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Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi: Choosing Your Battles

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

FOR MONTHS after the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001, a vigorous debate raged within the Bush administration: should the war on terrorism be expanded to go after well-known state sponsors of terrorism, especially Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq? By the summer of 2002 the internal debate had spilled out onto the front pages of the major newspapers, culminating in a historic congressional debate and vote in favor of the Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces against Iraq.

The public debate was lively and wide-ranging, but many commentators focused on one curious feature: how the principals in the debate tended to fall into two camps, one military and the other civilian. Within the administration, the strongest proponents of going to war with Iraq were the civilians, especially those who had never served in the military: Vice President Dick Cheney, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and chairman of the Defense Policy Board Richard Perle; they argued that creative uses of special forces and limited strikes could topple the Hussein regime and eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). At the same time, the strongest opponents of going to war were the senior military leaders and the most prominent veteran, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs and current secretary of state Colin Powell; they considered the innovative war plans too risky, while the more prudent military option of a massive buildup to a second Desert Storm was too costly. Accordingly, they argued, diplomacy and deterrence were the best way to deal with Iraq's WMD threat. Outside the administration, the pattern seemed to replicate itself. Some of the staunchest critics were retired senior military officers, and for a while the leading congressional critics included some of the most decorated war veterans in office. Of course there were prominent exceptions; for instance, Senator John McCain, the former Vietnam War POW, was a vocal hawk, whereas the late Senator Paul Wellstone, a well-known nonveteran liberal, was a prominent critic, but the pattern was too pronounced to ignore (Dewar 2002; Kiely 2002; McGregor 2002). In the words of retired four-star general Anthony Zinni, "It's pretty interesting that all the generals see it the same way and all the others who have never fired a shot and are hot to go to war see it another way" (Salinero 2002).

This marked civil-military subtext was matched by another at work in the Iraq debate: would the American public be willing to pay the human costs of a war against Iraq, or would support collapse when body bags showed up on CNN? Opponents of the war, military or otherwise, emphasized that Hussein could be expected to do everything possible to make a war bloody for Americans. Although polls showed consistent and fairly strong support among the general public for war, the support eroded somewhat when pollsters talked about “thousands of U.S. casualties” (see figure 6.2). Even without analyzing specific polls, some pundits were convinced that the body-bag syndrome would sink a war in Iraq. As one retired Marine officer worried aloud, “How long will public support last when hundreds, possibly thousands, of body bags start arriving home? Desert Storm and Afghanistan make war look so easy, with so few casualties. When support at home wanes, how will you turn back the clock?” (Raspberry 2002).

This book argues that the Iraq debate is not exceptional. On the contrary, the debate’s civil-military and casualty sensitivity subtexts fit a pattern. The pattern is evident in systematic surveys of civilian and military opinion, shows up in case studies of decision making on the use of force since World War II, and shaped American foreign policy in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Do civilians and the military in the United States differ in their attitudes about when and how force should be used? Do they differ about the appropriate human costs that the use of force should entail? And do these attitudes, however differentiated, affect the propensity of the United States to use force in international disputes? We answer yes to all three questions, and demonstrate this with original survey data as well as with systematic analysis of the historical record of U.S. involvement in foreign disputes since 1816.

Civil-Military Gaps and the Use of Force

The debate over Iraq recalls the civil-military turmoil of the 1990s. In his autobiography, General Colin Powell relates his difficulty in dealing with the academic and “nonmilitary” style of the Clinton foreign policy team. He describes his patient efforts early in President Bill Clinton’s first term to instruct civilian leaders on when and how to use force. During one such session, Madeleine Albright, then ambassador to the UN and later secretary of state, asked General Powell in frustration, “What is the point of having this superb military that you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?” Powell reports that he thought he “would have an aneurysm.

American GIs were not toy soldiers to be moved around on some sort of global game board” (Powell 1995, 576–77).

The Powell-Albright exchange cannot be dismissed as merely a contretemps between two powerful and idiosyncratic personalities. Nearly every post–cold war use of U.S. military force was conducted against the backdrop of some sort of civil-military dispute, and these disputes in broad brush seemed to conform to the Powell-Albright pattern: civilian leaders seemed more willing than military leaders to deploy the military in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Kosovo, and so on (Desch 1999; Feaver 2003). Nor is this simply an artifact of partisanship, with a Democratic administration flummoxed by a Republican-leaning senior military. During the debate over Iraq, Senator Trent Lott, then the Republican leader in the Senate, was asked about the apparent hesitation on the part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to embrace the Iraqi mission; Lott averred that the chiefs would end up backing the Bush administration in a war, but then went on to express his frustration in Albrightesque terms: “If the military people don’t want to fight, what is their role? Do they want to be people that clean up after natural disasters?” (Gertz and Scarborough 2002). Something deeper than personalities or partisanship is at issue—a basic civil-military divide on how force should be integrated into American foreign policy.

It is conventional wisdom that military experience colors people’s attitudes about America’s role in the world. The scholarly literature on civil-military relations argues that there are important differences of opinion between civilian and military leaders (Huntington 1957; Betts 1991; Holsti 1999; Feaver and Kohn 2001b; Kohn 2002; Feaver 2003). At the colloquial level of the media pundit, the insight seems obvious. Of course we should expect civilian and military leaders to approach foreign policy and the use of force differently (Bamford 2002; Kessler 2002c; Van Deerlin 2002). There is even a popular slur—chicken hawk—directed at one of the apparently persistent features of American politics: non-veterans who are gung-ho on the use of force (Cohen 2002a; Kelly 2002). To be sure, exceptions abound, with some prominent civilian politicians showing reluctance and some prominent military officers showing a greater willingness in a given case (Avant 1996/97). At the most senior policymaking levels, the civil-military distinction is blurry and only awkwardly fits the neat categories of classical civil-military relations theory (Roman and Tarr 2001). Nevertheless, reports persist that post–cold war civil-military relations in the United States are characterized by repeated clashes between promiscuous civilians and reluctant warriors (Mandelbaum 1996; Weigley 2001). Even or perhaps especially in the post-September 11th world, many of the most important debates in American foreign policy—how to conduct the war in Afghanistan, whether to attack Iraq, or how to attack

Iraq—seem to crystallize along broadly defined civil-military lines (Dowd 2002; Kessler 2002a,b; Landay 2002; Marquis 2002; Milbank 2002a,b; Ricks 2002a,b; Webb 2002).

At some level, this makes common sense. Like any other profession, the military immerses its members in a set of beliefs, traditions, and experiences that those outside the institution do not share. Many of these relate to the military's most central mission: fighting and winning wars. Lawyers undoubtedly differ from the general public in terms of their attitudes toward the legal system. Academics surely have distinct views regarding universities. But in the case of civil-military relations, it is important to know what those gaps are and whether even understandable gaps have an impact on U.S. foreign policy.

This book is a follow-on project to a larger study of the so-called culture gap between civilians and the military in the United States and what that gap might mean for national security (Feaver and Kohn, 2001a; b). The earlier study responded to concerns that a gap was emerging between the military institution and civilian society that was harmful for military effectiveness and civil-military cooperation; it concluded that as the twenty-first century began, the gap between the military and society in values, attitudes, opinions, and perspectives presented no compelling need to act to avert an immediate emergency. However, there were problems that, if left unaddressed, would over time undermine civil-military cooperation and hamper military effectiveness. The earlier study identified the interface between differing civilian and military worldviews and the actual use of force as a priority for research—hence the need for the separate, sustained, and systematic analysis of the issue presented in this book.

In a similar way, the “casualty phobia” question raised by the Iraq case—does the U.S. public have the stomach for war or is it a paper tiger?—was only the continuation of a longer debate that has dominated U.S. post-cold war foreign policy. Certainly the last three tyrants to directly challenge the United States—Saddam Hussein in 1991, Slobodan Milosevic in 1999, and Osama bin Laden in 2001—all believed that the United States could be successfully defied. The key to each of their military strategies was not outright defeat of the U.S. military on the battlefield, a task made hopeless by the United States' unmatched technical prowess. Rather, the key was to defeat the U.S. will, by raising the costs of war beyond what the American public would be willing to pay—something that each of the challengers thought was within his grasp. As one Iraqi general captured during the Gulf War told U.S. intelligence officers, “Saddam Hussein, the man is a gambler. He was certain that you would not attack, and if you did, it would only be by air. He kept telling the Iraqi people that airpower had never won a war in the history of warfare and that Americans would never have the nerve to engage the Iraqi army on

the ground. I remember him saying that Americans would not be able to stand the loss of even hundreds of soldiers, that Iraqis were prepared to sacrifice thousands” (Gordon and Trainor 1995). Similarly, in 1999, Slobodan Milosevic referred to the U.S.-led NATO force’s reluctance to take casualties in Kosovo when he told German foreign minister Joschka Fisher, “I can stand death—lots of it—but you can’t” (Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000). And bin Laden made a similar calculation in 1998 when he told a reporter, “America is a paper tiger that runs in defeat after a few blows” (Strobel 2001). The disastrous Ranger raid in Mogadishu in 1993 seemed to confirm this basic American weakness: if you kill enough Americans, they will go home.

Pundits recognized that September 11th may have changed the stakes for the American public, but they still worried that a new war with Iraq might founder on this same body-bag syndrome. After all, the American public might have been willing to pay a huge price to wipe out the perpetrators, Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, but in fact no such price was needed. Once again the Cassandras in the arm-chair strategist community were proved wrong, and after a year of heavy action the U.S. military had suffered only fifty-three casualties in the Afghan war. The real question of how the public would react if casualties ever did start to mount was left begging, even while September 11th brought home the priority of national security. And although the question was usually left hanging, at least since Vietnam the conventional wisdom has supplied only one answer: the American public only wants war on the cheap and will not accept even moderate levels of U.S. casualties.

The Basic Argument

In this book we show that the conventional wisdom about civil-military relations and the use of force is right in some respects and wrong in others. We present evidence to show that civilians and the military do differ in systematic ways in their attitudes concerning whether and how to use force and in their professed willingness to bear the human costs of war. Moreover, these different opinions seem to have had a profound effect on the propensity of the United States to initiate the use of force for most of its history, from 1816 to 1992.

Compared with mid-career active duty military officers, civilian elites who have no military experience are somewhat more interventionist with regard to the range of issues over which they will support the use of force by the United States. Military officer respondents report what may be called a “realpolitik” approach to the issue, one that reserves the use of force for interstate issues that represent a substantial threat to national

security such as control of territory, the maintenance of geostrategic access and position, and the defense of allies. Civilian elites who have no military experience are somewhat more likely than military officers to report an “interventionist” opinion, advocating foreign policy goals that do not fit within the *realpolitik* interstate security paradigm, including responses to human rights abuses and the internal collapse of governance in other countries, or the desire to alter a state’s domestic regime. Thus interventionists will generally have a wider set of issues across which they will support the use of force, while *realpolitik* thinkers will only support force over a narrower range of issues. In other words, civilian and military views converge somewhat when considering potential *realpolitik* uses of force but diverge more sharply when considering potential interventionist uses of force. Veterans in the civilian elite give responses that track more closely with active duty military officers than with nonveterans in the civilian elite.

At the same time, however, nonveteran civilians express a greater willingness to place constraints on the manner in which force is used, whereas the military respondents are more likely to endorse a position that has come to be known as the Powell Doctrine of overwhelming force (Stevenson 1996; Dauber 1998). The doctrine calls for using force only in circumstances where the political will is present to use force essentially without restrictions, or with only very broad restrictions such as no use of nuclear weapons. Again veterans in the civilian elite give responses that track more closely with active duty military officers than with nonveterans in the civilian elite.

These opinion differences are not dramatically large and to some extent they merely confirm the expectations of the case study literature that has examined civilian and military attitudes during cold war uses of force. Nevertheless, confirming this pattern with more systematic opinion data sets the stage for linking the opinion gap to actual foreign policy behavior.

The record of how the United States has engaged the world from 1816 to 1992 matches to a remarkable degree the pattern one would expect if one extrapolated directly from opinion to behavior. Since veteran opinion corresponds with military opinion, we can use veterans’ presence in the political elite as a proxy for measuring the civil-military gap over time. Relying on a composite measure of military experience across the executive and legislative branches of government, we correlate these data with a yearly database on U.S. relations with other countries around the world from 1816 to 1992. Specifically, we identify whether the United States initiated the use of force, called a militarized interstate dispute (MID), against each possible target country for every year, called a dyad-year.¹ We

¹ The method is explained in greater detail in chapter 3 and in Bennett and Stam (2000). For a dispute to qualify as a MID, the initiating state must use military force, threaten to

find that as the percentage of veterans serving in the executive branch and the legislature increases, the probability that the United States will initiate militarized disputes declines by nearly 90 percent. At the same time, however, once an MID has been initiated, the higher the proportion of veterans in the government, the greater the level of force the United States will use in the dispute.

With regard to the critical issue of casualty sensitivity, our findings are just as striking: the belief, widely accepted by policymakers, civilian elites, and military officers, that the U.S. public is especially casualty phobic (meaning that public support for a mission will evaporate at the first sign of casualties) is a myth. Our survey indicates that the public will accept casualties if they are necessary to accomplish a declared mission, a finding consistent with other research that suggests the public will support casualties if the mission is being actively pushed by the nation's leadership (Larson 1996; Kull and Destler 1999). On *realpolitik* missions such as the defense of South Korea and Taiwan, there is a broad consensus that these goals are worthy priorities for U.S. foreign policy and worth the loss of substantial American lives, at least on the order of another Desert Storm (which had 383 combat deaths). No such consensus exists, however, with regard to interventionist missions such as nation building in Congo or protection against genocide in Kosovo, precisely the missions that dominated American foreign policymaking in the decade between the 1991 Gulf War and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Here there is confusion over what the American public really thinks, and important divisions emerge between civilian elites who are influencing policy, on the one hand, and military elites who are implementing policy, on the other.

Casualty sensitivity appears to be a function of what might be called rational calculations. People who think the national interest is not engaged by certain missions do not support casualties in those missions. People who think that force is not very effective have a lower acceptance for casualties across the board. Yet even when these "rational effects" are accounted for, the military showed a significantly lower tolerance for casualties than its civilian counterparts on interventionist missions. Moreover, this effect remains prominent despite the disproportionately low number of women in the military relative both to the civilian elite and to the mass public. As a group, women offer substantially lower numbers for "acceptable casualties." Thus the gap between male military officers

use force, or move its military forces so as to communicate a threat. Thus the U.S. initiation of hostilities with Spain in the Spanish-American War is an example of one MID for the year 1898. By contrast, in 1897 the United States did not initiate any MIDs with any other country. From 1816 to 1992, there are 8,780 dyad-years representing the universe of U.S. relations with foreign states. Over the same period, the United States was involved in 243 MIDs, of which it initiated only 111.

and their civilian male counterparts is even larger than is first apparent. Within the military we find that attitudes on casualties appear to be associated with both age and service. Most important, we find that younger officers and those in the Marine Corps and Air Force are the most willing to tolerate casualties in nontraditional missions. Since these officers are the most likely members of our sample to see combat in such missions, this result undermines the claim that military casualty sensitivity is a function of self-preservation.

Scope and Approach

This book operates at the intersection of a variety of different literatures. It is, first and foremost, a book about civil-military relations and the use of force. Scholars have long recognized that civil-military relations are partly an end to themselves and partly a means to other ends (Feaver 1996; 1999). Civil-military relations are an end to themselves because one of the defining features of a democracy is civilian control of the military. The vast majority of the literature on U.S. civil-military relations (or indeed, civil-military relations elsewhere) addresses the problem of maintaining civilian control, regardless of what civilian control might mean for other desiderata.² As Samuel Huntington (1957) argued, however, civil-military relations are also a means to other ends, most importantly the security of a nation from external threat and internal subversion. Huntington claimed that some patterns of civilian control would be disastrous for a nation's defense because they would undermine military effectiveness (1957, 96–97), but remarkably few scholars have taken up this line of analysis.³ The one relatively rich area of research using civil-military relations as an explanatory variable concerns decisions for the use of force. The existing literature here is either theoretical or historical case study.⁴ Our contribution lies not on the theoretical end, nor in adding

² This is especially true of the work that is part of the recent renaissance in U.S. civil-military relations research: Weigley (1993); Kohn (1994, 2002); Avant (1994); Desch (1999); and Feaver (2003).

³ The only works looking systematically at how different patterns of civil-military relations affect military effectiveness are Millett and Murray (1988), Biddle and Zirkle (1996), and Brooks (2000).

⁴ The classics of the theoretical literature include Vagts (1937), L. Smith (1951), Huntington (1957), Janowitz (1960), and Finer (1962); for a more recent theoretically oriented analysis see Feaver (2003). The general empirical literature covers a wide range of cases, but focuses on great power behavior: J. Snyder (1984), Van Evera (1984), Posen (1984), Lee (1991), Sagan (1994), and Cohen (2001, 2002a). The most important works focusing on U.S. civil-military relations and the use of force include Betts (1991), Petraeus (1987, 1989), Weigley (1993, 2001), Gacek (1994), Kohn (1994), and Weigley (2001).

more detail to an already rich case study literature, but rather in bringing large-*n* analysis (including surveys of civilian and military groups and comprehensive datasets of U.S. conflict behavior) to bear on a topic that has hitherto only been addressed with deductive or case study analysis.

The second major literature our book engages concerns the determinants of the use of force more generally. The literature here is large, mostly looking at the role of power politics variables. Over the past four decades, many volumes have been written about the impact of systemic variables such as the distribution of military capabilities or alliance ties.⁵ In addition, Thomas Schelling's (1960, 1966) tremendous impact on the field led to a burgeoning literature on crisis-bargaining strategies and crisis escalation.⁶ In recent years, scholars of international conflict began to shift their attention to the impact of aggregate unit-level variables such as regime type—most notably in the literature on the so-called democratic peace.⁷ Within this literature, domestic political considerations, such as the link to elections and the link to partisan politics, have received by far the most attention.⁸

Despite the many studies and the great progress that has been made in understanding the sources of militarized conflict, a number of substantial lacunae remain in this literature. As we discuss below, numerous studies have documented variations in both elite and mass opinions about the use of force and military operations. But these changes in opinions have not heretofore been connected to actual changes in international military behavior. We hope our linkage of the literature on the civil-military gap to the quantitative literature on militarized disputes will open a new avenue into the study of international conflict. At the very least, our work incorporates a new level of analysis and a new set of arguments into the study of militarized disputes.

The third literature our book engages concerns U.S. public opinion and foreign policy, especially concerning the use of force. Again the literature

⁵ The literature is much too extensive to recite here, but the ideas were rooted in Morgenthau (1985), Waltz (1958, 1979), and Blainey (1973), among others. A few examples of the evolution of quantitative work in these areas are Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey (1972), Organski and Kugler (1980), Bueno de Mesquita (1981), Huth, Gelpi, and Bennett (1993), and Mansfield (1994).

⁶ Once again, the literature here is very extensive, but some of the prominent works are Schelling (1960, 1966), George and Smoke (1974), Snyder and Diesing (1977), Mearsheimer (1983), Axelrod (1984), Huth (1988), Leng (1993), and Pape (1996).

⁷ See, for example, Doyle (1986), Maoz and Russett (1993), Ray (1995), Rousseau et al. (1996), and Maoz (1997).

⁸ See, for example, Ostrom and Job (1986), Russett (1990), Gowa (1999), Gaubatz (1999), Goemans (2000), and all the articles by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1981, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2000a, b, and 2002). There is also an extensive literature on internal unrest and the diversionary use of force, but like the democratic peace literature, these studies focus on highly aggregated unit level data. For a review of this literature, see Levy (1989).

is vast, although it tends to specialize either in elite or mass opinion but not both at the same time.⁹ Our contribution is partly in providing more extensive analysis of new data that have been only summarily analyzed elsewhere.¹⁰ We are the first to analyze in any fashion the data presented in chapters 4 and 5.¹¹ Moreover, this book integrates survey responses across mass and elite samples, and across civilian, military, and veteran samples, and then explicitly links opinion data to behavioral data. No other study of public opinion and the use of force approaches the topic in this fashion.

Throughout the book, we use a two-stage approach. First, we analyze the causal logic underlying competing claims in the public debate and deduce a set of testable hypotheses therefrom. One of the most striking features of public discussions about U.S. civil-military relations is the large number of contradictory claims and hypotheses advanced. We impose some analytical order onto the cacophony, identify the basis for each set of claims, and along the way, we build a logical model of how civilian and military opinions in theory might affect the use of force. Second, we test the hypotheses against appropriate data. Some of the claims in the literature are inherently untestable and others may be testable in principle but the data for doing so do not yet exist in a usable form. A major contribution of this book, however, is that it makes use of new data to provide a more systematic empirical evaluation than hitherto existed. We test as many of the competing claims as we can, therefore, and in the concluding chapter identify where future research and analysis could profitably be directed to advance the understanding of these issues.

This study is focused on the United States, looking at civilian and military opinions there and how those opinions affect U.S. uses of force. Obviously, our findings have implications for other countries, not only for how they might interact with the United States but more profoundly for how similar dynamics may be at work in their own civil-military policymaking milieu. But we note these implications in passing, and since we have only U.S. data, we can only speculate about how applicable our analysis might be to other countries.

⁹ See J. Mueller (1973, 1994), Jentleson (1992), Lian and Oneal (1993), Oneal and Bryan (1995), Peffley, Langley, and Goidel (1995), Holsti (1996), Jentleson (1998), and Sobel (2001). There are important exceptions that do explicitly compare elite and mass attitudes but these do not consider the added dimension of civilian versus military. See Wittkopf (1990); Kull and Destler (1999); Reilly (1999).

¹⁰ Some analyses of these data have been reported in Holsti (2001), Davis (2001), Gronke and Feaver (2001). An overall summary of the project that generated these data is found in Feaver and Kohn (2001b).

¹¹ Early results of our analysis were presented at public conferences in Feaver and Gelpi (1999a,b) and published in Feaver and Gelpi (1999c).

This book also addresses the effect of the civil-military gap on the use of force. Our purpose is to evaluate whether or not, and how, civil-military issues shape the use of force. Civil-military considerations are only one set of issues related to the use of force and may not even be the primary ones. We will control for factors that we know affect the use of force, but in order to isolate the effects of civil-military variables we may have to bracket other issues that we know are important.

Perhaps the chief consequence of this focus is that we adopt a decision theoretic approach instead of a game theoretic approach; that is, we look at U.S. uses of force as if they were a decision problem for U.S. policymakers, not a result of strategic interaction between the United States and foreign competitors. Of course, U.S. decision makers are not deciding whether to use force in a vacuum. They are responding to or anticipating challenges in the international system, and those challenges are coming from states who are themselves anticipating and responding to actions by the United States. It is even possible that these external actors may be factoring into their strategic calculus estimates of U.S. civil-military relations and how those civil-military issues affect the way the United States uses force as a tool of statecraft. For instance, if conditions make civilian leaders more willing to use force, then foreign states might compensate by being more cautious and appeasing the United States. If this effect were strong, we might actually observe a reduction in the American use of force, but this would be due to an increased propensity on the part of the United States to use force.¹² In the jargon of political science, by treating our problem as if it is a decision theory problem when it may be a game theory problem, we introduce the potential for selection effects that might lead us to over- or underestimate the importance of the factors we are studying.¹³ When discussing our research design in chapter 3, we explain the steps we have taken to address this issue.

The advantage of the approach we are taking is that it best captures the intermediate stages along the causal path from civil-military issues to

¹² The opposite logic likewise holds. If the configuration of civil-military relations makes the United States more cautious about using force, opponents might seize on this and press their advantage, ultimately provoking the United States into initiating military force despite its greater reluctance to do so.

¹³ If such a selection mechanism were operating, it would likely not be due to other actors making judgments about U.S. civil-military relations. Except in the most extreme cases—possibly the more dramatic episodes in Clinton's stormy relationship with the military—it is doubtful that American civil-military dynamics reach the level of salience needed to be a major factor in other leaders' strategic calculi. It is possible, however, that other actors are responding to an observable implication of our civil-military dynamic, namely, the fact that some leaders are more interventionist than others. As we discuss in the text, we cannot rule this possibility out, but omitting it from our analysis, which we do, has the effect of biasing our analyses against finding the civil-military effect we uncover in chapter 3.

the use of force. We would not be able to include all of these beginning and intermediate steps postulated as important by the literature if we also tried to include the reactions of other states in our model. A fully specified model would be intractable, which may be one reason why analysts who do capture the interstate strategic interaction have opted for relatively impoverished civil-military dynamics (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Bueno de Mesquita, Siverson, and Woller, 1992; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995). Better to bracket off strategic interactions with other states than to bracket off civil-military issues of direct interest to our study. Our approach therefore makes best use of the new data the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) examination of the gap has generated, specifically the survey data on civilian and military attitudes to military missions and to the human costs likely to be associated with those missions.¹⁴

Framed this way, the issue is how civil-military relations affect decisions on the use of force. The use of force can be disaggregated into two separate decisions: the decision whether to use force and the decision on the amount of force to use. As we discuss in more detail in chapter 2, these decisions are logically linked. A positive decision to escalate from diplomatic negotiations to the use of military force implies a decision on what kind of force to use. Likewise, constraints on the level or kinds of force used probably affect the prior decision of whether to use force in the first place. A decision maker may be willing to use force if and only if it is of a certain kind. Colin Powell famously advised that if the president is unwilling to use massive force, then it is better not to use force at all, implying one set of logical links between the two decisions (Powell 1992); the fact that he had to press civilians on this point implies that other decision makers held the opposite but (in theory) no less logical combination of preferences. Because of the linkage, it makes analytical sense to separate the decisions into discrete points so as to capture both independent and interdependent effects.

Decisions on the use of force are cost-benefit calculations. Do the benefits of bombing Serbia outweigh the costs of doing so? One way civil-military relations might affect the use of force is if civilians and the military differ on their estimations of these benefits and costs. The benefits involve estimations of the national interest and estimations of the utility of force, that is, whether force can achieve the goals implied by the mission. The costs involve not only crude financial costs—the dollars spent

¹⁴ Note that since we lack survey data over time, we are limited in the kind of time-series analyses we can do. Where survey data is lacking, we are forced to use proxies of the “civil-military gap” to get a first-order approximation of the effects we are studying.

on jet fuel, exploded ordinance, military rations, and so on—but also more abstract costs like potential damage to other interests and values such as relations with allies. Importantly, there are also human costs: the dead and wounded that result from a use of force.

Estimations of the human costs of the use of force are what is meant by the term “casualty sensitivity” (Larson 1996). Some of the most important claims in the literature on U.S. civil-military relations are that civilians and the military are differentially casualty sensitive and that other changes in the gap contribute to changes in the sensitivity of civilians and the military to casualties. A related claim is that over time the American public has become so sensitive to casualties that it is essentially casualty phobic: even very low casualties are considered intolerable (Luttwak 1994). Casualty sensitivity feeds directly into both components of the force decision: if the casualties are thought to be prohibitive, decision makers may refuse to use force in the first place; and the effort to control casualties is an important, some have argued overwhelming, consideration on how force is used. Accordingly, in chapters 4 and 5, we focus on the casualty question, analyzing the only systematic data extant that compare civilian and military attitudes on casualty sensitivity.

The foregoing suggests yet another framing issue: how we are treating the role of public opinion in decisions to use force and what we mean by “public,” that is, whose opinion is considered relevant.

We adopt several conventions that are now standard in the general literature on public opinion and the use of force (Holsti 1996, Kull and Destler 1999). First, we distinguish between three levels of civilians: the civilian policymakers, who are closeted in the corridors of power with military leaders deciding on national security issues and making the final determination on whether and how to use force; the elite public, sometimes called the attentive public or opinion leaders, the subset of the general population that is most involved in the public debate on these matters; and the largest group, the mass public, or more particularly the mass voting public, the *demos* that makes up the citizenry of the United States of America. A similar division can be found on the military side of the civil-military divide: senior Pentagon leaders as decision makers; the up-and-coming officers as “elite”; and the rest of the rank-and-file officers and enlisted as the military analog to the mass public. Of course, each group can be broken down further by gender, race, age, occupation or service specialty, and so on.

To make the analysis tractable, we must simplify this admittedly stylized model even further. As is standard in the literature, we assume that civilian policymakers are taking their cues from both the elite and the mass public (Kull and Destler 1999). Thus, since we have data on what

decision makers do (that is, uses of force) but no systematic data on what decision makers think, we focus on elite and mass opinion as surrogates and influences on decision makers' opinions. Civilian policymakers are most attuned to elite public opinion, since this represents by definition the views of the people most active in public debates over policy and since the policymakers are themselves a part of the elite. But decision makers are also sensitive to what the mass voter thinks since that may determine whether they hold on to their positions of power. At the same time, policymakers seek to shape the opinion of elites who themselves seek to shape mass opinion so as to influence policymakers. As for the military, we will focus on "elite" opinion, the officer corps and especially those officers who have been identified by the military as likely candidates for promotion to higher ranks. This convention is standard in the civil-military relations literature ever since Huntington (1957) and is appropriate when the dependent variable of interest is policy outputs; officers have clear influence over policy while the influence of enlisted opinion is fairly negligible. And given the hierarchical nature of the military, this influence is greater the more senior the officer becomes (and the more likely the officer is to gain seniority).

Even distinctions as stylized as these are often lost in the current literature on civil-military relations and the use of force. Only rarely is "civilian" disaggregated into mass versus elite, and further breakdowns are even more rare. The infamous debate over whether African Americans were (or should have been) less willing to support the Persian Gulf War force because they were the ones supposedly more likely to die in combat is a prominent exception (Puddington 1991). There is also some debate over whether gender is a significant factor in foreign policy opinion (Holsti 1996, 166–68). Therefore we explore whether race and gender are important confounding factors in linking civil-military relations to the use of force. Likewise, Thomas Ricks (1997) claims that there is a generational shift in officer opinion, and so we look at age effects as well. On the whole, however, most of the public debate treats the players at very high levels of aggregation and we begin our discussion there; we add complexity to the discussion as logic and evidence demand.

A final word on the scope of this project. This book uses appropriate statistical techniques to analyze aggregate survey data and aggregate behavior data. We use these data to test hypotheses that have currency in the literature, either because the hypotheses derive from conclusions of other historical case study analyses of civil-military relations or because they are logical deductions from plausible models of how civil-military relations function in the United States. Our findings are remarkably robust in statistical terms, showing that, for instance, civil-military differ-

ences that are discernible in survey data are strongly correlated with the propensity of the United States to use force over time, even after controlling for the other factors that affect so complex a behavior as the initiation of force in an international conflict. What we have not done, however, is trace every step in the logic train posited by our argument through a series of intensive case studies of actual decisions to use force. Such an additional task would render an already formidable project intractable. We recognize that case studies exploring the causal mechanisms posited in our argument would be a fruitful next step for research, and in the conclusion we suggest ways of extending the work in this fashion. Yet since the existing literature is already strong in case study analysis but weak in the methods we employ here, it is appropriate to limit our scope as we have done. Our book, in other words, is neither the first nor the last word on the subject—but our findings are sufficiently conclusive and provocative to merit standing alone as the *next* word in an evolving debate.

The TISS Data

While the perception of basic civil-military differences of opinion on foreign policy and the use of force has wide currency, there are few systematic studies of those differences.¹⁵ Systematic analysis is rare because systematic data on civilian and military opinions are rare. Members of the uniformed military are not regularly captured in the extensive polling done of the American public. Even polling done on American foreign policy and explicitly including foreign policy “leaders,” such as the quadrennial American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy surveys by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, is of limited utility because military respondents are not included in the sample (Reilly 1999). The centerpiece of this book, therefore, is original survey data collected explicitly to explore the civil-military dimension. The survey data were collected in 1998 to 99 as part of a larger project sponsored by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, a consortium of faculty at Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and North Carolina State University interested in national and international security.

To explore attitudes across a wide segment of civilian and military elites and the mass public, the TISS project completed a broad, in-depth survey

¹⁵ Although there are few systematic studies of this perception, Ole Holsti’s seminal 1999 article evaluating some twenty years of survey data from the Foreign Policy Leadership Project is an important exception. The larger TISS project on the civil-military gap, from which this book stems, is another. The following section is adapted from Feaver and Kohn

of some 4,891 respondents representing three key groups: the general public, influential civilian leaders, and up-and-coming military officers.¹⁶ The survey sought responses to some 250 questions covering a range of issues: from the respondent's social and religious values to views on national security policy, and from military professionalism to the civil-military relationship itself. (The survey instrument is presented in Feaver and Kohn 2001b.) Between fall 1998 and spring 1999, the survey instrument was mailed to civilian leaders and administered to military officers.

To reach the group that we refer to as "civilian elite," we followed procedures developed by Ole Holsti and James Rosenau in the Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP) (Holsti 1996, 129–90). To achieve a broad, comprehensive sample, eight subsamples were chosen to receive the survey. The eight subsamples were drawn from lists such as *Who's Who in America* and other directories of prominent Americans in the categories of "Clergy," "Women," "American Politics," "State Department," "Media," "Foreign Affairs," and "Labor." Our elite civilian sample generated 989 responses out of 3,435 requested.

We sought to reach a comparable group of military officers, which we refer to as "military elite" or "up-and-coming military officers." We defined this group as "officers whose promise for advancement has been recognized by assignment to attend in-residence the professional military education course appropriate for their rank." Thus the full military sample of 2,901 respondents (out of 5,889 surveys sent out) is not meant to be a sample of the entire military, which would include both officers and enlisted, nor even of the entire officer corps. The elite military sample is drawn just from among officers who are likely to emerge as leaders and are likely to be promoted. These officers come from the pool of those military leaders that shape the military profession in America and function as the custodians of military culture over time.

The military sample covers the active and reserve officer corps of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, at four stages of advancement.¹⁷

(2001b, 5–8) and is used with the permission of the copyright holder, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

¹⁶ The methods employed in conducting these surveys as well as reports on subsample response and subsample characteristics are described in greater detail in Newcity (1999) and are available at the project website, www.poli.duke.edu/civmil.

¹⁷ The TISS sample is somewhat skewed compared with the distribution among the four principal services of the officer corps as a whole. The TISS sample is slightly overrepresented with Navy (34 percent of the TISS sample versus 25 percent of the officer corps) and Army officers (39 percent of the TISS sample versus 35 percent of the officer corps), and underrepresented with Air Force officers (17 percent of the TISS sample versus 32 percent of the officer corps). This underrepresentation is due to the fact that the Air Force did not allow us to survey Air University students. Nor were we allowed to survey Marine Corps University

For the first category, that of officer candidates before commissioning, we administered the survey at the U.S. Military Academy, the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy, and at a sample of Army and Navy ROTC units across the country. To reach the staff college level (officers roughly a decade into their careers), we surveyed students in the resident courses at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the Naval War College (junior class). For the war college level (officers roughly seventeen years into their career), we surveyed students in the resident courses at the Army War College, the Naval War College, the National War College, and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. For generals, the so-called baby flags, or officers at roughly the twenty-five-year mark who have been selected for promotion to brigadier general or rear admiral, we surveyed current attendees and the most recent graduates of the Capstone course at the National Defense University. Capstone is an orientation course of several weeks for new active duty flag officers and is conducted under the auspices of the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. We also surveyed Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine reservists who were at comparable stages of their military careers and who took courses by correspondence from the Army War College, the Naval War College, and the National Defense University.

Our central focus, however, is on the distinction between active duty military and the civilian elite. We exclude the precommissioned sample from our analyses because they are quite distinct in terms of their development and stage of life from the civilian and military elites. We are interested in the impact of the civil-military gap on American foreign policy, and the link between precommissioned officers and American foreign policy decisions is rather oblique. Moreover, we have no civilian sample that represents a comparable group to the precommissioned officers. The tremendous differences in age, socialization, and so on would make a comparison between precommissioned officers and the civilian elite rather like one of apples and oranges. We do include the military reservists as a comparison group that stands somewhere between the civilian elite and the active duty military. We do not, however, theorize extensively about the impact of reservist status. As noted in the conclusion, one fruitful avenue for further research would be to extend the analysis in these other subsamples. Restricting the data this way means that we are analyzing a military

students; however, our sample of Marine officers corresponds to their numbers in the military establishment (9 percent of the TISS sample, 8 percent of the officer corps). Our Marine and Air Force samples were drawn, instead, from students attending either Army and Navy Staff and War Colleges or the National Defense University. We have no reason to believe that this feature of the TISS military sample influenced our findings.

sample of some 1,011 returned questionnaires out of 2,515 sent. Of the military respondents, 623 were active duty military and the remaining 388 were from the reserves.

A shortened version of the survey instrument was also administered by telephone to a representative random national sample of 1,001 members of the general public during September and October 1998. There was a 63 percent response rate for this survey. We refer to this sample as the “mass public” or “general public.”

Organization of the Book

The book proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 explores civil-military differences on when and how force should be used. It begins with a brief review of the existing literature, which consists primarily of case studies of U.S. decision making during the cold war, and identifies areas of consensus and disagreement. The chapter uses the findings of the existing literature to inform analyses of the results of the TISS series of surveys. The chapter explores answers respondents gave to a series of foreign policy questions about the use of force—when it should be used, for what purposes, and in what fashion—and compares the TISS data with other survey data as appropriate. The analyses lead to the conclusion that civilian and military opinions on the use of force do differ in predictable ways, and that veteran opinions track more or less with military opinions. The analyses also lead to the conclusion that elite and mass opinions differ in predictable ways and that these differences show up in different responses by elite veterans and mass veterans.

Chapter 3 explores whether these survey results matter for the actual conduct of American foreign policy. We derive hypotheses concerning how different levels of veteran representation in the political elite (referring to the policymaking community, as distinct from the broader civilian elite public) might in theory affect the propensity of the United States to use force in international diplomacy. The chapter next details the results of a series of statistical tests of these hypotheses against data collected on all U.S. relations with foreign countries from 1816–1992. The findings are remarkably robust through different sensitivity tests and statistical controls. Consistent with the expectations of one strand of the civil-military relations literature, we find that the more veterans there are in the political elite, the less likely the United States is to initiate the use of force. At the same time, we also find that if the United States does initiate the use of force, the more veterans in the political elite, the greater the likelihood that the use of force will be on a large scale.

Chapter 4 evaluates a claim that has wide currency in conventional wisdom: that the American public is so casualty phobic that policymakers are constrained from putting U.S. forces at risk around the world. The chapter compares the responses of the civilian mass, civilian elite, and military elite samples in the TISS survey to a series of hypothetical questions asking how many casualties would be acceptable to achieve a range of different plausible military missions, from stabilizing a democratic government in Congo to defending Taiwan against invasion by China. The analyses show that there is little empirical support for the conventional wisdom that the general public is reflexively casualty phobic. On the contrary, the controversial missions that characterized the first post-cold war decade of American foreign policy—for example, intervening in civil wars—the public is considerably less casualty sensitive than either the civilian or the military elite. The conventional wisdom, based on a misreading of key events like Somalia and Vietnam, is mistaken. In reality, policymakers can count on sizable public support for military operations, provided that the leaders will carry them through to victory.

Chapter 5 explores the determinants of the civilian and military responses to the casualty question in greater detail. The TISS data permit the testing of various hypotheses for why there is a noticeable civil-military difference on the casualty question, that is, whether it is a result of other demographic differences between our civilian and military samples or whether it is a function of other attitudes the respondents hold on foreign policy. The data also permit the exploration of whether military casualty sensitivity is a function of rank, combat orientation, or even general service orientation of the respondent. Our results indicate that the civil-military gap regarding casualty sensitivity is not a simple spurious result of demographic or other factors. A substantial opinion gap exists even after we account for the impact of numerous demographic and attitudinal factors. Civilian and military attitudes reflect basic rational calculations about the costs each respondent is willing to see the United States pay to pursue what that respondent considers to be priority missions. Moreover, elite respondents' beliefs about the willingness of the American public to tolerate casualties were powerfully associated with their own aversion to casualties. Social contact with the military is also a powerful factor in explaining respondents' attitudes toward casualties; people who reported higher social contact with the military reported greater casualty sensitivity, and this factor appears to account for much of the difference between civilian and military groups. Within the military, casualty sensitivity is not a function of self-preservation or of careerism but rather appears to be related to doubts about the quality of political leadership and support undergirding the missions. Casualty phobia may well be a proverbial closed circle of logic: military officers express casualty shyness because

they are taking cues from political leaders who express casualty shyness because they buy into the myth that the general public is casualty phobic—which it is not.

The book concludes with a summary of our findings and a discussion of the significance of our argument, both for the academic literature and for policymakers in government. We suggest that our findings raise interesting questions that constitute a rich research agenda for the field.