Americans, the door is open for opinion leaders to try to shape, some would say, manipulate, mass opinion. Few would deny that the world of foreign affairs affords political leaders more leeway than does the domestic arena to get their way with the general public (Miller and Stokes, 1963). Elite cues have a special place in the formation of mass opinion on foreign policy, as is strongly argued by some scholars (Brody, 1991; Groeling and Baum, 2008; Berinsky, 2009). As far as the Vietnam War is concerned, Zaller (1992, ch. 9) attributes the change from support to opposition in the American public to the collapse of the elite consensus.

Partisan differences in the mass public over foreign policy issues provide a strong clue for leadership influence, as first shown by Belknap and Campbell (1951–52). While it may have been surprising to some observers that rank-and-file Democrats were more supportive than Republicans of

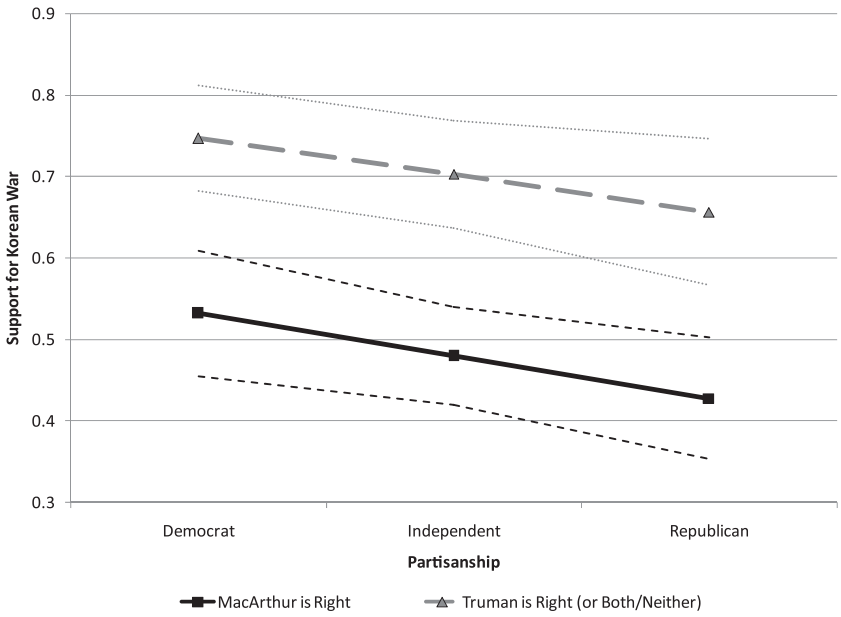

Fig. 4. The likelihood of supporting the war in Korea by opinion of the MacArthur-Truman Dispute and Partisanship. Note: Support for the Korean war is measured by the response that it was right to fight in Korea. Probabilities were calculated using the results from the model in Table 3. In this figure, gender, race, age, and education were held at the following values: male, white, age 35–44, and high school education. For each curve, 95% confidence intervals for the predicted probabilities are represented by the dashed lines.

both the Korean War and the Vietnam War, at least until the 1968 election, the finding squarely fits the leadership hypothesis. After all, both the White House and the Congress were controlled by the Democratic Party during that time. "Much of the public's response to the wars has been influenced by the position taken by the leadership of the political parties" (Mueller, 1973, p. 116). When mass opinion on an issue like a foreign war breaks down along the divide of long-term partisanship, it is likely that individual citizens are taking a cue from leaders of their party, most likely the President or prominent voices of the opposition party.

Partisanship appeared to sway Americans toward siding with Truman or MacArthur in their celebrated dispute over the Korean War. Close to eight of ten Republicans in the 1951 SRC survey agreed with MacArthur while a good number of Democrats backed Truman. But what is striking is that more Democrats deserted the President than backed him, and by a 5–4 margin sided with the General. Hence any effect of partisanship on war support was muted. The likelihood of supporting the war in Korea, as shown in Fig. 4, was very similar for Democrats and Republicans.[16] Democratic loyalty failed to prevent many a Democrat from rallying to MacArthur and against a Democrat in the White House. The pursuit of victory had broad bipartisan appeal. It undercut the ability of the President to exert opinion leadership in his partisan ranks, to the detriment of public support for the war, his own popularity and, ultimately, the electoral success of his party in the next election.

To probe further for evidence of elite influence on mass opinion for or against the Korean War, we employed Zaller's (1992, ch. 9) model for a "two-sided information flow." Given the high visibility of the Truman-MacArthur dispute, the American public certainly received conflicting messages about the war. Under these circumstances, the model predicts that opinion would be polarized along party lines among the highly attentive citizens and less so among the least attentive. To test for this possibility, we added a measure of attentiveness (a scale of familiarity with foreign policy issues) and the interaction between such attentiveness and partisanship to the equation in Table 3. The estimate for the interaction, however, fails to prove significant (0.103 with a standard error of 0.096). Partisans who were highly attentive to elite cues proved no more polarized in their opinions on the war than those who paid little attention.

Our findings on the effect of party leadership also differ from those reported by Belknap and Campbell (1951–52).[17] The latter made their case by relying on vote intention in the next election as a measure of party identification. But this type of partisan response is bound to be swayed by short-term perceptions such as opinions about the Korean War, and especially the Truman-MacArthur showdown, in

[16] These probabilities were calculated with gender, race, age, and education held constant at the modal or median category (male, white, 35–44 years old, and high school graduate).

[17] Belknap and Campbell were the principal investigators of the same 1951 SRC survey that is being used for this analysis as well.

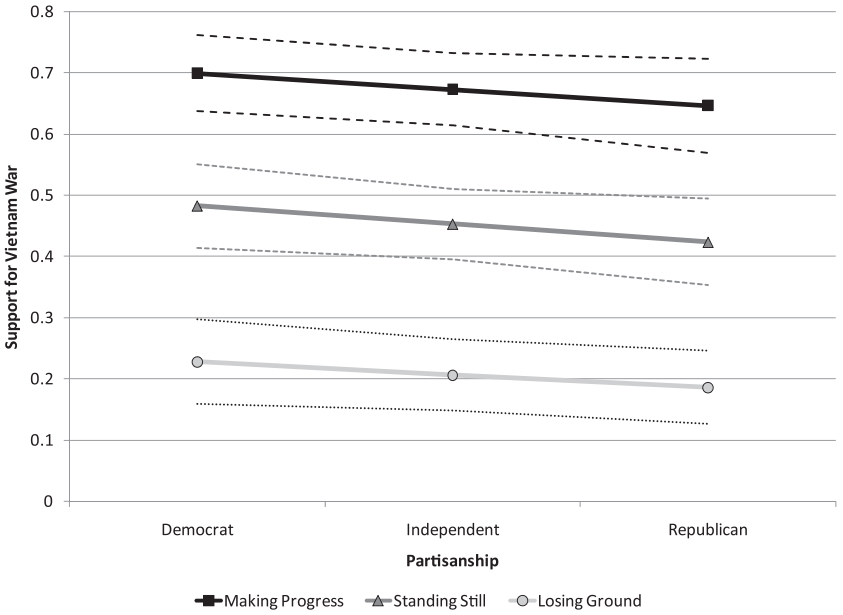

Fig. 5. The likelihood of supporting the war in Vietnam by prospect of victory and partisanship. Note: Support for the Vietnam war is measured by the response that it was not a mistake to fight in Vietnam. Probabilities were calculated using the results from the model in Table 3. In this figure, gender, race, age, and education were held at the following values: male, white, age 40–49, and high school education. For each curve, 95% confidence intervals for the predicted probabilities are represented by the dashed lines.

a survey taken at that time.[18] In contrast, we used past vote (1948) as a measure of party identification. In light of the highly partisan nature of the 1948 vote, this is a superior measure of long-term partisanship.[19] The vote for Truman or Dewey in 1948 was a far more partisan choice than the one Americans were contemplating to cast in the next election. By 1951, many a Democrat appeared ready to vote Republican, in no small measure due to misgivings over the war in Korea (Campbell et al., 1960, chs. 3 and 4). The partisan effect documented by Belknap and Campbell (1951–52) says more about foreign policy opinion, especially on the war in Korea, impinging on the vote for a Democrat or Republican in 1952 than about party leadership guiding mass opinion on foreign policy.

Next, let us turn to the possibility of elite influence on mass support during the Vietnam War.[20] In the February 1968 Gallup Poll used here, Democrats were barely ten points more inclined to back the Vietnam War than were Republicans. Some effect of partisanship, of course, operates through the perception of victory. About four in ten Democrats believed the U.S. was winning, compared to three in ten among Republicans, which suggests the same order of magnitude. In each group of partisans, the likelihood of supporting U.S. efforts in Vietnam, holding all the others factors constant, differs sharply depending on the perception of victory. As shown in Fig. 5, about seven in ten Democrats who see progress in Vietnam support the war compared to one in four Democrats who see the U.S. losing ground in Vietnam. Gaps of similar magnitude can be seen among Republicans and Independents. At the same time, when the war is seen as being lost Democrats are about as little inclined to support the war as are Republicans (one in five). And the same goes for the other options (standing still, making progress). As in the case for Korea, we find no evidence that partisan polarization is strongest among those most attuned to the media. The interaction between a measure of attentiveness (political interest in this case) and party identification turns out to be negligible (0.039 with a standard error of 0.070). Hence, during neither of the wars did elite cues as facilitated by partisanship guide mass support. What did register strongly was the prospect of victory.

8. Conclusion

Wartime morale, we conclude, depends on the prospect of victory. Our research offers evidence for this proposition as far as the wars in Korea and Vietnam are concerned. We have done so with the help of surveys that queried Americans about their perceptions of victory along with wartime support during those interventions. Though rare, those surveys were conducted at critical moments, the Truman-MacArthur dispute during the Korean War and the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War. The American public

[18] The vote intention breakdown in the 1951 SRC Study is 27–25 in favor of Democrats over Republicans, compared to a party identification breakdown of 47–28 in favor of Democrats in the 1952 SRC Study, and of 39–29 in the 1944 NORC Study. In contrast, the breakdown for past vote in the 1951 SRC Study is 36–25 in favor of Democrats.

[19] It is a mystery that the 1951 study by Belknap and Campbell, whose title refers to "party identification," did not include the measure of party identification that was used by the 1952 NES survey. After all, Angus Campbell was a principal investigator of both studies. Perhaps this suggests that the measure was invented sometime between June 1951 and early 1952.

[20] The measure of partisanship used by the 1968 Gallup survey taps a person's party identification in a way that produces nearly the same breakdown as the 1968 Election Study; the ratio of Democrats to Republicans being 44 to 26 in the former, and 45 to 25 in the latter. 37.

strongly favored the aggressive strategy of MacArthur ("there is no substitute for victory") against Truman's more limited strategy of settling for stalemate. With MacArthur gone, so was the prospect of victory in Korea. A more direct question about whether the U.S. was winning or losing in Vietnam closely predicts popular support for that war. What is more, as perceptions of victory tumble, in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive, so does support for the war in Vietnam. In a nutshell, when the American public is convinced that the U.S. is making progress toward achieving victory it will support a war, when it sees the war as a lost cause it will turn against it.

Contrary to widespread belief, casualties matter little for wartime morale. The cumulative toll had no corrosive effect during the Korean War, and no more than a trace in Vietnam. Taking account of the autoregressive feature of war support over time and game-changing events renders the casualty effect largely spurious. In other words, a public that believes the U.S. is winning will accept casualties as the price of victory in war, as Americans did in World War II. In that case, the rising toll of casualties will not have a corrosive effect on wartime morale. But when the public concludes that the war is unwinnable, morale will collapse, whatever the human toll. It is conceivable that as the prospect of victory diminishes, casualties may depress wartime morale, as seems to have happened during the Iraq War. Whether this was true during the wars in Korea and Vietnam is impossible to tell without more extensive measures of popular expectations of success.

Wartime morale in the general public also owes little to elite cues. According to the elite-cue proposition, when political elites, especially party leaders, are unified on the war, the mass public will follow suit; when leaders part company and divide along partisan lines, so will the mass public in due time. Without much doubt the American public has but a limited appetite and capability for dealing with matters of foreign policy. Many Americans may not be able to find countries like Vietnam or Korea on a map. Yet they proved quite familiar with someone like MacArthur and his strategy in Korea, or capable of gauging the prospect of success in Vietnam in the wake of the Tet Offensive. They did not have to turn to party leaders to figure out whether to be for or against the war. It is quite telling that unhappiness over the prospect of the war led many Americans loyal to the president's party to turn against the war. The elite-cues proposition may well apply to issues of foreign policy that are of little concern to the mass public. But when issues excite strong passions, it may not be wise to treat the public as malleable in the hands of elites, and instead allow for the possibility that elites take cues from the mass public. When the issue is one of life and death such as fighting a major war, ordinary citizens are bound to feel strongly enough about it and voice opinions that elites would be well advised to heed if they wish to retain power.

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