

**The Things They Carried:
Generational Effects of the Vietnam War on Elite Opinion**

Abstract

Do foreign policy elites who shared in formative political experiences also share similar views on subsequent policy issues? Proponents of a generation effect suggest they do, but this argument overlooks two facts: that not everyone experiences major historical events in the same way, and that different experiences might give rise to quite different policy views. Here we investigate the impact of the Vietnam War on elite opinion about foreign policy during the following two decades using elite surveys conducted by the Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP) from 1976 through 1996, assessing their susceptibility to what has been called the Vietnam Syndrome. Not surprisingly, we find that age and military service influenced elite opinion about the Vietnam War. More importantly, we find that different trajectories of opinion about the Vietnam War influenced later views about a wide range of foreign policy issues during the Cold War, even after controlling for party identification and ideology. However, there is little evidence that these effects persisted after the end of the Cold War, even on matters like civil war intervention where the experience of the Vietnam War was arguably still relevant. The "Vietnam Syndrome" that we find is restricted to the Cold War rivalry.

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Authors' note: A previous version of this article was presented at the 2016 annual meeting of the International Studies Association. The authors thank Jessie Rumsey, Emily Meierding, participants in the World Politics Workshop at Binghamton University, and the editors and anonymous referees at *ISQ*. We are responsible for any remaining errors.

Introduction

In a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed published a half-century after the United States' escalation of the Vietnam War, former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and retired US Senator Bob Kerrey asserted, "The years of the Vietnam War defined a generation and influenced and changed America. It profoundly affected the nation's culture and politics. No corner of society was untouched. The war framed and informed a generation and forced the questioning of institutional thinking, particularly in foreign policy."¹

Hagel and Kerrey's assessment of the Vietnam War's impact is not unusual, but it is telling. Like others before them, the former Senators from Nebraska characterize the Vietnam War as a generation-defining event. And, like others before them, they suggest that the war affected Americans' foreign policy attitudes, shaking their confidence in the establishment and its faith in US military might. Though Hagel and Kerrey do not use the expression, others have put a label on this lingering shadow of doubt about the efficacy of US foreign interventionism: the "Vietnam Syndrome."

Hagel and Kerrey share more in common than their Cornhusker roots and views on the Vietnam War's impact. Both are decorated veterans of the war, and both are foreign policy elites of the first order.² That these two men would share strong views on the war's effects is unsurprising, despite their partisan differences. But did the Vietnam War inform an entire generation, as they suggest? Previous studies of elite opinion found little evidence of generation effects on foreign policy attitudes (Holsti and Rosenau 1990; Holsti 1996). Our analysis of survey data from the Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP), conducted between 1976 and 1996, helps to account for the disjuncture between Hagel and Kerrey's conventional wisdom and the underwhelming evidence for generational effects in Holsti and Rosenau's analyses. Parsing the effects of distinct Vietnam War experiences allows us to identify patterns of elite attitudes toward the war and toward subsequent military engagements—patterns that reflect differences

¹ Chuck Hagel and Bob Kerrey, "Securing Peace With Trade and Diplomacy," *The Wall Street Journal* print edition, April 19, 2016, p. A13.

² Before serving as Secretary of Defense, Senator Hagel served on the Foreign Relations and Intelligence Committees; Senator Kerrey served as vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee and, after retiring, on the 9/11 Commission.

between generations, but also within the "Vietnam generation" itself. Different wartime experiences and contrasting conclusions about whether the war was a mistake gave rise to divergent views about American foreign policy in the years that followed. In this sense, our findings contribute to recent scholarship on generations, political socialization, and politics (e.g., Bartels and Jackman 2014; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009; Johnson and Dawes 2016; Neundorf and Niemi 2014; Schuman and Corning 2012).

That our study captures distinct foreign policy attitudes among people who experienced the Vietnam War in different ways comports with recent studies of wars' effects on the political attitudes of those who lived through those wars (e.g., Bellows and Miguel 2009; Blattman 2009; Grossman, Manekin, and Miodownik 2015; Hong and Kang 2017). Consistent with such studies, we hypothesize and find that wartime military service is associated with distinctive attitudes toward war—the Vietnam War, and especially in our study, prospective wars—and that these attitudes tend to persist. To gauge the persistence of elite attitudes shaped by war experiences, we use trends in attitudes toward the Vietnam War to predict elite opinion concerning prospective uses of US power abroad, both during and after the Cold War. Doing so allows us to evaluate the claim of a "Vietnam Syndrome" among the people most likely to affect foreign policy.

Not surprisingly, the elite survey data reveal that many respondents changed from support to opposition as the Vietnam War dragged on. For many in this group, war-related trauma came not from combat but from the shattering of prior assumptions about the war and about the United States' role and efficacy in world affairs. Such a change of heart is arguably more consequential for elites closely involved in foreign policy than it would be in the general public. Survey respondents who shared this experience of changing their minds perhaps are the core group of skeptics who suffered most acutely from a "Vietnam Syndrome." Members of this group proved reluctant to embrace interventionism and tended toward "dovish" opinions in post-Vietnam surveys.

However, survey data from the 1990s show that this dovish tendency among those who came to oppose the Vietnam War evaporated after the Soviet Union's collapse. Similarly, the "hawkish" attitudes of Vietnam War supporters that prevailed during the Cold War were attenuated in the 1990s. As we argue below, these changes cannot be attributed solely to political ideology and partisanship—rather, they reflect the importance of international context, and in

particular, overriding concerns about the Cold War. The disruption of earlier, significant patterns suggests that the hawk-dove dichotomy depended on the Cold War frame—and that among US elites, war-influenced attitudes were impermanent.

In sum, it may be tempting to speak of a "Vietnam generation" among US foreign policy elites, but it is more accurate to state that there are multiple generation effects shaped by individual experience and the international context. Within that age cohort, patterns emerge: those who served in the military and those who changed their mind about the war exhibit distinct attitudes concerning the war itself and subsequent projections of US military power. And to the extent that their divergent attitudes can be characterized as hawkish or dovish, these patterns break down after the Cold War, indicating that fears of a permanent Vietnam Syndrome were misplaced. To say, then, that the war "framed and informed a generation" may afford too much influence to the war itself and not enough to the constraining context of the Cold War. The Vietnam War's effects on the foreign policy attitudes of elites—members of a "Vietnam generation" and otherwise—were patterned and persistent, but did not transcend the effects of the Cold War rivalry and its demise.

To arrive at these conclusions, we begin with a brief overview of the notions of a Vietnam generation and Vietnam Syndrome. Building on extant international relations scholarship, we develop our expectations and two-stage research design. We then present the empirical results, which obtain even when we control for the background variables most consistently associated with elites' foreign policy attitudes in previous analyses: partisanship, ideology, and occupation (Holsti and Rosenau 1990, 116). We conclude by discussing some implications of our findings, which might be of particular interest in an era characterized by disillusionment with US military adventurism, pressures for restraint and retrenchment,³ and the burgeoning maturation of a generation that experienced its coming-of-age during the wars of 9/11.

The Vietnam War's Legacy in the U.S.: A Generation Averse to Using Force Abroad?

Generational analysis (e.g., Mannheim [1928] 1952) is built on observations about the human life cycle as it transects the linear passage of time. The stream of political events may be depicted

³ Zaretsky's (2011, 537–8) encapsulation of the post-Vietnam debate about the future of American foreign policy provides a basis for comparison with present circumstances. Cf. Mueller (2005, 53–4).

along a linear timeline, but not all living persons experience each event at the same life-cycle stage; some will be children, others teenagers or young adults, and some mature adults. Political events may be salient to individuals' lives during any life-cycle phase, but dramatic events are thought to have particularly lasting effects when subjects are old enough to perceive political events but young enough that their attitudes and belief systems are still developing.⁴ During these "formative years" a generational identity may be forged through a cohort's shared experience of salient events.

Attitudinal persistence models build on this notion with the "impressionable years" hypothesis (Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Sears 1990; Sears and Brown 2013). In part because they have not yet engaged in adult interaction with the political world, adolescents have a weak "experiential base" for political attitudes to take hold. Young adults are especially susceptible to the force of external events, and by the end of that formative life stage—roughly ages 16-30—political identity tends to be more fully formed and less pliable, a tendency supported by empirical studies of political beliefs' consistency in panel survey data (Jennings and Zhang 2005; also Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Jennings 1996; Sears and Funk 1999). As Bartels and Jackman (2014, 10) note, "the notion that early formative experiences have some special power to stamp different generations with distinctive political attitudes and beliefs has been one of the most familiar and influential ideas in the literature on political socialization."

As political events go, the Vietnam War—given its prominence in media reporting and the potency and persistence of debate about the war—clearly had extraordinary potential for shaping a generation who experienced it as young adults. Even before the war was over, at least one scholar speculated that it would push a generation of future foreign policy elites—those who were in their 20s during the war—toward a "Vietnam paradigm" of non-interventionism in world affairs (Roskin 1974). Scholars continue to apply the impressionable-years logic to capture the shared experience of the "Vietnam generation." Busby and Monten (2008, 457–60) for example identify the Vietnam War as a formative event, and code for a "Vietnam generation" in their study of establishment internationalism among foreign policy elites. Using open-ended survey

⁴ For example, for an American born in 1979, the experience of the 9/11 attacks (at age 22) would likely be a formative event, whereas Americans born in say, 1939 (age 62 in 2001) would have established their own political attitudes much earlier in the stream of political time, perhaps with the Berlin Wall Crisis or the Cuban Missile Crisis as formative events.

questions about "especially important events," Schuman and Corning (2012, 7) find that among respondents' judgments of pre-1985 events the Vietnam War ranks just behind World War II, and plays a special role for those who experienced the war during their "critical years" (2012, 14–5).

Leery of military activism in the Vietnam War's wake, Americans—and perhaps the Vietnam generation in particular—might appear more hesitant to deploy US armed forces overseas, especially in the developing world. Conventional wisdom and the media enshrined the intuition that the War had a durable impact on Americans' attitudes toward related issues, making them more pessimistic about interventionism and the United States' role in the world. This "Vietnam Syndrome" was characterized by *The Economist* as "scepticism... about both the legitimacy and the efficacy of America using military power overseas." Scholarship is more equivocal on the matter. Though a variety of studies have analyzed the Vietnam War's influence on attitudes toward subsequent military activism, "three decades of scholarship on war and public opinion have not produced a scholarly consensus on a crucial question: whether the Vietnam War fundamentally transformed U.S. public opinion on the use of force" (Eichenberg 2005, 140).⁵

Many studies in this vein have focused on mass public attitudes, exploring phenomena like "casualty sensitivity" and declining public support for war (Mueller 1973; see also Gartner and Segura 1998; Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2005–6; Kriner and Shen 2014). But the Vietnam Syndrome cannot be reduced to mass aversion to mounting casualties. Its symptoms are broadly consistent with findings that the American public is "pretty prudent" with regard to military intervention (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Oneal et al., 1996), inasmuch as the public seems to prefer military actions focused on "foreign policy restraint" rather than "internal political change" (Jentleson 1992), and conditions its support for intervention on the probability of success (e.g., Eichenberg 2005; Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2005–6). Taken together, these studies depict an American public reluctant to support military interventions that might resemble the Vietnam War, even if the studies do not directly link this reluctance with the War's impact. Given the connections' ambiguity, it would seem the diagnosis of a "syndrome" is inconclusive.

However much the American public as a whole has (or has not) suffered from a Vietnam Syndrome, the mass public's influence on policy and on decisions to deploy forces abroad is

⁵ Despite its illumination of American public attitudes toward the use of force between 1981 and 2005, Eichenberg's work does not conclusively resolve this issue.

limited; the prime mover, more likely, is the American foreign policy elite. Elites are sensitive to the electorate, but also inform and manipulate the public, giving cues and divulging information through the media (e.g., Berinsky 2009; Powlick and Katz 1998). They are more likely than less interested and educated citizens to have opinions that are consistent across issues and over time (e.g., Converse 1964). Their views may also differ from the general public in some respects, as in their near-unanimous support for US internationalism while isolationism remains a minor but persistent tendency in the mass public. Elites, then, may be more inclined than the "pretty prudent" public to embrace the use of force abroad to achieve national objectives⁶, which possibly makes elite opinion a tougher test of the Vietnam Syndrome than mass public opinion. A key question, then, is did the shared experience of the Vietnam War shape the attitudes of those with greater access to the levers of power (or significant potential to nudge those levers)? It is these foreign policy elites to which we turn our attention.

Not All Baggage Looks the Same: Unpacking the Vietnam Generation of US Foreign Policy Elites

A common assertion is that the Vietnam War shaped a generation of young Americans—and (by implication) as they aged and gained status, a generation of American foreign policy elites. Because elites—especially those who eventually attain influential positions in government, media, and other institutions—can have a significant impact on policy decisions, the question of whether the Vietnam War influenced that birth cohort's worldviews is of interest to scholars and analysts of US foreign policy. In 1980, Ole Holsti and James Rosenau published an empirical study investigating this possibility. In their words,

The generational argument, if valid, has some important implications for the future conduct of this nation's external relations because it suggests that members of the "Vietnam generation," as they achieve positions of leadership and influence during the

⁶ By Wittkopf and Maggioto's (1983, 306) reckoning, "Elements of the internationalist world view widely embraced by elites during the post-World War II period include a sense of active, global responsibility, a fear of communism, a conviction that the Soviet Union's expansive tendencies must be contained, a preference for military preparedness, and a willingness to use interventionist means to realize American objectives."

next several decades, will bring to their roles an intellectual baggage radically different from that of the leaders they are replacing. (Holsti and Rosenau 1980, 3)

Such tests of hypotheses concerning a "Vietnam generation" were arguably premature. Holsti and Rosenau (1980, 1986, 1990) themselves admitted that the tests were preliminary. Others (e.g., Yoon 1997) assessed whether a generational shift in attitudes had occurred by analyzing US foreign policy behavior, but such studies are at best indirect assessments of attitudes—and are even more premature, since generational replacement at higher levels of government had not yet occurred in the period under examination (Roskin 1974, 587–8).

Though preliminary, Holsti and Rosenau's contributions on elite opinion and foreign policy issues must not be discounted. Their work, along with that of Kegley (1986), Wittkopf (1986), and others revealed much about the attitudes and belief systems of American foreign policy elites. But even Holsti's 1996 book—which considers the generational hypothesis across five iterations of the FPLP survey and, unlike the earlier collaborative works, includes post-Cold War survey results—finds only weak and inconsistent support for generation-based patterns in respondents' attitudes. As Holsti acknowledges, "there is little evidence presented here to sustain the hopes—or fears—that the inevitable replacement of one generation by its successor will give rise to significant changes in public or elite attitudes toward foreign affairs" (1996, 166).

Holsti's conclusion follows from weak empirical associations between birth cohort and attitudes toward controversial foreign policy issues (e.g., Holsti and Rosenau 1990, 116–7; Holsti 1996). One problem with this approach to the Vietnam generation is that it implicitly assumes that the war had a uniform effect on those who experienced it. To be sure, the war may have had a greater impact on some individuals than it did on others, but Holsti's analysis still assumes that it pushed everyone it affected toward the same policy conclusions. Such an assumption makes sense for historical events about which there is an elite consensus; for instance, the experience of World War II is widely supposed to have pushed all Americans away from isolationist attitudes about the country's role in the world (e.g., Roskin 1974, 567 ff.). Given the elite consensus on this point, this is a plausible claim. However, no such consensus coalesced about the meaning of the Vietnam War.

For some, the Vietnam War revealed grave problems with the assumptions behind American foreign policy (e.g., Caputo 1977, xiv; Ellsberg 2002, vii–x). For others, it revealed limits on

public willingness to make sacrifices necessary to ensure the country's security (e.g., Mann 2005, xvi–xvii, 52–4). This divergence is likely to be especially pronounced among elites who are highly engaged with American foreign policy. For an event like the Vietnam War, the weak results turned up in previous research about generation effects might stem from the fact that they effectively average across these two very different groups. And the differences do not end there—as we show below, not all members of the cohort experienced the Vietnam War in the same way, reacted to the war in the same way, or evaluated subsequent intervention opportunities in the same way.

Effects of the Uniform, but not Uniform Effects: Expectations

We do not expect to find uniform effects among members of the "Vietnam generation." Our expectation of intra-generational variation comports with recent scholarship on how specific war experiences affect individuals and their political attitudes and activities. For example, findings reported by Bellows and Miguel (2009) and Blattman (2009) from Sierra Leone and Uganda, respectively, suggest that individuals with firsthand experience of war trauma are especially likely to be engaged and mobilized in postwar political life. Evidence from South Korea suggests that wartime trauma impacts individuals' political attitudes, such as trust in the government, and that such attitudes can persist even 60 years after war's end (Hong and Kang 2017). These micro-level studies from around the world suggest, perhaps unsurprisingly, that distinct wartime experiences can shape individuals and their political attitudes in different ways. If, as we suspect, such variation gives rise to significant intra-generational heterogeneity, then broad generalizations about the Vietnam generation's tendencies will not hold (Mayer 1992). Even if one set of experiences and policy conclusions predominated and characterized the "generation" in the future, as it appears to have done during World War II, there might still be minority views—and such differences are particularly important for controversial events like the Vietnam War. Rather than a single "generation effect," it is better to think of several possibly divergent "generation effects."

For instance, those who served in the military might well view a war differently than those who did not (e.g., Schreiber 1979). Horowitz and Stam (2014, 528) frame the issue in these terms: "Does military service increase familiarity and knowledge about the use of force, making

those who serve more likely to support military action, or does the exposure to danger in the military make those who serve more hesitant to use force in the future?" Grossman, Manekin, and Miodownik (2015) note that international relations scholarship tends to be polarized on this question. Consistent with scholarship associated with Huntington (1957) and Janowitz (1960), some predict that veterans will exhibit hesitancy to embrace military solutions, and instead will see war as a last resort. By contrast, a school of thought associated with Posen (1984) and Snyder (1988) "argues that military experience leads to militaristic attitudes and behavior." The logic is that soldiers' intense socialization is "intended to increase their aggression toward rivals, inculcate a sense of identification with the military, and make them more comfortable with the use of force... resulting in greater acceptance of military solutions to conflict" (Grossman, Manekin, and Miodownik 2015, 984–5). Those authors present evidence for the latter, and their findings guide our predictions.

Military service is not the only way experiences might differ—for those in potentially influential positions, simply changing their mind about a policy can itself be important.⁷ Doing so is costly because it alienates political allies who remain committed, especially to a highly salient policy like the prosecution of a war. If expressed openly, the new perspective could change or derail an individual's career. In addition to such risks, changing one's mind requires overcoming tendencies toward psychological inertia. For these reasons, the process of changing one's mind can be a significant, potentially formative event in its own right (e.g., Janoff-Bulman 1992). In an influential article, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) assert that cognitive processing of a traumatic experience or crisis can generate post-traumatic growth, a developmental process in which the individual has survived the trauma but been transformed in "deeply profound" ways (2004, 4). Post-traumatic growth is not the direct result of the trauma itself, but rather of the individual's attempts to process it:

It is the individual's struggle with the new reality in the aftermath of trauma that is crucial in determining the extent to which posttraumatic growth occurs... Psychological crisis can be defined in relation to the extent to which the fundamental components of the assumptive world are challenged... The "seismic" set of circumstances severely

⁷ Going even further, Roskin (1974, 576) argues that a traumatic foreign policy experience can impart a new paradigm in response to the "inadequacies" associated with the previously dominant paradigm.

challenges, contradicts, or may even nullify the way the individual understands why things happen, in terms of proximate causes and reasons...Cognitive rebuilding that takes into account the changed reality of one's life after trauma produces schemas that incorporate the trauma and possible events in the future (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004, 5).

Thus, the struggle to process the meaning and import of a trauma (such as an ineffectual or morally objectionable war) can reshape one's thinking about similar phenomena in the future (such as prospective military interventions resembling the problematic war).

The process of changing one's mind about the war suggests a learning process. We salute the brave souls who venture into what Levy (1994) characterized as a "minefield"—for example, Bartels and Jackman's (2014) innovative Bayesian updating model that accounts for the extraordinary impact of formative events by assigning them heavier weights than subsequent events later in life—but we do not follow their lead here. We neither propose nor test a general model of political learning. Instead, we isolate and characterize the effect of the Vietnam War experience (or more accurately, different sorts of Vietnam War experiences) as foreign policy elites age and mature, and assess whether such effects correspond to what is commonly understood as "hawkishness" or "dovishness" of attitudes about the use of American military power abroad, with an eye toward the persistence of an alleged Vietnam Syndrome.

For an event like the Vietnam War to have a lasting influence is more plausible for elites who are preoccupied with foreign policy than it would be for the general public. If being part of the "Vietnam generation" had an important influence on elite policy attitudes, then differences in attitudes toward the war associated with age and military service should persist over time, remaining roughly the same in surveys taken long after the Vietnam War ended. As we discuss in the conclusion, however, our results have more to say about intra-generational differences and the overarching Cold War context than they do about a chronic Vietnam Syndrome.

Hypotheses and Research Design

We test the impact of the Vietnam War on elite opinion in two stages, one to establish differences between generations and within the "Vietnam generation," and a second to discern whether respondents' views on the Vietnam War predict attitudes toward subsequent

interventionism, either exclusively within the Cold War context or in general. We first test whether those who had specific types of exposure to the Vietnam War—those of draft age and those who actually served in the military—took different positions on the event than others.

Hypotheses

Our first hypothesis thus seeks to ascertain whether we can identify a “Vietnam generation.” We expect the members of the Vietnam-era cohort to register attitudes distinct from those respondents who had already aged past their formative years. In keeping with the logic of post-traumatic growth viewed through a generational lens, we propose:

H1. Elites from the "Vietnam generation" should be more likely to have turned against the Vietnam War than those who were too old to be drafted.

Our second hypothesis concerns the effect of individual experience—and in particular, military experience—on attitudes toward the use of military force to solve foreign policy problems. Military service is not the only relevant experience, but it is especially relevant in assessing the impact of a war. Following Grossman, Manekin, and Miodownik (2015), we expect that military socialization predisposes veterans to support military solutions, and to remain committed to the cause of the war, despite controversy during its later stages:

H2. Military service should make elites less likely to have turned against the Vietnam War.

We can test whether these different conclusions about the Vietnam War held up retrospectively, as people of the generation who experienced it in their youth aged, and the War itself receded into history.

In the second stage, we test whether respondents' positions on the war influenced subsequent policy views. These influences might have worked through at least two different conclusions one might have drawn from the war. One concerns the Cold War rivalry and the policy implications of containing global communism. Since it was widely understood that the global spread of Soviet influence and ideology motivated US military involvement in and escalation of the Vietnam war, the development of negative attitudes toward the Vietnam War would have made some people *skeptical of the need to fight communism all over the world*:

H3. Those who turned against the Vietnam War should be relatively skeptical of policies related to the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Note that lasting effects linked to this conclusion should end with the Cold War, as the demise of the Soviet enemy and the global contest would render elites' cynical attitudes toward Cold-War policies moot.

On the other hand, some might have turned against the Vietnam War not because they were skeptical of the Cold War but rather because they concluded it was a civil war in which US intrusion was inappropriate, unwarranted, and doomed to fail. These observers are motivated to *avoid the dangers of intervening in civil wars*, a conclusion that has no obvious "expiration date." If the longevity of political attitudes shaped by war trauma is as durable as other studies suggest (e.g., Hong and Kang 2017), post-Vietnam reluctance to intervene in civil or regional conflicts, especially in less-developed areas not considered paramount in the Cold War, should persist even after the Cold War's end:

H4. Those who opposed the Vietnam War should oppose subsequent interventions in civil or regional conflicts, especially in less developed areas of the world. This pattern should persist after the Cold War.

If differences over contemporary policy issues based on positions taken during the Vietnam War outlast the Cold War, we can conclude that the second effect was more important than the first. Below we explain how we use the survey data to parse these effects and to distinguish the Cold War's contextual influence from a more general reluctance to engage in interventionism.

Data, Methods, and Controls⁸

We test our hypotheses using the elite surveys conducted by the Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP) between 1976 and 1996 (Holsti and Rosenau 1984; 1999). Holsti and Rosenau surveyed a relatively large sample of potentially influential Americans every four years during

⁸ This section reveals general information about our methodological approach, but since different modeling techniques are appropriate for different questions, we report specifics of model estimation in the results section.

this period.⁹ The sample drew on several relevant professions including military officers, public officials, university professors, doctors, lawyers, and media figures. With more than half holding graduate degrees, this group was much more highly educated than the general population. As Table 1 indicates, the proportion of each profession within the FPLP sample as a whole was relatively consistent over time. The same individuals were not sampled, but the same groups were.

Table 1.
Occupations in the FPLP Samples

Occupation	Year of Survey:					
	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996
Business Executive	12.4%	17.8%	17.9%	16.5%	16.7%	16.7%
Labor Official	2.9	3.5	3.1	2.8	2.7	3.5
Educator	24.5	25.0	24.2	27.4	28.1	27.4
Clergy	4.1	5.6	6.1	4.7	4.8	5.1
Military Officer	21.6	6.7	4.9	7.1	6.6	5.0
Public Official	7.3	5.5	4.6	5.5	4.6	4.6
State Department Official		6.0	5.7	5.8	6.0	4.7
Communications	8.2	9.6	8.6	9.1	7.0	6.7
Lawyer	5.1	5.8	6.0	6.2	8.1	9.0
Health Care	2.0	4.4	4.2	4.9	4.5	4.7
Other	11.8	10.2	14.8	9.7	11.0	12.9
n	2,282	2,502	2,515	2,226	2,312	2,141

Note: In 1976, Foreign Service officers were included with other public officials. The "other" category includes those listing more than one occupation, entertainers, and other selected from *Who's Who in America*.

One obvious problem with an elite sample of this sort is that the "policymaking elite" is not a clearly defined population. The structure and composition of this group is not obvious; for instance, high-ranking military officers clearly belong in the sample, but what share of the elite

⁹ The FPLP data have several advantages over the similar elite samples gathered by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA, formerly Chicago Council on Foreign Relations). First, the FPLP sample is more than four times larger than that typically gathered by the CCGA. Second, the FPLP consistently included items about respondents' retrospective views of the Vietnam War and about their military service. Third, the CCGA surveys include little demographic data, including age, so we cannot test hypotheses about generational effects.

"population" do they comprise relative to other groups such as academics and Foreign Service officers? Without a convincing answer to this question and corresponding set of weights, it would be a mistake to draw strong conclusions about the prevalence of particular views among policymakers. We will refrain from such conclusions, focusing instead on sources of differences within the sample.

While defining the correct composition of the policymaking elite and weighting the FPLP sample accordingly is beyond this article's scope, in our analysis we do consider the way this sample was gathered. Holsti and Rosenau sampled several professions relevant to foreign policy, including educators and military officers. One potential problem this sampling strategy poses for our analysis is that we might confound the effects of individuals' views during the Vietnam War with tendencies associated with their post-war professions. This is especially problematic because their view of the war might have influenced their choice of profession, which then served to preserve and reinforce their perspective. To handle this issue, we include a fixed-effect dummy variable for each occupational category in models of post-Vietnam foreign policy opinions. This is a conservative estimation strategy. To the extent that respondents' views on the Vietnam War influenced their choice of profession, we might underestimate the impact of the War on their subsequent opinions.

The first part of our analysis estimates the effects of belonging to the Vietnam generation—being among those eligible to serve in the War—and of actual service in Vietnam on retrospective attitudes toward the War. Here, we are interested not only in respondents' ultimate conclusions about the war but also into their pathway to this view. Turning against the war after initially supporting it is potentially different than the experience of opposing the war from the beginning. Moreover, such conversions are a staple of memoirs written by the elites the FPLP surveyed, and should be more likely among those who were relatively young at the time.

The second and more important part of our analysis evaluates the association between respondents' positions on the Vietnam War and their subsequent policy views. We selected policy questions from the FPLP survey with two criteria in mind. First, we chose items that asked respondents' views of contemporary policy questions rather than general philosophical attitudes, also avoiding those that were explicitly linked to the Vietnam War. It would be less surprising—and less interesting—to find that broader policy outlooks, such as opinions about containment of the Soviet Union, were linked to Vietnam. Later issues with no immediate

substantive linkage to the Vietnam War offer a better test of the "Vietnam Syndrome." Second, we use survey questions both about policy issues arising from the U.S.-Soviet rivalry and about interventions in less developed areas that were not clearly related to the Cold War. This allows us to discern whether differences over Vietnam exerted their effects mainly through Cold War attitudes, through attitudes toward intervention in less-developed countries, or both.

Assessing the impact of respondents' opinions about the Vietnam War and their subsequent policy views raises an important issue of causal inference. Such an association could arise because respondents' ideological commitments or party loyalties shaped both their views about the War *and* their later opinions. If this is the case, then there might be no causal relationship between these opinions. To avoid this spurious inference, we control for party identification and ideology when estimating the effect of Vietnam on later policy views. This is a conservative estimation strategy. The FPLP survey questions asked about respondents' current party identification and ideology. If the Vietnam War shaped these basic attitudes—as it might have among foreign policy elites—then models that include these controls will underestimate the impact of the Vietnam War experience on subsequent policy views. For present purposes, avoiding a spurious causal inference is more important than underestimating the War's impact.

Empirical Results

Age Cohorts, Military Service, and Attitudes toward the Vietnam War

The FPLP survey asked a common question about the Vietnam War in all six surveys between 1976 and 1996:

Some people felt we should have done everything possible to gain a complete military victory in Vietnam. Others felt that we should have withdrawn as soon as possible. Still others had opinions between these two. Please indicate which position came closest to your own feelings—both when the war first became an issue and later toward the end of U.S. involvement—by checking one box in each column.

The survey allowed respondents to choose "I tended to favor a complete military victory," "I tended to favor a complete withdrawal," "I tended to feel in between these two," and "not sure."

As the question indicates, the survey recorded respondents' opinions about Vietnam both "when the war first became an issue," and "toward the end of U.S. involvement."

Holsti and Rosenau (1984, 33) used responses to this question to sort positions on Vietnam based on the trajectory of the respondent's views on the war.¹⁰ Our categorization scheme is similar to theirs, and includes five groups:

Consistent Supporters: Those who favored a complete military victory at both points

Converted supporters: Those who favored a complete victory at the end of the war, but not at the beginning

Ambivalents: Those who held an "in between" or "not sure" position at the end of the war

Converted critics: Those who favored complete withdrawal at the end, but not at the beginning of the war

Consistent Critics: Those who favored complete withdrawal at both points

Table 2 presents the percentage of the sample that fell into each category in the six FPLP surveys. The distribution of the sample over these categories remains roughly the same over time. As conventional wisdom about the Vietnam War would have it, "converted critic" is the modal category, comprising more than a third of the sample in every year. Much of the Vietnam War's impact hinges on whether converted critics continued to have distinctively dovish policy views over time. This is the essence of the "Vietnam Syndrome."

¹⁰ Holsti and Rosenau divided our "ambivalents" into three categories based on whether the respondent had hawkish, dovish, or ambivalent views at the beginning of the war.

Table 2.
Retrospective Positions on Vietnam War in FPLP Samples

Position on the War	Year of Survey:					
	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996
Consistent Supporter	15.9%	18.4%	13.9%	14.9%	13.7%	13.4%
Converted Supporter	5.6	4.8	4.8	5.1	3.9	4.4
Ambivalent	23.9	25.1	24.1	23.8	25.7	28.1
Converted Critic	38.0	35.6	38.2	33.8	36.6	36.4
Consistent Critic	16.6	16.1	19.1	22.4	20.2	17.8

Note: Percentages are of the sample born before the 1960s. The categories are based on Holsti and Rosenau (1984, 33). Consistent supporters (critics) supported (opposed) the war in both its early and later stages. Converted supporters (critics) supported (opposed) the war only in its later stages. Ambivalent respondents did not take a clear position in the final stages of the war.

The numbers in Table 2 exclude the small fraction of the sample born after 1960. As children, they were unlikely to have had opinions about the war during its early stages. As Table 3 suggests, the FPLP sample was a relatively old one. Few people achieved the professional status necessary for inclusion before the age of 30, so even in 1996 only 3.5 percent were born after 1960. The comparisons that follow are between the Vietnam generation and their elders.

Table 3.
Age Distribution of the FPLP Samples

Decade of Birth	Year of Survey:				
	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996
1900-09	1.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
1910-19	18.3	7.3	2.0	1.0	0.8
1920-29	36.0	39.5	31.8	26.3	19.7
1930-39	25.7	28.6	32.1	36.5	37.9
1940-49	14.9	18.3	23.4	25.4	25.8
1950-59	3.8	5.9	9.6	9.8	12.3
1960-69	0.2	0.1	1.0	1.1	3.5

Note: The FPLP data divide the 1976 data into four cohorts by birth year as follows—

World War II generation (born before 1923): 26.8%

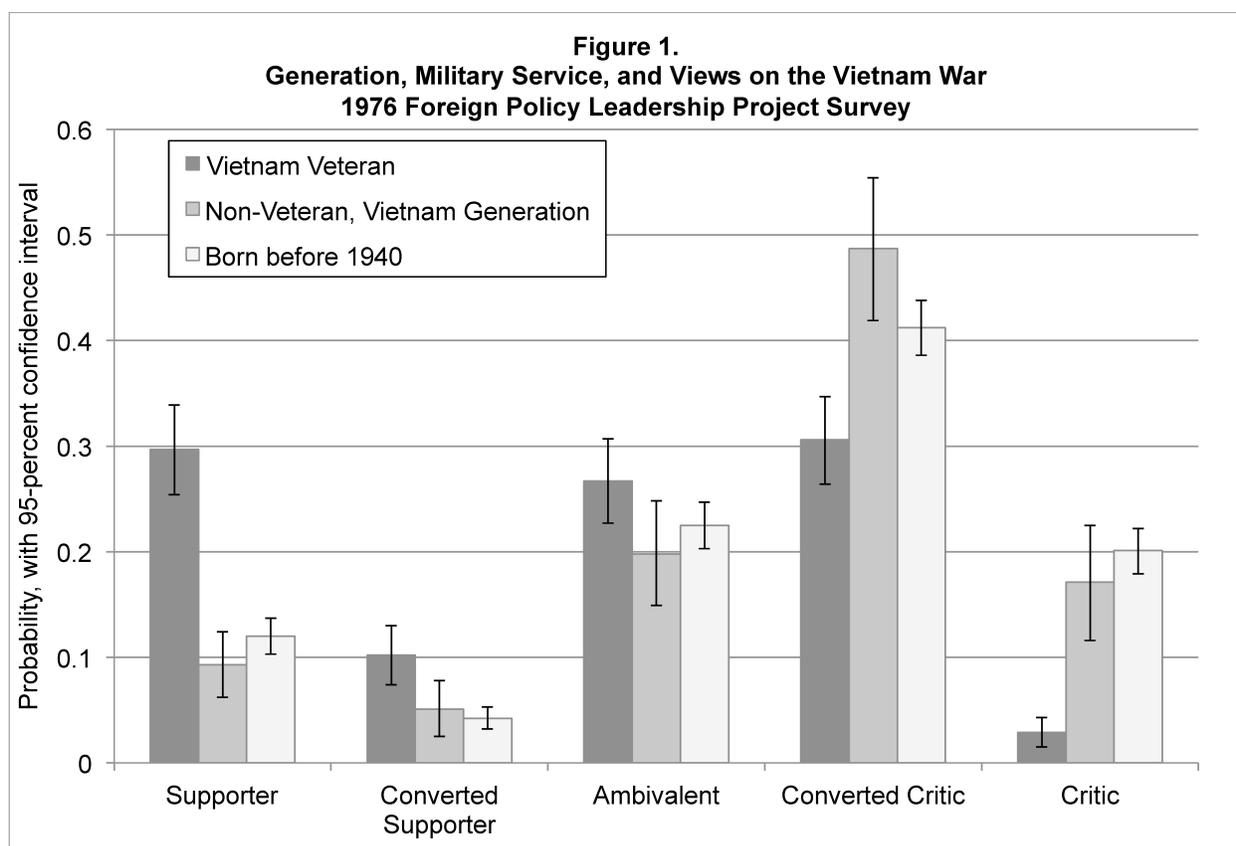
Korean War generation (1924-33): 11.8

Interim generation (1933-40): 20.3

Vietnam generation (born after 1940): 41.2

We first test the effect of age and military service on the trajectory of respondents' views about the Vietnam War. To do this, we estimated multinomial logit models of the five trajectories noted above for each survey. These models included a variable indicating whether respondents were young enough to be eligible for the draft during the War—our definition of the Vietnam Generation—and another indicating whether they served in the war. We also included a control for gender to ensure that military service does not proxy a gender effect.

Figure 1 displays the results for the 1976 FPLP survey.¹¹ There is substantial support for our hypotheses 1 and 2, concerning the Vietnam Generation and military service, respectively. First, other things being equal, members of the Vietnam Generation were more likely to become converted critics. Only a small fraction still favored the pursuit of military victory by the end of the War. This result fits with both the conventional wisdom about the war and the idea that people are more likely to change their views when they are relatively young.

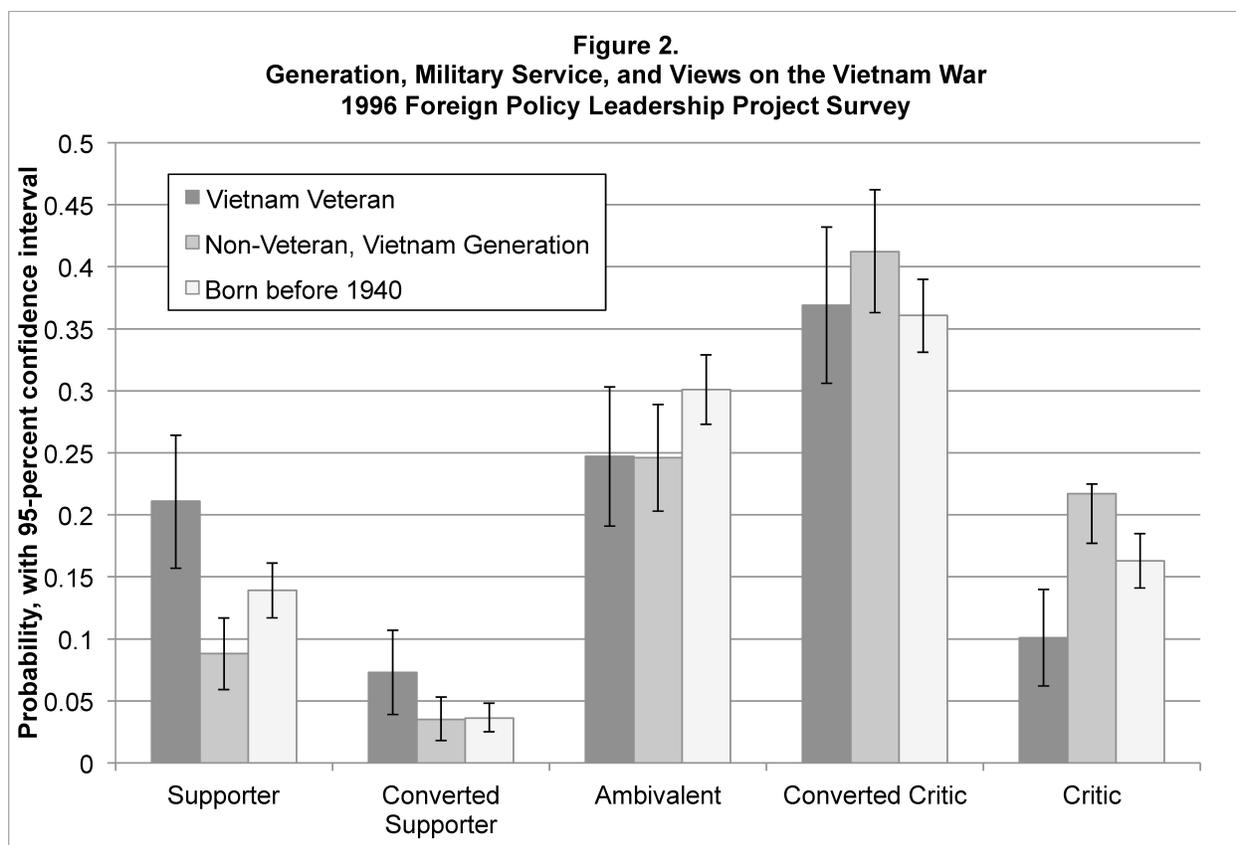


¹¹ Table A-2 in the appendix presents the full multinomial logit results for each FPLP sample.

Second, military service in Vietnam tended to bolster support for the war. Most Vietnam veterans were also part of the "Vietnam generation" as defined here, so these constitute an important exception to the generation's broader trajectory toward anti-war views. Some of this pattern is certainly the result of self-selection. Members of the privileged group in the elite sample who had doubts about the war could probably have avoided military service. Our point here is not that serving in Vietnam caused the differences that emerged from the war, but only that it reinforced them and contributed to their durability.

The patterns in Figure 1 generally hold up in later surveys. In nearly every survey, non-veterans from the Vietnam Generation were significantly more likely to be critics or converted critics and less likely to be supporters. Similarly, Vietnam veterans were more likely to be supporters and less likely to be critics or converted critics. Figure 2 presents the results from the last FPLP survey, taken in 1996. As one might expect, the strength of the relationship diminishes somewhat over time, as memories fade and the older comparison group gets smaller.¹² Even so, the same basic pattern remains visible. As in 1976, Vietnam veterans in 1996 were significantly more likely to have been consistent supporters of the war. Non-veterans of the Vietnam generation were more likely to be converted critics.

¹² As a further check on the relevance of military service in Vietnam and membership in the Vietnam Generation, the appendix also presents model comparison statistics testing whether a simpler model that excluded these variables performed better. These also support the relevance of these considerations, but weaken somewhat over time, particularly in 1992 and 1996.



The Vietnam War was an important event for American elites concerned about foreign policy. Among the elites the FPLP sampled, memories of the war remained consistent for the two decades after it ended. The experiences associated with membership in the Vietnam Generation did not entirely determine respondents' views of the war—there was plenty of individual-level variation—but they made a significant difference. Of course, the experiential foundations of elite views on the Vietnam War are only a background element of the Vietnam Syndrome argument. The central claim concerns the impact of the Vietnam War on opinions about US international activism in the years after the war ended.

The Vietnam War and Later Foreign Policy Positions

The most important claim of the Vietnam Syndrome argument is that positions adopted during the war continued to influence policy attitudes for years afterward (hypotheses 3 and 4). We test this claim by using the assessments of the Vietnam War from the preceding section to predict

subsequent policy views. Here we report marginal effects in graphical form. Marginal effects that are statistically significantly different from those reported for respondents who were ambivalent about the Vietnam War are marked with asterisks. The appendix contains the full numerical results of each model. In every case, we control for party and ideology, so the marginal effects we report are for ideologically moderate respondents who did not identify with either major party.

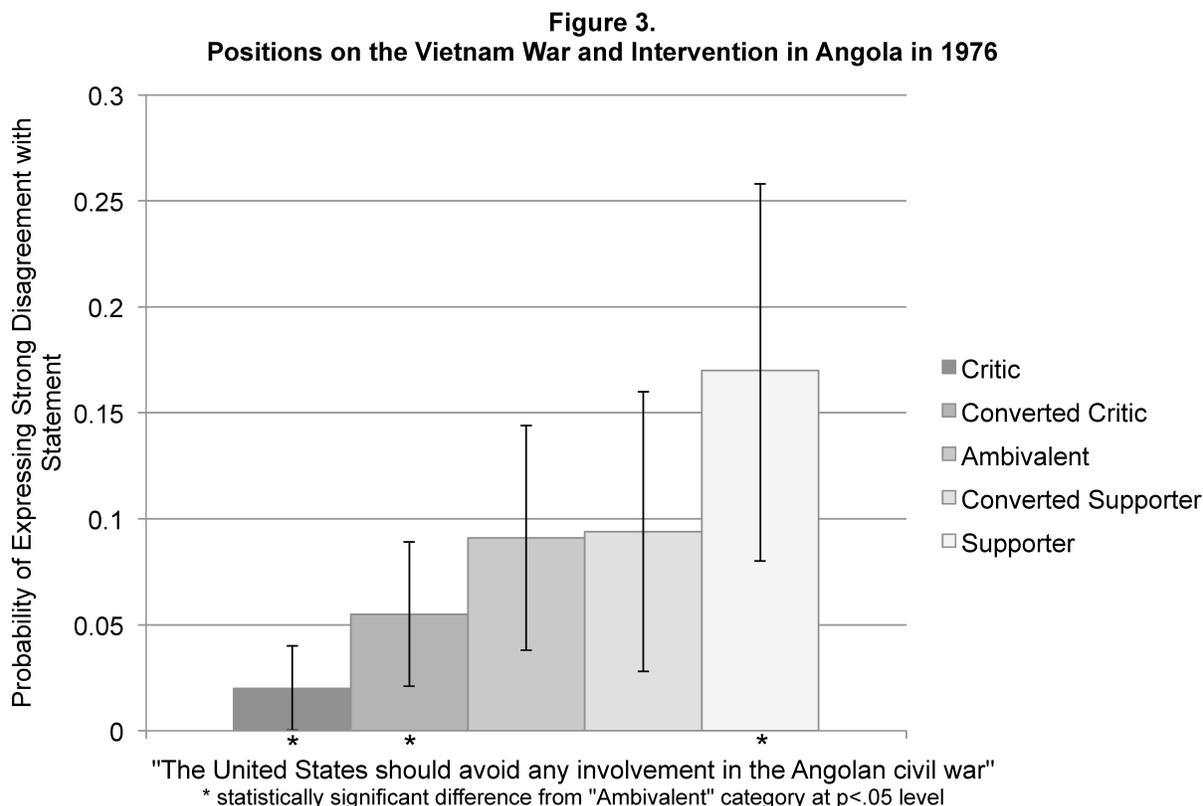
Vietnam and Later Issues: The Cold War Years. We turn first to the surveys administered during the Cold War. The results we will report come from logit models in which the dependent variable indicates the most aggressive position available to respondents. In principle, an ordered choice model would have made use of more information, but violations of the parallel regression assumption call the results of such a model into question in nearly every case. The loss of information actually makes the binary logit model a tougher test of the Vietnam Syndrome hypotheses because it biases the results against rejection of the null hypothesis.¹³

1976: Intervention in Angola. The 1976 survey included only a few questions about specific policies, and unfortunately most of these were framed in terms of the Vietnam War. For example, when respondents were asked whether they agreed that "[t]he U.S. should avoid any involvement in the Angolan civil war," they were asked to indicate the extent to which their position was shaped by the American experience in Vietnam. Given this framing, it is unsurprising that views on Vietnam were strongly related to responses about the Angolan civil war, as Figure 3 indicates.¹⁴ As the asterisks indicating statistical significance and the confidence intervals suggest, critics, converted critics, and supporters of the Vietnam War all expressed opinions about intervention in Angola that differed from those who had been ambivalent about

¹³ In addition to the variables indicating each trajectory of opinion about the Vietnam War, the models also include controls for ideology and party identification, as well as dummy variables for each occupational category. Once again, those born after 1960 were omitted from the analysis.

¹⁴ Table A-3 in the appendix presents the numerical results of these models, including the significance tests. As a further check on the relevance of opinion trajectories on Vietnam, we tested whether a restricted model that excluded these variables fit the data equally well or better. Model fit statistics reported in Table A-3 strongly support the full model.

the War. While not a very difficult test of the lasting influence of the war, it serves as a baseline for assessing the influence of respondents' attitudes toward the Vietnam War on comparable policies in subsequent surveys. As we demonstrate using surveys from 1980, 1984, and 1988, the relationship remains at least as strong for the remainder of the Cold War—and without explicit Vietnam War framing.



As one might expect, ideology also influenced attitudes toward intervention in Angola. Among respondents ambivalent about the Vietnam War, those who were "very liberal" had just a 0.05 probability of strongly disagreeing with the anti-interventionist statement in the survey. "Very conservative" respondents had a 0.16 probability of doing so, with other ideological self-placements falling between these two extremes. Neither Republican nor Democratic Party identifiers were more likely to strongly disagree with the statement than those who reported no party identification. These results are not surprising. For our purposes, the most important thing about them is that positions on the Vietnam War made a difference even when we control for

these well-established influences on opinion. The impact of positions on the Vietnam War was not simply a reflection of partisan or ideological differences.

1980: Afghanistan, SALT, and the Iranian Hostage Crisis. The 1980 FPLP survey included three items useful for distinguishing between the effect of Vietnam on Cold War attitudes, and those concerning intervention in less-developed areas. First, the survey asked respondents whether they agreed that "Soviet actions in Afghanistan do not affect vital American interests," an item that relates to both military intervention in the less-developed world and the Cold War rivalry. Our model focuses on the probability that respondents would "strongly disagree." Second, the survey included an item requiring respondents to select a characterization of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT):

If it can be resumed, the SALT process would:

- make an important contribution to a safer world
- be a useful but limited step in the right direction
- be of little significance
- seriously jeopardize U.S. national security
- not sure

The SALT question bears on the Cold War rivalry, but has little to do with intervention in the less-developed world. By contrast, the survey asked about the American hostages then being held in the U.S. Embassy in Iran, an issue that had much to do with prospective intervention in a less-developed country but little to do with the Cold War. After an introduction¹⁵, respondents were asked about their preferred response to the seizure of the embassy:

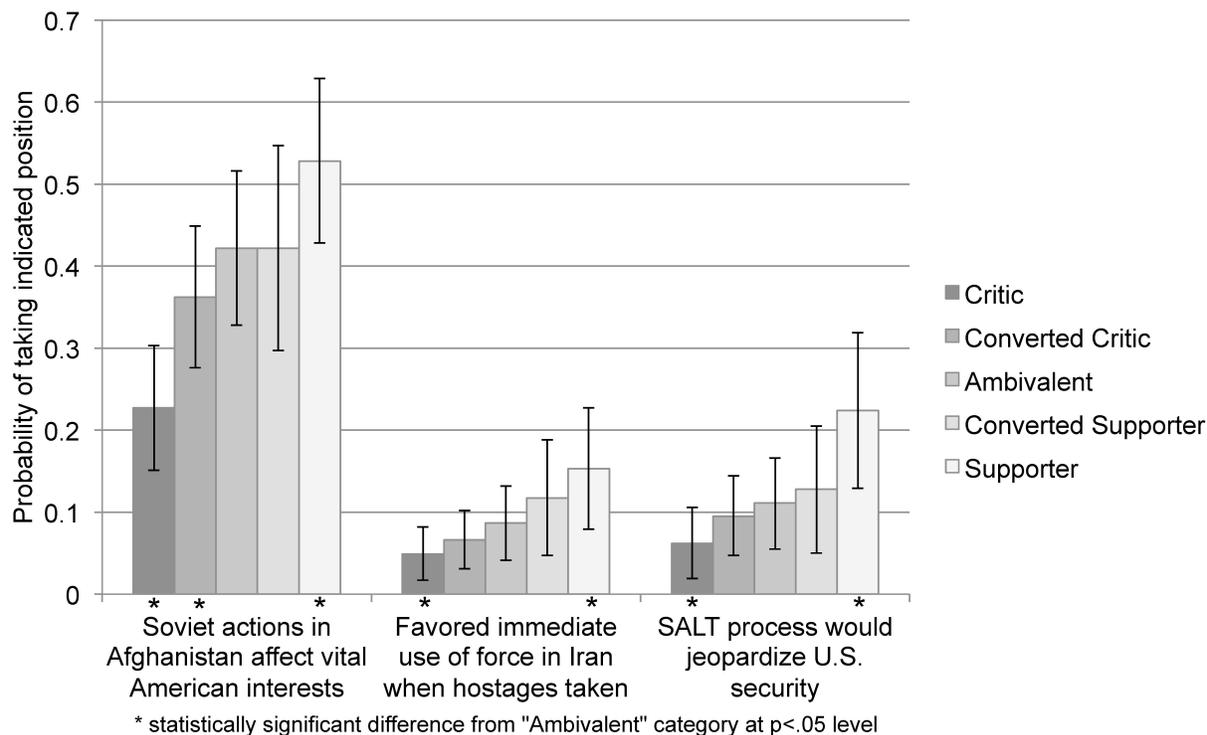
¹⁵ "Some people felt that the U.S. should have used all available military power to gain the release of the hostages in the Embassy in Iran. Others favored bargaining with the regime in Iran to secure their release. Still others opposed bargaining prior to the release of the hostages, and favored the use of various strategies for effecting their release. Please indicate which position comes closest to your own feelings, both when the Embassy was first taken over and after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by checking only one box in each column." We employed the response after the embassy was seized in order to elicit opinions about intervention rather than the Cold War.

- I tended to favor immediate use of military power.
- I tended to favor bargaining with the regime in Iran.
- I tended to oppose bargaining prior to the release of the hostages and favor using all means short of military force to secure their release.
- I tended to oppose bargaining prior to the release of the hostages and to support the use of military power if diplomatic and economic measures seemed unlikely to break the stalemate.
- Not sure

Figure 4 presents the results of our analysis. On all three questions, consistent critics and consistent supporters of the Vietnam War took positions that were statistically significantly different from "ambivalents," who had had no clear position on Vietnam. Converted critics were significantly different on the question about Afghanistan, though not the other two.¹⁶ The step-like pattern of predicted responses seen in response to the 1976 Angola question recurs on the 1980 questions, with consistent supporters of the Vietnam War more often taking the most hawkish position and consistent critics rarely doing so. Converted critics of the war were also more dovish than ambivalents, though not always by a statistically significant margin. Overall, the 1980 data suggest that positions on Vietnam influenced subsequent views on both the Cold War and military intervention in general.

¹⁶ Table A-4 in the appendix presents the numerical results of the models, including the significance tests. We also tested whether restricted models that excluded the Vietnam opinion variables fit the data equally well or better. Model fit statistics reported in Table A-4 strongly support the full model in all three cases.

Figure 4.
Positions on the Vietnam War and Current Policy Issues in 1980



As was the case in 1976, the legacy of the Vietnam War is apparent even though we control for ideology and party identification. Our results show that conservatives were substantially more hawkish than liberals in response to all three of the 1980 questions. Party also had some effect, though it was not consistent. Democrats were more hawkish than those with no party identification in response to the question about Iran. Republicans were more hawkish in response to the question about the SALT process. These results make sense in terms of the politics of the time, yet views about the Vietnam War still mattered even after we consider these partisan and ideological patterns.

1984: Missile Deployments, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Lebanon. The 1984 survey included an even wider range of useful questions. Echoing the 1980 question concerning SALT, the survey asked about recent missile deployments in Europe; and it asked whether respondents agreed with Cold War interventions in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan.¹⁷ It

¹⁷ The exact statements were as follows:

"The U.S. should provide support to rebels who are fighting in Afghanistan."

"Sending U.S. military advisers to El Salvador."

also asked about the intervention in Lebanon, a case less closely tied to the Cold War. After an introduction,¹⁸ respondents were asked to select their preferred option for American policy after the 1983 truck bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut:

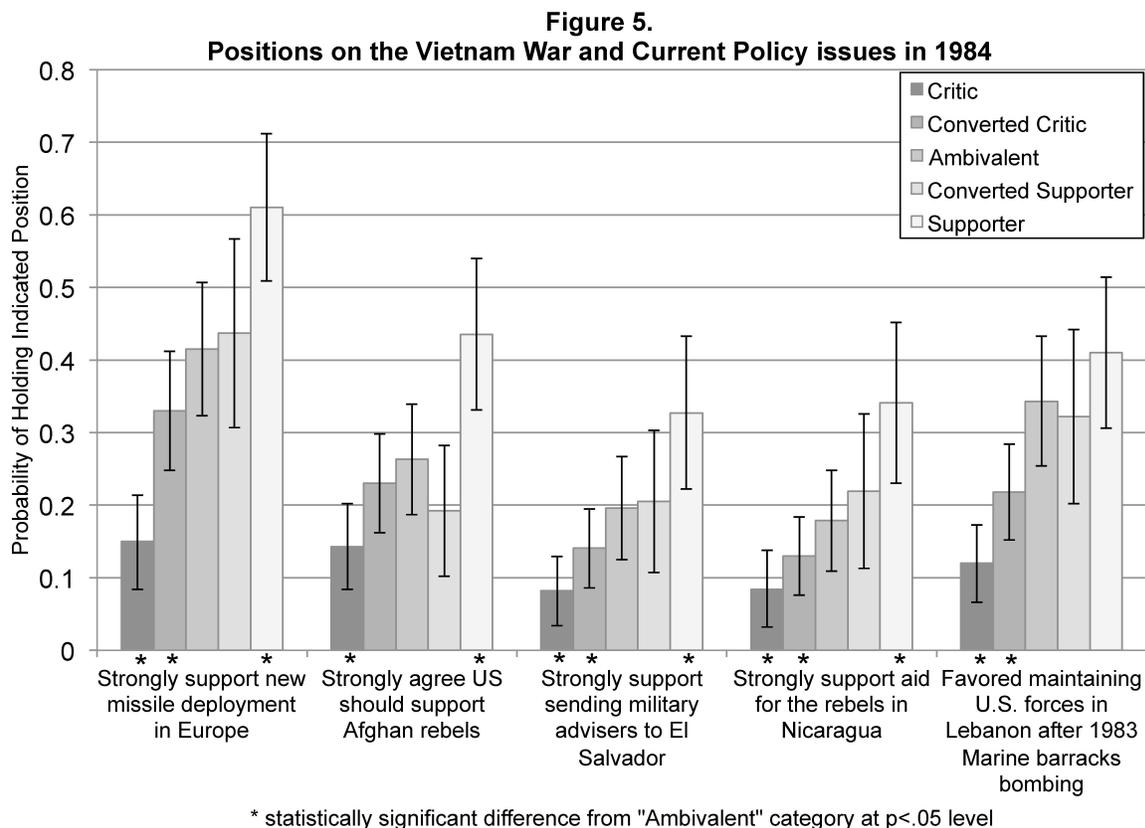
- I tended to favor the peacekeeping force.
- I tended to favor staying out.
- I tended to feel in between these two.
- Not sure

Figure 5 presents results concerning these five items from 1984.¹⁹ The step-like pattern of responses to most questions is quite close to what we observed in 1976 and 1980. Once again, only converted supporters—by far the smallest set of respondents—were not significantly different in their responses from those who were ambivalent about the Vietnam War. The other groups adopted positions that paralleled those they had taken on the Vietnam War, with critics and converted critics significantly more dovish than the war's supporters, as expected. Even on Lebanon—the issue least closely linked to the Cold War and one that deviates somewhat from the prevailing step-like pattern—critics and converted critics line up as expected, and are significantly different from ambivalents.

"Supporting rebels fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua."

¹⁸ "Some people feel that the U.S. had an obligation to send a peace-keeping force to Lebanon. Others feel that we should have stayed out. Still others have opinions in between these two. Please indicate which position comes closest to your own feelings—both when U.S. forces were first sent to Lebanon and after the truck bombing of the Marines in Beirut." Though both are relevant, we chose the question about respondents' later position because it was clear by this time that the intervention would not be bloodless.

¹⁹ Table A-5 in the appendix presents the numerical results of these models, including the significance tests. We once again tested whether restricted models that excluded the Vietnam opinion variables fit the data equally well or better. Model fit statistics reported in Table A-5 strongly support the full model in all five cases.



1988: Arms Control, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Persian Gulf, and Libya. The 1988 survey was the last administered during the Cold War. It included items about the Cold War and military interventions linked to that struggle. Once again, arms control offers a topic closely related to the Cold War but not to military intervention. Though the vast majority of the sample agreed that the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty should be ratified, some controversy remained. Respondents were asked whether they agreed that "[a]lthough the INF Treaty includes stringent verification procedures, the Soviets are likely to violate it." More than 20 percent strongly agreed.

The survey included four questions about the extent to which respondents agreed with several military interventions. The survey asked respondents to rate their support for each item on a five-point scale. The statements were as follows, all from the same list:

Sending U.S. military advisers to El Salvador

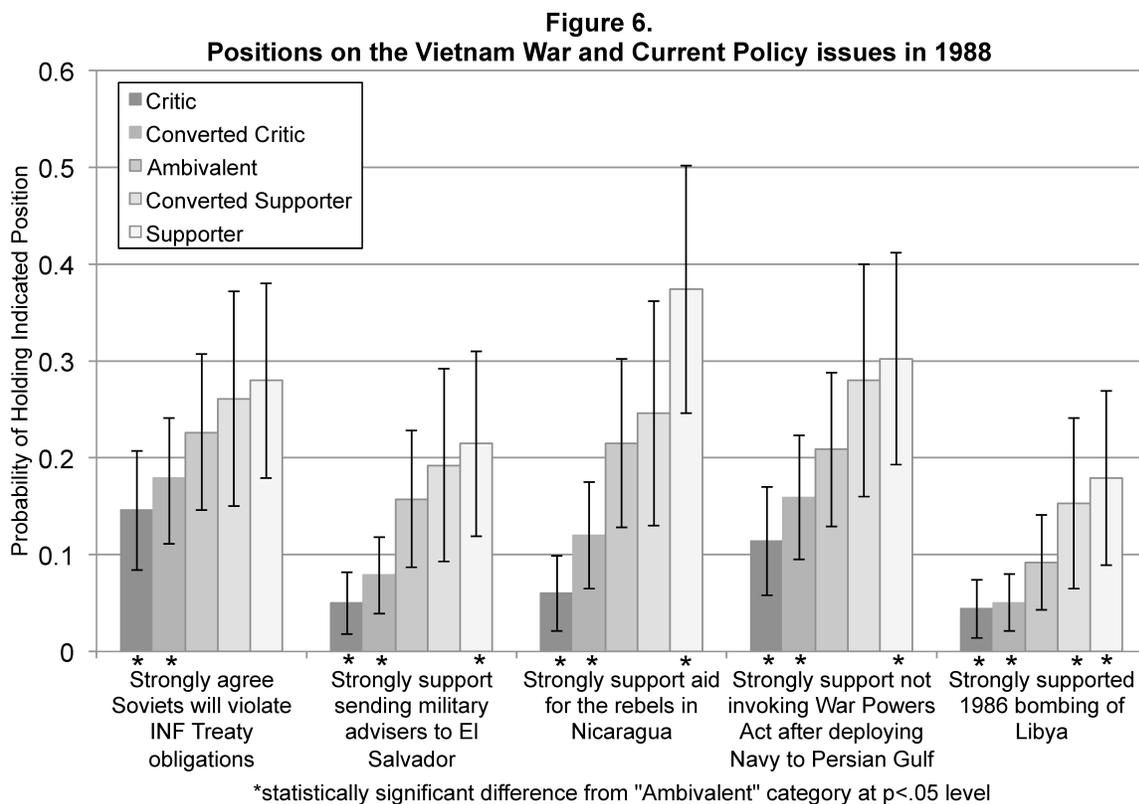
Supporting rebels fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua

Refusing to invoke the War Powers Act after American naval forces were deployed in the Persian Gulf
Bombing Libya in the spring of 1986

The interventions in Nicaragua and El Salvador were closely tied to the Cold War. By contrast, the principal targets in the Persian Gulf and Libya were not communists.

Figure 6 presents the results of the analysis, and the now-familiar pattern found in 1976, 1980, and 1984 appears once again.²⁰ The step-like progression obtains in almost every case, with supporters of the Vietnam War adopting the most hawkish positions and critics the most dovish—a result that emerges with equal force, even for the interventions that had the least to do with the Cold War. This result obtains in spite of the controls for ideology, which also had strong effects, and party identification, which rarely did.

²⁰ Table A-6 in the appendix presents the numerical results of the logit models, including the significance tests noted here. We once again tested whether restricted models that excluded the Vietnam opinion variables fit the data equally well or better. Model fit statistics reported in Table A-5 strongly support the full model in four of the five cases. Expectations about Soviet violations of the INF treaty provide a partial exception. Here inclusion of the Vietnam opinion variables was supported by only one of the two test statistics.



Vietnam and Later Issues: The Post-Cold War Era. The 1992 survey was the first administered after the Soviet Union's breakup. Unsurprisingly, nearly all survey items were unrelated to the Cold War.²¹ There were, of course, many questions involving interventions in less-developed areas. As we shall see, the patterns arising from opinions about the Vietnam War—so apparent during the rivalry with the Soviet Union—soon faded, even on questions containing echoes of the Cold War.

1992: Panama, Iraqi Aggression, and Persian Gulf War Termination. We analyzed three questions on intervention from the 1992 survey. Two came from a list of policy items with which respondents were asked to agree or disagree, recording their position on a five-point scale. The two items we used were as follows:

²¹ The survey included an arms control question but the Cold War's end largely eliminated controversy about it. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with "[S]igning a strategic arms reduction treaty with the former USSR." The fact that more than 96 percent agreed or strongly agreed rendered the analysis conducted on earlier arms control questions impossible.

Invading Panama to remove Manuel Noriega from power

Ending the Persian Gulf War while Saddam Hussein was still in power

The third question was similar to those asked about the hostages in Iran in 1980 or the Lebanon intervention in 1984. After an introduction²², the survey asked respondents to select from a menu of policy options about the Persian Gulf War:

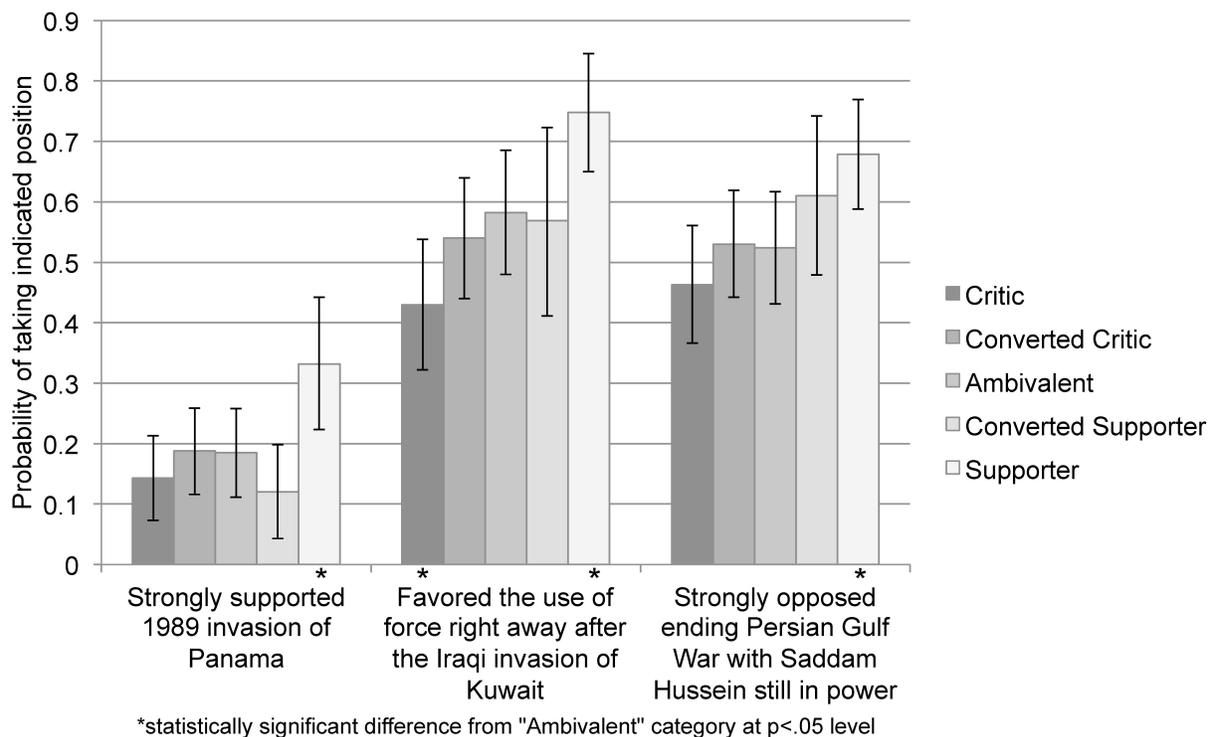
- I tended to favor using force right away
- I tended to favor giving sanctions a longer time to work
- I tended to oppose getting involved at all
- Not sure

Figure 7 reveals a weakening in the step-like pattern linking contemporary policy views to respondents' positions on the Vietnam War in the earlier FPLP surveys.²³ Consistent supporters of the Vietnam War had distinctive views on all three questions, just as they had on all the previous items we have considered. However, the other trajectories on the war no longer predicted policy attitudes very well. Consistent critics of the Vietnam War had distinctive views only about the immediate use of force in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Converted critics were no longer distinguishable from ambivalents on any of the three questions.

²² "People differed over President Bush's decision to start the war against Iraq. Some felt he was right to use military force right away. Others felt he should have given economic sanctions a longer time to work. Still others opposed getting involved at all. Please indicate which comes closest to your own feelings—both before and after the U.S. launched military operations on January 16, 1991, and retrospectively after the war ended—by checking only one box in each column." Our analysis focuses on opinions before the war was launched.

²³ Table A-7 in the appendix presents the numerical results of the logit models, including the significance tests noted here. As with the other surveys, we tested whether restricted models that excluded the Vietnam opinion variables fit the data equally well or better. We found support for doing so in two of the three cases, but even in these instances it was not as strong as it had been in earlier surveys. These results accord with the general weakening of the Cold War pattern visible in Figure 7.

Figure 7.
Positions on the Vietnam War and Current Policy Issues in 1992



Because converted critics were the largest group in the sample and contained most non-veteran members of the Vietnam generation, these results raise questions about the post-Cold War relevance of elites' formative experiences with the Vietnam War. After the Gulf War ended in 1991, President Bush famously proclaimed "[b]y God, we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all" (Herring 1991, 104). Our results suggest he might have been correct, but that the outcome may have had more to do with the end of the Cold War than with the conflict in the Persian Gulf. This is even clearer in the 1996 results.

1996: Bosnia, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Somalia, and NATO Expansion. If the Cold War-era pattern linking views on Vietnam to subsequent foreign policy opinions constitutes a "Vietnam Syndrome," then the FPLP 1996 survey tends to reinforce Bush's opinion about its demise. We selected five questions for analysis from this survey, including two about hypothetical uses of military force. Respondents were asked if they would favor or oppose the use of US troops:

If Iraq invaded Saudi Arabia

If the Cuban people attempted to overthrow the Castro regime

We drew two other questions from a similar list of foreign and defense policies. The survey asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed with each item:

Using U.S. troops to try to end the civil war in Somalia

Supporting a plan to expand NATO to include such Eastern European countries as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic

The items on Cuba and NATO expansion are especially interesting because they had the potential to evoke the Cold War pattern of responses related to the Vietnam War.

A fifth question focused on the deployment of troops to Bosnia after the 1995 Dayton Accord. After an introduction,²⁴ respondents were asked to select one of several policy options at different points in time:

- I tended to favor sending U.S. troops to Bosnia
- I tended to oppose sending U.S. troops to Bosnia
- Not sure

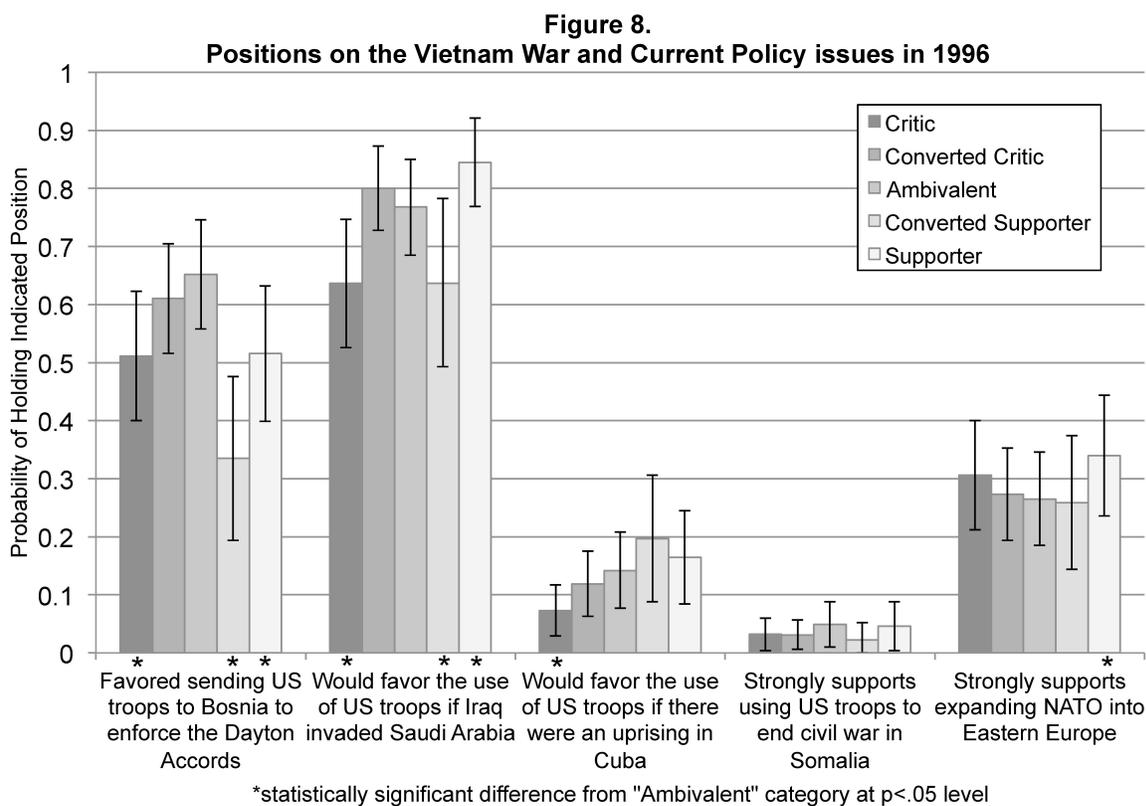
The Bosnia mission was among the largest and most important deployments of American troops during the decade between the 1991 Gulf War and the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. As in Vietnam, the conflict in question was a civil war.

Figure 8 displays the results.²⁵ The disappearance of the Cold War pattern is striking. The correspondence between respondents' Vietnam War positions and their contemporary policy

²⁴ "People differed over President Clinton's decision to send American troops to Bosnia. Some felt he was right because without U.S. troops, the Bosnia peace agreement would fail. Others felt there was no vital American interest in Bosnia that would justify sending troops there. Please indicate which position comes closest to your own feelings—both when the decision to send troops was announced in November, 1995, and today." We will focus on opinions at the time the decision was announced because the fact that American forces would suffer no casualties in the effort was not known at the time.

²⁵ Table A-8 in the appendix presents the numerical results of the logit models, including the significance tests noted here. Unlike what we found in earlier iterations of the FPLP survey, comparisons of the models including the Vietnam opinion variables with restricted versions that exclude them do not

views—a regular feature of nearly all the Cold War-era survey items—is now almost entirely absent. In every case, converted critics of the Vietnam War had views that were statistically indistinguishable from those who had been ambivalent about the War. Even consistent critics and consistent supporters of the Vietnam War, the groups that reliably took the most extreme positions on later policy questions, did not have distinctive views on some important issues in 1996. Each group differed from those who had been ambivalent about the war on only 3 of the 5 issues we examined. They were indistinguishable from one another on Bosnia, Somalia, and NATO expansion.



Even though ideology and party identification suggest themselves as reasons for the observed change, partisan reactions to the Clinton administration do not explain the disappearance of the Cold War pattern for at least two reasons. First, Republican opposition to Jimmy Carter did not obviate the Cold War pattern in the 1980 survey. However, the pattern had already weakened in the 1992 survey, administered before the election and focused on the Bush

generally support the full models. We find clear support for the full model in only two of the five models. These results accord with the near-absence of the step-like Cold War pattern in Figure 8.

administration's policies. Second, the results presented here control for both party and liberal-conservative ideology. These considerations had substantial effects on most of the questions asked in the 1992 and 1996 surveys, just as they did during the Cold War. Conservative respondents were no longer relatively hawkish in the 1996 survey, which probably does reflect their distrust of operations launched during the Clinton administration. Indeed, they tended to oppose the Bosnia deployment. However, the Cold War pattern breaks down even on questions where conservatives adopted hawkish positions like those they had espoused during the Cold War, as they did with respect to the defense of Saudi Arabia and the use of troops to support an uprising in Cuba.

One might argue that the interventions considered in the 1996 survey are simply different than those considered in earlier surveys and should not be expected to produce the same pattern of elite disagreement seen during the Cold War. For example, humanitarian rather than security concerns arguably motivated the troop deployments in Bosnia and Somalia. The fact that many elite observers did not view post-Cold War interventions in the same way is precisely the point. In the absence of the Cold War as an organizing device, the meaning of being a "hawk" or a "dove" changed—and patterns symptomatic of a Vietnam Syndrome appeared to go into remission. This is not to say that the Vietnam Syndrome was psychosomatic. Our results suggest that the Vietnam War crystallized elite views on a variety of confrontational policy issues, and that it had a particular impact on the Vietnam generation, leading them to more hawkish positions if they served in the war and more dovish positions if they did not. But the Cold War's end disrupted the context in which "hawk" and "dove" denoted clearly distinguishable positions, and marked an end to patterns of elite opinion that had held since the mid-1970s.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our findings on the Vietnam War's effect on elite opinion have implications for three phenomena associated with cynical attitudes toward using US power abroad: the "Vietnam Syndrome," a "Vietnam generation," and whether one or both of these prompted a persistent, dovish turn in the attitudes of foreign policy elites. Though the results allow us to endorse neither an uncomplicated version of the "Vietnam generation" claim nor an unrefined diagnosis of a

"Vietnam Syndrome," we are able to present a more nuanced picture of elite opinion in the shadow of the Vietnam War. This picture is relevant today because the Vietnam-era cohort now occupies high-level government positions, because scholars are investigating the effects of war on political attitudes and generations, and because a new generation whose impressionable years coincided with U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is maturing. Amid pressures for US retrenchment and reduced interventionism, a reconsideration of the Vietnam Syndrome is timely and has renewed salience.

A more refined diagnosis must acknowledge that the incidence and effects of a Vietnam Syndrome are shaped and constrained by individual experience and international context. First, the Vietnam War's effects on attitudes toward interventionism depended on how individual views had evolved during the war. The vast majority of foreign policy elites surveyed by Holsti and Rosenau reported that they had initially supported the war, just as most of the American public did. Those who later turned against it—the modal group of "converted critics"—generally favored relatively dovish positions on many subsequent foreign policy issues, including a range of military interventions (some Cold War-related, some not). By contrast, those who had continued to support the Vietnam War through its final years took a significantly harder line on these issues through the 1970s and 1980s. Notably, this pattern is not simply a subsidiary effect of partisanship and ideology. It holds up even when we control for those well-known considerations.

Second, these attitude trajectories resulted in part not just from being part of the "Vietnam generation," but from specific experiences within it. Consistent with findings of recent micro-level analyses of war's effects on individuals, our examination of the FPLP data identifies significant, patterned differences in elite attitudes toward the Vietnam War itself. Those who served during the war were more likely to have continued to support it during its final years. Respondents from the Vietnam generation who did not serve were more likely than their older compatriots to have turned against the war by the time it ended. Indeed, it seems that having turned against the war was a formative experience in and of itself, though notably a different one from combat or military service. Differing attitudes toward the war arising from these distinct experiences predicted divergent attitudes toward future uses of US power abroad, even within the same cohort. Overall, it is clear that the formative experience of the Vietnam War yielded heterogeneous generational effects, rather than a uniform generational effect.

Third, our results suggest that the Cold War was a critical contextual variable that sustained elite divisions that emerged over the Vietnam War. Individuals' trajectories of opinion about the Vietnam War made a substantial difference for their later policy positions, but only while the Cold War lasted. In principle, the American experience in Vietnam might have led elites to conclude that intervention in civil and regional conflicts was unwise, regardless of whether these interventions related to the Cold War. In fact, Vietnam-related patterns of elite opinion ended in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, suggesting that the "Vietnam Syndrome" among foreign policy elites pertained to the Cold War rather than to military intervention in general. The evidence is unequivocal: in response to the eight survey items we examined from the 1992 and 1996 FPLP studies, elites who had turned against the war in Vietnam exhibited attitudes no different from those who had been ambivalent about the war. This result contrasts sharply with the Cold War era, during which these "converted critics" held distinctively dovish views on 11 of 14 survey items we examined. Indeed, in many post-Cold War cases, even consistent critics and consistent supporters of the Vietnam War no longer held distinctive attitudes about major foreign policy issues, in stark contrast to their reliably polarized attitudes during the Cold War.

The fact that positions on the Vietnam War cease to reliably predict patterns of elite opinion after the Cold War suggests an answer to one potential criticism of our claim about the impact of the Vietnam War: that opinions about the War proxy broader "hawkish" or "dovish" attitudes. If this were the case, these differences should have been apparent on later military interventions. The rejoinder that interventions like those in Bosnia or Somalia differ from earlier uses of force underscores this point. The sense that these interventions did not engage real security interests is precisely why the Cold War was so important. Presidents frequently cited concerns about the promotion of human rights and democracy during Cold War interventions, but the security frame defined by the U.S.-Soviet rivalry appears to have predominated. After the Cold War, the labels "hawk" and "dove"—already artifacts of the Cold War²⁶—had little residual meaning. That our results highlight the context-dependence of these labels suggests that perhaps they should be treated as relics. Labels that oversimplify can mislead.

Our introduction echoed the words of decorated Vietnam veterans and foreign policy elites Chuck Hagel and Bob Kerrey, who also asserted, "Nations, like individuals, are products of their

²⁶ Herken (2014, 277–8) traces the use of "hawk" and "dove" to a December 1962 *Saturday Evening Post* article on the Cuban Missile Crisis by Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett.

experiences." On the strength of the evidence presented here, we cannot say whether the American nation at large was shaped by its Vietnam War experience. We can state with confidence that individual experiences of the Vietnam War shaped the attitudinal tendencies of potential opinion leaders who lived through the war. Especially for young adults in their formative years, for those who served in the military, and for those who changed their minds as the war persisted, how they experienced the war shaped subsequent attitudes toward US interventionism. We can state too that these effects were persistent, but not permanent: after the Cold War's end, robust patterns of hawkishness and dovishness that prevailed during the Cold War years broke down, along with former doves' reluctance to embrace interventionism. The dependence of the hawk-dove distinction on the Cold War context complements our findings about the heterogeneity of the "Vietnam generation" and the limited persistence of a "Vietnam Syndrome," and invites speculation about future adversaries and power configurations that will shape or constrain elite attitudes concerning America's role in the world.

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