BRUCE ANDREWS

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Public Constraint and American Policy in Vietnam [1976]

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bruce andrews

I. Society and Foreign Policy

If foreign policies are also domestic products, we will want to know what the connection was — in the case of Vietnam-between the limits of foreign policy and the role of the American public. Several explanatory questions immediately suggest themselves. Why did American policymakers feel the results of the Vietnam conflict would be so overwhelmingly important? Why were they allowed to continue, and to escalate, for so long? Why was disengagement excluded from all possible agenda, even in the early years of the involvement? Also, what relationship will our answers have to America's political structure or to the currents of its domestic opinion? These questions, formerly the preserve of critics, now confound the students of American policy in the 1960s. The apparent inadequacy of official national security accounts has set the stage for a large and diverse cast of critical interpretations. While more apologistic analysts stress the role of exception and irresponsibility, others have begun to locate the apparent sources of responsibility and continuity — especially within the framework of American society. When (or to the extent that) the demands of the international environment were neither self-evident nor compelling, what will we need to know about this domestic society to make sense of America's commitment in Vietnam?

I intend to suggest one way in which we might examine a social interpretation of American foreign policy, characterizing the state as a purposive social actor guided to a varying extent by domestic social rules. The role these rules play is both descriptive and explanatory.[1] To the degree that the govern-

ment represents or is responsive to a political constituency, for example, domestic rules will delimit the conduct or policy. If, on the other hand, the elite was acting without serious constraint from the public, we might still describe its goals as means toward some broader domestic end, and, in this "second order" purposive relationship, we might locate domestic rules of a different sort: constitutive rules which define that relationship (Andrews, 1975b). Usually when we hear discussions of the role of the public in foreign policy, however, it is *constraints* that are being talked about.

One view of American policy, exploring this emphasis in political terms, has claimed that the prospect of an American disengagement in the 1960s was "ruled out" by the likelihood of a right-wing backlash — the danger of political tarring, if not feathering, at the hands of disgruntled hawks and erratic masses. This is a controversial view, and in evaluating it, several strands must be unraveled. The public may have been an objective barrier to disengagement in the 1960s (a volatile and fervently anticommunist popular opinion with a good potential for being mobilized), or the president may have systematically misread both its character and strength. The entire "public" conception will be misleading insofar as the goals of the policymakers were governed by felt constraints which bore little relationship to domestic opinion. We should ask, for example, if the general public represented a serious constraint "downward" (preventing disengagement), or if it could easily have accommodated (and made sense of) a quite different policy. Were state actions responsive to popular preferences (or permitted in the face of popular inertia) in a way that makes the public the unseen protagonist of the drama? Are there public rules; or, in a parallel fashion, does the general public rule?

The careful reader will note that such questions can not lead us to an authoritative record of the policymakers' views; this may well be a shortcoming, especially for those whose interest goes no further than the actors' frame of reference and who would willingly and abruptly end their account once some mixture of strategic and political considerations is posited. But even their positing must remain tentative, for no one pretends, or should pretend, that the evidence such accounts rely on (memoirs, interviews, and so on) can be advanced to the point where certainties are allowed. Different styles of

inquiry simply have different aims.

This paper will attempt to discover what features of the American commitment, particularly in the early years, can be clarified by using the lens of domestic opinion — by seeing if that policy can be successfully redescribed as a preventive measure in the face of public barriers and encouragement. It will confront the received descriptions with some of the (admittedly fragmentary, though too infrequently studied) literature on the American public, both as electoral participants and as a source of backlash. With this as the groundwork, it will examine the shape and distribution of opinion and opposition on Vietnam, as well the ability of the American political system to overcome those tendencies toward insulation and elitism that stand in the way of expressing the articulated will of the people. I also want to more fully spell out the implications of both the standard arguments and the empirical evidence for the problem of the democratic control of foreign policy. Finally, such an inquiry can respond to some of the explanatory questions about American policy. It can hope to learn whether the public has been the source of the rules of conduct by means of which American policy might best be understood — as a series of socially-conformative actions that make sense in the light of their political setting.

Needless to say, this analysis will be guided by some of the prescriptive and normative implications of a public account (one that assumes the political necessity for refusing to disengage in Vietnam, perhaps the most tragic and dramatic nondecision in the postwar era). Perhaps we could say that the public got what it deserved, rather than getting what we would have predicted. At least one proponent of a political treatment of the war, for example, has said that “domestic politics couldn’t excuse it” (Ellsberg, 1973: 37). Although this is very likely, the dialectic of blame and justification is not so easily ignored. As Boyd (1972: 441) notes, “severe public constraints on policy is a *necessary* condition for holding the public responsible for a policy.” Failing to examine the *validity* of the domestic claims can therefore mislead us. One begins by acknowledging the calculated and purposive nature of policy (and stepping away from the idea that Vietnam was an accident, created by advisors and bureaucrats who became unwittingly lost in a “quagmire”). One ends

up by casting the net of responsibility toward the president and then, in a partial and perhaps improper backtracking, toward the role of public opinion or a domestic political culture described as the "sustaining sources of policy" (Alperovitz, 1970: 75).

2. The "Public Constraint" Interpretation

> I conclude reluctantly that we have elected and have been led by presidents who... were willing to kill large numbers of Asians, destroy Asian societies, imperil American society, and sacrifice large numbers of Americans from time to time, mainly for the reason that their party and they themselves would be in political trouble if they did not [Ellsberg, 1971: 136].

To go from the high-toned strategies of international statecraft to the grubbier calculations of domestic politics is not an easy step, nor is it a familiar one. Recent experience has nevertheless helped revive such a focus. No longer placed exclusively on a strategic or geopolitical plane, foreign policy has become seen as "an integral and subordinate element of domestic politics."[2] To a degree not sufficiently appreciated, policies are shaped by reference to the political environment, not only by the demands of the international arena. Domestic politics do not stop at the water's edge. The makers of policy overlap with the political leadership, and leaders are on probation.

After Korea and the scars of McCarthyism, for example, many claimed that Democratic administrations have had a marked and warranted sensitivity to political extortion, whether the band of blackmailers could be identified (as a conservative minority) or, more often, imagined (in the form of an unruly or demagogic mass). Perhaps the spectre of the last conflict governed behavior in the present. Some analysts maintain that domestic politics *required* not only the containment of communism but also a series of concessions in the form of a tough and indiscriminatory globalist stance, and a willingness to wait (and wait and wait) before making new diplomatic departures toward China, Russia, Cuba, or Third World insurgents. Innovations were

postponed until the proverbial next term, even though for both Johnson and Kennedy these full second-terms would never arrive. The Asian Cold War was thought to be domestic dynamite; to underplay America's role of resistance or to attempt to negotiate its way out was therefore unthinkable. The tolerance of the general public would stretch only so far before it snapped.

In one view of Vietnam, it is such "U.S. political imperatives" which can account for the desire to postpone defeat there at virtually any cost. As failure became a symbol of politically (and not only strategically) disastrous repercussions, it implied that choices had narrowed to the point where "This is a bad year for me to lose Vietnam to communism" could become a "*recurrent* formula for calculating Presidential decisions on Vietnam realistically, given inputs on alternatives" (Ellsberg, 1972: 101)[3] The president could be seen to be relatively powerless — a follower. With victory an impossible dream in Vietnam, the escalating stalemate might therefore be attributed to "the almost neurotic quality which had provoked a country to reach beyond its own real interest because of domestic fears which had been set up at home" (Halberstam, 1972: 293).[4]

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge's famous meeting with the new president on November 21, 1963 provides an interesting elaboration of such an outlook.[5] After a briefing on the deteriorating Asian state, Johnson's immediate reaction came in three phrases:

(1) "1 am not going to lose Vietnam;"
(2) "I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went;" and
(3) "I don't think Congress wants us to let the Communists take over Vietnam" [Halberstam, 1972: 298].

Several things are worth quickly noting. First, the almost reflex-like quality of the response; second, the invocation of tough resolve on Johnson's part; third, the way a predominantly civil war or war for national unification was fitted, without hesitation, onto a Procrustean Cold War framework-of communist aggression and of the "loss" by the U.S. of something that, by

implication, it possessed; fourth, the analogy of China and probably a memory of the domestic costs which Truman had been forced (or allowed himself) to pay for that policy; and last, the implications of failure for Johnson's dealings with Congress (an old stomping ground whose support was a critical one he did not wish to lose). The responsibility of the president is to a certain extent projected onto the public.

After John Kennedy's death, Johnson supposedly saw political (and not merely international) safety in continuing with the Asian objectives of his predecessor. Vietnam was to be kept quiet, kept out of political debate and Republican hands. Such a setting would therefore rule out the abandonment of old commitments, however insignificant, as well as the launching of adventuresome new policies, such as the attempt to set up a coalition regime in Saigon which might risk spurring an American exit and complicating matters domestically. These political factors are said to lie behind Johnson's expressed aim in March 1964 of "knocking down the idea of neutralization wherever it rears its ugly head" (Pentagon Papers, 1971: Vol. III, p. 511).[6] The "primitives" were not to be provoked.,

In this interpretation, the memory of McCarthyism (and perhaps MacArthurism as well) takes pride of place. If communist incursions were not met, if the United States declined the chance to do battle without first having unleashed its arsenal, if insufficient toughness were revealed, the Johnson administration would be vulnerable to a fanatic backlash. The loss of China, handed down to American politicians as the legacy of the 1950s, also became the legacy of the 1960s: "soft on communism" was a term to conjure with. To avoid such a dangerous attribution, success on the battlefield was not necessarily needed, but a visible and ungraceful defeat had to be postponed at all costs. Otherwise it would open the floodgates to the darker currents of America's political culture: the scapegoating and repression, the demagoguery, the know-nothingism and untutored emotions of the mass, the vicious refusal to admit that America had its limits and was unable to control events. As an earlier memo of 1961 by the secretaries of State and Defense had put it (Pentagon Papers, 1971, Vol. II,111): "loss of South Vietnam would stimulate bitter domestic controversies in the United States and would be seized upon

by extreme elements to divide the country and harass the Administration." If Atlas lowered the Free World from his shoulders, trauma would likely result.

Another related fear and prediction found occasional voice. Should the American effort end in humiliating failure, the quietism of the public might again come disastrously to the fore — combining a shrill and divisive concern for domestic problems with a public indifference toward the ever more complicated demands of the international realm. Disengagement might bring on a dangerous and irresponsible isolationism. Such a turning inward or "never again" sentiment would in fact make future interventions more difficult, more prone to involve nuclear weapons, and more likely to require setting aside democratic ideals at home.

Concern with the public also expressed itself in more direct political terms. We might acknowledge, along with GeIb and Lake (1973: 184) that "the root restraint on Democratic Presidents all along had been fear of a right-wing Republican reaction." On foreign policy, the political Left was largely contained (having nowhere else to turn), but the Democrats would somehow have to "handle" the Right. There was talk of being bested by those who were better positioned, better equipped to exploit the public's tendency toward (an occasionally hysterical) anticommunism. The choice for Lyndon Johnson might have been between reelection and electoral punishment, for as the president foresees the dominoes falling, "the one significant domino is clearly his own administration" (Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, 1970: 160). Shrinking campaign contributions or popular disgruntlement could dim the prospect of reelection, as could overt challenges from the G.O.P. in 1964, 1966, or 1968, or (another persistent fear on Johnson's part) even from Robert Kennedy assuming his brother's mantle and castigating any weakness, any abandonment of the struggle. These domestic apprehensions have been codified by Daniel Ellsberg (1972: 132) as "Rule 1. Do not lose South Vietnam to Communist control-or appear likely to do so-before the next election." One implication might be that such fears were warranted ones.

A spring 1963 meeting reportedly took place between Senator Mansfield (who had argued for removing American forces from Vietnam) and an unexpectedly responsive President Kennedy. I will quote one account of it

at length (O'Donnell, 1970) for it gives such a rare characterization of the perceived domestic restraints:

> The President told Mansfield that he had been having serious second thoughts about Mansfield's argument and that he now agreed with the Senator's thinking on the need for a complete military withdrawal from Vietnam.
>
> "But I can't do it until 1965 — after I'm reelected," Kennedy told Mansfield.
>
> President Kennedy felt, and Mansfield agreed with him, that if he announced a total withdrawal of American military personnel from Vietnam before the 1964 election, there would be a wild conservative outcry against returning him to the Presidency for a second term.
>
> After Mansfield left the office, the President told me that he had made up his mind that after his reelection he would take the risk of unpopularity and make a complete withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. "In 1965, I'll be damned everywhere as a Communist appeaser. But I don't care. If I tried to pull out completely now, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands, but I can do it after I'm reelected."

Once again, certain features of this account deserve a careful look, for the quotation goes beyond a blunt expression of the president's belief in the barrier to present a few intriguing ambiguities. It mentions the risk of unpopularity. Was it felt only to be a risk, and a risk that might be "manageable" after a reelection-certainly, we might wonder, after an electoral triumph like that of Lyndon Johnson? How many Vietnamese and American lives would be sacrificed to avoid that risk? Also, the problem of McCarthyism is imagined to occur only *before* an election; perhaps it needs substantial partisan "fuel" provided by a party which is a serious presidential contender. One other sugges-

tion from the last quoted sentence would be that certain things can be "gotten away with" after a reelection, that a "red scare" might materialize now but not necessarily then.

There are other elements to this alleged constraint. One final one, especially important to Lyndon Johnson, stemmed from the danger of "losing" the Congress, of stimulating its hostility, or of forfeiting its backing and respect. Johnson's sensitivity about Congress in the early years was legendary. It remained to a large degree both his reference group and his gauge of public opinion, as well as the arena in which his historical mission might be performed: advancing the Kennedy program by means of a grandiose domestic offering. In the face of an international retrenchment, his 1964 legislative plans could have been jeopardized. A disgruntled military might have relied on its conservative backing in Congress to undermine Johnson's control, thus compounding the "emasculation" of an international loss with that of domestic recrimination. We should also note that insofar as legislative concerns rather than electoral worries became the major focus, two points follow. Any public constraint that existed would be free from the cyclical nature of elections; it would be continuously present. And finally, ironically, the greater the liberal ambitions which the president harbored in the domestic sphere (comparing Johnson to Kennedy, Nixon, or Eisenhower, for example), the more intensely this political pressure on foreign policy would be felt. The larger the domestic consensus demanded, the more foreign policy concessions required. In the spirit of compensation, Vietnam might, almost literally, be tossed to the wolves — or to the hawks. "Essentially political reasons" would make 1964, like 1963, still another year of lost possibilities (Ellsberg, 1972: 210;Gelb, 1971: 143).

Combining these elements (increasing the likelihood of trauma, back. lash, and demagoguery, of electoral defeat and legislative troubles, of population isolationism or of a general swing to the right on the part of the mass), the resulting barrier might be powerful, and even explanatory. In light of such prohibitions, perhaps even a stalemate in Vietnam during the early Johnson years could be thought of as a prophylactic one — at least it could allay the impression of softness or defeatism, holding the public back from trauma, and

saving the valuable political skins of the policymakers. In general, the frequency with which these convictions are cited [7] gives them a degree of prima facie weight. It allows us to assume that they were expressed to some extent at both the executive arid the bureaucratic levels, but not to assume their significance. Pronouncements by political leaders, for example, may be largely an exercise in ideological control, a way of emphasizing certain permissible attributions which do not fall within the dominant taboos.[8] The plausibility of these pronouncements, their implications for the democratic control of foreign policy, their relative significance, and, most important, their ability to explain the elite's commitment and frame of reference in domestic social terms: all these things remain in question.

3. PUBLIC CONSTRAINT: PLACATING A MIRAGE

This emphasis on the role and responsibility of the general public should not seem farfetched; it has, in fact, become a familiar analytic "move." Even apart from its application to the policy in Vietnam, a loose consensus has grown up around the idea of the constraining role of popular opinion in the arena of foreign policy, a consensus so widely and complacently shared that evidence has given way to presumption; assertions have taken the place of careful thought.[9] In this general view, public opinion (usually painted in extremely unbecoming colors) acts to hem in the makers of policy, fixing the outer limits in which they can maneuver, setting broad policy criteria, and imposing its demands. As Dean Rusk put it in 1965, "the long-range foreign policy of the United States is determined by. the American people" (cited in Cohen, 1973: 9). But we are right to ask *how* these public attitudes exert their powerful impact on foreign policy. Perhaps the public, acting in accordance with the dictates of consumer sovereignty, buys or declines the "policy products" of its national leaders (Almond, 1960: 5-6)-or perhaps the public's views are taken by osmosis. Do they prompt or compel certain state actions or nondecisions? Must they be reckoned with? Are they effective "in the final analysis"? Or do they in some way influence, intimidate, and set the stage? Though the conventional picture tends to throw these possibilities together in a reck-

less way, we can tease out some central contentions with relative ease.

Aware of what has been called the public's "latent veto," government leaders concern themselves with the configurations of power at home as well as abroad. And, in a democracy, while public attitudes may not dictate future decisions, they can express a threat to certain policies that will tempt the government elite toward caution and strenuous avoidance of a visible failure. Rather than a detailed prospective control, a post hoc reproof might be a weapon in the hands of the public. As an uneducated Southerner put it years ago:[10] "I ain't ax no man what him *will* do I ax him what him *hab* done." The government must therefore look to the future, at times shelving, diluting, or restructuring its adventurous innovations, and at other times being encouraged in its belligerence. Its scope of discretion is limited, in one familiar image, by the system of "dikes" which public opinion is said to resemble.

Regardless of how familiar these images are, we still have the right to be skeptical. In the case of American policy in Vietnam, for example, how broad a scope of discretion was the public allowed? How dilapidated were those dikes? How many mass "fingers" were needed to prevent the momentum of government policy from crashing through them? Suspicion is even great enough to put forward what may be a more apt analogy for public opinion: the *sieve*.

In response to this question of whether the level of public constraint has generally been exaggerated, several writers have given a resounding yes [11] Such an answer comes in several parts: it asserts that the government's concern for public opinion has been overrated or contrived, and that the permissiveness or malleability of popular opinion has been ignored. In many if not most cases in the making of American foreign policy, popular opinion is largely disregarded, manipulated, or redundant. Because of their limited scope and their penchant for unenlightened fantasizing, the discussions in the public arena can often be summarily dismissed. Governmental secrecy will only facilitate this irrelevance and exclusion. As a Public Affairs Bureau official in the State Department put it (see Cohen, 1973: 157), "Even on Vietnam no significant public opinion enters U.S. policy as far as the State Department is concerned."[12] Remarks such as these would indicate that domestic attitudes,

especially at lower bureaucratic levels where incrementalism reigns, tend to remain unnoticed or be heavily depreciated.

If these patterns continue (and there is a wide body of supportive evidence to elaborate), the policy elite would not need to cater so strenuously to the hard-line attitudes of the public — certainly not as much as some of the familiar descriptions might claim. A study of opinion on Cold War issues from 1955-1964, for example, showed the impossibility of deriving the attitudes of the policy elite from earlier mass views, but significantly, did not rule out the reversed relationship (Peterson, 1972). In general, substantive evidence which supports the idea of public rulership or inhibition is quite thin. As Bernard Cohen (1973: 19) puts it, public attitudes may not be "dikes" or "hedges" at all, but *clouds*: at times "one can move right through them . . . without even knowing it. They are a figure of speech." But they are a figure of speech which, when employed in an account of a foreign policy, has very striking implications-of a prescriptive sort, for example.

In a public account or in the way a member of the foreign policy elite understands himself, elements of fakery and self-deception are also likely to have been involved, for policymakers may just naturally assume that their demonologies and fears about the world are shared, even more crudely and thoughtlessly, by the general public. This is only compounded by a habit of not openly debating these domestic political considerations within the government. The result, it seems fairly certain, would be to increase the awareness of risks and strengthen the indifference to whatever opportunities for change the international environment might provide. This plea of "what can I do, the public being what it is" suggests a president with much less power than the contemporary era has granted him; it implies a relatively paralyzed, rather than an imperial, presidency.

The government's perception of public opinion, in fact, may have largely amounted to an externalization of its own assumptions: an attempt to make the unlikely the impossible, and to deflect or rule out its own responsibility. Choices which are said to be made in the light (or under the shadow) of public conservatism can go quite far in legitimating the policies that result. For not only is a democratic patina acquired, but the innovative ideas of crit-

ics are left without a leg to stand on-because, it is easily assumed, they could never expect to gain the support of the public or to avoid the threat of backlash. In this way, official excuses are provided; choices are simplified, as well as justified. If a decades-long policy of containment and intervention is to be allowed to continue, it can carry with it a decades-old reading of its continuing political necessity — as "protection." As Huntington (1961: 251) wisely notes, "The true success of an Administration is revealed by the extent to which informed and articulate critics of its policies accept its image of public opinion." Once this occurs, criticism can be incrementalized.[13] Yet in our explanations, the place of such images may be quite different. We should *expect* policymakers to say these things about popular control, to make these periodic offerings at the altar of democratic theory. Rather than taking them at face value, however, we can take them seriously in another way-as signifying features of the context in which they are projected, or as a reflection of the background expectancies of their audience.[14] It would perhaps be better to characterize them as more of a symptom or mirage, and less as a pressure. To a large degree, a national security policy *creates* its public. But as long as the public determination (or delimitation) of state policy remains one of the country's imposing myths, these images of public opinion can be self-validating or wish-fulfilling. They can smooth the path the elite would have taken even without them.

Another possibility could be considered: whatever public restraints exist may be self-created ones, for the policy elite can generate the very vulnerability that later hems it in. To fight a Cold War, for example, you need a Cold War public. But with a continuing "oversell," you also leave yourself open to certain public demands, especially in regard to the tactics that are used to insure the agreed-upon goals. In order to safeguard public support for massive military budgets and an expansive world role, a need for a seamless web of anticommunist militancy may be created at the cost of precluding certain tactical choices and forms of retrenchment. Yet even so, we should remember that the escalation of rhetoric which may create these problems is not undertaken or maintained for its own sake. It is more likely to be grounded in a set of pre-existing international goals. For unless these are more than just *avoid-*

ance goals, more than short-term strategies aimed at simply evading the domestic repercussions which the foreign commitments made possible, then the oversell (and the created vulnerability) makes little sense. To the extent that these elements are present, they will cast a shadow over any public interpretation of American policy, and particularly of instances of intervention in the Third World.

What a model of domestic political necessity has failed to deal with successfully has been the element of misperception on the part of the elite, and the ways in which the elite's so-called vulnerability can be contrived (occasionally even deserving characterization as a deft piece of stagecraft). The prescriptive bearing of such a model is also worth noting. Unless the style of inquiry goes beyond the frame of reference of the elite and looks at the domestic context that might make that policy outlook intelligible in social terms, there will be a temptation to unfairly attribute responsibility for the policy. The public, without further ado, may be mistakenly cast in the garb of the villain.

Changes in the public (or the willingness of leaders to be responsive to it) may, in other words, need to precede any radical restructuring of American policy. The policy elite may need to become more insulated from the polity in order to resist its pressures. On the other hand, this "prerequisite" could merely amount to a distraction, a kind of red herring, for significant departures in policy might have been politically acceptable at the tune they were proposed. This could be the case if public opinion in no way pushed the government toward aggressive action and even if an expansive policy were passively supported. Of course, policy goals will often be grounded in (that is, be means toward) more inclusive domestic ends, but an actual restrictive role on the part of the general public in "monitoring" that linkage may be nowhere present. Decisions can derive from broader policies, and policies can perhaps rely on the assumption that where policymakers lead, a permissive mass will follow. The notion of a constrained or a democratic foreign policy may be simply a pleasing myth, one which gives solace and recommends silence to the general public, and provides the policy elite with legitimacy and self-serving excuses. Given a new lease on life, metaphors and alibis can be mistaken for

reality. At times they may even come to replace reality in our political perceptions.

4. Bullets And Ballots: Public Opinion and the American Electorate

Fed a steady diet of buncombe, the people may come to expect and to respond with highest predictability to buncombe [Key, 1966: 7].
The more statesmen absorb from social scientists, the more cynical they are apt to become about "the public will" [May, 1964: 118].

As an interpretation of America's goals, the idea of a public restriction begins to seem less persuasive. Perhaps at this point a closer look at the political characteristics of the American public could tell us what elements of this view might be salvaged and which elements will be still further undermined. In the first place, we need to see if the public is even capable, let alone likely, of playing the role that has been attributed to it. Questions such as these will help organize the discussion, for they bear not only upon the explanation of America's refusal to disengage from Vietnam, but also on the prospects for a representative foreign policy.

Guiding me here, of course, is the assumption that a broad portrait of the general public can cast some light on the particular features of Vietnam. The *salience* which the problem of disengagement later acquired and the polarizations it gave rise to, for example, should be placed into perspective: Americans have generally been little engaged by international politics, let alone by national policies. Normally, indifference reigns; involvement is superficial or sporadic. If concern with world affairs is higher than we often presume (relative to domestic affairs), this is perhaps because less concern is given to domestic policies than we expect. In these instances, consensus and compliance may become hard to distinguish, as the hierarchy and routines of everyday life are recreated in the acceptance of the state's policies as well as its interpretations of what is occurring.

One thread of analysis running through a vast literature on the American electorate has in these ways emphasized the incapacity of the pop-

ulace. It finds a general public made up of a cast of inattentive, apathetic, or sheep-like characters, largely unable to find coherence among their own unstable and superficial attitudes, and relying instead on habit, irrelevant party cues, or the manipulative lead of others. The electorate, especially on matters of foreign policy, in other words, does not even faintly resemble the theoretical ideal of an attentive and articulate citizenry. Instead, the interests of influential elites or the idiosyncratic visions of the leaders have their own way amidst the privatism and conformity of the mass. This would be “a movement of unreasoning pawns” (Hamilton, 1972: 54). “They look upon politics as news to be consumed, a drama to be watched” (Hacker, 1971: 73). In such a view, mass attitudes are as uninspiring as they are irrelevant.

In general, political perceptions remain unclear, for what the mass public lacks is an ability to place foreign policy in any kind of meaningful perspective. The remoteness of international affairs has supposedly given rise to “black and white” attitude structures, as well as an overreliance on simple analogies unfettered by sophisticated thinking or by any reference to concrete experiences. In this view:

> Minimal information about the world will yield a simple unidimensional cognitive structure, which is most conducive to aim ethnocentric attitude of maximum psychological distance from things foreign. This can manifest itself in isolationism, a disliking of foreign nations, a fear of them, or a desire to fight them with slight provocation [Scott, 1965: 86].

“Dark areas of ignorance” still prevail.[15] There is also a penchant for Manichean simplifications. Because their levels of information and attentiveness about world affairs are often scandalously low, many writers have seen a dangerous *volatility* in the general public — one that might make more understandable the elite’s desire to exclude them, control them, or muffle their demands. They have largely found the public too emotional and belligerent, too intolerant of ambiguity, and too little concerned about other nations to be safely given much influence over the nation’s goals or policies in the interna-

tional realm.[16]

According to the received claim, the general public has been largely innocent of attitudes that are structured in ideological terms (Converse, 1964). Lacking interest as well as information, their level of conceptualization is not a high one; they are thought to be unable to apply whatever broad political assumptions they may have to particular issue concerns. As a result, their policy preferences tend to be undifferentiated, unpredictable, vague, or simplistic: logical consistency and the stability of their opinions over time would be less the rule than the exception. Particularly among lower-income groups where the time perspective is apt to be grounded upon short-run concerns and expectations, there is little possibility of a reflective stand on long-term foreign problems. Political opinions would more likely be "psychological epiphenomena" or "aggregated Pavlovian responses" to the political stimuli of the moment (Hennessy, 1970: 471,476). What dominates is an erratic superficiality.

In Gabriel Almond's classic analysis (1960), as one example, the less well-educated citizens' views displayed the characteristics of moods. Inflexible attitudes had a habit of giving way to unreasoned overreactions when faced with a crisis event. This broad picture is a bleak one, and once we grant its realism, certain "hard" prescriptive implications begin to show their face. It has been from the mass that an intrusive and irrational wave was expected. Insofar as it was forced to acknowledge this body of opinion, the policy elite would therefore be aware of its "legitimate" need to contain, rather than inflame it. Traumatic events which might trigger a volatile reaction would be carefully skirted. One conclusion seems to follow. If the character of mass opinion remained the same, the prospects for a disengagement from a commitment like that of Vietnam would be critically affected. The character of the mass public might rule them out.

A bulwark against such irrationalism could supposedly be found in the small "attentive public," that thin layer made up of concerned and well-informed citizens, relatively well-educated, cosmopolitan, and economically advantaged. But was this a reasonable assumption? It would seem to be only if a sizable gap existed between the quality of mass attitudes and those of the

attentive or "elite" public. In an older view, based squarely on survey data from the 1950s, a clear split does exist (Converse, 1964). Only among the better-educated public, for example, would we be likely to find consistent ideologies (a principled binding together of attitudes that can guide more concrete choices). Only a small minority with their greater knowledge and perspective on political issues could approximate a model of "rational decision" (see Smith, 1968), with its stress on object appraisal, alignment of ends and means, and a broad contextual and time perspective. By expressing viewpoints that are more stably anchored (and thus more stable), this knowledgeable and ideologically-guided elite public could thus provide a buffer zone of more "responsible" opinion—even if perhaps not a large enough one to guarantee the success of innovation.

This is, however, one point of view we need not accept at face value, for some of its time-bound features make it unable to guide an analysis through the more turbulent waters of the 1960s. Premature certitudes are always worth guarding against. On many fronts, the burden of recent evidence from the 1960s has been shifting against the older views, and moving toward a more sanguine updating (Brown, 1970; Pierce, 1970; Lipsitz, 1970; Lane, 1962; Wilker and Milbrath, 1970; Cobb, 1973; Miller et al., 1973). For example, the gap between the attentive public and the mass— while undeniably present—has very likely been overstated. The level of attitudinal consistency for both groups also seem to have increased rather dramatically in the 1960s, and especially *before* 1964 (Nie, 1974: Nie et al., 1975: ch. 8-9). According to some of these newer "populist" accounts, stable belief structures and an ideological directedness of opinion can be found during this period even among the less-well-educated (who are, admittedly, less adept at articulating their views). Nor have reasonably strong and well-anchored political opinions been all that uncommon. On the contrary, in the mass public, the stability of underlying orientations over time has recently been considered quite substantial. And to the extent that this has been the case, the analytic usefulness of singling out the mass as a volatile source of constraint or pressure becomes suspect.

The swings in mood and salience that were found several decades ago

have since been flattened out. No longer volatile in response to international events, as Deutsch and Merritt suggest (1965: 183), public viewpoints are now quite stable except in very special circumstances: "Almost nothing in the world seems to be able to shift the images of 40 per cent of the population in most countries, even within one or two decades." These special circumstances (the likelihood of which we should bear in mind when considering the chance of a "trauma") would probably require the *mutual* occurrence and reinforcement of several elements: persistent state activity aimed at redirecting opinion, along with the pronounced impact of "spectacular" events that would occur in the absence of important cross-pressures and against a background of other events. A negotiated disengagement from Vietnam in, for example, 1964 or 1965, may well not have been capable of bringing about such a confluence of factors.

Nor have Almond's findings of rigidity (in normal periods) and over-reaction (in times of crisis) been reaffirmed in the light of more recent evidence. In one account (Peterson, 1972), American mass opinion on Cold War issues (from 1955 to 1964, for example) was found to be relatively unaffected by evidence of conflict behavior that the Soviets initiated—even by those actions which should have confirmed or triggered the basic predispositions of the public. As for the instability of attitudes, these have been found at times to be *greater* among the college-educated than even the grade-school graduates (Richman, 1972). Certainly this would alert us to a weakness in the older "elitist" perspective, for while this variability in opinion on the part of the better-informed might denote a sensitivity to events, it might also be merely an erratic response. As this study found, significantly, the responsiveness to events in the international realm was *not* noticeably different among the different groups. Instead, a kind of sluggish permissiveness may be widespread across all levels.

Related to these claims is the Mainstream Model that Gamson and Modigliani (1966) have set forth. Here, a familiar connection is underscored—between an attachment to society, with an acceptance of its social and normative influences, and a general support of official views. The two are linked closely, though perhaps counter-intuitively, for higher levels of educa-

tion and awareness come to "socialize" the citizenry in a variety of ways, often blunting criticism and generating consistent increases in support for the actions of the state. By encouraging a better awareness of what the government is doing, "sophistication" and greater media exposure creates, paradoxically, a greater willingness to support it, or remain within the intellectual limits of its policy. A description of the government's actions will be taken not only from its overt behavior, but also from an official account which includes a recital of the government's purposes and reasons for behaving as it does. This account therefore plays, at least in part, a dual role: that of explanation and justification (see Scott and Lyman, 1968; Edelman, 1964, 1971). If these accounts are successfully manipulated, the attentive public will come to "understand" the policy, yet in an uncritical way: by accepting not only the government's account of what it is doing, but also of why it is doing it (phrased in terms or in alibis which the audience will accept). The talismanic value of national security arguments has played a special role here, one that might fit quite handily with the contentions of the Mainstream Model. Unlike an opposing Cognitive Consistency model that would predict a greater national polarization of opinion at higher levels of education, here (reinforced by additional knowledge) the underlying predispositions of the public would point more and more in a similar direction: toward consensus and acquiescence. Especially in response to the initiatives of a president, official policy could catch most opinion in the middle of its net.

Regarding the likelihood of a backlash, one related element will only add to our skepticism: the great and increasing salience of the presidency for the general public during this period. As a leader, a cue for the acceptance of policy as well as for attitudinal conformity and the widespread desire to be located "in the mainstream," his position was unmatched. The likelihood of a major independent shift in mass attitudes was thereby lessened, especially on international issues where events are farther from the referents of concrete everyday life and where the role of the executive is more easily seen. It only underscores once again the substantial elasticity, conformity, and permissiveness of opinion.

The role of deference, particularly in a crisis situation, has (until

recently) been pronounced. With the average citizen also relying on governmental information, rises in public support tended to follow the moves of the president *in any direction* (see Waltz, 1967: 272-273). Such patterns help produce the great resistance to untutored changes in opinion that I have mentioned, as people try to subsume their basic outlook under an official viewpoint, and assimilate to it the impact of international events. This means, finally, that the chances for a domestically successful change in policy must be rehabilitated, for if most citizens support the official foreign policy because (or as long as) it is official policy, changes in that policy might easily carry the public along with them. The majority is a susceptible majority. And we would predict this especially in a case where the general public was neither highly-informed nor greatly involved psychologically in the symbols of success. "He who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definition of reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 109). Even a knowledgeable public deduces its views and defers more readily than if often presumed. Taking all of these elements of opinion into consideration, what is more and more likely to materialize is a great degree of governmental leeway—as long as the state actors (unlike the early Vietnam years) are interested in taking advantage of it.

> If a man's vicarious experience with events that concern him, as far back as he can remember, consists of emergencies, crises, and hazards followed by new crises, what influence will this have upon his behavior? It may well induce helplessness, confusion, insecurity, and greater susceptibility to manipulation by others [Edelman, 1964:14].
>
> *The President makes opinion, he does not follow it* [Lipset, 1966: 115].

* * * * *

Even if mass public opinion offers neither a threat nor a serious source of constraint, perhaps this is a task for the periodic intervention of the voters. Doesn't the notion of electoral accountability bring with it an ever-present

chance of punishment at the polls? Is this not the mechanism by which the voice of the people insinuates itself into the highest policy. making circles? An answer to these broad questions should evolve from the answers to a number of subsidiary ones—concerning such matters as partisanship, the importance of issues, the cues of official policy, and so forth. Once these matters are evaluated, we can begin to step forward more confidently to an assessment of the domestic context, of the extent to which it warrants the attributions that some have been prone to give it.

The character of electoral choice has been much discussed in recent years, and several alternative descriptions are possible. Voters' disillusionment, first of all, has not been the free-floating phenomenon on which the fears I have mentioned are usually based. As I have said, attitudes are frequently prompted by policy, and similar guides are present in the electoral arena. What guides the electorate in its voting decisions, according to the standard view, is the compass of party loyalty, as well as broad attitudes toward the candidates and a more limited role for the appraisal of issues. in the 1952-1964 period, for example, the overall totals for party identification changed scarcely at all. Rates of "defection" were fairly constant. What helped domesticate the elections, then, were widespread and habitual commitments to the political parties, commitments that were the major correlate of electoral choice. At the individual level, few forces remained more stable. The 1964 data (Pomper, 1968: 85) indicate, as one example, that less than one quarter of the voters had shifted party loyalties during their lifetimes. This has not exactly been an unruly electorate. Because of this stabilizing element, the risks of failure could be softened — or at least the risks of an erratic and unmediated popular response.

But an important question remains, one which has recently attracted a great deal of attention: the extent to which *issue* concerns break through these stable patterns of partisan loyalties, or cause them to loose their grip on the determination of voting choices. For if issues have little weight, at least the likelihood of an electoral disaster spurred by the polarization of issues would be slight. But, on the other hand, a less sophisticated and "issueless" mass might be more easily mobilized to punish the incumbent or his party, with-

out the *restraining* role that issue concerns might represent.

The standard view, again based securely on earlier data, tended to denigrate the importance of issues (see Sears, 1969). It claimed that policy concerns have been slight and changeable, usually surfacing in areas that impinge quite visibly upon the people's daily life or upon the most salient interest of the groups with which they identify. Rarely referring to policy stands, the public's articulated likes and dislikes about candidates show a tendency to personalize instead, or lean heavily on partisan cues. Such an electorate has by and large been assumed not only to be relatively uninformed about specific issues, but also to be unable to differentiate between the parties' stands regarding them. To complicate matters further, those who were most attentive to the policies were thought to be the very voters least likely to change their minds during the campaign: the party loyalists. Without these loyalties as a guide, opinions were more unstable, and interest seemed to decline. As for the way issues are articulated at the level of policymaking, most voters apparently know very little about them.

We should also look at the strength of the relationship which is said to exist between electoral choice and policy preference. Compared to the role of party identification or candidate image, issues have tended to leave only a marginal imprint on voting behavior. In one case, reexamining Key's data from 1936-1960 on the consistency of issue positions and stances toward the president, strong relationships were found only where the so-called issue question was a transparent vote of confidence in the candidate. When policy issues were phrased without explicit reference to parties or candidates, the correlations dropped precipitously (Sears, 1969: 361-363; also, Key, 1966; Miller, 1967: 226). Especially in regard to foreign policy, elections have not been won or lost on the issues. Quite the contrary, voters' policy attitudes, we are told, either derive from or are assimilated to their more stable allegiances toward party or candidate. These attachments provide an anchor for their opinions.

Such an interpretation, though well grounded in survey data from the 1950s—the somnolent (or "issueless") Eisenhower years — need not be taken as gospel. Important revisions in it have been suggested, the cumulative effect of which has been to grant the electorate of the 1960s a more responsible and

issue-oriented style of action than had previously seemed justified.[17] Even the older characterizations of party loyalty have been amended to allow it more of a self-interested and rational quality, so that party identification becomes less of a rigid and autonomous antecedent. In these views, party attachments are deflected by, and at times even derived from, the long-range impact of issues and the accumulation of broad issue positions — whose stability over time may account for some of the stability in party allegiance (Jackson, 1975a, 1975b; Price, 1968; Pomper, 1972: 467). Undergirding the electoral decisions may be higher levels of cognitive support and ideological clarity than were once thought possible. Such a transformation might decrease the likelihood of an irrational or thoughtless response to international events.

After 1960, a more *general* kind of thinking about parties and candidates becomes more prevalent, and the evaluating of candidates takes on ever larger doses of sophistication—as measured by the increased references to issues and ideological distinctions, as well as by the willingness to tie the two together (see Nie, 1974; Nie et al., 1975; RePass, 1974; Miller et al., 1973). One view of what has happened is that changes in the political environment in the 1960s generated new stimuli to which voters have responded with greater interest and concern for the issues. As attitudinal consistency increased, references to stances of the candidates on the issues began to take on a more substantial and coherent form. And with the parties taking on stronger and more distinct identities on certain issues, issue polarization and the electorate's ability "to tell the difference" between the parties has also grown. On issues important to them, voters in 1964 and 1968 surveys. For example, were surprisingly better able than before to discern (and be concerned with) these distinctions. With relatively clearer issue stands, "issue partisanship" and a more ideological orientation on the part of the voters were more prevalent. Perhaps most impressive have been the rather strong relationships between voting choices and policy preferences on salient issues—appearing to be as important a factor in 1964, for example, as the role of party identification, and able at times to displace it (RePass, 1971: 400). Not only had the salience of issues increased, but so had the electorate's ability to use their issue preferences in their voting (especially when the inertial tendencies of

party allegiance were temporarily deflected).[18] Such trends were gathering strength even before the "choice not an echo" atmosphere of 1964.

At this point, one may have some greater familiarity with the elements of the problem (and the new importance of issues in this counter-interpretation), but still be quite unpersuaded of their overall substantive importance for the area of foreign policy. How much of it can be applied there? At least in the past, foreign policy concerns in particular have formed only a small component of electoral choices, especially when compared to the powerful role of party loyalty. For the most part, they have affected those without such strong cues, as well as the rare party loyalists who happened to find their views on these issues greatly at odds with the stance of their party. The relationship between stands on foreign policy preferences and electoral choice, as a result, has not been impressive. A tradition of bipartisanship has added its effect, helping to homogenize the issue preferences; to a large extent, party divisions have not structured them.

On the shape of earlier presidential victories, these stands did have a slight yet noticeable impact, providing decreasing *advantages* of 3%, 2 1/2%, and 2% to the Republicans in 1952, 1956, and 1960 (Miller, 1967: 226).[19] In part, a changing perception of the parties' relative ability to keep America out of war accounted for the declining advantage of the G.&P. During the 1950s, the Republicans acquired a peace-and-hard-times label which, on the Democratic side, was matched by an image of war-and-prosperity. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, this war-prone attribution gradually left the Democrats as public evaluations made a dramatic reversal. By 1964 *only 12%* felt the Republicans would do a better job in keeping the U.S. out of war—an issue that has been of continuing significance to the public. Nor was this shift simply an epiphenomenon of the Goldwater candidacy. By mid-1962, the Democrats were even with the G.O.P.; they were favored by a small margin on this issues in early 1963. By 1966, however, the escalation and protraction of Vietnam had taken its toll: Republicans somewhat overcame their negative image and a slight majority favored them on this concern (Waltz, 1967: 282; Miller, 1967: 220; Mueller, 1973: 117).

Yet even in acknowledging this broad issue preference, or the fact that

there has been a substantial increase in the correlation between issue attitudes and electoral choice, we are left with vexing problems. The significance of patterns like these even among domestic preferences is uncertain, for the recent analysis of 'issue voting" has failed to clearly distinguish between prospective and retrospective evaluation.[20] We may find an electorate which, in forming its voting preferences, is critically concerned with future policy choices which the government will make. We would more likely expect on the other hand, that no such prospective capability for gauging goals and reasons exists, but only an ability to react to results, perhaps in some vague relation to the issues (compare Key, 1966; Pomper, 1968; Brody, 1968; Boyd, 1972; Brody and Page, 1972; Kessel, 1972).

When we ask whether the voters look forward as well as backward, we can give a relatively blunt answer. Rather than reflecting carefully thoughtout expectations about the candidates' abilities to handle particular issues in the future, voters' evaluations have largely been made in retrospect, as judgments about past performance—the narrow successes and the ambiguous failures. While this may in some ways narrow the candidates' electoral accountability in the face of change, it might also give material form to the fears of an incumbent as he considers putting a visible "failure" on the agenda. When policies go sour or deviate from widely held preferences, the public may decide a "house cleaning" is overdue and punish the candidates or party that they associate with the past.

Yet does even this represent a serious hurdle? To the extent that the public gives any injunction to its leaders on matters of foreign policy (or at least on all but the most salient matters), this injunction may turn out to be little more than the mandate to *succeed* (Brody, 1971; Stone and Brody, 1970); it is a mandate for the government to avoid a serious failure in achieving the goals that it sets for itself. Prior issue commitments are difficult to translate into prospective guidance, and even the dangers of retrospective punition might seem largely to revolve around the success or failure of government policy *in its own terms*. International events and media presentations, in other words, would be read by reference to the administration's objectives: to a great extent, success is policy specific and cued by officialdom.

But even so, the hypothesis of such a limited electoral mandate has its limitations. It does not address itself precisely to the idea of a public pressure of a potential backlash, nor to the likelihood that the mass public will loose itself from the guidelines of official policy. This is an important lacuna in such an interpretation, at least for the purpose of this paper, for we will want to know the degree to which, and the freedom with which, the administration *can* in fact define the criteria of success in its own terms. How much constraint would present itself in the face of a government effort to reverse course, rather than to persevere without success in a protracted intervention? Until now, most of what has been said about popular and electoral opinion suggests that an administration can set its own criteria with considerable freedom, especially in a period such as 1964-1965 when the public's awareness of those criteria had not yet reached a high level, and where a higher propensity toward followership in the face of remote international problems was coupled with the almost oligopolistic impact of bipartisanship in international affairs.

The chances of an 'uncontrolled" reaction are lessened. From the recent evidence I have discussed, the mass electorate would deserve an upgrading in the status we give it — a newer and more responsible view of party loyalty is possible, amid the public's increased sophistication has shown up in other ways as well. In particular, the growing importance of issues in the 1960s (even before 1964) should be considered, as well as the rise in the consistency of attitudes and the ways in which some of the inertial force of partisan attachment has been undercut in the formation of voting choices. Yet, particularly in the area of foreign policy where the level of issue polarization had not been great — at least compared to the domestic side of the ledger — these changes need not increase the likelihood of an unsophisticated response or pressure. On the contrary, we might recall the implications of the Mainstream Model (Gamson and Modigliani, 1966). These changes may well have lessened the possibility of an irresponsible backlash and narrowed some of the gap between the mass and the attentive public.

What, then, is left? The threat of great electoral punishment on the heels of inaction or retrenchment (rather than continuing failure): this seems to have little place in a reading of the electorate. Rather than a selfconscious

public in matters of foreign policy, the picture well into the spiral of Vietnam is that of a relatively acquiescent following, a public anchored by symbols and attachments that helped to offset the prospects for polarization. Without striking cleavages in opinion, the stability of voting preferences was high and acted as yet another buffer against the effect of events and results, for these could be at least partly reinterpreted in terms of one's deference toward the president, confidence in his vision, long-standing partisan loyalties, or a simple desire for peace. In the realm of voting, as in the realm of opinion, these elements prepare the way for a quite diluted measure of accountability, especially for the president and particularly a Democratic president. They also help to subtlely complicate some of the restrictive bearing of the new importance of issues in the 1960s, by creating a more responsible (and yet not intensely polarized) public in the realm of foreign affairs. As I will discuss in more detail later, it is also possible to suggest that certain *domestic* concerns, now increased in salience, may have represented still another resource in the hands of the policy elite, should it have attempted (or desired) to disengage. Prospective guidance and serious retrospective constraint give way to a "cueing" by the president's policies and initiatives. As long as no great sacrifices are demanded of the people, we are left, it seems, to expect compliance.

One serious objection still stands. We may not be able to extrapolate such *general* findings into the arena of Vietnam, for either the fervency of the consensus, the opposition to the war, or the communicated resolve of American leaders may have made this an exceptional issue even at its outset. After all, we are interested in examining the *specifics* of the relationship between policy and opinion in the Vietnam years, and not only in these broad hypotheses about the public and its permissiveness. We will want to know to what extent public pressures and preferences aligned with government policy in such a way as to cast the public, if not in the role of culprit and protagonist, then at least in that of a chorus or an "accessory to the crime." The next task should therefore be to examine the structure of opinion and opposition in this case — as a way of reflecting back on the general discussion and of laying some guidelines for the future.

5. THE LANDSCAPE OF VIETNAM OPINION

Although Americans are certainly not known for their attentiveness to public concerns, especially in the area of world affairs, exceptions do occur. Vietnam has been just such an exception. Levels of interest and salience ran unexpectedly and increasingly high during the late 1960s — high enough toward the end of the Johnson era, to foster the impression of a "kibbitzing" and restrictive public. But here, caution is in order. Before the massive escalations of the Johnson years, the people's concern was quite narrow: the domestic leeway of the president was at its most spacious. In these years, the public expressed a kind of "inattentive tolerance" toward American actions in Vietnam; its attitudes toward the government's broad goals there would deserve the same characterization—not only in the early years, but right up to the present as well. Before Johnson's victory over Barry Goldwater, Vietnam ranked only thirteenth on the public's list of concerns. As of late May 1964, almost two-thirds of a Gallup Poll's respondents claimed to have paid little or no attention to what was happening there (Free and Cantril, 1968: 52, 59-60; compare RePass, 1971, 1974; Patchen, 1966).

Although the range and quantity of the political signals handled by the public has been desperately low, Vietnam once again displays its exceptionalism (Verba et al., 1967). Fairly high levels of information were reported in the years following the dispatch of American troops. While this too goes against the grain of many expectations, we must take care in considering it. Very often, the question asked as a gauge of information about the war were gauges of unenlightening facts about a spectacle, and not of the sort of information one would need to make a critical choice among the policy alternatives "in the air." The real issues (apart from the details of a spectacular "event") revolved around some quite different, if less commonly demanded, questions: was, for example, America's national security or way of life enough at stake for the government to harbor the goals, employ the means, or create the carnage that resulted, or, under the circumstances, might one more appropriately escalate, deescalate, or attempt a withdrawal. It seems as though a more specific concept should be introduced, that of *issue information.* For the

average citizen, it is fairly certain that in the early stages and very likely in the later stages of the war, this issue information did not exist. For the most part, an acceptance of the government's justificatory account of its behavior served to divert the demand, on the part of the public, for certain kinds of knowledge and critical understanding. They were replaced to a large extent by slogans, unexamined assumptions, or by taking the word of the officials.

Support for the war ran quite high. Popular attitudes on this matter were partly orderly and partly inconsistent: in regard to tactical choices, for example, many people presented themselves simultaneously as hawks *and* doves. What did not materialize, however, was what some of the older evidence might have led us to expect: the erratic, event-prone oscillations. Instead, inertia and a decline in support for the administration highlighted the Johnson years. As the war became a more immediate concern, inattentive inconsistency was gradually swept aside. By the fall of 1964, for example, after the American attack arising from the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin, popular responses had begun to display a mixture of supportiveness and pugnacity, possibly combined with cues from the candidates' stands in the campaign for the presidency (Free and Cantril, 1968: 200; Wright, 1972). But, as always, it is hard to distinguish this policy support from a predictable and unreflective backing of the president, especially one who has benefited from a landslide election and from the emotions surrounding John Kennedy's death. Well into Johnson's own term, this approval predominated. In March 1966, as a single example, only 8% of a poll's respondents claimed they would counsel withdrawal even if Red China intervened with "a great many troops" (Mueller, 1973: 86; 82-90). Serious questioning about the nation's aims had either not yet begun, or a measure of patience and trust had temporarily replaced it.

Looked at broadly, popular opinion seemed to harden fairly gradually during these years, as support for the administration kept a high profile. But even with this familiar pattern of support, its significance is not always so clear. Several alternatives emerge. It could represent a passive followership or, on the other hand, a reckless escalation-prone public that was continually tugging at the bit of official moderation. Is there any reason to credit this latter possibility? Insofar as an escalation sentiment emerged, we are surely right in

attributing much of it to a "war fever (inn Senator Fulbright's words) which was generated by the government's already provocative and seemingly "legitimate" escalations. It also suggests a willingness to accept official goals (or a scaling down of them) combined with a much less expansive desire: to be free of the Asian albatross, to get the involvement "over with." Support for a stronger stand expresses a choice of tactics, a way of calibrating certain means with pre-existing ends, and not necessarily a symbol of the public's determination to stay in Vietnam in the face of official reluctance. While pro-escalation sentiment recorded in national polls did increase from about one-fifth to one half of the public in the 1964-1967 period before dropping back to about one-third and less after the Tet offensive, it cannot therefore be treated simply as a potential backlash. The links are too complicated to afford us the simplifying luxury of such an attribution. It is not at all unlikely that even this subpopulation could have gone along with a government that was systematically reevaluating its aims in Southeast Asia.

We should not fall into a trap whereby solidity and inflexibility are mistaken for one another, for not all majorities are barriers to change. More often, as long as the routines and comforts of everyday life are not jeopardized, they represent a flexible or, at times, even an "Oedipal support" (Hamilton, 1972: 123) for official policy, especially on the part of the better-educated and more informed inhabitants of the "mainstream"— those most exposed to the media and the claims of the government. For instance, it was often assumed, quite mistakenly, that opposition to American policy during the later Johnson years stemmed from hawkish attitudes which constituted a serious restraint (downward) on policy change. The Stanford data reveal, however, that at least as of 1966, those who withheld support were more likely to be *dovish.* They tended to reject escalation options, while accepting the idea of a deescalation. Respondents who basically approved of Johnson's position, on the other hand, were more likely to favor a stepping up of the violence than was the much smaller group of opponents. At that time, therefore, if a restriction or potential backlash had existed, one would have looked for it among Johnson's backers (Verba et al., 1967; Mueller, 1973: ch. 5; Gamson and Modigliani, 1966). But in this case, because followership has been so wide-

spread (*especially* among the higher socioeconomic brackets) it gave the administration an extra cushion of support — a more flexible one than if the hawks had been an important oppositional element rather than the loyal camp-followers which they appeared to be. For not only could the president rely on a striking "global approval of the government" and a "bias toward positivity,"[21] but also upon the strategic role of the presidency and the strong leaning toward the Democrats in measures of party identification amid preferences on the issues.

This places several things in perspective. Although respondents in the Stanford survey might have accepted some escalation or reduction in the fighting, at that point and *before* the options were sanctioned officially, they seemed to balk either at a major escalation or an abrupt withdrawal. Also, many of the more resistant hard-line attitudes were undoubtedly low in intensity, perhaps relying on old Cold War slogans or on signals from the 1964 campaign — the kind of simplifications that last so long in part because they are so redundant with the appeals of the government. Not only did a permissive majority exist in these years, but it may well have afforded considerably more leeway for the president to move in a dovish, rather than a hawkish direction. Hawks can at times be sheep.

Americans did of course exhibit anticommunist attitudes which helped shape their ideas when it came to foreign policy. But again, however well documented, this is one fact we should not overplay. When the people are bewildered or are not intensely involved (these are the usual cases in foreign policy), they may allay their confusion by echoing what they think to be official and therefore reasonable, responsible views. But the general public may not have shared an "addictive fear" of communism, nor phobic feelings toward it which could be cathected onto a variety of representations whenever and wherever an elite would sanction them. It could therefore have been both inaccurate and self-serving to assert, as did one interviewed State Department official, that "most Americans are kind of sublimated hawks" (Cohen, 1973: 123; Parenti, 1969: 32, 72).

Nevertheless, the Cold War attitudes of Americans are not just a myth. According to a Harris Survey three-fourths of the public approved of the

American invasion of the Dominican Republic in mid-1965,feeling that the US. should use military force to keep the communists out of the Western Hemisphere. The escalations in Vietnam had perhaps made these tactics (and the determination that lay behind them) an acceptable, understandable, and perhaps even fashionable alternative. In the spring of 1966,strong sentiment of this sort was again registered when only 5% of the respondents to a N.O.R.C. study felt that American policy toward Russia, China, and Cuba was "too tough" (Lipset, 1966: 103; Free and Cantril, 1968: 79). Yet we might also recall that in the American culture of that time, the phrase "too tough" was virtually a nonexistent term, bereft of significance and meaningful reference. By the spring of 1966, with the symbolic commitment of American effort having become quite visible, 81% disapproved of the idea of a presidentially-sponsored withdrawal from Vietnam leading to a communist takeover. We might conclude that as long as it skirts disaster and heavy casualties, military interventionism would be regarded as an acceptable tool in the service of those aims that the government had defined. But in spite of such findings (which could be multiplied endlessly), the idea that these attitudes are obsessed, or would give rise to obsessive or volatile demands does not find solid backing. For the public, more immediate and concrete problems are likely to take precedence. Habits of deference are strong. Besides, a willingness to accept certain kinds of violence is not the same thing as a demand for ii, nor is it necessarily an opposition to scaling down the nation's goals in a way that would make that violence unnecessary. Dislikes and phobic fears cannot be equated.

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At this point, though many questions about the allegiance to a policy remain unanswered, we can perhaps gain a clearer idea of what support and constraint were involved (and where we might look for its explanation) by disaggregating the pro-war majority. By probing the differences of opinion within it, we can give up some of the abstractness that comes from flattening out a complicated situation. We can also see what light these differences shed

upon the possibilities which were present in the public for a restructuring of American aims, particularly in the early years of the Vietnam involvement.

We note one thing right away: within the supportive majority on Vietnam, internal cleavages were surprisingly small. This was especially true later on (Verba et al., 1967; Rosenberg et al., 1970: ch. 3; Verba and Brody, 1970: 329; Patchen, 1966: 294; Wright, 1972: 137-138; Hamilton, 1969: 57-58; Rosenberg, 1965: 330). White men, known for showing their pro-Cold War colors more strongly and distinctly than American women, tended to dominate the hawkish group of activists. Blacks and women, on the other hand, were somewhat less likely to lean toward military alternatives. Regional differences were marginal. What the Cold War seems to have brought with it has been a kind of demographic homogenization on the national level, sweeping aside many of the factors which an older literature on public opinion had made so much of. The age groups most clearly affected appear to be the young and the early middle-aged, a combination Munich-Cold War generation, growing up on the appeals for preparedness. But aside from the substantial and surprising "oversupport" of youth (even in 1964, a majority of non-Southern whites aged 21-30 backed a stronger stand in the war even if it meant invading North Vietnam), the demographic differences among the supporters were not, or did not remain, impressive.

Social-structural cleavages might be more promising. Partly because of the importance of a Marxist tradition in both political sociology and revisionist history, considerable attention has been given to class-based differences in the support for American policies, including Vietnam. At one extreme, we might look for a predatory social order presided over by higher-income elites, who are usually able to exercise hegemony and insure the compliance of the less-advantaged. At the other extreme, more conservative students and policy-makers might expect, even from the beginning of the involvement, to find a broad national consensus with no decisive differences among classes—except for the ever-present danger posed by a belligerent subordinate class against which the consensus was to be protected.

The first important analysis of attitudes on the war in 1966 (Verba et al., 1976: 323-324) discovered, rather unexpectedly, that standard variables of

social status (income, education, occupation) had by that time virtually no relation to policy preferences on Vietnam. Any attempt to locate responsibility for the support of the war in the upper (or lower) reaches of the class structure, this implied, would serve only to obscure the breadth of the national consensus. Other findings, however, have made such an hypothesis more and more difficult to accept, or at least to extrapolate into all periods of the conflict.

It appears now that higher income groups, as well as better-educated and more attentive Americans displayed the attitudes which many had attributed to the mass. Those of *higher* status showed stronger support and less negativism for the conflict than did the poorly-educated and the less well advantaged. Such a pattern, present also during the Korean conflict, appeared in attitudes toward military spending as well (Modigliani, 1972; Hamilton, 1968, 1969, 1972: 118-129, 452-454; Mueller, 1973: ch. 5; Russett, 1972). Although more contradictory findings are sometimes present, support for escalation reveals a similar pattern, with hawkish or belligerent attitudes disproportionately cluttering the higher, and not the lower reaches of the social scale, It was college-educated Americans in the spring of 1964 who most strongly supported the use of American troops. Acceptance for this overt form of intervention increased with higher levels of formal education although not, in a consistent fashion, with higher family incomes. A small margin of high income respondents and a majority of the college-educated recommended escalation (Patchen, 1966, 1970). A similar constellation of support was found in the 1964 election study, a fall 1964 polling, a 1966 Detroit study of escalation sentiment, a February 1967 Gallup survey concerning the aerial bombardment of North Vietnam, a far-reaching spring 1967 analysis, in local referenda, and in a January 1968 study requesting self-designation as hawk or dove (Free and Cantril, 1968: 82; Wright, 1972: 137-138; Converse and Schuman, 1970: 23; Modigliani, 1972: 960, 963-964; Hamilton, 1969: 57-58; Hahn, l970a, 1970b; Brody and Verba, 1972). Also as the spring Survey Research Center study shows (Patchen, 1966, 1970), individuals of higher social status (whether measured by levels of education or family income, and even when controlling for age) were more likely to reject the options of with-

drawal or neutralization Among younger respondents, this relationship was especially strong.

There was eventually a shift away from hawkish attitudes among higher status groups as the war progressed, which helped weaken the stronger correlations found earlier between support and socioeconomic position. It seems possible (see Wright, 1972) to attribute this change to a sensitivity to the mass media and the shift in media stance toward a more dovish or skeptical position, especially since much of the change took place among those who claimed to pay the most attention to the media. If some explanation were sought for the original class differences, we might look for it in a similar condition: a greater willingness to follow official assumptions and a greater exposure to the appeals of the media (in which those assumptions are aired). These are tendencies that, in the earlier years of the conflict, not only pointed in a similar direction, but were closely related to levels of education, information, and class. During these years, it appears that "the tough, hard line is a proclivity of established, educated, upper-middle-class white Protestants" (Hamilton, 1972: 454). This places the potential opposition into quite a different light, for the smallness of this core group and the unlikelihood of their mobilizing a mass backlash (which will be treated in more detail later) would run at cross-currents with the received claims about the general public. And such claims have not even had to consider the consequences of an actual desire to disengage on the part of the policy elite. Had such a desire ever been important, it could have led the administration to exert its powerful countervailing influence in the public arena and increase its leeway accordingly.

As we sum up these admittedly scattered findings, the apparent consensus of the mid-1960s is found to be more equivocal and more susceptible to differentiation by social status than was once presumed. Especially before the narrowing of the relationship between preferences and status in the later years, the "responsible" nature of the better-educated and attentive public, and the solidity of the support for U.S. policy, seem less pronounced.

In fact, studying public opinion and electoral behavior, both in a general way and in regard to Vietnam, few reasonable grounds have been found for strong fears of a backlash or for an attribution of constraint. Much has

been found, on the other hand, to suggest a radical discounting of these claims. Such a conclusion does not mean that a variety of participants did not believe, or could not have believed, in such a restriction. But to the extent that such beliefs were prominent (and here the evidence is overly sketchy and usually overdrawn), these presidential and elite accounts can be thought of — not as a reflection of an objective popular barrier or pressure for continuing—but as something different: a self-vindicating and at times perhaps willful misreading both of public opinion and the domestic political future — a kind of surface discourse that finds little warrant in the deeper rules or shared expectancies of its context. We simply cannot neatly translate the levels of support for intervention, anticommunism, or escalation into something they may not have amounted to: a potential and vigorous resistance to disengagement. As we have seen, there is little in the character of popular opinion that calls for such a reading.

If there were few domestic restrictions, can the public be held in any way responsible for the war, and for the refusal to withdraw? In a strictly representative or democratic guise, it cannot. But are there other forms of responsibility? Actually an affirmative answer suggests itself here, for permissiveness and acquiescence can go in more than one direction. Although the general public may not "prohibit" a deescalation or "necessitate" a continuing conflict, it might also not prohibit an escalation or necessitate a withdrawal or a quicker negotiated end to the war. Certainly a form of responsibility can be located in these facts. The arguments and evidence I have rehearsed to show the political *weakness* of the public will cut both ways. Even as they may make a backlash unlikely, they undercut the possibility of a "frontlash" as well. A viable opposition to current policy will, as a result, be inhibited — except in the relatively rare cases where the elite is already seriously divided and can give leadership and respectability to the dissent. These are possibilities which should be considered to see if the weakness of the restraint "downward" was paralleled by an equally feeble "upward" restraint, and to attempt to gauge the implications.

6. Consensus And Opposition

Later on, of course, support for the war did waver, as opposition (or dovish sentiment) expanded, became legitimated, and erupted into dramatic displays and attempts at influence. But looking through the lens of the Vietnam experience, we need to know to what extent domestic concerns played a restraining role, or if the permissiveness of the consensus papered over serious hesitations about America's aspirations in the world or its globalist view of its national security needs and international role.

One interesting measure of popular opposition, and one largely immune to a mere acquiescence in official policy, is the "mistake" question. Respondents were asked periodically if the U.S. should have become involved with its troops in Vietnam, or whether they thought the intervention was a mistake. From mid-1965 on, response declined in support — from the 61% in August 1965 who asserted that the intervention was *not* a mistake to the 61% in May 1971 who thought it was. In mid-1967 the narrow majority denying its mistaken character became a minority, and from mid-1968, a majority actually classified it as a mistake (Mueller, 1973: ch. 3; Schuman, 1972). Although this question is a narrow one, with its focus on the problem of troops rather than on the guiding premises of policy, it nevertheless affords us some measure of the consensus and its fragility.

In these years, followership was gradually eroded, for unlike more distant foreign policy issues, wars are felt directly, thus making it more difficult to manufacture a legitimation or to manipulate the popular reluctance and anxiety about international conflict. The injunction for policies to succeed in their own terms was not being met, and some of the originally hawkish supporters (in the attentive public in particular) were being influenced by shifts in the media and by the accumulation of bad news (Brady, 1971; Stone and Brody, 1970; Wright, 1972; Hamilton, 1972: 4849,453454, 526). By 1968, particularly in the wake of the Tet offensive, patience and optimism about a military solution to the war had weakened still further. January showed self-designated "hawks" with a 56% to 28% edge over the "doves;" by March that margin had vanished. Doves outnumbered hawks 42% to 41%, and public

approval of Johnson's handling of the war had dropped to 26% — an all-time low.

Yet the opponents of the war were not doves perching comfortably on a single line of opinion. As late as the 1968 election study, while almost three-fifths of those interviewed would characterize the intervention as a mistake, their policy preferences continued to take a more erratic form (Converse and Schuman, 1972: 20). Almost as many showed a desire for taking a stronger stand as for total withdrawal. Disaffection in this later period, in other words, cannot be equated with dovishness, nor did either attitude necessarily involve any appraisal of America's goals or the legitimacy of its efforts. But, at least, it shows that quiescence and hegemony need not be identical. At many points majorities did express support for a variety of deescalations if not for withdrawal itself, deluding themselves perhaps that these options could still salvage the goals of the government. According to the Stanford data, 88% of the 1966 respondents claimed to be willing to negotiate with the National Liberation Front, 70% would accept a negotiated truce, and narrow majorities agreed to admit the NLF into a coalition government or abide by free elections which the NLF might win. Yet even where options ruled out by the government found a receptive audience among the public, we should be cautious in our interpretation. Not only could these proposals have been impossible and therefore irrelevant, but the majority support that underpropped them could have expressed war-weariness far more than a principled stand against intervention. It was often not associated with any skepticism about the Cold War or about the relationship between American security and the containment of communist insurgents. For the most part, these larger premises went unquestioned, and preferences were made known on tactics alone, perhaps accounting for the willingness to escalate on the part of many respondents who were still not sure that Vietnam was worth a protracted war.

Disaffection was occasionally, but not always, coupled with support for withdrawal. In a poll in the late spring of 1964, for example, less than three-fourths of the respondents claimed to know of the conflict. Of these, the surprisingly high figure of 28% favored disengagement; 53% were opposed (Patchen, 1970, 1966: 295). After the much-publicized political turmoil in

South Vietnam in mid-1966, and given a simple choice between continuing and withdrawing, less than a majority (48%) favored sticking it out; 35% embraced the idea of withdrawal. When given a question about a compromise agreement with China that might neutralize Vietnam, those in favor substantially outnumbered the opponents, 46% to 29%, with a sizable "no opinion" segment (23%) providing an additional cushion. Several years later, should the South Vietnamese government have decided to stop fighting, 72% of the respondents recommended withdrawal; a mere 10% of grade school graduates, 15% of the high school and 28% of the college educated wanted the United States to continue alone (Patchen, 1966: 296; 1970: 657-658; Mueller, 1963: 86-87).

More importantly, this hesitation in the face of a growing, if covert, American commitment was largely untutored, for disengagement had not yet gotten the kind of high level backing and legitimation that are usually needed for a foreign policy alternative to gain widespread appeal.[22] Few political figures at *any* point during the Johnson years went so far as to counsel withdrawal, or to admit that it may well have been, from the very start, the only alternative to an escalating and destructive stalemate. Even as late as 1968, Eugene McCarthy limited his recommendations to a general bombing halt, a push for more conciliatory negotiations, a coalition government, and so forth.[23] This fact is crucial, for how well can the evidence of disapproval be sifted and deciphered? How clearly will a suggestion for change be revealed? Rarely does a sizable chunk of the electorate ever call for an unproposed course of action. Their forte, as many have said, lies elsewhere: in retrospective judgment, not in the imaginative articulation of new options.

When asked vaguer questions about "what we should do next," the responsiveness to the idea of withdrawal was on the whole quite muted during the early years of the conflict, but, with some deviations, continued to grow during the later 1960s (Mueller, 1973: 81-92). Throughout 1966 and 1967, for example, when a communist takeover was accurately cited as the consequence of a U.S. withdrawal, support for withdrawal totaled between 15% and 19% of the public. Only later did this option acquire political power and shed its status as the unlikely wish of a small minority. By March 1968,

given a simple approve-disapprove question about a gradual withdrawal sponsored by the government, and with no mention of a communist takeover, 56% approved. Two years earlier, 56% had *disapproved.* Looked at broadly, therefore, disillusionment and disaffection with the war ran high in Johnson's later years and the "unprimed" support for withdrawal showed a certain strength, which we should be careful not to exaggerate.

Even so, as in the case of support, these national figures may be misleading, for they cover over the constituent elements and splits within the opposition. By disaggregating the opposition, we can hope to see with greater clarity where the national consensus broke down, and where it was shared with unequal intensity — in a sense, to see what the social roots of "nondecision" were. Although the opposition to the war could have been randomly distributed, there could also have been important differences — with something to tell us about the interests that were represented, and those that were ignored, by military interventionism. There might also have been embedded within the opposition a latent social conflict with implications for the future of American policy.

Race, sex, and age present possible axes of differentiation. Blacks, for example, countering the relative hawkishness of whites, proved less supportive both of the war effort and of its escalation. The arguments for the war were less well heard, or proved less convincing. When queried, they were considerably more willing to accept the alternative policies of deescalation and withdrawal (Verba et al, 1967; Shuman, 1972: 527; Hamilton, 1969: 57). Mueller (1973: 143) shows the substantial differences between black and white men in 23 polls taken from 1965-1971.[24] This willingness, found during Korea and World War Two as well as Vietnam, was even stronger when information levels were held constant — perhaps displaying the ability of the media and of government rationales to homogenize much, but not all, of public opinion.

Women also tended to take more dovish stances and express more negativism about the war. This finding is not unexpected; it fits nicely with earlier evidence that women have been less prone to accept war with slight provocation, and less likely to embrace hard-line Cold War viewpoints. They have also been less intolerant of pacificist demonstrations, less optimistic

about the outcome of a possible nuclear war, and more worried about the chance of nuclear attack. As Rosenberg et al. (1970: 76) have phrased it, “It seems clear that males are more willing to temporize with human life as an ultimate value than are women.”[25]

Among demographic variables, age was also significant. Americans of 50 and over consistently gave less fervent backing to the war and, as measured by the Mistake question in 22 A.1.P.O. polls from 1965 to 1971, were more prone to negativism. This likely reflects their hesitance about “internationalism” in the way it had come to be defined, along with a relatively stronger feeling that the problems of the nation at home should have top priority—a sentiment taking root in their experiences from the 1930s. In contrast to the younger Munich-Cold War group, this was more of an inter-war generation.

In an interesting 1971 survey question on the willingness to come (with military supplies, U.S. troops, or neither) to the aid of 11 different countries attacked by communist-backed forces, the prospect of *even NATO allies or Mexico being attacked* could not summon a majority in favor of sending American troops (though we must remember that this was after years of disillusionment with the ongoing war in Vietnam and in the absence of government exhortations or appeals to a threatened national security, and so on, which would surely have increased the support). If we look at possibilities somewhat comparable to South Vietnam — Thailand, Brazil, Nationalist China — the same pattern appeared, only more stubbornly opposed to involvement. In the case of Thailand, to highlight some of the demographic variance, only 6% of those 50 and over (compared with 17% of those age 21-29), only 4% of nonwhites (compared to 12% of the whites), and only 9% of American women (versus 13% of the men) were willing to send troops in the case of attack (Cantril and Roll, 1971: 86-89; compare Russett and Hanson, 1975; Schuman, 1972).

The last cleavage is more provocative; it concerns differences of opinion linked with income levels and class situations. Several studies that I have already reviewed converge on a similar finding: poorer and less well-educated Americans were more likely to express dovish sentiments. They were not as likely to support U.S. interventionism, and they were more likely to oppose

it. This dovetails neatly with the earlier findings about the war's support among the upper strata; it is largely based on the same studies. Hahn's census tract analysis (1970a, 1970b) of local referenda between 1966 and 1968, for example, found opposition to the war centered squarely in the working-class rather than upper-middle class sections of the communities involved, and also — in an interesting sidelight — revealed that the disapproval expressed in referenda was considerably higher than in supposedly comparable opinion surveys. This may well indicate a disguising of the levels of opposition in standard polls due in part to the interpersonal dynamics of the survey situation. A Survey Research Center study (from spring 1964) uncovers a similar pattern of opposition (Patcheri, 1966, 1970). Asked whether more American troops should be sent to Vietnam (even risking war with China), only one-third of those with a grade school education assented, but 53% of the supposedly more sophisticated college graduates endorsed the action.

Lower income and lower status Americans (and those with less formal education) were not only more likely to favor negotiation and neutralizing settlements to the war (options that some proposed from time to time with little avail), but also to accept the idea of a complete withdrawal, It is significant that in the late spring of 1964, only 38% of those with a grade-school education opposed withdrawal (compared to three-fourths of the college graduates). Support for the idea of "Trying to make some compromise agreement with Communist China on this — like making all Vietnam neutral" was also greater among high school or grade school graduates and persons of less prestigious occupational status (Patchen, 1970: 657-658; 1966: 296-301). This, we should recall, was the much-denigrated uninformed minority from which some thought a backlash would arise. Other studies (in the fall of 1964, in June 1966, 1968, in the various Vietnam referenda, and in mid-1969) suggest the same conclusion (Free and Cantril, 1968: 82; Wright, 1972; Hamilton, 1968, 1969, 1972; Rosenberg et al., 1970: ch. 3; Mueller, 1973: ch. 5; Brody and Verba, 1972; Hahn, 1970). Support and opposition to the war, and to the withdrawal of American troops, was far from homogeneous. On the contrary, it broke down quite plainly along the major fault-lines of the social structure.

Lower-status groups thus went beyond hesitance in the face of a seem-

ingly needless war and, in doing so, offered an extra cushion of support for any American leader contemplating withdrawal or a negotiated disengagement — particularly in the early years of the conflict. To account for this, we can raise a variety of possibilities. Partly it was because these groups articulated a different sense of priorities and were less "internationalist" (for example, less concerned with protecting the expansive international position which the U.S. had secured in the course of the Cold War, or "in the honor and prestige involved in successful completion of foreign wars" (Hamilton, 1972: 454). It was also, in part, because with less formal education, political attentiveness, and media involvement, they were saved from the full brunt of Cold War appeals during the 1950s and were, as a result, inadequately socialized into the anticommunist world view. Also, in accord with a Mainstream Model, they were less affected during the war itself by the prevailing norms of interpretation and by the arguments used (by officials or in the media) to justify the government's role.

It is worth exploring this matter in some detail. A supplementary interpretation would find in these same groups (blacks, the poor, the less well-educated, older people, and so on) a large reservoir of neo-isolationist sentiment. While some of the social sources remain the same, this sentiment tends to be regarded quite differently than the isolationism of the past. No longer stigmatized as a barrier to America's responsible leadership of the Free World, their attitudes came very gradually to be seen as a justifiable reluctance in the face of a costly and even genocidal interventionism. But regardless of whether we relate this new reluctance to an older ostrich-like variety of isolationism, to a new self-centered atomism that has deflected energy away from public concerns and obligations, or even to the predictions of a long-term cyclical swing in attitudes, such as Frank Klingberg (1952) and others have rather far-fetchedly suggested,[26] one thing is certain. The sentiment was not randomly distributed in the general public; it was centered in the lower realms of the social structure. And such a concentration could be found throughout the period of escalation — at least until the late 1960s when much of the attentive public became disaffected en masse.

This concentration might even help account for the extremism of

some responses to the war, which appeared to display an uneasy mixture of disaffection and even support for disengagement with a surprising willingness to escalate. A feeling of "*either* get in *or* get out" (RePass, 1974: 32-33) may have been expressed, as opinions on the war ranged themselves on two different dimensions: the readiness to accept official goals, and the acceptance of violence when it came to the means. For this reason, as I have said, hard-line stances should not be taken at face value: they may have exhibited less of a blocking force against disengagement than an obstacle to a costly and protracted war. Perhaps this underlies the fact that Barry Goldwater's Southern victories came from the least "internationalist" states and that in 1964, half of all those who favored disengagement from Vietnam also claimed to back stronger measures against Cuba (Free and Cantril, 1968: 58,67, 82; Patchen, 1966,1970: 661-662).[27]j In any event, in the neo-isolationist sentiment as well as in the opposition to the war and the expressed support for policies of deescalation and withdrawal, we do find, again and again, that the same social and demographic groups were disproportionately represented. Contrary to earlier interpretations, an important social issue might be found submerged in the currents of public opinion.

* * * * *

> The only way to help the poor man is to get out of that war in Vietnam. . . . These taxes — high taxes — it's going over yonder to kill people with and I don't see no cause in it.[28]

* * * * *

There is one such possibility we might consider: namely, that the high intensity of certain *domestic* preferences could restrain America's expansiveness (or leeway) in the world arena. This might underlie one exceptional quality of public attitudes regarding Vietnam — their progressive divergence from official viewpoints. Such a divergence seems to have proceeded *pari passu* with the intrusiveness of the war on American domestic life and interests. It became a

domesticated issue (see Rosenau, 1967: 46-50; Brody and Verba, 1972) — competing for attention and resources with essentially domestic concerns in such a way that anti-interventionist attitudes would become related to liberalism on domestic social issues, and hawkishness to conservatism. Nor was this increasing consistency between domestic and international attitudes merely an artifact of the war and the opposition to it. Recent studies find the most dramatic increase to have occurred between 1960 and 1964 (Nie, 1974; Nie et al., 1975: ch. 8; Russett and Hanson, 1975: ch. 4), which suggests that foreign policy and Cold War attitudes had become somewhat domesticated already — several years before such a connection broke through the constrictions of bipartisanship and began to be placed on the political agenda in an active way.

Some of the apparent isolationism does seem related to the different sense of priorities that has been gestating since the height of the Cold War; we can see this by comparing the domestic focus of national concerns in 1964 with the more internationally-centered ones of 1960 (RePass, 1971: 39 1-393; Hamilton, 1972: ch. 2). Later findings point in the same direction. Attempting to tap a trade-off between domestic and international concerns, for example (a trade-off that American political leaders are reluctant to stress), surveys have asked for agreement or disagreement with the statement: “We shouldn’t think so much in *international* terms but concentrate more on our own *national* problems and building up our strength and prosperity here at home” (Free and Cantril, 1968: 75; Cantril and Roll, 1971: 43,78-79). On this question, agreement shows a steady rise from 1964 (55%) to 1968 (60%) to 1971, when 77% agreed and only 16% disagreed. The majority has never been a national cross-section; it decreases in size with rising levels of both income and formal education.[29] Other studies sketch a similar picture of lower-income Americans, with a domestic “bread and butter” perspective and the feeling (singled out spontaneously) that some of their most deeply felt needs have been continuously ignored by a government with a quite different set of priorities. This has been coupled, quite understandably, with strong desires to have some voice in the decisions concerning Vietnam and with greater unwillingness to delegate responsibility.

Even on surveys of Vietnam preferences, this domestic focus could be detected. As the conflict progressed, majorities showed considerable reluctance to foot the increasing domestic bill for the war. A suggestion of raising taxes to pay for the intervention was opposed, for example, by two-thirds of the respondents in the 1966 Stanford study as well as in a 1967 Gallup poll. Supporters of deescalation were more likely to oppose it (Verba et al., 1967; Converse and Schuman, 1970). A feeling of wasting money and of ignoring domestic priorities was occasionally even linked directly with a desire for escalation, as a way of getting the American involvement "over with." Solutions such as Vietnamization, negotiation, or jettisoning the burdens of war by turning the problem over to the U.N. also gained wide support for roughly similar reasons. At this point, and in the light of what might be seen as the submerged domestic issues and potential conflicts regarding the war, we should look for a response to Daniel Ellsberg's question: "How could we have let them, with so little protest?" Most of the previous discussion of the public's political weakness stakes out at least one line of response. But even the existence of strong disaffection and differing priorities among the public did not find representation in the higher circles until fairly late in the conflict. As a result, it made for only a small dent in the obstinate consensus that enshrined the goals, if not always the tactics, of American policy.

Several things can be stated straight off. First, the opposition to the war was slow in developing. In 1963-1965 (a period of considerable domestic leeway before the major escalations) no significant public pressure for disengagement can be found. As President Nixon and the proponents of the "electronic battlefield" were to learn, invisibility is an ingenious defense against opposition. So is an acquiescent populace, but there we should remember that "silence is not necessarily a lifetime occupation" (Lipsitz, 1970: 142.143). Even so, the sometimes intense disaffection with the war did not seem to center around any of the broad aims or conceptions that lay beneath U.S. policy. Instead, except for a relatively ignorable minority, it took on another tone, characteristically pragmatic and incremental, highlighted more by a tired impatience than anything else. Under these circumstances, success would probably have been a solvent of all but the most principled disenchantment.

The failure of the opposition then becomes one component in a "how possible?" explanation of the war's prolongment.

Analyzing this failure with the depth required will be an important job, but well beyond the scope of this paper. Only a few brief remarks can be made, only some of the implications considered. We should be aware, for example, of the disadvantages that the voices of opposition faced. For not only did the government command remarkable resources in defining the terms of the Vietnam debate, but any full-scale criticism took on the dangerous overtones of *lèse-majesté* or even disloyalty. This only further reduced the scope of issue conflict as well as the likelihood of assertion. At the point where contrary views might have influenced policy, there were other limitations. Public pressure, for example, is likely to pry a foreign policy loose from its normal grooves only when a partial collapse of the consensus within the elite is paralleled by the disaffection of the public. On Vietnam, these two processes did finally begin to work in tandem, but only partially (based on quite divergent considerations) and only then after years of effort. Before that time, the elite continued to exhibit strains of that unflinching militancy which many have attributed to the mass.

Diluting matters further were the negative attitudes toward war protesters which most Americans seemed to share, often expressing them with great fervor. There was an often overlooked discrepancy, in other words, between growing popular opposition to the war and popular feeling against demonstrators. Even when they themselves opposed the intervention, citizens were frequently, even pathologically opposed to any visible means of registering that dissent. In the later years, of those that felt the war was a mistake and even of those favoring complete withdrawal, a *majority* rated war protesters negatively.[30] For many people, if one disagreed with the policy, personally there was nothing to be done — or nothing that ought to be done. National security policy simply was not an arena for public display. Instead, war protest was widely perceived to be threatening, or illegitimate, or both.

Demographic factors also entered in. Many of the most probable critics — women, for instance — were also the most passive, their dovishness expressing itself in a diminished support for the war and its escalation, but not

necessarily in visible opposition. In spite of the dramatic efforts of the anti-war movement, activism was generally limited. As one study in fact suggests, "doves" were *less active* in their disapproval of policy than were "hawks" (Verba and Brody, 1970; Schuman, 1972). Had the role of popular opinion been pronounced, this could have made an official misreading of the general public more understandable. As some have noted (Rosenberg et al., 1970: 61), "outside of the relatively rare situations of one-man, one-vote, people of limited education essentially lapse into political invisibility." With many of the war's potential opponents falling into this category, the voice of the opposition (with its contrary domestic priorities) was further muffled.

7. International Hegemony, Domestic Hegemony

> Politicians will continue those policies which result in popular approval and revise those which lead to popular condemnation [Pomper, 1968: 97; Boyd, 1972].
>
> [A] ruling class makes its policies operate, even when the mass of society cease to endorse them [Kolko, 1969: xii, also 13].

To any discussion of the representative quality of American policy or of the responsibility of the general public for prolonging it, the character of public opinion and electoral behavior can serve as a skeptical preface. But though it may undermine certain arguments about the domestic roots of policy, the nature of public opinion does not exist in a vacuum. There are structural conditions to consider which make the possibility of a constraint on either disengagement or escalation even more improbable, and which affect the second possibility I mentioned much earlier — that while no constraint may be present, the policy could be constituted by the interests that the general public expressed. Its interests might monitor or define the "second order" purposive relationship between international aims and domestic purposes (Andrews, 1975b). Yet the public's ability to be heard depends upon the political structure through which popular demands are mediated or given voice. If

the policymakers cannot easily be held accountable to the people, then the people cannot easily be held responsible for the policymakers. Muteness and impotence preclude constraint.

They also preclude any prospective role, while clouding over the significance of any post hoc evaluation. The impact of elections on Vietnam policy, as one example, has always been problematic. Partly due to the nature of the electorate and the diluted role of foreign policy issues, elections (even of the feared future variety) have not been contests or debates which could provide the elite with a kind of verdict. Neither John Kennedy's narrow "squeaking by" nor Lyndon Johnson's landslide gave them any reason, nor made it seem necessary, to change America's goals in Southeast Asia. Electoral opinion was either too vaguely expressed or, as in 1964, gave the president a margin of leniency that he chose to ignore.

To start with, elections tend to be poor gauges of policy preferences and equally poor mandates. This is true even where several positive elements are present — in particular, an overriding issue which generates carefully articulated opposing views on the part of the candidates. Certainly in 1964 Vietnam was not an overriding issue in the eyes of the general public, and even in 1968 a striking divergence of views on the part of the candidates did not materialize. Elections, in other words, are not referenda. Victories are equivocal, and in the 1960s they were as equivocal as ever.

In an election, we know that a simple choice between two parties cannot express a complex array of different preferences that are held with differing strength. A majority coalition (perhaps fashioned by aggregating a series of minority issue publics) therefore says nothing whatever about the support that an individual policy might garner among the electorate, or even about the support for it that a victory is often said to express.

Other elements only compound the matter, limiting still further the role of the electorate on questions of foreign policy. Party preferences, for example, have historically shown little relation to the Cold War consensus or to positions on other foreign policy issues, including Vietnam (Miller, 1967; Cantril and Roll, 1971: 38; RePass, 1971: 389-390; Rosenberg, 1965: 319-320; Boyd, 1972: 432). The "compass" of party loyalty will thus prove an

inadequate guide. In wiping out the signals by which one learns the implications of various policy choices, bipartisanship has tended to distort the distribution of attitudes and inhibit public debate. The basic commitment of the nation in regard to foreign policy became relatively nonpartisan; partisan issue polarizations were not impressive ones. What Johnson's 1964 victory could register, in other words, was not majority preference on the campaign issues so much as a vague overall orientation that different issue publics created as they swelled or made dents in the governing coalition. And, during the later Johnson years, it was only with the greatest difficulty that policy preferences and opposition to the war could influence electoral outcomes, not to mention changes in the goals of the state.

We can naturally unearth some differences between the parties, especially in 1964, but even here the sole choice lay between the firmness of Johnson and Goldwater's less predictable belligerence.[31] Because of the Johnson landslide against an essentially minority figure within a minority party, the election could not act as a mandated disapproval of Goldwater's hawkish views, nor as a trial balloon for President Johnson. Nevertheless, many war critics have misunderstood this situation. Some have been surprised, and even outraged, that after a resounding electoral triumph Johnson turned around and began to emulate his opponent, putting into action plans of escalation which had already been conceived. This outrage rests on a common yet distortive reading of American elections. If voter evaluations are predominantly retrospective (if they react to past performance more than they offer future guidelines), then an explicit mandate on foreign policy would not exist. Johnson captured a clear majority of those who supported each of the Vietnam options given in the 1964 SRC election survey: 63% of those favoring withdrawal, 52% of the escalators, and 82% of those who wanted to stop the fighting (Pomper, 1968: 251). And, to some extent, these policy preferences may have been an artifact of party loyalty or a readiness to follow the foreign policy views of a candidate favored for other reasons. More significantly, if a mandate does not exist, it cannot be violated.

Partisan differences did emerge among the electorate, but their importance is far from clear. In a war fought under Democratic auspices, those iden-

tified with the Democrats were less willing to claim that the U.S. had made a mistake in sending its troops. According to the 1966 Stanford data, they had slightly *higher* mean escalation scores than Republicans, though this difference did not achieve statistical significance. It may only mean that an aggressive American policy held the allegiance of the party loyalists. After the aerial bombing of North Vietnam, not only was the current policy accepted by an almost two to one margin, but Johnson's 1964 supporters were *more* likely to approve of his 1966 actions than were Goldwater's supporters — though at first glance, the latter group might have been expected to constitute the backlash or the pressure group for escalation, or at least to see the wisdom of Johnson having taken a page from Goldwater's tactical book (Pomper, 1968: 252-253). There is nothing in these early years to show how Johnson violated a mandate to avoid escalation, but much to indicate the prevalence of followership — whether of official policies (as in the Mainstream Model) or of party cues.

In a broader sense, the "Democratic" nature of the war played a preventive role, in forestalling the rise of an important public restraint, even if it was much less successful in inhibiting the rise of dissatisfaction or the "domestication" of the war issue. It made it improbable that any socially-structured opposition would arise, for such an opposition could no longer rest on the (perhaps increasingly shaky) moorings of party loyalty in the late 1960s. As long as party leaders maintained their allegiance to the Democratic president, they could not champion the sources of disaffection (especially among lower-income brackets) that might in another circumstance have been their constituency. The breaking away of figures such as Kennedy and McCarthy came very late, and only after considerable hesitation. Had the war visibly begun (or visibly failed) under Republican auspices, an RFK-style coalition could perhaps have rallied against the war as it did much later in the chronology. Kennedy's murder, Humphrey's nomination, and McGovern's inability to capture this broad constituency in the midst of a "lower profile" 1972 conflict ruled out this possibility.

Other structural factors combined with these situational ones. Voters, for example, have in recent years been unable to rely on cues of social class in a way that would make elections an "expression of the democratic class strug-

gle." Although this is often thought to be unimportant in questions of foreign policy, the distribution of opinion on the war which I have discussed should make its relevance more persuasive. Class differences did exist in the support and opposition to the war, particularly in its critical early stages. One must, therefore, ask if such differences had any available means of expression. It is true that class polarization among the party identifications of party loyalists did not appreciably narrow during the 1960s as it seems to have during the Eisenhower years. But, on the other hand, class-based *voting* outside the South has declined rather steadily since the late 1940s (see Glenn, 1973). Without such class signals, the less well-educated may be at a particular disadvantage, especially insofar as they are less able to guide their choices by a clearly articulated set of principles. With a downplaying of the social interest differences in party appeals, the potential electoral resistance to a policy of intervention was (and has been) left with even less of a "handle" than before. The recent trend toward Independence among certain groups and away from stable party identification (without a compensating rise in new group-based cues) would merely complicate the matter (Schreiber, 1971; Nie et al., 1975: ch. 5), giving even a partisan opposition a less secure ground.

This pattern can be put in historical perspective. An exclusion of the country's subordinate strata from meaningful political participation has evolved over time. The effect, when combined with the elements already mentioned, will be to undermine still further the idea of a broadly representative policy. For nonparticipation is not a randomly distributed phenomenon. Instead we find it clustered in the lower part of the social structure, characterizing many of the same groups which were disenchanted with the war on the basis of neo-isolationism, or a reverence toward domestic priorities. This phenomenon will also imply something fairly definite about the interests to which a policy must pay attention, especially insofar as it denotes "the suppression of the options and alternatives that reflect the needs of the nonparticipants" (Schattschneider, 1960: 105). These needs become ones which a foreign policy is no longer required to represent.

Such a pattern can be traced back historically to the sociopolitical system that evolved after the 1890s and that is said to have "displaced" the real-

ities of democracy and a highly politicized electorate as these came to conflict with the interests of the rising capitalist elites. The popular foundations were eroded. The realignment of the 1890s achieved this result by effectively depoliticizing a large portion of the electorate: "political stability and elite insulation were brought at the price of partially liquidating political democracy" (Burnham, 1974: 1052; also Burnham, 1970, 1972).[32] From this point on, slippage in party loyalties and electoral "disaggregation" as well as steep rises in partisan violatility became in some ways the legacy. Another has been the increasing irrelevance of the party system for certain purposes. Decoupled from the polity, parties could no longer serve as vehicles of collective action or as an effective way of transmitting the oppositional demands that those at the lower end of the American socioeconomic scale have been prone to voice. Insofar as these domestic demands conflict with an expansive foreign policy, the foreign policy may be protected at the cost of its representative quality.

Nor have these patterns been merely historical. In the 1960s, the bias of participation has been turned sharply against the lower strata, muting the articulation of their discontent and, at the same time, overrepresenting the better-educated and wealthier citizenry within the formal political system (their overrepresentation in the informal processes of influence and mediation are of course also well known). In international matters, these patterns are particularly pronounced. For example, of those who claimed to be paying attention to Vietnam in 1964, the ones who supported withdrawal were considerably less likely to voice their choices through voting (60%) than those who wanted to escalate or stay in the conflict (77-78%). Comparable figures exist for 1968 and for 1952, the election year of the Korean conflict (Schreiber, 1973: 94; Dawson, 1973: ch. 4). This is not all. Depressive factors of sex, race, and low income were all combined on Vietnam, compounding the failure of the political parties to present an anti-interventionist alternative in the early stages of the involvement.

Some of the formal political constituents of this pattern are well known. Normally, for example, the political universe is a fragmented one, with policy concerns distributed across a variety of narrow "issue publics." Without propulsive leadership on the foreign policy front in Johnson's early

years, the issue public concerned with Vietnam was a small one: small enough to let a rigid policy ambition be held in the absence of gravely upsetting *international* events. And America's power allowed it to skirt the latter, it seems, as long as the direct involvement of the Soviets and the Chinese could be moderated, and, as the Tet offensive showed, as long as the appearance of a large-scale defeat could be avoided. Without such a fortuitous international "redundancy" (with the international events acting in an almost "harmonic" fashion), the potential opposition to the war might have been considerably weakened. Particularly in the early years it was largely unable to link its grievances and symbolic attachments (which were often of a domestic nature) to the complex international choices, to a reevaluation of priorities, or to concrete policy options in regard to Vietnam. Atomization and disorganization in these years led, essentially, to irrelevance.

Bipartisanship, biases in participation, inattentiveness, a relatively issueless" electoral history, the prevalence of nonideological voting (the list could be extended): all of these patterns indicate that no ready political means were available for inhibiting the exercise of American power abroad. Instead, tremendous domestic leeway was granted to what Walter Dean Burnham (1972: 31) has called "a state with an explicitly clearly defined ruling class based upon an oligarchy of syndicalist elites"[33] Just as on the domestic front, the policy elite could exclude many of the public's concerns and claims from the agenda, could give them minimal attention, or could respond to them belatedly, half-heartedly or in the spirit of manipulation (see Cohen, 1973: ch. 5) and "conflict management."

In the mediating linkage between polity and policy in regard to Vietnam, one of the most significant aspects is that as important policy options were discarded at the highest levels, portions of the public found their interests excluded from the policy process. This is neither uncommon nor surprising. If "democracy" acts to socialize conflicts (Schattschneider, 1960: ch. 1), then limitations on (or exclusions from) democracy should act to privatize or suppress potential conflict, if "administration" contracts participation, then stabilizing the political community would be a powerful way of preserving the current shape of the consensus. Unlike domestic policy—where the govern-

ment may have to take account of, and at times even represent, the demands of a wide range of domestic actors and coalitions (including the poor, disadvantaged minorities, the working class, and so on)—on foreign policy it has fallen back on the older distinctions between the mass and the attentive public. And it has used them to justify a shrinkage of the political universe — in which only the latter can safely be represented. Yet it is worth mentioning that this attentive public amounts to only a thin strata, largely composed of better-educated and better-off Americans, with a proclivity toward internationalist and interventionist views (or with at least a willingness to follow the guidance of the state and the media). Except where foreign policy issues become heavily politicized and "domesticated" for the mass, this skewing of the government's attention can mean that only a minority domestic interest will be promoted, or used as a referent for foreign policy. Those minority interests would then alone give rise to the domestic rules that regulate the relationship between foreign policy goals (seen as social means) and the broader social ends and needs toward which even a "national security" policy may be instrumental. Any domestic demand that would conflict with and constrain the resulting conception of the national interest could be conveniently damped.

* * * * *

Although many of the conclusions have been prefigured, some final remarks are in order. In considering the notion of a public constraint on American intervention, I have tried to see how permissive public and electoral opinion have been, and if they therefore allow us to understand American policy as a representative or delimited "domestic social policy" which can be understood by referring to the context of public opinion. Finally, I have assessed the public's responsibility for the failure to disengage, both as a potential backlash and as an immobilized restraint. In all of these areas, by looking at the political character of the public and by analyzing the support and opposition to the war, I have tried to offer serious qualifications in the face of what seems to me an overdrawn picture of the role of the public in American foreign policy. Other related questions await further analysis—as only a few

examples: why, without proof or plausibility, the unrealistic fears of domestic recrimination were said to have been retained; why the bias of apparent misperception leaned systematically, rather than randomly, in one direction (toward the unbegrudging acceptance of the idea of a danger from the right and from the mass); why policymakers reinforced and periodically breathed life into these apprehensions in the later years of the conflict; why domestic feedback of a "goal-sustaining" kind might have predominated over the "goal-changing" variety; what domestic interests were at stake in the war's continuation and served as its referent; and why the policy engendered the particular constellation of social support (or *constitutive* domestic norms) that it did.[34]

The vulnerability of the Democrats to charges of insufficient "toughness" has been noted, but not overstressed. Certainly this issue had a diversionary impact, but much of it could very probably have been blunted if the Democratic party had attempted to capitalize on a different set of *domestic* priorities. It was a potential disadvantage, in other words, which could be compensated for in a variety of ways. In 1964, we should recall, the Democratic party was in a position of almost unparalleled advantage — favored on measures of party identification by *51%* to *24%* (up from the already commanding 46% to 28% lead of 1962), and only *12%* of the respondents in 1964 favored the Republicans on the war-and-peace issue (the relative ability of the parties at keeping the U.S. out of war). In the case of Vietnam, the attractions of peace in the short run, if skillfully exploited, could have undercut much of the domestic risk of disengagement.

Also, while a virulent form of McCarthyism may have given rise to crude stereotyping and recurrent apprehensions, one could actually say that a milder version of it was employed as a resource during the course of the war. It helped to "muzzle" the liberal critics and widen the government's scope of discretionary action. As long as a greater evil could be convincingly portrayed, many lesser evils could be perpetrated under the guise of a "prophylactic" intervention: this was true at the international, the domestic, and the bureaucratic levels. The gap between the useful and threatening varieties of anti-communist nationalism, in other words, should not be exaggerated. As studies of McCarthyism have shown (see Rogin, 1965, for an impressive analysis),

support was not so much found in a bipartisan mass of lower middle-class voters threatened by status anxieties, but instead it appealed strongly to conservative elites within the Republican establishment. If such sources remained the same in the 1960s, however *weakened,* a very different light will be cast on the idea of a constraint from the general public. Insofar as the president and his advisers shared this expansive and strongly anticommunist outlook on the world, the source of proscription should be reconsidered. By the mid-1960s, it is better thought of as a redundancy of little importance to the explanations we might set forth.

Nor can the "China lesson" be given pride of place. The growing and increasingly legitimate and politically channeled protest against the Vietnam war is too easily ignored. Its existence, and the gradual erosion of Cold War militancy, argue that any belligerent backlash would have been more moderate, even if one had occurred. In fact, well before the discontent over the protracted Korea-like conflict became public, there was considerable reluctance about the involvement. Administration spokesmen seemed aware of this. McNamara, considering the possibility of initiating direct action in March 1964, spoke of the "problem of marshalling the case to justify such action" (Pentagon Papers, Vol. III: 504), just as William Bundy recommended "an urgent U.S. information effort [to] get at he basic doubts of the value of Southeast Asia and the importance of our stake there" (Pentagon Papers, Vol. III: 177). One of Johnson's chief foreign policy advisers noted later in an interview that although the basic decision to hold onto Vietnam was made well before the 1964 election, at that point "a more proximate nationally understood rationale for commitment did not yet exist" (cited in Eidenberg, 1969: 94). This failure to convince the public that a Vietnam disengagement or neutralization would have threatened American security gave grounds for expecting much less serious domestic consequences or recriminations in the face of a negotiated withdrawal, for example. William Bundy even argued in January 1965 that if the situation in Vietnam came apart, and ended in a "Communist Vietnam," that *"the American public would probably not be too sharply critical"* (Pentagon Papers, 1971, Vol. III: 265, 685, my italics). Domestic opinion was one of the *hurdles* that had to be overcome in this peri-

od fore the escalation could proceed, not one of the immediate factors pressuring it along.

What has in fact tested the boundaries of public compliance in the post-war era is not the abandonment of dubious commitments, but the occasions of protracted intervention. Frustrating land wars in Asia may create problems, one of which is an excessive willingness to escalate, to demand that the great military might of the country not be husbanded in too niggardly a way. This readiness is in a way the reverse side of the public's reluctance (or of what some have called its anti-interventionism; others, isolationism or immoderation). As William Bundy noted, this is still the danger of using the tactic of a "slow squeeze," as he put it, "under the klieg lights of a democracy" (Pentagon Papers, 1971, Vol. III: 616; 593, f53f

Even so, the kind of thinking involved here should be noticed, both in the case of an apprehension about pressures to escalate, and in the worries about rekindling an isolationist tendency that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Such fears are not neutral or "literal;" they make no sense apart from their setting. We should, more specifically, notice what assumptions are being made. They take their place in a relatively unchanged picture of America's vital interests abroad. Let us, in other words, not put the cart before the horse. For it was the official disinterest in turning away from a policy of intervention and from a fairly expansive (and expensive) idea of what constituted its national security that made the public's compliance so needed in the first place. They wanted to avoid a constraint from the public, or from part of the public, that is true, but this was a constraint on the *tactics* of the war, not so much on the goals. Even a public prone to escalation need not be prone to backlash and trauma; and to the extent that such a backlash was feared — it was the wrong backlash.

These fears become more implausible still — of Johnson's situation in 1964-1965, for this was a special situation, both before and after the landslide at the polls. Neither the Congress nor the public were ever expected to be in a mood more receptive to change — a fact that cut both ways, however. Yet by failing to take advantage of this leeway on the domestic side (except as a permit for escalation), the actions of the policymakers suggest that things

much stronger than domestic political prohibitions were at work. For not only was the Great Society largely yielded up in the end to avoid jettisoning the war effort (since Congress was less enthusiastic about expensive domestic legislation in the midst of a war), but so were Johnson's political career, and even the prospects for a Democratic triumph in 1968. A stalemated war seemed to place these things in jeopardy more than a negotiated withdrawal might have, and with an immensely higher cost.

It is reasonable to say that policymakers lost touch with the public in the aftermath of a supposed 1964 mandate. The self-encapsulation of bureaucracies and decision-making groups played a role here, as did the special and slightly paranoid presidential style of Lyndon Johnson. The conventional wisdom would be largely upheld in the face of the public's indifference or its disaffection, as long as the domestic "antennae" of bureaucrats and policymakers could be employed in what were essentially self-serving ways. Domestic signals or sources of negative feedback came to be ignored, often contemptuously. As one office director in the State Department put it, "To hell with public opinion.. We should lead, and not follow" or, from an official in the Public Affairs area: "We are looking for public *acquiescence*" (Cohen, 1973: 62, 64).[35]

In these circumstances, aided and abetted by the impotence of public opinion, the *vox populi* is faintly heard, if heard at all. The state may become less of a broadly representative national actor, and more responsive to narrower interests or private visions — and even more "self-referring" (Andrews, 1975b) in the face of an acquiescent mass. The idea of a significant role played by the public in the continuation of the war, in other words, seems more at home in the realm of myth than in that of explanation. In the way of prescriptive implications, the policies may need to be less, not more, insulated from the interests of the general public.

As these findings are elaborated, what should be seen is the very small yield in trying to understand American policy in terms of popular opinion or as a representation of the limits beyond which the mass public would not go. For an explanation of policy in substantive social terms, these imagined public constraints will not suffice, nor will they indicate to us the domestic rules that constitute the aims of policy and their domestic significance, as well as

their value as means toward broader domestic ends or interests. Had it not violated the demands of the international role which the policymakers sought to protect and advance (and therefore the vision of domestic order and what might be called the national self-image), a different policy would seem warranted and domestically comprehensible. This was especially true in the early years, the years of covert escalation and readiness to escalate further, before the idea of political necessity had received much attention. Later on, it did begin to be heard more often, though by this time in a confusing mixture, in which the discourse of justification seemed to outweigh that of revelation, and in which alibis and motives started losing their distinctiveness. Particularly earlier, a redirection of American policy had a very good chance of being popularly accepted — even if it risked dispensing with some of the international (and, by implication, domestic) "honor" by which the additional years of the American involvement were to be explained.

NOTES

1. To pursue such an interpretation, we must look beneath the goals and aspirations of the policy. Too often, critics have looked upon these purposive elements (the goals and accounts of the policy elite, for example) as either self-explanatory or hopelessly opaque. A good working assumption would on the contrary be that they point beyond themselves to the character of the underlying domestic society. This "referential" or at times representational aspect helps make them socially intelligible. We would need to locate a social context in which the state actions are embedded or, more specifically, a set of informing social rules and purposes which both delimit and make sense of the goals of the elite. See, for example, Andrews (1975a), Gunnell (1968), and the literature cited therein.

2. Hoopes (1969: 24, 29) gives what he calls Lyndon Johnson's "instinctive premise." In addition, see Ellsberg (particularly 1972: 77-1 32, 209-212); GeIb (1971); Halberstam (1972, 1973); compare Alperovitz (1970: ch. 6); Prewitt and Stone (1973).

3. A domestic politics interpretation of the war could take several

forms. First to see whether the public setting was a decisive part of the situation to which the makers of policy referred and which could make sense of their refusal to disengage. A second explanatory approach is the more familiar subsumptive-nomological kind in which one presents a hypothetical model of domestic constraint that can with some accuracy *generate* American choices and performance in Vietnam. An action is understood in the first approach when a goal is uncovered, certain reasons are found for the goal, and a social context can be located in which those reasons fit. The second approach explains *what happened* by giving laws and background conditions that, had they been known beforehand, could have *predicted* some of the physical features of the state's behavior.

The most complete presentation of the domestic constraint view has taken the second approach — see Ellsberg (1972: 107, 77; 101; 123; compare 127, 93; 132-135). A set of decision rules is sketched out (Rule One: Do not lose South Vietnam before the next election) which can apply to all periods of postwar American policy, and thus can *subsume* any specific outcomes. In a deductive sense, this model "seems sufficient to explain behavior," for even in periods where other matters were less pressing, the systemization of domestic political factors into decision rules can be seen as "sufficient underpinnings" for policy outcomes. "There may be other reasons, but that alone would be compelling" (Ellsberg, 1971: 135). A predictive style of explanation (of which this is a particularly clear example) can thus tell us. "how to bet" Unfortunately, this style of explanation is limited — as a way of plotting the process involved or of locating reasons and purposes within a real (as opposed to a hypothetical) framework of social rules and needs. A kind of social intelligibility or transparency has been sacrificed; in its place we are given some measure of predictive ability. A rule-guided conception of behavior, on the other hand, will not be deductive in this way, for the relationship between society and state action can be thought of differently: a relationship of relevance rather than causal sufficiency. Policies cannot be deduced from domestic rules, for the latter are rules (and not laws of behavior) precisely because the actors can dislodge them. They allow for contraventions, rather titan exceptions; for delimitations, and for a way of seeing how the domestic sig-

nificance of an international act is constituted.

4. The explicitly causal language is worth noting. Compare Gelb (1971: 152); Alperovits (1970: 89); Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (1970: 162).

5. Also see the discussion in Eidenberg (1969) that rightly stresses the role of the viewpoint and its early crystallization in narrowing the range of choice, and in making future escalations all but inevitable. Johnson's fear of softness was characterological as well as situational. In this sense, an imagined domestic setting could serve as a stage for playing out a personal psychological drama.

6. Johnson's desire to camouflage the Vietnam issue in 1964, to keep it out of the arena of partisan conflict, is illustrated by an attributed remark: "If you have a mother-in-law with only one eye and she has it in the center of her forehead, you don't keep her in the living room" (Halberstam, 1972: 424). Or note Hamilton's remarks (1972: 55): "The Republican party.., in essence, is an unpresentable party. They must, given their peculiarity, avoid the issues, or find some that are easier to fake, such as nationalism, patriotism, foreign policy, subversion in government, and subtle degrees of 'softness' on communism."

7. This is only a partial listing: Ellsberg (1971, 1972, 1973); Brodie (1973: 137, 206-207); Halberstam (1973, 1972: 355): "Johnson himself did not take the domino theory seriously; he was far more worried about the loss of a country to the Communists and what this would do to him in terms of domestic politics;" Gelb (1971: 166-167) referring to enlarging the prospect of "the nightmare of a MeCarthyite garrison state;" Taylor (1972: 402); Rostow (1972: 270); Hoopes (1969: 120); Cooper (1970: 6, 9, 455); Kearns (1974: ch. 9) where a later conversation with Johnson Is recorded:

> And I knew that if we let Communist aggression succeed in taking over South Vietnam, there would follow in this country an endless national debate — a mean and destructive debate — that would shatter my Presidency, kill my Administration and damage our democracy. I knew that

> Harry Truman and Dean Acheson had lost their effectiveness from the day that the Communists took over in China. I believed that the loss of China had played a large role in the rise of Joc McCarthy. And I knew that alt these problems, taken together, were chickenshit compared to what might happen if we lost Vietnam.

The *Pentagon Papers,* quite predictably, contain little evidence of these considerations. That the person responsible for their availability should be the one most associated with a domestic politics perspective on the war is a small irony. Eilsberg's own views on this problem (private conversation, 1975) now diverge significantly from the interpretation he has presented in his earlier writings. From a different reading of American opinion and the proclivities of the mass public, such as the one presented here, he no longer accounts for his "Rule One" prohibition in terms of correctly perceived public pressures, but instead by giving a much more decisive role to corporate interests and the insistence of dominant social elites.

8. A comment suggested by Noam Chomsky.

9. I am indebted to Cohen's lucid treatment (1973: Ch. 1) of the conventional wisdom for this brief analysis. For several examples, see Rosenau (1961: 41); Wallace (1971: 44); Alperovitz (1970: 77); Kelman (1965: 581).

10. George B. Tindall (1952) *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900.* Cited in Pomper (1968: 255).

11. Conclusions pointing in this direction are not uncommon. See, as examples, Rosenberg (1965, 1967); Waltz (1967); Miller (1967); May (1964: 117, especially 121-122 on "fictions"). Also note Huntington (1961: ch. 18) for a study of the permissiveness of opinion on the subject of defense spending, possibly comparing it with Russett (1972); in addition, see Caspary (1970) and Peterson (1972).

12. Ii would be risky to generalize too much from Cohen's study of the State Department, however. At higher levels in the executive branch, more notice is undoubtedly given to the public, though often in a distortive or engineering fashion. Notice, for example, the manipulative as well as antidemoc-

ratic sentiments expressed by Maxwell Taylor (1972) in the final chapters of his memoirs.

13. 1 have followed Kelman (1965), Cohen (1973), and Huntington's analysis in developing these points. For example, Cohen (1973: 21):

> This is not necessarily a conscious and deliberate subterfuge; it could as easily be an automatic set of euphemisms and rationalizations, an institutionalized response to the felt necessity of saying *something* about ultimate responsibility for decisions, wise or unwise.

Also, see Hamilton's remark (1972: 136) about the "stylization of a false majority."

14. A similar approach to the problem of motivation is persuasively advocated by Blum and McHugh (1971). In addition, see Scott and Lyman (1968); or Huntington (1961: 248): "Their images of public opinion derived from their policy preferences."

15. Here, the academic consensus is extensive. See, among many others, Smith (1970); Sears (1969: 327, 337); Lane and Sears (1964: ch. 6); Richman (1972); Wilker and Milbrath (1970: 488491); Free and Cantril (1968: ch. 4); Patchen (1966).

16. This view dovetails neatly with older views about the proclivity of the working class (or mass) toward authoritarianism—views which stressed the dangers of short-run time perspective, primitive forms of conceptualization, diminished levels of ego stability, intolerance, and absolutism. The two strands seem interestingly intertwined. Hesitations about mass politics among certain scholars can be shown to parallel the worries voiced by certain policymakers concerning the threat of a right-wing or mass "intrusion" into the arena of American foreign policy. Compare Lowi (1969: 185); Rosenau (1961: 35); Galtung (1964). For helpful correctives, Bachrach (1967); Hamilton (1972: ch. 11); Brody and Verbs (1972); Lipsitz (1970); Cobb (1973); and Wright (1972) should be considered.

17. There is a large and rapidly growing, literature on this topic. Note,

for example, Pomper (1972); RePass (1971, 1974); Brody and Page (1972); Hamilton (1972: cit. 2-3); Jackson (1975a, 1975b); Nie (1974); Nie et at. (1975); Boyd (1972); Pierce (1970); Key (1966); Miller et al. (1973). Kessel (1972: 459) cites a particularly extensive list of relevant work.

18. Pomper (1972) and Nie et at. (1975) have stressed the importance of such a "political" explanation for a shift that demographic changes cannot easily account for. On pure policy positions in 1964, for example, Johnson was found favorable by a remarkable 80-20 margin, considerably larger than his 69-31 advantage on "total image." See Converse et at. (1965: 331, 323-327), and compare RePass (1974).

19. The findings are from a decomposition of the electoral decision, performed by Donald Stokes, based on multivariate analysis of attitudes expressed in open-ended answers. For later elections, see RePass (1971); Kirkpatrick and Jones (1970: 698); Brody (1968). Kessel (1962) warns, however, that this may be a veiled measure of general party preference having little cognitive content.

20. A point suggested to me by Richard Brody.

21. This level of approving acquiescence is something we may easily forget in the later Vietnam-Watergate era. See Sears (1969: 420, 424431) who reviews some of this literature. Also, note Rosenberg (1965: 318) and Murray Edelman's important work (1964, 1971) for one sort of interpretation (in terms of acquiescence in dominant symbols). The importance of symbols, myth, and ideology takes us well beyond the focus of this analysis, but I hope to deal with it in a future essay.

22. RePass's study (1974) of responses to open-ended questions in the fall of 1964 gives a compilation of issue comments used to illustrate points on a scale of Issue Cognizance (to see what intellectual grounding they had). The following are all the comments he listed (of what the respondent would like to see done about Vietnam). They could, I think, be seen as illustrative, if not representative (1974: 24-30):

(a) I don't know, but I hate to think of our boys getting killed when it isn't any of our business;

(b) Bring our men back home;

(c) Get in good and finish it or stay out;
(d) Try to find out how we can help them, give the help and get out. The place isn't worth the lives of our boys;
(e) Get out of it. Because in the first place they took up something that France threw aside;
(f) I'd like to see an end to the fighting even if it meant pulling out. Some feel that's losing face, but I don't think we are accomplishing anything with the position we now have;
(g) Our handling of Vietnam was wrong but not necessarily that we should have stayed out. I really don't know — we're not well enough informed — I've heard mainly conflicting reports. If it could be ended by air attack, I wouldn't be against it, but it's my understanding that the problems are indigenous to the South. I don't necessarily believe we will lose all of Southeast Asia if South Vietnam goes.

23. And note Converse et al. (1969: 1093) on the lack of information and the hawkishness that underpropped McCarthy's support in the 1968 New Hampshire primary. Also Page and Brody (1972).

24. Another finding sheds light on the level of alienation. Black respondents in one study (Schuman, 1972: 530-533) showed greater use of the word "they" when referring to the U.S. government's involvement (41% compared to 15% for whites), and less frequent use of the identificatory "we."

25. Rosenberg (1965: 305-307) reviews the earlier findings and speculates on its connection with such male social traits as aggressiveness, feigned invulnerability, etc. Converse and Schuman (1970: 23) note the interesting fact that as early as 1964, when comparable males were quite hawkish, women from "quality" colleges and universities were already harboring negative views about the war. Compare Wright (1972: 137-138); Hamilton (1969: 57); Mueller (1973: 146-147); Patchen (1966: 294); Cantril and Roll (1971: 7249).

26. See Samuel Huntington's uncritical endorsement in Pfeffer (1968: 2,4041): "not even Lyndon Johnson could successfully buck Frank Klingberg" and "The swing to introversion in the Klingberg cycle is clearly a fact, and it

is precisely this fact that caused the national trauma over the Vietnamese war." Also, Rostow (1972: 709-710).

27. One could suggest that a kind of xenophobic isolationism was at work. Though more prone to favor escalation in 1968, Wallace voters were also less "internationalist" than supporters of either Nixon or Humphrey, and were more likely to feel that the U.S. had made a mistake in its troop involvement. His support in the South was clustered in rural areas, and in the North his supporters did not choose Vietnam as the most important national problem. See Kirkpatrick and Jones (1970), and Patchen (1970: 661-662) on the isolationism of lower-status respondents in a spring 1964 survey, with an unnecessary attempt to relate this to authoritarianism.

28. From an interview cited in Lipsitz (1970: 157). Yet see Verba et al. (1970: 324), "The conflict, after all, does not involve domestic status politics."

29. The question is confusing because, of course, the real trade-off is not on the plane of thought, but of action. "Building up our strength" might be a domestic alternative with great appeal for tough-minded conservatives. Compare Lipsitz (1970) and Dawson (1973: ch. 6).

30. See Schuman (1972: 516-517); Rosenberg et al. (1970: 4445), and Robinson (1970). Robinson cites the paradox: it was more probable that less well-educated respondents would favor disengagement, but at the same time feel less warmly than better-educated ones (on a feelings thermometer) toward war-protesters. He interprets this as showing that war-protesters for them "represented such an overt threat to the existing American value system." The intriguing implication is that disengagement from Vietnam was *not* seen by them as such a threat to U.S. values.

31. These differences may, of course, have made a difference. RePass (1974) cites several statements on foreign policy from interview protocols in the 1964 Election Survey (which he used for illustrative purposes about levels of rationality in candidate evaluation). Concerning Johnson:

(1) I don't think he's taken a firm enough stand in Cuba and Vietnam;

(2) He's going to take his time on an issue and not 'cock his gun' too fast and get us in war;
(3) He's not too strong on foreign policy;
(4) He has taken care of flare ups which have threatened our peace;
(5) He has been holding up strong against aggression in Vietnam; and
(6) He's not a war-monger as Mr. Goldwater is.

Concerning Goldwater:

(1) His foreign policy is crazy;
(2) He'll have us in war in nothing flat if he were to get elected;
(3) He has a very rigid foreign policy based on force. He would not be likely to compromise or give a little in foreign affairs; and
(4) He would employ preventive aggression in countries where we don't belong and have no right, where our actions in those countries would be criticized and get us further into hot water.

32. Note also Schattschneider (1960: ch. 5-6). Several recent critiques place this complex issue into a quite different perspective, in particular by highlighting the role of electoral mechanics and intervening legal or rule variables after 1890 in accounting for such changes, or by putting forth doubts about the politicized character of the nineteenth-century voting universe. See Price (1968) and Converse (1972). Burnham (1974), with Comments by Rusk and Converse, as well as Burnham's Rejoinder, gives good coverage of the present stage of the discussion.

33. Hennessy (1970: 476):

> Policymaking becomes something like the thieves' midnight distribution of booty while the victims remain asleep; as long as those with interest, attitudes, and shared power bargain suc-

> cessfully among themselves, the deed is done without any wide social or cultural constraints being invoked.

As Edelman (1964: 28) overstates it, "Policies severely denying resources to large numbers of people can be pursued indefinitely without serious controversy." Or, finally, as Petras reminds us (1970: 198), "The policy of maintaining the status quo entails the immobilization of the populace."

34. We might also want to speculate on the impact of these recent experiences on the next interventionary episode, especially insofar as Vietnam has stimulated such extensive discussion of the levels and sources of policy support and opposition — possibly the first time these questions have been researched with any care. Opposition groups, in particular, may in the future be able to accelerate the sequence of events somewhat, as potential audiences are located, and mobilized, at a more rapid pace, and as some of the assumptions of a "downward" public constraint are placed in question. An unprecedented public intervention may be added to the agenda. Complications arise, however, if we think of several possible "recapitulations" of the involvement, under different circumstances — for example, a competitive intervention by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, in which the former, but not the latter, might be operating under a considerable "upward" public constraint—or in a case where the anti-war coalition arising from Vietnam might split, with ideological allegiances taking precedence for some over a reluctance to intervene or a desire for neutrality (such as a civil war breaking out in Chile, a facsimile of the Spanish Civil War, an intervention in the Middle East, and so on). The Vietnam findings, in other words, may add up to a rather special case, out of which a distinctive coalition arose but not necessarily in a permanent fashion. These suggestions are ones I owe to Richard Hamilton.

35. Though Rostow (1972: 532) can speak euphemistically of Johnson's "stoic disregard of short-run political costs," the nondemocratic implications of American policy cannot be so easily ignored.

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