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### Media and Public Opinion Effects On American Foreign Policy Under Bush, Obama, and Trump

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MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION EFFECTS ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY  
UNDER BUSH, OBAMA, AND TRUMP

A thesis presented

by

**Luke H. Mayer**

to

The Political Science Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Honors in Political Science

Trinity College  
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Thesis Advisor

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Department Chair

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The United States is generally viewed as the global protector of democracy. Throughout the nation's history, there have been many times when the United States pursued policies to either protect or promote democratic governments abroad. Peoples' freedoms are incredibly important to the American<sup>1</sup> government, because it preaches equality for all is necessary and freedoms allow a government to grow and better develop itself to create better lives for their people. The most important aspect of the American government, however, is electing officials that want to represent the people in Congress and as president. The office of the president of the United States is the most crucial position in government because of the tasks it is presented with in creating or continuing policy that is best for the nation. When the United States forms policy, the president is the one judged in terms of the public either supporting or opposing it. The president is perceived be the overall representative of the people, and therefore he is thought to create policies that represent the American peoples' views. In this thesis I will be examining foreign policy created under presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump and the degree to which public opinion affects it.

### *Broad Context*

The American political world seems to be much different than it has been in previous years. A new style of politics has been introduced; i.e., one that allows the political parties to

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<sup>1</sup> When I use the word "America" or "American", it is assumed I am discussing the United States of America, and none of the other countries in the American continents.

engage in verbal confrontations with each other to determine who is “right” and who is “wrong.” A new battle has also begun within the media, as there is a new appearance of a bias between media outlets. I began thinking back to previous American responses to policies and began to question if there was ever a time in which the American public influenced foreign policy actions through the media or if the media just expressed the news to the public about what the policies did. No events in recent years came to mind, and that is when I decided to conduct research on determining whether public opinion influenced American foreign policy, and what is the media’s possible role in this relationship.

### *Country Case Selection*

Examining the relationship between foreign policy, media coverage, and public opinion under all of the American presidents would take years, so it was important to narrow down this thesis to a time period, which would then suggest the presidential administrations I should study. I wanted to hold my research to modern events, which is why I am focusing on foreign policy under President’s George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. Each created unique policies that were designed to help the nation in difficult times. Seeing how these policies were supported or opposed in the United States may help me understand if the public played a role in the policy alteration. Also, Presidents Obama and Trump created some policies that were originally designed and introduced under the Bush administration, so there will be an examination on whether or not continued policy received either more support or opposition because it was done under either a new president or a different time.

I did not want to focus on foreign policy as a whole since that topic is too large to discuss within a senior thesis. Therefore, I concluded that I would focus on one area that has been a focal point of presidential foreign policy, the media has covered extensively, and the public has had fairly strong opinions on: the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> However, I chose three specific nations within the Middle Eastern region that have received a large percentage of the attention: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. Afghanistan was chosen because it is the focal point of the so called “war on terror.” Military forces have been deployed there regularly since military force was authorized in 2001. The American people have seen fluctuations of deployment, withdrawal, successes, and failures within the region, making it an excellent choice. Ideally, we will find that Afghanistan policies fluctuate from administration to administration, along with media coverage and public opinion.

Iraq was chosen for reasons that are similar to Afghanistan’s, but it has faced more military action and fluctuation. There was essentially one military action designated for Afghanistan, but Iraq is a nation where the American people experience two separate Iraq campaigns: the first in 2003, and again in 2014 during the rising Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS. These topics are essential in looking at public opinion on policy because the prolonged military presence that was needed to stem the terrorist organization’s rise to power. President Trump won the presidency at a time where ISIS was still a threat, which makes each president very involved in a complicated military operation overseas. As will be discussed in the following chapter on Vietnam, the American people are now generally tired of long military campaigns, so seeing if this effect remains true and if it affected any part of the campaign will be interesting to determine.

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<sup>2</sup> When I use the phrase “The Middle East,” I am referring to the Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran.

Lastly, Iran was the final nation selected for this study because of its rise as a regional power and the conflicts the United States has had with it diplomatically. While it is not directly part of the military action against terrorists, it has sponsored terrorism, an aspect the United States stands strongly against. Iran has constantly made attempts to pursue ways to acquire a nuclear arsenal, and the United States has been at the forefront in ensuring it does not succeed. Each of the presidents have attempted to strike some type of deal with Iran that would stem its enriched uranium grade research. There have been numerous strategies about how to approach these agreements with a variety of media coverage, so seeing how the media covered the results of the deals or agreements conducted may prove beneficial in determining if there was any type of influence on the public. Iran is a large, regional power, and because it has had the same conflicts with each president, it was deemed crucial to include in this thesis.

### *Research Question*

The overall question to this thesis is: *To which degree did the media influence the American public's support of or opposition to presidential foreign policy making in the Middle East under Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump?* This ambitious question will allow us to better understand the democratic system as a whole and if the public actually has influence in a democracy as it believed to be.

Three hypotheses can be formulated to address the media's role in foreign policy making and on public opinion: (1) the media plays a significant role in the public's support of or opposition to presidential foreign policy; (2) the media does not have much influence on



the public's views of foreign policy; and (3) the government uses the media as a tool to demonstrate the benefits of their policies. Aside from the general hypotheses found in scholars' works, the chapters on Bush, Obama, and Trump will offer their own hypotheses on the anticipated influence of public opinion on policy. However, it is generally hypothesized the public will have some degree of influence on the policies American presidents pursue in the Middle East.

### *Literature Review*

Discussion about the influence of public opinion on foreign policy has been pervasive within the pertinent scholarly literature over time. Walter Lippmann first addressed this relationship in his work in 1921, making bold statements about the public's function that most people today would disagree with. His work was joined by Gabriel Almond, which followed similar trends in stating the public thought is not acknowledged when creating policy. Together, their work is known to state that, generally, the public has little effect on presidential foreign policy making. Their viewpoint was never challenged until Ole R. Holsti wrote a piece about how the relationship between foreign policy and public opinion had evolved over time. This literature review will discuss the major contentions in the Almond-Lippmann consensus and Ole R. Holsti's critique on how public opinion has evolved over time, with a section discussing the relationship between the media, public, and government.

In general, Almond and Lippmann's work has three common features that Holsti describes as follows: , "(1) it is volatile and thus provides inadequate foundations for stable and effective foreign policies; (2) it lacks coherence or structure; but (3) in the final analysis,

it has little if any impact on foreign policy” (Holsti 1992, 439). Lippmann acknowledges that public opinion is supposed to be a mover of democracies, that is, public opinion is supposed to play a prominent role in the decisions of democratic law makers. However, Lippmann’s writing gives the impression that the public is manipulated on election day for politicians to win votes, thus making public opinion ineffectual in influencing policy (Lippmann 1921). To him, public opinion is a mystery that politicians must decipher in order to win elections. The politicians either use public opinion to their advantage, however they ran the risk of angering the public in the event bad policy was issued. Lippmann also believed that the public knew little about what was happening in the foreign policy world. The public had no opinion on the matter because it did not understand what went into it (Lippmann 1925). The final point of contention from Lippman’s end was his belief in the idea that public opinion was never cohesive. He saw the public as set of individual actors who decided to stand on one end of the support or opposition spectrum, which would never affect any change in policy making (Lippmann 1925).

Almond’s approach to the understanding of public opinion towards foreign policy ploughs a different road that leads to the same conclusion. Ultimately, Almond stated that most Americans tend to focus on their private lives and material goods, making them more interested in domestic policies and indifferent to foreign policy (Almond 1950). Disinterest in what occurs overseas would make the people’s opinions largely unheard or acknowledged. Almond also contributes to the overall arguments through his belief that, “most Americans lack intellectual structure and factual content” (Almond 1950, 69). This is one of the pillars of the Almond-Lippmann consensus because a lack of structure could lead to volatile public opinion shifts. Also, lacking structure leads to the public not having a significant base on

which to formulate policy opinion. These contentions give insight into the reasoning that the public was generally thought of as not having the capabilities to influence foreign policy.

Holsti's first major point of contention challenges the idea of the public having a "volatile" mood towards foreign policy. His research found the public has strong, stable reactions towards foreign policy that mimicked the strength in opinions on domestic policy. He discovered that the public generally does not receive full information about events, treaties, conflicts, and other major issues between nations, but it is still able to think rationally about the situation and arrive at conclusions that are drastically different than what the Almond-Lippmann consensus believes (Holsti 1992). These findings allow scholars to understand the evolution of public thought on this first point, opening the idea that the public is more rational than volatile. The second major contention of public opinion lacking structure and cohesiveness was debated based on the idea of how different political views cause political groups to have structure within their own communities. Holsti acknowledge that the scholars to date have not agreed on a broad conclusion on if the American public at large was structured, but he nevertheless found certain groups, whether unilateralists or multilateralists, were generally well organized in supporting the same ideas. Therefore, while the public may not agree with every view, each organization was cohesive and well-structured within their own ideologies (Holsti 1992). The last major contention may be the most important, as it addresses whether public opinion actually influences foreign policy. In general, Holsti found more research was needed to reach a conclusion due to similar data on both ends of public opinion impacts and public opinion does not impact foreign policy spectrum. There were vast amounts of research that placed data on both sides, with politicians either not pursuing policy in the face of public opposition to it or ignoring public

opinion entirely (Holsti 1992). However, despite Holsti's comments on a divided conclusion, it is clear through his studies that public influence has been on the rise in recent decades than before and may continue this upward trend.

This thesis will then contribute to this discussion of whether public opinion impacts foreign policy, but it will be adding a new variable. These original discussions only refer to the relationship between foreign policy and public opinion, however, in the modern era, the public opinion and foreign policy dynamic has evolved and new variables need to be accounted. The media has risen to a higher standard because of their interactions with government officials and talking to the people to learn about their views. Therefore, in order to understand whether a new dynamic is taking form between the public and foreign policy, we must introduce the media variable. Instead of now looking at whether one affects the other, the media variable will allow to see if they hold any type of influence on either side, or whether they serve as information that allows the people to create their own views on policy.

Walter Lippmann's studies on the media were limited to newspapers because of the technology of his time. He mostly wrote on what the news entailed and how the American people should perceive it. Lippmann was of the mindset that although the American public expects to hear the truth from media sources, their primary function is record and recognize events. This idea is echoed in his statement on the news as being "precise in proportion to the precision with which the event is recorded" (Lippmann 1921, 229). This precision has been challenged for some years, because as more events occur, more facts and information are needed for the audience. Lippmann also reported newspapers need to balance the facts with judgments in order to make sense of the variety of facts they possess (Lippmann 1931). Lippmann believes the press has power within their field to create their own idea of public

opinion. In this case, an autonomous public opinion would not truly exist, and it would potentially give the media large amounts of power if they attempted to change any policies. He continues this theory in his mentioning that the news can either help or cause civil unrest and disorganization within an institution, which would seem to give it extraordinary degree of influence (Lippmann 1921). While Lippmann mentioned all of the theories surrounding the news, his main idea of the press revolves around it not having an effect on the public because it merely records events.

Within the same sphere, Almond believes the media does not have a major impact on the relationship between the public and government, but he does acknowledge there has been an increase in media impact on the public over the few years when his article was written in 1956. The media, according to Almond, does a better job at taking an active role learning about and commenting on what foreign policy initiatives are, and while there is no mentioning of it affecting the American public's thought, they desire the news more and want to hear more (Almond 1956). However, Almond gives the impression that the media works as an arm of the government based on its transmission of news. He found the media portrays some information based on the overall mood or tone of the subject matter. If the president had grave news, the media will project apprehension and unease, while if the news were great, everything would appear uplifting. While some of the newscast could be exaggerated or emphasized, causing the American people to behave more agitated towards some stories and less towards others, this only occurs if the news were operating with limited information (Almond 1956). Thus, there is an evolution from Lippmann to Almond, but the major agreement between the two is that the media does not have a function in aiding the support or opposition of the American public towards foreign policy.

Thus, it is clear that while the media may not have a direct effect on public opinion, the general consensus is the media's influence is increasing, and more research needs to be conducted in order to better understand the relationship between the public, government, and media. This thesis will contribute to the overall discussion of determining if the media plays a role in aiding either the public or government in their creating or changing of foreign policy. The media was recognized to cause the public become more aware of the foreign policy changes undergoing (Soroka 2003), yet their impact has yet to be discovered.

### *Chapter Organization*

In order to better understand the current relationship among the government, media, and public, it was recognized we must address when relations among them changed. The first chapter discusses the Vietnam War and how it became a turning point in how the public thought about foreign policy. It will be found that the media originally served to help the government persuade the American people the former's policies were good, but that the war caused the public to pay more attention to the White House's actions, and the media changed their role and became more critical. This event became a catalyst for change and served as one of the reasons as to why Americans more attentive. This background allows us to understand how the current relationship between the public and government took shape and how it has progressed throughout the years. Every current event has a starting point, and in terms of the people becoming more attentive about towards foreign policy, Vietnam was the beginning.

The following chapter will be fully devoted to President George W. Bush, his policies towards Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran, how the media responded to his policies, and what the public thought of them. There will be a demonstration of policies, media coverage<sup>3</sup>, and use of public opinion data to determine if there was any influence towards the policies, as there could be correlations between public opinion and policy. President Bush instituted much of the current policy towards dealings with terroristic organizations and foreign adversaries at a time when the nation faced a devastating terroristic attack, and it is theorized the public supported military action and sanctions the limited nuclear growth, however they grew tired of a prolonged presence in a foreign nation, but continued to support limiting nuclear advancement. Thus, the evidence found within the chapter demonstrates that while there was a change in opinion on the military actions in the Middle East, a change of policies did not follow. It serves as the first example that living in a democratic nation does not necessarily mean decisions are made based on the American public's beliefs.

After discussing the Bush presidency, the thesis turns its attention to President Obama. This chapter will follow the same format as the previous one, but there will also be a determination on whether Obama continued his predecessor's policies or if he followed a different policy course. Including a continuation or discontinuation of policy allows us to understand if President Obama saw any mistakes within Bush's approach to policy and either tried to fix or merely followed suit. As Bush was a Republican and Obama a Democrat, it is theorized that foreign policies changed, and the public opinion was taken into account to a

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<sup>3</sup> Typically, in political science we like to avoid biased sources, however we made an exception for the media coverage component of the chapters. It is acknowledged there are times when major media outlets exhibit a large bias, but this is beneficial to the information in the chapter. It is this type of bias I want to examine to determine if it would affect the public to react to the foreign policy in anyway. Therefore, all three chapters contain opinion pieces that are designed to reflect what the public believes.

greater degree. To complete this process, we will again examine how the media portrayed his policies and what the American people thought of them. Public opinion polls will be used to determine if public opinion fell in line with policy, included with a discussion on whether the media influenced either side or if they served as information on foreign policy for public knowledge. Based on this information, will we discover President Obama's presidency largely mimicked Bush's, and public opinion did not necessarily affect the course of foreign policy. President Obama is often viewed as someone who was an advocate for the people, and while his decisions on which foreign policies to pursue in the Middle East correlated with the thoughts of American public opinion, the American people did not recognize that.

The final chapter that will provide evidence that American public opinion not affecting foreign policy making in the Middle East will be devoted to sitting President Donald Trump. While only a little over two years into his presidency, it is crucial to use Trump's presidency as a key in order to predict whether or not we will eventually see the same trends as the previous presidents. Thus, I included the major policies he has implemented to date, keeping in mind that some of those policies are fairly new and are in formation. The media coverage was fairly difficult to investigate, because for this thesis the main focus is the coverage of the policies and not the person making them. In researching this topic, I discovered that many news sources were more focused on Trump's rhetoric and personal actions rather than his policies, so it became important that every source was thoroughly screened in order to find the pertinent information. I will also be using public opinion polling data to determine if public opinion correlated with the course of Trump's



policies. Overall, this chapter will show that there is a major disjuncture between all three fields, which each changing courses and opinions as a result of introduced policy.

Lastly, this thesis will conclude by explaining how all three of presidencies ultimately cause us to realize public opinion does not ultimately influence foreign policy decisions with regard to the Middle East. Each chapter will be summarized, but with a focus on how to better understand their findings and what they might mean going forward. However, there will be another aspect included in the conclusion, and that will be a discussion on whether there is a public partisan divide between supporting or opposing policy. Partisanship within the public opinion sphere is incredibly important upon looking into the deeper reasonings of policy support, which is why it must be included. This thesis only focuses on the American general public to understand if similar policies under different presidents' garner more, less, or the same support among the public, however, the question of whether public partisanship plays a role within foreign policy support is a subfield of my research, which is why it will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

## **Chapter II: Vietnam as a Turning Point**

The discussion of when the American public began influencing foreign policy must be addressed in order to accurately portray the overall effects they have had. Thus, this chapter will serve as a brief history of when the American public began impacting the government's foreign policy beginning at the Vietnam War. In modern day, the Vietnam War has been generally discussed as being incredibly influential on the government because of its importance in the world of the 1960s. It will be found that the war served as a catalyst in the changing relationship between the public and the government, with the media causing much of the change. First there will be a presentation on how the government and media worked together in terms of showing war, followed by the support of the war, which ultimately had a steady decrease in opposition, in which the recognized year of culminating events is 1968. The final section of this chapter will discuss the roll this war played, and the limitations presidents now have on prolonged external conflicts.

Upon looking at the great history of the 1960s, it would be wrong to discount any other outside factors that may have contributed to the overall lack of public sentiment towards the war and furthered general public involvement in foreign policy. Thus, it is recognized that outspoken leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., and actions such as the institution of the draft, which was incredibly unfavored by college students, will not be discounted. These factors may have contributed, but this argument relates the media as the main reason of these three that led to the downfall of the Vietnam War and increased public involvement in support of foreign policy.

## Historical Relationship Between Media and Government

The relationship between the media and government is something that should never be overlooked. Naturally the two fields have never had the same relationship as today, but seeing how they have progressed gives background on the general whys and hows the dynamic has changed. This section will serve as the general overview between the media and government have communicated in order to portray similar information, keeping the public's faith in the military.

Originally, newspapers and letters were the original method of learning about battle outcomes and casualty numbers, but as the times progressed so did the news. The Civil War was considered by many to be the first modern war that incorporated many photographs from the aftermath of the battle, and found the first time newspapers had the ability to mass produce the corresponding battles either the next day or within a week ("News and the Civil War · The News Media and the Making of America, 1730-1865" n.d.). The same could be said about World War I. World War II, however, is where the American public saw the biggest shift in how they received their information. This time brought about a change, for as the technology advanced so did news distribution. In order to ensure the American people had any type of validated information on the world war, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Office of War Information, or OWI, through executive order 9182 on June 13, 1942 (P. W. Stewart 2016).

The American people would attend cinemas to see governmental films on the war, and the OWI controlled all of the vetted information. The different companies that worked for the OWI system, called "United News," were permitted to send two civilian camera

crews to heavy combat areas to capture images. The footage would then be sent to the War Department, which was tasked with reviewing what type of images would be permitted and what would be censored (P. W. Stewart 2016). The editing could take weeks, even months, to complete, so many times the public was watching old footage that did not properly dictate where in the war the military stood. Aside from those government run films, citizens would also watch Hollywood films that depicted some type of war story. These movies were also created through famous producers, such as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Koppes and Black 1977). While there were issues with the type of content Hollywood could show, the underlying fact is during World War II the government had a monopoly on any type of war imaging and discussion in cinemas and on the radio, thus creating a clear form of manipulation that showed the American people the brighter side of the war compared to the mass casualties in both theaters of operation.

However, the Vietnam War brought about a new type of media portrayal that changed how the news function upon dealing with the government's interpretation of the war events. Vietnam became known as the first televised war, because it allowed the American people to see the events unfold in front of them, unedited, as it truly happened (Mandelbaum 1982). The American people were no longer subjected the manipulation of the government, but now shown what the mass media believed was more accurate.

## **Public's Feelings Up To 1968**

It is no secret that the Vietnam War was known for its unpopularity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 1960s in general is a decade when most Americans learn about the struggles

the United States was facing both internationally and domestically. Therefore, instead of learning about the war as a whole, people tend to focus on the vast amount of student demonstrations and disparaging media coverage. However, people generally forget the widespread support for the war prior to 1968. Even though modern day views the war negatively, it does not represent the entirety of the public's feelings about it. Therefore, it is important that when we address the Vietnam War, we take the time to study not only the latter half but also the earlier portions of it to see how the public supported military actions. Then, we can move on and see how exactly the public influenced the foreign policy towards Vietnam over the years due to an increased unpopular view.

Public support on Vietnam is very difficult to track within the first few years of the war because it was not very public to the American people. Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy began the military involvement on the Vietnamese Peninsula through the deployment of American troops from 1955 to 1963. Originally, the people knew of some type of involvement and inclusion of military advisors and small portion of troops, but it was not until roughly 200,000 troops were sent under President Lyndon B. Johnson to Vietnam in 1965 did the people begin to formulate ideas on American involvement (Lunch and Sperlich 1979). Previously, after Kennedy's assassination in 1963, the American people knew so little about the war efforts that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara advised Johnson to sparsely acknowledge Vietnam to the public, even though there was a subtle increase in more military and economic resources (Sobel 2001). As the escalation against North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front increased, so did the public's interest, causing a desire for more information on the war efforts (Sobel 2001; Lunch and Sperlich 1979). However, 1967 still found a majority of the American public

avored the increasing military efforts (Appleton 1966; Lunch and Sperlich 1979; Sobel 2001).

Johnson used the uninformed public to his advantage as he deployed more troops every year. This escalation, documented in the Pentagon Papers, found the President called up an extra 262,000 men to prepare for military action along with an extension of a terms of service, keeping those serving for longer (Gelb 1971). This 1965 recommendation increase troops in Vietnam to over five-hundred thousand. Despite the American people technically having the majority of support of the escalation, it was found that this began the slow trend in increasing opposition towards Johnson and the war efforts.

The support garnished under Johnson's administration demonstrated the public preferred policies that sought a quick military victory, but it was believed the public wanted to limit American involvement in Vietnam (Appleton 1966). Ultimately, there was a divide between policy makers, in which those who favored the war became known as "hawks", and those opposing the war "doves." This rift may have started the preliminary feelings of uneasiness towards the war. Unfortunately, there was no bridge linking these two ideas, and a divide furthered between the "doves" and "hawks." These sides also caused a rift between what opinions were heard. In the early 1960s, "hawks" were more likely to have the support of the elites, while the "doves" were only represented through opinion polls (Berinsky 2004). However, in the opening decade of the war, the public was more likely to support the "hawks" ideas towards the war. In a 1966 Gallup poll, seen in Figure 2.01, 47% of American adults sided with the "hawks" while only 26% with the "doves" (Saad 2016). However, the doves' voices were echoed more after a change in elite opinion. This information implies opinions were generated around and tended to follow elite thinking.

[Insert Figure 2.01]

## **The Change in Public Opinion: February 1968**

In a poll that tracked public opinion on determining whether or not Vietnam as a mistake, according to Figure 2.02, the beginning of September 1965 and end of February 1968 found overall support that it was not a mistake to enter Vietnam, as seen in Figure 2.02 (Sobel 2001). However, favorability gradually changed from support to withdrawal. While it was noted that the public would believe and support President Johnson's decisions if the public believed it represented their concerns (Appleton 1966), that view ultimately disappeared, and anti-war sentiments slowly emerged. The second half of the Vietnam War brought about a type of resistance to foreign policy the United States government never witnessed before. This resistance resulted in eleven different protests across college campuses between 1965 and 1970 (Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999). The protests did not cease there, however, and continued for several more years until the war officially ended on April 30, 1975, when North Vietnamese tanks entered the Saigon Presidential Palace ("Milestones: 1969–1976 - Office of the Historian" n.d.).

[Insert Figure 2.02]

To the American government, the sudden outrage that erupted across the nation seemed random. However, that was not entirely the case. Upon looking closer at Figure

2.02, one can see the slow regression the public had on their opinions, showing an increase in opposition. Very slowly, starting as far back as 1965, there have been records of college campuses protesting. Beginning in 1965, professors at colleges and universities would have a “teach-in”, which would prompt students to discuss and resist the Vietnam War (Sobel 2001). These small anti-war expressions slowly crept around the United States for several years before any other type of resistance arose. The year 1967 saw mass demonstrations in New York City and San Francisco, afterwards prompting President Johnson to acknowledge something must be done to keep the public on his side (Sobel 2001).

Unfortunately for the president, a large military event occurred that secured the demise of American support on the war. The Tet Offensive, carried out early in 1968, sparked new feelings among the American people because of what the government stated. Originally the government and major news networks would televise how successful the American troops have been and how weak the North Vietnamese were, but when Viet Cong guerillas and the North Vietnamese army spontaneously attacked Saigon and other American military bases, the people began to question that reliability. Tet ultimately ended in an American military victory, as the Viet Cong were routed, but that did not matter to the general public (“U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War: The Tet Offensive, 1968” n.d.). The public was focused on how a supposedly weak enemy could launch an offensive that almost ended the war.

In what defined the legacy of the Vietnam War, American college students began to openly resist the war in a variety of ways. As time in the war increased, so did the students’ opposition. They would march at rallies or burn their draft cards in solidarity to show their staunch unwillingness to fight to the government. At times, the protests were so large and



potentially dangerous the national guard was deployed to prevent any type of harmful action, however that approach had consequences. In 1970, the national guard was deployed to a Kent State University student protest. Because of nervousness about the size of the protest, the guardsmen opened fire on the students, killing four (Lewis and Hensley 1998). The protest's impact was so large that it caused more campuses to have similar events. Even though there was already a constant and consistent decrease in support, events such as the Kent State shooting prompted more outbreaks that ensured the government knew the opinion of the people. The next three years brought about further protests, and the American people split into either support or opposition to the war. Their collective voices reached the ears of Congress, convincing many policymakers that the war was not worth the costs.

## **Media's Impact on the Vietnam War**

As previously discussed, the Vietnam War was known as the first televised war. Originally, much of the early footage shown on televisions in the early 1960s were replicas of the upbeat, winning the war type info as shown during World War II (Hallin n.d.). This was largely due to the fact that television networks were wary in presenting any type of graphic imaging. Some of their footage included combat, however this was mainly of marines shooting into the woods at an unseen foe (Mandelbaum 1982). This allowed for the governmental films and edits to remain the primary source of information. However, this all gradually changed as the course of the war continued. As to be discussed in this section, there were several key outbreaks that prompted major news networks to bypass governmental

filters and instead project their own interpretation of events, aiding the shift in public opinion towards the war.

There were certain events that contributed to the downfall of the war that could be the cause of the mass media. One of the first instances, which ended in the absolute destruction of a village, Cam Ne, was aired without any type of governmental editing. In 1965, a CBS news team, headed by anchorman Walter Cronkite and correspondent Morley Safer, witnessed an incident where United States marines unnecessarily burned a town to the literal ground. This town, Cam Ne, had no involvement in the war, but after Cronkite and his fellow CBS correspondents were fired upon during a visit, the marines then burned everything (Brinkley 2012). Safer caught the events on camera and immediately sent it to the main headquarters in New York where it was aired that night. The White House wanted CBS correspondent Safer fired for filming this act because it brought about negative opinions towards the military, but the news station kept him because it showed the public what was actually happening (Brinkley 2012).

Three years later, 1968 saw three major events that ultimately ensured the public opposition for the war would fall. In February, Cronkite voiced his own opinion of what the outcome of the war will bring in his national broadcast titled "Report from Vietnam, Who, What, When, Where, and Why?" (Brinkley 2012, 369). During the broadcast, Cronkite stated "For it seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate" (Brinkley 2012, 378). Afterwards, President Johnson knew that his public support for the war was officially over and announced he would not run for re-election. However, the biggest reaction the president had was when he stated, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America" (Carlson and Berkowitz 2012, 417). The greatest

importance of this statement is clear submission of a United States President to that of a news source. Before this event, the nation never saw a president succumb to popular opinion, much less a news source, and fully admit that they could no longer have support because one event. By not fighting Cronkite and declaring his statement as incorrect, Johnson gave up and admitted the war could not be won.

The second event in 1968 was Vietnamese Colonel Nguyen Ngoc Loan's execution of a Viet Cong guerilla in the middle of the street after the Tet Offensive (Hallin n.d.). This iconic photo, taken by Associated Press photographer Eddie Adams, was displaced across countless newspapers including the New York Times and Associated Press (Astor 2018). The impact this particular photograph had was incredible, because it showed the brutality of the war. Here, an unarmed, handcuffed Viet Cong guerilla was executed swiftly. According to the rules of the Geneva Convention, an execution can only be carried out through a death sentence via court (Red Cross, n.d.). Therefore, upon the notice and recognition that Loan only approached the captive and executed him, there is a clear violation of the convention, which showed the American people the sheer brutality of war that was occurring. This photo only empowered the war opposition movement.

Only a month later in March, United States Army troops committed one of the greatest, and most infamous, massacres at My Lai, furthering Johnson's War as bad press, a wrong decision, and the war's overall brutishness. Military personnel entered My Lai on a peaceful March day, yet the days end found countless civilian casualties. Ordered to the surrounding area because of a report stated there was a strong Viet Cong presence was there, the soldiers ended up murdering over 500 innocent men, women, and children (History.com Editors 2009). While the news networks did not explicitly witness these events, a soldier

who was present did not participate, leaked the story to the press, which then covered the court martials of the men in command (PBS n.d.). After the news investigation was complete and the photographs taken by Sergeant Ronald Haeberle surfaced, the public reacted negatively and continued their opposition. Once this barbarous act was aired on television and read about in newspapers, the American people kept their strong opinions about ending American involvement in the war.

[Insert Figure 2.03]

One chart that helps demonstrate the severe trend of opposition is Figure 2.03. This chart graphs the confidence in military leaders over time as well as the public's view on whether Vietnam was a mistake. As one can see, there are gradual trends in the military leaders' confidence decreasing and the view of Vietnam as a mistake increasing, with these points intersecting at 1968. Upon the noticing this intersection, it is noted that the public and military leaders had the same general feelings that only decreased steadily, but more rapidly, as the war continued. Upon the events that secured the downfall of the war, nothing could have been done that would alter the military or public opinion. For both, the war was over.

Overall, the media was incredibly active in the capturing of Vietnam footage. Their desire to extract accurate information for their viewers greatly conflicted with the government's intention on maintaining domestic support. Therefore, it is found that many major declines in support are relative to some of the major events that occurred. Scholar John E. Mueller analyzed and tested the Gallup data shown in Figure 2.02 with his own collected data in order to see the natural progression. What he found, shown in Figure 2.04,

is the steady continuation of public opposition that swept the nation (Mueller 1971). Another aspect the chart shows in the two major drops that occurred in the post-Tet period, supporting the idea that the culminating events of 1968 were the final events needed to secure the notion that the war will not regain popularity.

[Insert Figure 2.04]

## **Consequences of the Vietnam War**

The Vietnam War has left a legacy that was riddled with negativity. It existed in a world that was creating ways to produce information that was not subjected to a governmental filter. The major news networks now worked for themselves, gathering information to accurately inform the citizens of the real events that were unfolding. The time for governmental manipulation was over. Thus, the Vietnam War left several legacies, some that have continued to modern day, and some that ended at the end of the century. This section dives into two of the consequences and how they relate to today's society with the public's observance of foreign policy.

The first consequence was the origination of the Vietnam Syndrome. This feature stated that the United States will never enter a war without a clear objective, sufficient military force, and an overall, combined support of both Congress and the American public (Kalb 2001). No scholars are certain where this originated from, but its overall effect constrained presidents in pursuing prolonged conflict. Generally, the media has been attributed with causing much of the syndrome aspects, such as demonstrating public support

and providing the nation with the government's objective, thus promoting the idea that the media had a large say in determining support or opposition for a military action. However, the Syndrome ended in 1991 with a victory during the Gulf War. The media played a large role in praising the military, which was heavily financed and prepared for a quick victory (Sobel 2001). President George H. W. Bush calculated all of his moves to ensure that the public would support him if he did in fact order an invasion. Therefore, upon having the approval of Congress, the public, and with good media showing, the Gulf War was highly successful (Sobel 2001). After this war, the United States was at ease with the Vietnam Syndrome, as the US military had a successful invasion.

The second major consequence that resulted from the Vietnam War is how Vietnam overall served a critical juncture of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. As seen throughout this chapter, the American public originally went from a misinformed, not caring nation to a fully invested, oppose the war reaction. This twenty-year war brought about a new type of attention to foreign policy that never addressed earlier. Because of how the media was able to bring raw content to American homes, the people found it easier to have an opinion on the type of content they were being shown. Also, the steady decline in favorability towards this war was the first time it was seen, and well documented, in the history of United States military actions. While there were some unpopular wars in the past, the Vietnam War paved the way for the American people to speak out and protest decisions they did not favor. The consequence of this juncture has extended to modern day, where the public has a seemingly similar response to the policies that have been implemented in the Middle East.

## **Chapter III: President Bush**

Nearly thirty years after the Vietnam War, a tragic event struck the heart of the United States. On September 11, 2001, terrorists associated with the group known as al Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and flew them into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. The September 11 attacks thrust the United States into new types of policies the nation had never before adopted. This chapter will discuss the policies the Bush administration pursued in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran, how the media covered these events, and public opinion on these policies. It will argue that public opinion did not affect any presidential foreign policy decisions, and that the media supported the policies until the military campaigns continued for a prolonged period. Media coverage on Iran was shallow because of the public's disinterest.

### **Policy Initiatives in the Middle East**

President Bush initiated the policies with which most Americans are now familiar when dealing with terroristic organizations. The September 11 attacks created a new world for the presidential administration that did not involve waging conflict against traditional nation states, but rather invisible organizations stretched across multiple countries. Overall, Bush's policies were largely structured on combatting terror organizations within Afghanistan and fighting or limiting nuclear growth in Iraq and Iran. This was the first time in many years since the United States was last attacked at home, which is why the policies were very militarily involved. The goal in defeating terrorism and limiting an adversaries'

nuclear growth was designed to protect the American people. The policies Bush pursued in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran will be respectively expanded upon below.

### *Afghanistan*

Contrary to what the American people believe, the United States has not technically been at “war” with terrorism. The phrase “war on terror” was derived from President Bush during his address to the nation following the September 11 attacks. During this address, the president stated: “We will stand together to win the **war against terrorism**” (Bush, n.d.), thus introducing this concept to the American people. Since then, US involvement in the Middle East has constantly and consistently been referred to as either the “war on terror” or “global war on terror.” The truth behind what would become one of the longest “wars” the United States has conducted was technically a simple authorization of military force. The joint-session resolution in no way declares war against global terrorists, but rather states:

That the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons (*Public Law 107-40* 2001)

This distinction is incredibly important because it allows us to understand the United States Afghanistan invasion policy at the basic level. It is first crucial to understand that it was technically not war. For the remainder of the thesis, I will use the phrase “authorization of force” to refer to the United States war on terror.

The authorization of force is the first policy President Bush introduced towards the Middle East following the September 11 attacks. Ultimately, it allowed for a reallocation of



military resources to the Middle East in an effort to prevent more terror attacks on the American homeland. Stopping foreign terrorism became the priority for the Bush administration because of his passion for protecting the American people. This is noted in his speeches, for he always emphasized his willingness and determination to do everything necessary to protect the American people. One statement that echoed this devotion came from his address to a joint-session of Congress, in which he stated: “I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle of freedom and security for the American people” (Bush, n.d., 73). The invasion of Afghanistan lasted three months, but the determination of protecting the people from terrorism spread to Iraq (“A Timeline of the U.S. War in Afghanistan” n.d.). However, President Bush was not ceasing his efforts in Afghanistan to help the nation rebuild itself from Taliban control.

The second major policy effort that was conducted after the United States military invasion was pumping funds into Afghanistan to rebuild their nation. While there are different theories on the motives behind this funding, ultimately President Bush pursued a policy in which he was determined to create a democratic government within the turmoil of the failed Taliban state. Originally, the Taliban instituted dangerous reforms and laws for the people who were constantly at risk of punishments for not behaving like a Muslim should in the eyes of the Taliban (Laub 2014). Building a democratic institution that was close to mirroring the American system was thought to be a more stable way of creating freedoms for the Afghan people. However, the Taliban was never fully expelled from Afghanistan, as military operations continued throughout the Bush presidency, and many regions were still subjected to Taliban influence and governance (“A Timeline of the U.S. War in Afghanistan” n.d.). Creating a government that could successfully repel the Taliban would have also

allowed the American military and advisors to leave. Thus, President Bush pursued a policy of aid that would allow the United Nations to help rebuild the nation.

The invasion of Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime and the restricting of the Afghan government were the two policies that served as an umbrella for the future presidents. More military action was taken throughout the presidency on perceived Taliban hideouts, and aid was distributed throughout different sections within the government (Suhrke 2011). The goal in Afghanistan was to create a make shift democracy that would allow for the people to have the same freedoms and liberties as American citizens experience. However, Bush only began the restructuring of Afghanistan. Most of the president's attention turned to Iraq, leading a majority of time ensuring the Taliban did not successfully regain control of Afghanistan.

### *Iraq*

The most prominent policy the Bush administration instituted in Iraq became known as the Bush Doctrine. It had four parts that were the backbone of what the Bush administration believed: 1) the internal actions of a state drove the external actions; 2) preventive war; 3) unilateralism; and 4) the United States must serve as a hegemonic power (Jervis 2003). These four aspects not only drove the American political engine as it worked to dismantle the Iraqi dictatorship, but also served as the major factors driving American involvement during their occupation. The Bush administration believed that the internal actions of a government reflected their foreign policy; or believing a tyrannical government would pursue tyrannical foreign policy. Thus, as Iraq was a major power in the Middle East

and served as a mentor to others in the region, it was concluded that there should be an attempt to create a democracy within Iraq for two reasons (Jervis 2003). The first was to show the world that the United States was determined to see the abolition of tyranny. Second, President Bush saw the resolution of the Iraq conflict as a first step to creating a more peaceful world. If there was one thing about which Bush was most passionate, it was taking the measures needed to promote freedom and peace throughout the world (Jervis 2003).

The second pillar was a willingness to engage in preventive war if the situation deemed necessary. Preventive war is attacking a nation before it has the opportunity to strike the United States or its allies (Gregg II 2016). With regard to Iraq, the goal was to eradicate terrorism and the assumed weapons of mass destruction. Using this type of preemptive attack is risky, as with Iraq it was unclear whether or not the nation had nuclear weapons, and even if it did, whether it would actually use them (Jervis 2003). Therefore, as a protective means, and still very wary of Middle Eastern nations because of the September 11 attacks, the invasion of Iraq continued on the grounds of preventive war. The third pillar is often the most contested of the Bush Doctrine, as it is purely unilateralism in regard to worldly dealings. While the United States' intentions were clear, another aspect of this policy demonstrated to the world that there was one plan of action that would be followed: the American plan. There was the overall consensus within the Bush administration that this authorization of force and, ultimately, the global war on terror would be led by the might of the American military, and no country or international organization could deter it (Jervis 2003).

The last pillar is American hegemony. This idea is not merely just a policy, but also serves as more of an idea. It is described as the United States, being the greatest power, must act differently than other nations that are not as powerful. In one sense, it seems as if the United States is now taking a position of becoming so powerful that it would be impossible for other nations to come close to rivaling it, especially with regard to its nuclear capabilities (Jervis 2003). It seems logical for the greatest power to have the most lethal arsenal, yet relatively dangerous at the same time. However, when it came to operationalize this idea in Iraq, the American power showed itself not only through quick military victory, but also the power it had over the country during its occupation. As a result of “winning,” the American government found itself occupying Iraq, dictating its new, governmental future. American hegemony is more than just the projection of military power, it involves controlling the nation and the gears within it.

The second policy instituted in Iraq was the effort to stabilize the nation. Once the United States overthrew the regime, it was now tasked with the challenge of replacing it. An interim government was formed, and steps were taken to create a democracy. The technical occupation of Iraq ended June 28, 2004, however numerous American soldiers still remained within the country in order to help the Iraqis safeguard the stability of their new government (“George W. Bush - Key Events” 2016). Due to Iraq’s ethnic and religious diversity, the goal was to create a government that would be able to incorporate all people without leaving one susceptible to unfairness by the others. While it was unclear at the time how long the process would take, it was incredibly important Iraq transitioned to democracy because of its centrality for Middle Eastern politics.

*Iran*

The United States relationship with Iran during the Bush administration began relatively well, with the former helping American efforts in rebuilding the Afghanistan government post invasion. The relation was so strong in building an Afghan government Iran persuaded many Afghans to back Hamid Karzai, the American selection for president (Hadley n.d.). However, Iran was known for its attempts of creating and refining weapons grade uranium in their search to build a nuclear weapon and also its training and funding of Islamic militants throughout the Middle East. President Bush decided to not engage Iran militarily as he did in Afghanistan and Iraq and decided to impose sanctions upon and create deals in order to combat their nuclear pursuance. Ultimately, Bush these sanctions and deals that were designed to circumscribe both the Iranian enrichment program and the country's support of terrorism throughout the region.

One of the major policy initiatives Bush pursued towards Iran was pressing for a nuclear deal that would incorporate and allow the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, to review their nuclear plants and determine if their nuclear program was in fact creating nuclear power for the citizens and not for weapons (Hadley n.d.). This agreement was constructed to give the IAEA better access to Iranian black sites that were supposedly used and designed for researching and developing weapons grade uranium for nuclear weapons. Originally some of the first rounds of negotiations failed, which prompted harder stances to be taken. Ultimately, the Bush administration, with help from the United Nations, applied sanctions on those partaking in nuclear pursuance and froze the assets of those who helped arm the Iranians (Hadley n.d.). However, the United

States applied additional sanctions against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp and state-owned banks. This action was close to a frontal attack against the Iranian government, as it limited the Iranian government's control on their own citizens (Hadley n.d.).

The nuclear policy Bush pursued with Iran pertained to the latter's involvement in promoting state-sponsored terrorism. Iran was widely known to be among the main supporters of the terrorist organization Hezbollah, which is one of the greatest threats to Israel, a key American ally. It was believed Iran's support of terrorism was a means of rejecting Bush's sanctions (Byman 2006). However, Bush made it clear he would not tolerate nations that sponsored terrorism. Not engaging Iran militarily, as he did in Afghanistan and Iraq, because of their involvement with terrorism demonstrated a new style of approaching nations sponsoring terroristic organizations. Iran was included in the administration's global "war on terror" because of their support of Hezbollah, however their approach to restraining that involvement varied from previous policy.

## **Media Impact**

The beginning of the "war on terror" was unique, largely because no one knew what the future held. The government, citizens, and media were now wading through uncharted waters, unsure about what next to expect. The media covered the 'war' as they saw it, showing the American people what was occurring overseas. They proved to be the primary source of information for the public, letting them know how the policies were enacted and the success they yielded. This section will seek to understand the media's role and determine

if it may have played a role in altering public opinion or served as means of obtaining information.

### *Afghanistan*

The invasion of Afghanistan received widespread attention from the media because of the 9/11 attacks. Day after day, the media portrayed images and videos of planes striking the towers, the civilians on the street running from the horrors, and people jumping out of the World Trade Center as an alternative to burning. Therefore, when it came time for Bush to declare his authorization of force, the media greatly promoted the announcement, helping stir the public into supporting a foreign war (Kellner 2004). It is surprising at how quickly the news media reacted to the terrorist attacks and how determined they were to endorse retaliatory military action. Some outlets created their own slogans calling for wars, and others calling for large, immediate action designed to quickly defeat the terrorists (Kellner 2004). Another story that prompted the media's support for the military action occurred when the White House released a statement how the invasion of Afghanistan was also designed to help Afghani women (Berry 2003). The media used the women's plight as a means of covering the actual conflict that was occurring in Afghanistan. They manipulated the people in supporting the effort because one of the primary focuses was protecting women (Korn 2011).

However, despite the extensive coverage supporting military action in Afghanistan, the news coverage largely faded. Towards the tail end of Bush's presidency, the Middle Eastern focus was primarily on Iraq. This shift began after the initial Iraq invasion largely

because of the belief that Iraq captivated reporters. There were more combat, troops, and general action, which is why larger news outlets sent more reporters there (Korn 2011).

There was also the thought that Afghanistan in general had complicated motivations, dangerous terrain and areas for reporters, and was too expensive to cover effectively. Even still, it was generally hard for the media to exhibit the events in Afghanistan because the public had primarily turned its attention to Iraq (Folkenflik 2009).

### *Iraq*

As we saw briefly above, media coverage of Iraq steadily increased after the 2003 invasion. Ultimately, it was resulted in most outlets validating military action. Various news sources agreed with Bush's statements concerning Iraq's nuclear weapons without investigating their veracity (Kurtz 2013; The Daily Take Team 2013). Iraq became incredibly popular, and the thought of overthrowing a dictator who had nuclear weapons brought the Americans together. The media never bothered to investigate the claims made because they did not think to do so. The outlets were subjected to groupthink and never wanted to worry about any other opinions opposing the invasion (Kurtz 2013). However, coverage did change as the years wore on.

After the negativity began, the Bush administration became worried about the press only underscoring "bad news" (O'Hanlon 2006). The thought that continued showing of violence and destruction overseas would cause the public to develop negative views arose within the administration (O'Hanlon 2006). In the latter years of the Bush presidency, the media spent a lot of time covering Iraq because of the number of military actions taking



place. Iraq was seen as more important than Afghanistan, and many outlets relocated some Afghanistan reporters to Iraq (Folkenflik 2009). Most of the coverage shifted to violence, the exorbitant cost of the action, and disagreements among different Iraqi leaders, which demonstrated rifts within their government about their plan following the conclusion of military action (O'Hanlon 2006). Therefore, while the media originally supported military action, it gradually shifted its views after the elongated campaign began having more negative than positive results.

### *Iran*

Media coverage of Bush's Iran dealings was scant. This demonstrates that while Bush may have made it a priority in limiting Iran's nuclear ambitions, the media was too involved with other events. However, based on some of the media outlets that spoke of Bush's pursuit of an Iran deal, the sources were neither supportive nor critical, they simply informed the general public of what was occurring. PBS covered a fair portion of Bush's Iran relationship, offering details on what was attempted, background information on Iran, how they affected the United States, and explained certain sanctions (Hadley 2010). The reasons as to why there was a general lack of media coverage undoubtedly include as the media's preoccupation with Iraq, a factor that will be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.

### **Public Opinion**

Determining how public opinion affected Bush's policies is important because it may serve as the beginning of a trend in the public's influence on foreign policy. The public began the war with Bush, and after seeing the media's coverage of it, it is theorized the public was largely supportive of the initial invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The people were angry about the September 11 attacks and wanted to respond, which is why I am theorizing overwhelming support at the beginning of the presidency. However, it is also expected to see a shift in how the public reacted as the war continued, for as we learned about Vietnam, support waned with prolonged military presence. It is theorized the public would largely support the deals with Iran, as they would prefer to see sanctions placed on an adversary who was bent on acquiring nuclear weapons.

### *Afghanistan*

[Insert Figure 3.01]

[Insert Figure 3.02]

In the first figure CBS News asked respondents whether they approved or disapproved of military action in Afghanistan in October 2001 and between September 19 and 23, 2009. The 2001 chart, labeled as Figure 3.01, noticed that overall, 90% of respondents supported military action in Afghanistan, while only 6 percent disapproved, and 4 percent did not know (De Pinto 2009). When contrasted with the September 2009 chart, labeled Figure 3.02, we see a very clear drop in approval and rise in public disapproval. At the end of the Bush

presidency, 47% of respondents approved of the military action in Afghanistan, 42% disapproved, and 11% did not know (De Pinto 2009).

[Insert Figure 3.03]

Another figure that demonstrates public attitudes towards the affairs in Afghanistan was conducted by Gallup, which also found a steady decline in support over time. Figure 3.03 observes whether Americans viewed sending troops to Afghanistan as a mistake, and in 2002 a vast majority, 89%, declared it was not a mistake. However, as the years and issues progressed, 2009 saw 66% believing it was not a mistake (Newport 2014). This drop is not as significant as the one CBS discovered, however the relationship between the two cannot be ignored. Even though this graph expands to 2014, for now the focus is only on the Bush administration from 2002 to 2009.

However, perhaps the most revealing graph does not come from American public opinion, but Afghani opinion. While this thesis focuses on American support or opposition for Bush policies, the results of a poll on Afghani opinion of the United States from 2005 to 2009 shows very similar regressions as that of the previous graphs. Titled Figure 3.04, in 2005, 83% of Afghan citizens were incredibly favorable of the United States. However, 2009 saw a decrease in that favorability, as 47% of the citizens now saw the United States as favorable (Langer 2009).

[Insert Figure 3.04]

*Iraq*

[Insert Figure 3.05]

[Insert Figure 3.06]

The first two figures, Figures 3.05 and 3.06 respectively, derive from a Pew Research Center study that asked American citizens two questions: if the decision to use military force in Iraq was a right or wrong decision; and if troops should pull out or stay in until the nation was stabilized (Editors of Pew Research Center 2008). This study spanned from the invasion in 2003 to the end of the presidency in 2008, and despite seeing a downward trend similar to Afghanistan, Iraq experienced a significant drop in favoritism incredibly quickly. Initially citizens supported the military as both the right decision and remaining until Iraq was stabilized, but the quick loss of support beginning roughly around 2005 causes researchers to question if there was an event that triggered a drastic change from support to opposition in Iraq.

The next figure was taken from a Gallup study that was solely designed to study American public opinion on Iraq. It asked different questions on multiple fronts, however the most important was their tally on if the American people viewed Iraq as a mistake. As can be seen from the data in Figure 3.07, the results are the same as that of the Pew studies. The trends follow the same downward slope that appears to intersect early in the Iraq campaign. When comparing it to the Afghanistan figures, the difference is very clear: Iraq

faced more unfavorability from the American people than Afghanistan. Gallup also shows that there is a strong opinion that the United States should not have entered Iraq.

[Insert Figure 3.07]

[Insert Figure 3.08]

The final public opinion chart was taken from a CBS study that asked respondents whether they believed the Iraq War was worth the costs, first in 2003 and again in 2008. Figure 3.08 has the results from the data CBS collected, with only 46% of respondents believing Iraq was worth it in 2003. While the tally drops off in 2008, with only 28% believing the war was worth the costs, the overall regression remains stagnant with all three polling sources (Dutton et al. 2014). Thus, the polls continued to find, across different surveys and agencies, that the general public had the largely same opinions on the Iraq War. The only stark difference between the CBS polls and Pew and Gallup is their close margin in 2003. Where the previous polls saw a great rift between opinion at the start of the campaign in 2003, the CBS poll found respondents were never positive about the military engagement at all.

### *Iran*

Similar to the media information, there was also a lack of polling data for Bush's Iran policy. There is some data that portray how the American public felt about Iran as nation.

Figure 3.09 demonstrates that the American people did not have a favorable view of Iran for the entirety of Bush's presidency. Following the trend from 2001 to 2008, 80% of Americans on average stated they viewed Iran unfavorably (Gallup Inc n.d.). If 80% of Americans had this view, one would assume there would be more polling on Bush's dealings with Iran. Gallup also found that in 2006, another 80% of their respondents believed Iran was creating their own nuclear weapons based on what they heard from the government (Gallup Inc n.d.). Again, 80% is a supermajority, yet Iran never seemed to take any type of spotlight within the foreign policy world in the media. However, based on the policy Bush pursued, it could be assumed he was following the public's preference in attempting to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions.

[Insert Figure 3.09]

## **Conclusion**

The information presented in this chapter demonstrates certain transition periods that occurred during the Bush administration. For Afghanistan and Iraq, both the media and public supported the military campaigns designed to counter those who committed the September 11 attacks. However, as time progressed, both the media and the public grew tired of military actions, and negative views slowly increased. In general, Afghanistan was largely more favored than Iraq because of the direct relationship the former had to the 9/11 attacks, as the graphs demonstrated a large majority viewed a military campaign in Afghanistan was the correct course of action until the Bush presidency ended. The only

astonishing realization occurred when the lack of coverage began because of the new mission in Iraq. This fact was never considered in an original hypothesis because it never seemed plausible. At the time, it was well known that the terrorists arrived from Afghanistan, yet a nation that had no affiliation to al Qaeda received more troops and combat. Afghanistan faded from the media's spotlight and only resurfaced during Obama's presidency.

Iraq saw the distinct shift from support to opposition from both the media and public, as was apparent through discoveries of the media broadly showing negative effects of the "war" and the drastic change in opinion over the years. Nevertheless, the media could be partially blamed for misleading the public into supporting the war because it largely failed to scrutinize the main arguments Bush presented to justify his decision to invade the nation. Despite the original backing of the policy, the media realized the harsh realities of combat and strove to contain mostly negative press, which accounted for the concern within the Bush administration that the media would cause them to lose the "war." Overall, the military action continued despite failing public and media support.

As previously mentioned, Iran never had any type of real spotlight in the media's foreign policy news. A deal was attempted but never consummated, however the post-Obama deal caused news organizations to argue it was this initial push for a deal in 2006 that brought about the Iran nuclear deal (Beauchamp 2015). It is puzzling as to why Iran was not covered more, and it could be theorized that the Iraq coverage happened to overshadow Iran as well as Afghanistan. This theory could stand because the Iraq "war" distracted the media from conducting operations within the nation that caused the authorization of military force. Thus, it could be theorized that while the public was wary of Iran and Afghanistan, the media decided to not cover the policies, leading to limited polling data conducted on those nations.

After noticing the media and public's response in the different nations, we must now address the overall effect the media and public had on foreign policy. Ultimately, the media largely served as a means of bolstering public support for Bush's foreign policy. While there was negative coverage and press, this does not outweigh the large call to arms the media promoted in Afghanistan and Iraq after September 11, 2001. Iran's media coverage does not affect the overall coverage during Bush because the press barely covered the issues associated with the nation. The public did not affect any of the foreign policies because they supported the original policies President Bush created. When the public began expressing opposition to his policies, Bush did not alter any of them, which is why they had no effect.

There is one main reason as to why the public and media strongly supported the initial invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq: the rally around the flag effect. Often associated with the Iraq War, this effect emphasizes that the American people strongly supported President Bush in a time of national tragedy and crisis (Lindsay 2003). The public wanted to respond because they were directly attacked and may have felt as if they had a duty to protect their liberties and have revenge for all the innocent deaths. However, according to the opinion data, the effect was fairly short-lived, as public support for the conflicts drastically decreased.

Researchers also could never have predicted the events that occurred following the invasion and overthrowing of Saddam Hussein's Iraq government. Ultimately, a power vacuum consumed the nation, with multiple factions fighting for control. This led to the rise in the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, which ended up prolonging the American presence in Iraq for years to come. Researchers tend to blame the initial American invasion for this



catastrophe, as it caused presidents Obama and Trump a new type of military campaign to confront upon their ascension into office.

Despite these effects, it will be interesting to see if this trend continues over the course of the next two presidencies, or if they will yield vastly different results.

## **Chapter IV: President Obama**

President Barack Obama assumed office at a very difficult time. The previous administration left behind a very stressful situation in the Middle East, as Obama was tasked with maintaining stability in both Afghanistan and Iraq and the decision about whether to continue the previous administration's policies or develop his own. This chapter will analyze Obama's policies in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran and assess whether the American public supported or opposed his policies, and whether or not the media influenced its views. Overall, it finds that President Obama's policies were similar to that of Bush's, they were merely implemented in different countries. Also, similar to President Bush, it finds that the media had a generally negative impact on the public support for policies, yet it did not affect any of Obama's policies.

### **Policy Initiatives in the Middle East**

The general policies President Obama pursued varied from one country to the next in the Middle East. However, in retrospect, it is clear that they followed a similar path: limit American involvement in conflict zones and protect America's allies. The president did not favor an American military presence in the region because of its unpopularity in the previous administration and made it clear that he would withdraw the troops as quickly as possible. Obama also wanted to create stable governments, largely in Afghanistan and Iraq, so he promised more funding to those nations as a means of ensuring their governments were strong and protected from potential terrorist threats. Lastly, President Obama was wary of

the nuclear developments occurring in the Middle East, and so he desired new policies and reforms that would bring about a deal to ensure no nuclear weapons would be pursued, which would cost more division and power struggles within the region. Below, we will discuss these policies in detail, first beginning with Afghanistan, followed by Iraq and Iran respectively.

### *Afghanistan*

Much of President Obama's focus in the Middle East was about stabilizing and restructuring the new government of Afghanistan. For comparison, President Bush's Iraq was President Obama's Afghanistan. Each had their own goals and beliefs about what should be done in a specific country and each devoted considerable effort and time in attempting to create their vision. However, President Bush left Obama with a difficult situation to address, as Afghanistan was facing financial difficulties and still at risk of persistent Taliban attacks. The country was crumbling under the weight of lack of stability to maintain any sort of survival, and the people were still at risk of Taliban retaking the nation. Therefore, in order to ensure the Afghan regime would not crumble during his presidency, and after a lot time and money were spent restructuring the nation's governmental organization, President Obama instituted policies in Afghanistan similar to Bush's Iraq.

First, Afghanistan was the main target because the Authorization of the Use of Military Force dictated that any organization or nation that played any type of role in 9/11 attacks was subject to American military involvement. Therefore, Obama deployed 21,000 additional troops to Afghanistan to ensure neither al Qaeda nor the Taliban retook power

(Nelson 2016). However, despite dispatching these troops, it was recognized there should be a new course of action that would allow the Afghani people to defeat the Taliban on their own and establish their own form of democratic government. Thus, similar to Bush's Iraq policy, Obama authorized a surge of soldiers deployed to Afghanistan, above that of the original 21,000 there, that were meant to train the Afghan military to be able to defeat the Taliban themselves (Nelson 2016). This surge skyrocketed American military presence in the nation, which also gave the impression that maybe the original work of Bush did not actually complete the mission. One issue that also arose out of this policy was the promise President Obama made in regard to withdrawing the military from the Middle Eastern region. Obama created the idea a stronger military presence was needed to train the Afghans to fight so the United States could finally leave. The President did keep his promise and began the withdrawal of American forces in 2011 ("A Timeline of the U.S. War in Afghanistan" n.d.). Even though the American military never fully left Afghanistan under his administration, this act potentially demonstrated his policy was successful so there was less need for an American military presence.

The area where the initial policy differed from the previous administration was the pursuance of more multilateralism compared to unilateralism. The Obama administration was highly pro-internationalist, emphasizing the need and involvement of international organizations along with nations. Therefore, in order to have a more stable nation, Obama pushed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to assist in the building of non-military assets, such as security and police forces, to which NATO supplied roughly 5000 troops ("A Timeline of the U.S. War in Afghanistan" n.d.). Along with that promise was the overall agreement among NATO countries that Afghanistan would be fully returned to the people's

rule at the end of 2014 (“A Timeline of the U.S. War in Afghanistan” n.d.). More funds were also distributed to the Afghani government, despite wariness of the nation’s leader, Hamid Karzai. Unfortunately for the lawmakers, they had no choice but to send those funds and hope they were being allocated properly.

The funding was one of the “smaller”<sup>4</sup> policies Obama implemented along with the overall withdrawal was an aid package that culminated to \$1 billion a year to assist Afghani civilians, beginning in 2009, and lasting for the duration of his presidency (Miller 2016). This was a continuation of the aid programs President Bush formed and was done because of the amount of help the nation needed in forming their own government and was separate from the other international funds Afghanistan was receiving. These funds were designed to fight corruption and help the nation grow, but there was no way to track where exactly the funds were going, thus causing distrust of the government. In fact, so much aid was sent to Afghanistan that 90% of their annual income was foreign aid (Suhrke 2011). Ultimately, much of these funds contributed to political corruption within the government (Suhrke 2011). As Obama’s presidency came to a close, the situation in Afghanistan did not improve as the government was not stable, and the Taliban were still very prevalent.

### *Iraq*

The case of Iraq was far more complicated than that of Afghanistan. Initially, Obama wanted all of the military troops out of the country as soon as possible, but subsequent events complicated thwarted that goal. When the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) entered the

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<sup>4</sup> Smaller is in quotations not because the monetary value of \$1 billion a year is small, but because it is a relatively small policy to pursue and implement amidst the crisis occurring.

world stage, the American military could not withdraw, and Obama found himself in another conflict. The brutality in which ISIS ruled over their territory was unprecedented and caused global outrage. While there will be no discussion of any military raids in Iraq, as they do not pertain to this thesis, much of the discussion around Iraq involves the challenges Obama faced in Iraq as a result of the entrance of ISIS.

From the beginning of his presidency, Obama wanted to exit Iraq as quickly as possible and focus on Afghanistan, as he believed Afghanistan was the focal point of terrorism, (Traub 2016). Thus, 2011 saw a large American withdrawal, which left the new Iraqi government largely to defend itself. Unfortunately, the Iraq War caused a large power vacuum in the nation, allowing for any type of person or military group the possibility of assuming power. One of those groups, whose roots traced back to a member in the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan during the Soviet Union invasion of 1979, successfully invaded Iraq and established a new caliphate (Vox 2015). Most people in the United States are incredibly familiar with ISIS, largely because of how quickly they rose. With a new enemy in a nation that was seemingly rescued from the horrors of the last ruler, it appeared action had to be taken.

Thus, ISIS's rise in Iraq caused the Obama administration to rethink its strategy of complete military withdrawal from the country. When the terrorist organization finally became known as ISIS after their invasion of Iraq in 2013, more military force was deemed necessary to combat the threat. In 2015, Obama attempted to receive a separate Authorization for Use of Military Force specifically for ISIS. Originally, ISIS was aligned with al Qaeda, which is why the President was technically able to continue using military force. However, when al Qaeda denounced ISIS and stated the two were no longer affiliated

with it, the legality of the situation changed and further legal action was needed to continue the airstrikes on ISIS targets (CNN Library 2019; Acosta and Diamond 2015; Vox 2015). While no authorization was officially passed, it did not deter the American government from pursuing military action, including air strikes and special forces raids, on apparent ISIS hideouts, as Congress never objected to any of these actions. Therefore, while the Obama administration succeeded in removing ground forces from Iraq, there was essentially a resumption of military force in the area due to the new threat, making it appear as if little had changed between the Bush and Obama administrations.

### *Iran*

One of the most impactful nations within the Obama foreign policy agenda was Iran. Their ambitious pursuit of nuclear weapons continued into his administration, sparking international concern. In the Middle Eastern region, Iran was a dominant force that aspired to become a nuclear power. Thus, they began creating their own nuclear programs in order to create something they were always denied. The Obama administration spent much of their time working to constrain Iraq's nuclear ambitions. Thus, much of its policy towards Iran involved finding ways of limiting the type of nuclear growth they were allowed along with restrictions on how many nuclear plants they were allowed.

Talks about a nuclear deal began in 2013, but as these complex reforms take time, the deal was not consummated until 2015. The deal primary focused around enriched uranium, the total amount, and its use. Enriched uranium is used for a variety of reasons, including electricity, but largely nuclear weapons (World Nuclear Association 2017). Thus, there were

suspicions that the Iranian government was hiding their nuclear weapons project within their nuclear energy plants. Also, the Obama administration wanted to limit the amount of enriched uranium Iran could have, because it is very difficult to track not only the amount of uranium they are currently using, but also what exactly they are using it for.

The details of the nuclear deal were as follows: Iran's stockpile of uranium was reduced by 98%, and within the remaining 2 percent, only around 3.5 percent was allowed to be enriched (BBC News 2018). Iran also had to turn some of their nuclear weapon plants into standard plants that was not capable of producing any type of weapons. They were also tasked with allowing inspections from the International Atomic Energy Agency and demonstrating that were not pursuing nuclear weapons in private (BBC News 2018). There were some benefits to Iran so things were not entirely unfair, and those mainly concerned the lifting of previous sanctions that had prevented it from selling commodities like oil, and unfreezing its foreign-based assets so it could trade internationally (BBC News 2018).

There was a sense of urgency upon creating this deal with Iran because of its negative history with the United States. Iran was very anti-Israel, and as Israel is one of the United States' closest allies, there was worry a nuclear war would break out between the two. Also, as mentioned in the last chapter, Iran was known for being a state sponsor of terrorism. Thus, having a country that was willing to export weapons to aid terrorism could alter the power dynamic within the Middle East. Obtaining nuclear weapons could potentially open up the possibility for terrorist organizations to acquire them, shifting the type of damage they could inflict, the power the organization has within the state, and also wariness in talks in attempt to learn their what their demands are and why. Therefore, obtaining a nuclear deal



that would inhibit Iran's progress was paramount, and the Obama administration greatly succeeded in this policy.

## **Media Impact**

The Obama administration received a lot of press coverage because of the public's interest in his response to events occurring in the Middle East and how his policies would differ, or be similar to, those of Bush's. Naturally there was both good and bad press, but it interesting to see the type of coverage media outlets portrayed. The American public was beginning to tire of the war that was progressing into the ten-year period (Stelter 2010), and the media coverage of the events may echo those feeling.

### *Afghanistan*

In the early years of the Obama presidency, the news coverage on Afghanistan was mostly negative because of the length of time American troops had been deployed there. Some of the large media outlets held special reports titled, "Afghanistan: Can We Win?", "Can This War be Won?", and "Why Are We in Afghanistan?" (Stelter 2010, B1). These special reports aired in the early years expressed the media's opinion on the military presence and policies involving Afghanistan. As some of these reports were aired on ABC or CBS, many people tuned in and may have agreed with the opinions the media portrayed. This negative news coverage of the military action in Afghanistan echoed the public's opinions.

There was a lot of frustration expressed across all media venues that emphasized the importance of withdrawing the troops. MSNBC news anchor Rachel Maddow had a primetime program where she stated the following, “Does the president care that the public is almost uniformly in favor of getting U.S. troops out and fast? Those numbers are much higher than they once were. But he’s not changing his plan. Does he care about public opinion on this? And if he doesn’t, why doesn’t he?” (Pew Research Center 2011). On the other side of the political spectrum, Bill O’Reilly opined that “the apathy of the American people about the theater [in Afghanistan], it’s almost like Iraq. They don’t want to hear about it anymore” (Pew Research Center 2011). These statements, spoken in 2011, the year of the beginning of the withdrawal policy, illustrate generally what the news media thought of the policies. There appeared to be a new understanding between the relationship between the government and the news, as the majority opinions of the American people were echoed in the broadcast media, stating they were together on an issue and questioning why action was not taken sooner or quicker.

However, there was also more positive news coverage that emphasized President Obama was doing a great job in his policies in Afghanistan. Much of the public understood and knew from his stances that Obama supported aiding Afghanistan in their struggle to have a sovereign nation, yet he desired a limited role for the United States military. The media assured the public an American withdrawal in Afghanistan was occurring, per their desires, even though it was moving slower than desired. Announcements of the withdrawal were made at a time when the public needed to hear good news, because the people could have been doubting whether the presidency is making decisions that represents what the people

want. Following through with the withdrawal demonstrated the administration is in fact doing what it said it would (Pew Research Center 2011).

### *Iraq*

Similar to Afghanistan, the American people were supportive of withdrawing from Iraq during the beginning of the administration. There was an overall support for this notion because of similar reasons as well. The length of the military action was exhausting the American people, so it came as no surprise when the media reported roughly 75% of Americans were pro-withdrawal two months before the last soldier left Iraq (Gustafson 2017). Aside from those brief statements, the media barely covered Iraq because the occupation was winding down.

However, one event that cast the conflict in Iraq in a negative light after military action resumed occurred when a United States Army Captain sued President Obama for waging an illegal war against ISIS. This case argued the president lacked the necessary authorization from Congress to conduct military actions against the Islamic State (Savage 2016b). Ultimately the case was thrown out because the judge ruled the Captain lacked the standing to sue and the action was matter between the executive and legislative branches, therefore making it something the court could not decide (Savage 2016a). In this particular instance, the media was stating what the events were and what occurring. While it is possible this story may have negatively impacted the public's opinions on remaining militarily involved in Iraq, there is no data to support this claim.

Much of the other media information on ISIS largely served as information on what the terrorist organization was doing. Naturally the organization was casted in a negative light, as their harsh treatment of citizens was emphasized, which may have caused animosity within the public mind.

### *Iran*

At the time of the structuring and agreement of the Iran nuclear deal, the President received a fair amount of positive press and congratulations for circumscribing the country's pursuit of nuclear weapons. However, more recently, stories on the benefits and realities of the nuclear deal have surfaced, largely when President Trump decided to withdraw from the deal.<sup>5</sup> Overall, the news media was torn between support and opposition to the nuclear deal, demonstrating a bias between different outlets. CNN reported the deal to be a success, whereas US News stated the deal was a betrayal to the Bush administration's stance on not allowing Iran to own a nuclear weapon, and arguing the deal was a threat to Israel (Glaser and Logan 2015; Zuckerman 2015). There was also the discussion from the sources that Obama lied about what the contents of the deal contained, such as giving Iran access to the United States financial system when he told Congress that was not a part of the deal (Bacon 2018). Even still, there are an equal number of sources that praise the deal for stemming Iran's nuclear growth. Therefore, the only conclusion within this policy is a divided media.

The interesting aspect behind the media coverage was the demonstration of bias on Obama's policies. A divided media could potentially lead to a divided public, which will be

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<sup>5</sup> This point will be discussed further in the chapter on President Trump. It was mentioned here as a reference to when the media decided to focus on the large pros and cons of the deal as a result of Trump's challenging it.

determined in the following section. Originally, it was believed and theorized the public would have largely supported policy that was designed to prevent a potential adversary from obtaining nuclear weapons to either sell to other nations or use for themselves. Since the current challenge to the deal President Trump created, more negative media have arisen. However, at the time of the policy enactment, the media remained divided on its success.

## **Public Opinion**

As the ten-year mark of military involvement drew closer, there are certain trends that are expected to be seen among the views of the public. Based on what scholars know of the history of the American people during wartime, it is theorized that we are nearing the point in which we will most likely find American citizens opposing the war based on the overall length and lack of any real result, similar to the Vietnam War, as discussed in Chapter II. I am theorizing this effect will be seen in both Afghanistan and Iraq, as the conflict was in those nations the longest. For Iran, it is hypothesized that the American people supported the Iran deal because of the limitations it placed on a nation pursuing nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup>

### *Afghanistan*

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<sup>6</sup> It is recognized that there will be several figures that contain both national average data and data on party thought. For this thesis, the reader should be reminded that we are only examining the general public thought on the matter, and ask they refrain from making any assumptions on partisan votes. As a further reminder, there will be a brief section in the conclusion that discusses the possibility of partisan voting shifts, but thesis is focused purely on the general public and the effect on foreign policy.

Overall, the public opinion about Afghanistan was fairly negative. While a majority of Americans believed invading Afghanistan in 2001 was the right decision (Newport 2014), the thought on whether it was appropriate for the military to still be there was vastly different. Figure 4.01 shows the trajectory of American public opinion from 2009 to 2018 on two scores. First, there is the prediction of the effect the United States would have in the region followed by the thoughts on how the home nation actually performed. According to the graph, and only focusing on the timeframe of the Obama administration, the end of 2011 found 58% of Americans believed that the United States would succeed and 34% foresaw failure. Four years later, we see a complete shift between the views that are nearly identical. Roughly 36% believed the United States mostly succeeded while 56% believed it mostly failed (Oliphant 2018b). The American people were originally supportive of the administration's decisions, however time showed that war weariness overtook the people and there was a strong urge to withdraw.

[Insert Figure 4.01]

The next set of figures focus on the withdrawal plan President Obama implemented in 2011. Figure 4.02 asks the general question about whether the American people supported the overall plan to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. As it was found, 72% supported the plan, 23% opposed it, and 5 percent expressed no opinion (Saad 2011). The question in Figure 4.03 asked more specifically asked about the timetable that the Obama administration introduced and polled the American people on the time it would take for a full withdrawal. Overall, as seen from the national average, 30% agreed with the timetable, 33% preferred a

shorter timetable, 31% would rather have had no timetable, and 7 percent had no opinion (Saad 2011). While the public appeared evenly split on the length of the withdrawal they would prefer, the overarching theme is the policy reflected the polling data on withdrawal, and the timetable guided the American people that any type of withdrawal was acceptable.

[Insert Figure 4.02]

[Insert Figure 4.03]

### *Iraq*

[Insert Figure 4.04]

Even though a majority of Americans still held a very unfavorable view towards Iraq during the Obama presidency, as shown in Figure 4.04, much of the American population still did not want to be a part of any type of conflict in the region. Even in 2015, Gallup asked American citizens if they would support ground troops in Iraq to help fight the Islamic State, 53% were opposed (Gallup Inc n.d.). This data demonstrates the American thought process at the time in the Obama years and the type of policies they wanted to see. However, Figure 4.05 represents a discrepancy between those who favored the full withdrawal at the time versus looking back at the policy. In 2011, 75% of Americans supported the withdrawal from Iraq, but only three years later 61% agreed that military troops should have been withdrawn (Dugan 2014). The decline in withdrawal support may have been as a result from

the rise in ISIS in Iraq. People may have wanted the American military involved in order to suppress their rise.

[Insert Figure 4.05]

In Figure 4.06, which shows American predictions to the outcomes in Iraq, the American people were more confident in the policy working and having success in Iraq than experiencing failure. The middle of 2010 saw 58% of Americans stating there will be success with only 35% predicting failure (Drake 2014), which also demonstrated a confidence in the White House's foreign policy. However, opinions about whether or not the United States succeeded or failed is also demonstrated, and 2012 to 2014 mark a clear separation between the ideas. Initially, the public believed that the United States succeeded in Iraq by a margin similar to that of those who predicted success over failure. However, 2013 saw an even margin of success to failure, and the data for 2014 demonstrates that, overall, the United States policy in Iraq had failed (Drake 2014). Even as the conflict with the Islamic State progressed, 58% of the American people disapproved of Obama's policies in dealing with the new terrorist organization (Bowman 2016). As mentioned above, there are some theories that will be discussed as to why this is the case in Iraq.

[Insert Figure 4.06]

*Iran*



Iran has always been a country of which the American public has been wary. Upon calculating Gallup data concerning whether the American public view Iran as either favorably or unfavorably over the course of the Obama presidency, an average of 84% of American citizens viewed Iran unfavorably (Gallup Inc n.d.). Figure 4.07 demonstrates this trend. However, in the context of Iran's long history of sponsoring terrorism beyond its borders, it is unsurprising that its unfavorability with Americans has been as high as it is.

[Insert Figure 4.07]

[Insert Figure 4.08]

Looking at the data on the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, as predicted, the time found an overall support for the deal, as demonstrated in Figure 4.08. The study found 56% supported the deal with 19% showing disapproval (McCarthy 2017). The important thing to note at this point with the Iranian deal is the continued emphasis on then politics of present day. The people viewed the deal as important to policy because of the limitations it placed on the Iranian government in producing nuclear weapons that could potentially damage allies, if not the United States, severely.

However, there is one study that echoes the divided views seen within the media. Pew Research Center conducted survey to document American public support for the nuclear when it announced and several weeks after. Their results, shown in Figure 4.09, demonstrate a decline from 33% in support to 21% in support for the Iran nuclear deal from July to September (Pew Research Center 2015). This trend is seen in the media as well, as there was

a continued division between those who favored the deal compared to those who did not. We also found more opinion pieces in newspapers, such as New York Times, that were written in opposition. Therefore, the media echoes public opinion on this policy.

[Insert Figure 4.09]

## **Conclusion**

Based on the policy information presented in this chapter, it was found that President Obama actually pursued similar policies to that of President Bush. Obama's surge of military troops in Afghanistan echoed that of his predecessor in Iraq, with both showing only frustration of failure. Afghanistan, being the main target during the administration, experienced criticism from the American people and media because of the length of the operation and lack of progress. The Taliban were not fully ousted from the country and a stable Afghani government was never created even though there was a reallocation of funds and personnel to help with those two problem areas. However, we do find a correlation between withdrawal, media coverage of the withdrawal, and public pushing of this policy. President Obama stated his goal was to withdraw troops after their mission was completed, but there never any indication about exactly when that would be. In this situation, the media may not have directly affected the people's opinions on the matter, but it helped reflect dominant popular thinking.

There were exaggerations found within the examination, and that was news anchor Rachel Maddow's statement of the "uniform" decision the citizens made. First, there has

never been one decision the entire public could back. This word choice was purely designed to convey human emotion, not demonstrate cohesion among citizens. Second, there was no real evidence stating the desire for withdrawal was any higher in 2011 than other years.

While the public became more supportive of the US military mission leaving Afghanistan, there was no way to fully track how much its support varied over time. Much of the opinion on the withdrawal policy was not the withdrawal itself, but the time it would take to fully leave. Because the nation was nearly split evenly on the timetable, it was very much open for the president to determine which length was better for the troops and Afghan citizens. It was known that realistically an immediate extraction could never occur, so the removal of soldiers over time was designed to slowly give the Afghan military control of the operations and the government full control over the nation.

Also reflecting Bush's policies, as Bush spent little time in Afghanistan, Obama did the same in Iraq up until the ISIS invasion, which prompted for a change in policy course as the United States was once again needed to intervene militarily. However, it is also where we find interesting effects of public opinion's impact due to the rise of the Islamic State. The data showed a change of American citizens feeling success but then failure from 2012 to 2014, and that could be as a result of this rise. When examining these effects, it is important to remember the mission. The overall mission in Iraq, from the beginning, was to overthrow the Hussein dictatorship and establish a functioning democratic government. However, because the situation was treated poorly, Obama pushed for troop withdrawal early in his presidency, most people believed the Iraq government was stable, leading the nation to become easily susceptible to outside influences, thus precipitating the rise of ISIS. Therefore, the change in the American public's thinking is easily seen. The public originally

felt success because of how the Iraq government was doing, but after the ISIS invasion, the failure of American policy became evident. The so-called “stable” government was failing, and the Iraqi military could barely hold off Islamic fighters. The fact that the military lost a much of the country could be attributed to the withdrawal of the American military, which is why 2014 saw a large portion of Americans concluded that a withdrawal from Iraq occurred too soon.

It appears the American people were incredibly eager to withdraw from Iraq, largely because the prolong engagement exhausted the public from the Bush to Obama years. While the media and public praised the overall withdrawal efforts initially, no one foresaw the gruesome events that eventually would occur, throwing the nation back into a country it fought so hard to escape. Even still, the people largely disapproved of how Obama handled the situation, something he appeared to not have changed despite the public pushing for reform.

There was also a similar policy approach with Iran, as both presidents sought to limit the country’s nuclear and broader regional power ambitions. However, as we saw Iran proved to generate polling results that countered my hypothesis. Instead of seeing overwhelming support for curbing a foreign adversary’s nuclear progression, we instead find a divide within the media and public about the overall effects of the deal. Many citizens believe the deal does not limit Iran’s nuclear growth, which is several media sites echo.

The media’s coverage fluctuated between the positive and negative because of the different issues occurring during the presidency, yet it consistently aired towards the negative side. Obama’s policies were rarely seen in a positive light, the exception being his withdrawal policies. The various stories and specials on Afghanistan and Iraq reinforced the

American people's desires to fully withdraw, as they no longer say any type of reason to remain invested in a region that was only wasting American resources and life. It cannot be forgotten that thousands of American soldiers were killed in action carrying out missions for the nations, something the American people were exhausted from. To them, this situation mirrored Vietnam: many American casualties, negative results, and little reason for continued intervention.

With this information juxtaposed with the media's coverage and public opinion data, there was once again no real change in policy as a result of the people. An interesting quote to remember from Rachel Maddow is "Does he care about public opinion on this? And if he doesn't, why doesn't he?" (Pew Research Center 2011), for it represents a difference in opinion between the government and the people. Yes, public opinion is supposed to be important for the administration to adhere too because they represent the general public, but no, it is not a president's strict duty to follow it slavishly. Overall, the media had no effect on the presidency as it was believed it would have. Originally, it was hypothesized President Obama would have tweaked some of his policies to maintain greater public support for his foreign policy, yet this was not the case. What largely transpired was mirror image the Bush presidency: i.e. a president who made momentous decisions and stuck with his policies in the face of public opposition to those policies. However, the interesting thing to note is how the policy actually mirrored the public's opinion. Obama did withdraw troops from Afghanistan, however this fact was not clearly portrayed within the news media and polling sites. Therefore, while we can recognize the Afghanistan policy followed public opinion, it was not represented as such.

## Chapter V: President Trump

This thesis would not be complete without the inclusion of our current president, Donald Trump. Despite having been in office for almost three years, including his current policies may enable us to predict what path his policy is taking and whether public opinion may or may not ultimately influence it. Overall, this chapter will find that there is a general split between the American people and how they view President Trump's foreign policy actions in the Middle East. It will be discovered that public opinion changed on several policies under the Trump administration, and the media is echoing the public's thoughts on policy. However, despite the brief tenure of the presidency, we could use the information gathered and known to predict whether there are likely to be policy changes in the future or whether the administration will stick to its current course in response to public opinion.

### **Policies Initiatives in Middle East**

While this section may lack substantial policies, it is only because the President is still in the process of making decisions on what to do within the region. The policies he has introduced will be discussed and expanded upon in order to understand the decisions he made and if he continued his predecessors' policies. All three countries will be raised, as they are all extremely prominent in present day.

*Afghanistan*

President Trump's Afghanistan policy has thus far mirrored that of President Obama: both men were staunchly for withdrawing troops, yet they both deployed more military members to the country in an attempt to prevent the Taliban from reclaiming the nation. It was believed President Trump had three options when dealing with Afghanistan: full withdrawal, increase troops and become a more active member in the political system, and have limited counterterrorism engagements (Felbab-Brown 2017). The decision to leave troops in the region, as we have already seen, is unpopular, however it was deemed necessary in order to curb Taliban attacks. The enlarged presence of troops was before any types of further developments were discovered, because recently there have been discussions of obtaining a peace deal with the Taliban that stated they would not permit any organization to carry out a terrorist attack from within Afghanistan as long as the United States withdrew their troops (Rohde 2019).

While increasing the troops in the nation went against the public's wishes, it appears as if President Trump has made headway in terms of striking a peace agreement with the Taliban, ending a conflict that has stretched to now almost eighteen years. Founding a peace agreement would accomplish a feat the previous presidents failed to do; however, their prior efforts may have aided the long-term process. Trump's insertion of additional troops actually correlates with the advice and recommendations from his policy advisors. They told him the best way to make peace is to keep up pressure on the Taliban through military presence, which encourages it to engage in diplomatic discussions (Burns 2019; Rohde 2019). If there was a sudden withdrawal of American forces, then the Taliban would have no reason to partake in the discussions, which would potentially revert Afghanistan to its form before the

American involvement. Thus far, the policies have been successful, and the talks have been continuing fairly well.

### *Iraq*

In his time in office, President Trump only had to deal with one issue with Iraq that was slowly waning since his arrival in office: the embeddedness of the Islamic State. Even in his campaign speeches, the President promised the American people that he would defeat ISIS at all costs. Ultimately, it led to policies that did not deviate much from the previous administration. Even though he ran stating he did not support the Iraq War, he did not intend on withdrawing from the nation without having defeated the terrorist organization (Smith 2018). Iraq has largely claimed they defeated ISIS in 2018, but that has not stemmed the latter's attacks on the Iraqi people (Damon et al. 2019). These attacks are some of the motivators behind the continued troop placement. In neighboring Syria, it was reported that ISIS was defeated in March 2019, causing happiness in the region (Benen 2019; Galioto 2019; Mitchell 2019; Rogers and Hubbard 2019). This announcement is crucial because it is also at a moment where, as mentioned above, the situation in Afghanistan is also amidst reaching peace. After years of conflict, there is a possibility that both wars could end within the same year.

However, the Iraq War ceasing does not necessarily mean all military action will cease. President Trump may soon create a policy that would keep troops in Iraq in order to monitor Iran, one of the President's greatest enemies (Arraf 2019; Hanna and Cambanis 2019). While this proposition would cause many problems, largely because Iraq wants the



United States to completely withdraw, it is currently unsure whether this will become a policy that survives the duration of the presidency. President Trump does not trust the Iranian government and believes maintaining a robust military presence near its border will allow better insight into preventing the nation from obtaining a nuclear weapon. The major issue that underlies this policy is the fact that there would be a continued military presence in a nation that is largely against the American insertion. Only time will determine what will happen.

### *Iran*

President Trump has been very vocal about the types of policies he has intended to implement regarding Iran. Since the creation of the Iran Deal in 2015, Trump has been firm in stating how the deal did not fully benefit the United States and also did not adequately limit Iran's ability to acquire nuclear weapons. Thus, one of the first decisions he made was to pursue a policy course that took a harder stance on Iran's nuclear development. The first step in this process was withdrawing from the 2015 deal, thus sparking concerns from European allies but support from Middle Eastern allies, which was viewed as one-sided and not capable of reaching any type of peace (Landler 2018). The next few steps are still in progress, as the withdrawal from the 2015 deal only happened in May 2018. However, on the basis of the President's rhetoric, it is expected he will pursue hardline policies that are designed to ensure Iran does not obtain nuclear weapons.

Aside from the withdrawal, there have been economic sanctions imposed on Iran that are intended to cripple its government and bring it closer to negotiations for a new deal.

However, the Iranian foreign ministry correspondent acknowledged those sanctions would further divide the two nations, causing more animosity between representatives (P. Stewart 2018). The US administration may have also been hoping their economic sanction policies would encourage the Iranian people to rise up and call for reform in the nuclear industry, however that has also failed to occur. Presently, one of the newest biggest issues was mentioned above, American troops in Iraq to monitor Iran, as it now appears no type of deal could be achieved without the overall supervision of the American government. As these events are still occurring and unfolding, it will be interesting to see how these chains of events aid or deter a new nuclear deal.

## **Media Coverage**

It may not be a wrong to speculate that most people would agree that President Trump has received a lot of bad press concerning many of his actions since he started campaigning for the presidency. However, it is important to understand that much of this negativity may be the result of his heated rhetoric and explanation of the policies compared to an actual examination and implication of them. This negativity would demonstrate a bias media, which could affect the public in several ways. It could demonstrate the media could want their own agenda passed or echo the feelings the American people have towards the president and not the policy.

*Afghanistan*

President Trump has been campaigning for a withdrawal in Afghanistan since his run for the presidency in 2015. However, we learned since his time in office that he has deployed more troops in 2017, doing what President Obama did only a few years earlier. While the media has been touting reports of the public wanting an American withdrawal, it is come to be shown that after Trump made headway with the Taliban's leaders, which could lead to a peace deal and an actual withdrawal and end of military conflict after 18 years, the media is now unsure about pulling out of Afghanistan. Some news media, like *The New Yorker*, have published articles that praise the withdrawal as means of moving on from the past, yet others, for example *The Washington Post*, show a new type of apprehension in withdrawing (Olsen 2019; Rohde 2019). Another news source, *The New York Times*, is conflicted, as some of their reporters state the importance of withdrawing from Afghanistan and others state Trump may be acting to rashly to withdraw right away (Olsen 2019; Finer and Malley 2019). There are some television outlets, such as NBC News, that merely stated defeat should be declared, hinting withdrawal is the right policy to pursue (Andelman 2018). Overall, the media is still divided, and the fluctuation of opinion among outlets is concerning. Seeing a general divide in the media at this point could be a demonstration of biases based on who the president is compared to the policies he creates. Instead of examining and critiquing the policies Trump institutes, coverage could be changing because of how they view him as a person.

*Iraq*

Much of the media reporting on ISIS does not come from Iraq, largely because of claims ISIS's strongholds were defeated in 2018 (Damon et al. 2019), but rather Syria, where the group was supposedly defeated in March 2019. However, the issue of a potential resurgence arises, which one source attributes to how Iraq government is currently operating (Damon et al. 2019). While its coverage of ISIS in Iraq since their original defeat has tapered off, much of the media's focus have been on the new developments of keeping military troops on base to watch Iran.

The sources largely agree that Trump's new policy of maintaining troops in Iraq just for to contain Iran is foolhardy and should not be considered (Hanna and Cambanis 2019; Hansler 2019). Other sources are choosing to focus on the Iraq side of the issue rather than the American side because of the overall effect it would have on the people: a prolong United States presence in their country. The Iraqi people do not want to be a part of the American conflict with Iran, as it would cause the nation to have their own issues with their neighbor. Iraq is attempting to rebuild relationships, and having this strain would tamper it (Burke 2019; Rubin and Schmitt 2019; Turak 2019). These sources are therefore fairly critical of this policy because of the strain it would place on the Iraqi people. Through their continued coverage on the effects it has on Iraq and issues it could cause, it could theoretically cause the American people to oppose this policy.

### *Iran*

In the last chapter it was discovered a vast split within the media's coverage of Obama's Iran deal. In this new presidency, the media has demonstrated unease and concern

at the start of the withdrawal, yet over time has reached a conclusion that withdrawing from the deal was highly beneficial (Fleitz 2019; Stanley 2018; Stephens 2019). Following two nations that had the media split on Trump's policy, the overall agreement that the United States should withdraw and create a new deal is very surprising. These sources also discuss how Iran has continued breaching the deal through its further pursuit of nuclear weapons, how the United States has not fully inspected Iran for enriched uranium plants, and how the new sanctions imposed since that time have harmed Iranian economic growth, showing success of withdrawing from deal (Fleitz 2019; Stanley 2018; Stephens 2019). The portrayal of success is encouraging to the American people that President Trump may be creating a good policy that could better protect their interests. While the articles are not clearly supporting this action, their portrayal of a successful policy may, in time, lead the American people to support withdrawing from the Iran deal, despite it being one of President Obama's foreign policy achievements.

## **Public Opinion**

At this time, it can be noticed that the much of the media has exhibited bias toward many of the President's policies in the three nations. However, the extent of this bias's effect on the public has yet to be addressed. Therefore, this section seeks to understand if there are any current trends with regard to how the public has reacted to the media's take on the policies and if they responded openly to the government in either support or opposition.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Also, based on what we see on the news and words we hear around us, it is important to make sure the polls used differentiate between people's opinions of the President and their opinions of the policy. Currently, I have come across many people that dislike the policies the President has introduced because he is the one who

Based on policy changes thus far, it is theorized that the President may experience more public support than the previous administrations because his actions are reflecting the preferences of the American people.<sup>8</sup> While this trend is ideal, we must also be prepared to anticipate results that demonstrate a continued split between support and opposition. Political biases have increased since the 2016 election.<sup>9</sup>

### *Afghanistan*

[Insert Figure 5.01]

As we saw in polling data from the previous chapter, and again in Figure 5.01, 2018 saw 49% of Americans believed the United States government “mostly failed” in Afghanistan (Oliphant 2018b). This poll would lead us to assume that a large majority of Americans would prefer some type of withdrawal. However, surprisingly between 41 and 51% of Americans approve of withdrawing in Afghanistan, yet 57% would support an immediate withdrawal of troops (Kirby 2019; Ruger 2018). The authorization of the use of military force has still remained unpopular among Americans, yet they remain split among the means of actual withdrawal, which will be discussed further in the concluding section of this chapter.

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formed it. This discrepancy should be noted, and proper reading and analysis of the polls will be conducted to guarantee this effect does not occur.

<sup>8</sup> It must also be noted that there will be no variable for whether or not people answered based on their impression of Trump. That is why the polling data will be chosen carefully.

<sup>9</sup> This point to be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

*Iraq*

[Insert Figure 5.02]

The survey data on Iraq largely reflect the predominant views among the American people about the conflict in Afghanistan. Figure 5.02 demonstrates the same view we have seen in the previous chapters, yet it still holds true. There was one poll that had information on how the American public felt about withdrawing from Iraq, but it was included in their thoughts on withdrawing from Afghanistan. This poll found that 25% of Americans wanted troops to be withdrawn from both Iraq and Afghanistan and 25% wanted a decrease in troop levels (Ruger n.d.). Once again, and similar to Afghanistan polling information, we are struck with data that does not necessarily agree with the discoveries we made earlier. Another poll that speaks to the concern of data not lining up comes from Figure 5.03, which shows that, as of 2019, 79 % of Americans view Iraq as unfavorable, which makes a case for theorizing a similar percentage would want more of a troop decrease. However, it appears that this may not be true.

[Insert Figure 5.03]

With regard to American opinion on troops remaining for watching Iran, no polls have been released.

*Iran*

Iran has seen a discrepancy between two important sites that discuss support and opposition for the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. The Pew Research Center and The Hill polled Americans about the deal, with Pew finding 32% support the deal and 40% oppose it, whereas The Hill found the opposite: 56% supported Obama's deal to 26% (Folley 2018; Pew Research Center 2018). This disjuncture in outcomes may demonstrate that the public is fully split between whether or not they support the original deal. A separate reason we find a disjuncture may be resulted from the format at in which the polling sites asked their questions. Question format is important in polls, and certain styles may cause respondents to choose one answer over another (Pew Research Center n.d.). Moving forward, three different polling sites, Reuters, CNN, and CBS, all have different figures on the percentage of respondents that prefer to stay in the Iran nuclear deal President Trump threatened to withdraw from. Reuters found 42% of Americans wanted to remain in the deal, CNN found 63%, and CBS found 21%. However, they all similarly found nearly the same percentages in American citizens that support withdrawal, 29%, 24%, and 21% respectively (De Pinto et al. 2018; Kahn 2018; Sparks 2018). The support for withdrawal is the only the constant, and the massive gaps between the opposition also demonstrates how torn the American people actually are in terms of discussing this issue.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the information gathered from the media portrayals of Trump's policies and public opinion polls related to his policies, we find very strange trends that ultimately need



more time to sort out. Much of the disjuncture described above is a result of how the media and public opinion have changed from the previous presidencies to the current administration. The media has been torn between whether or not the United States should not withdraw from Afghanistan even though the sitting president is determined to do so and has been the only President to make real progress towards it. We have learned he has taken steps towards negotiating with the Taliban to ensure the safety of the United States will be retained and Afghanistan will no longer harbor terroristic organizations. However, based on what we find in the polls, there is a bare majority of citizens that actually wants to follow through with a withdrawal despite the high percentage stating the United States failed in their mission. Thus, what we find with Afghanistan is that while Americans largely favor withdrawal, they are split between how the withdrawal should be conducted, and when it should occur.

Iraq also poses a similar situation. However, we have slightly more information that allows us to narrow down our theories. As seen from the data, the media largely focused on the Iraqi side of the American military remaining to watch Iran, with minor information about ISIS's presence that still remains since announcement of their defeat in 2017. However, as there is still a large presence of troops, we know from the previous chapters that American citizens want out of the elongated military action, and once again President Trump is the only president willing to fully withdraw. Even still, we only see barely half of Americans that actually want to go through with withdrawal despite the large amount that view Iraq as unfavorable. One possible answer to this is the puzzle is that the American people are hesitant on a full withdrawal from Iraq because they are wary of the nation. There have been two deployments of troops within two administrations, which may lead to fear of

Iraq potentially succumbing to another terroristic government, thrusting the United States into yet another military action. However, time will determine whether or not this scenario occurs. As for keeping troops within Iraq to check Iran, as there is no data it is hard to make assumptions on what the public believes.

Lastly, Iran raises the biggest puzzle because of all the discrepancies discovered during the research. The polling data also does not match what the media message projects. As we saw in the last chapter, the media was divided towards the Iran nuclear deal, and Trump received a lot of support for the withdrawal and pursuit of a new policy. However, the data does not support this conclusion. Based on the current information, we can assume that the public is very divided about whether it supports a policy of withdrawing from Iran. There is one conclusion that can be deduced from the information, and that is the American people were hesitant to withdraw from the Iran deal because it provided some assurance that a deal was in place as means of security in knowing Iran had some stipulations on enriching their uranium, even if it was unsteady and unenforced. Now, there is nothing in place aside from sanctions that limit Iran's economic growth.

Thus, the overall conclusion is that while the media varied in terms of portraying the news to instilling bias within the American people, there is no evidence that would support the media's effect how the public should respond to President Trump's foreign policy. Also, it was found that the American people largely formulated opinions that were contrary to what the media was projecting. These discrepancies show a divide within the public and how it is not relying on the media as a source of opinion during the current presidency. Trump's presidency is still in its early stages, and his policies are evolving and emerging as this thesis is being written. There will be more information available later, but at this time the findings

stand. A lack of polling data is a result of lack of present information, because it takes time for institutions to poll and gather their information before distributing it. Therefore, the information available at this time demonstrates the public is torn regarding its views about the president's foreign policy.

## Chapter VI: Conclusion

This thesis has provided information on the media coverage and public opinion related to the foreign policies of Presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump in order to understand the underlying relationship between the policy, the media, and public opinion. President Bush's policies were favorably received by the public from the beginning of his presidency because of its support for fighting terrorism after the 9/11 attacks. However, the longevity of the military campaign in Afghanistan and Iraq caused public opinion to reverse course and prefer American troops be withdrawn. While information on Iran was scant, it was assumed that the public largely supported the attempts to stem the nation's nuclear pursuit. However, the overall transition from positive to negative, with a majority of the administration experiencing positive remarks, leads to the conclusion that much of Bush's policy was perceived positively and had the backing of the American public public preferences. Although, as demonstrated in the Bush chapter, there was a change in opinion during his administration in which Bush did not heed, which is why we arrive at the conclusion that public opinion did not influence Bush's policy.

President Obama's policies were also perceived positively by the public at the start, but they then proceeded to receive more negative press after the President deployed more troops to Afghanistan and failed to withdraw them in a timely manner. His Iraq policy also received some negative press due to the rise in ISIS, thus causing unfavorable opinions from the public towards the policies designed to defeat them. In some cases, the people wanted more robust action taken, yet this was not done. Iran slowly increased their nuclear power, but after the nuclear deal it was unsure whether the media and people would support it.

There was no clear evidence on whether the public fully supported or fully opposed the deal when it was formed, and we have only begun to learn about some of the issues the public was concerned with during the Trump administration. In general, public opinion did not affect Obama's foreign policy, and the media's role was one that largely echoed the public's preferences.

Lastly, President Trump, while still early in his presidency, found that his foreign policies actually reflected public opinion to a greater extent than was true during the previous administrations, yet it then changed course in favor of not wanting a full or quick withdrawal, but rather one that was long and extended over time. The same was true of public opinion concerning the Iran nuclear deal. After the President announced he would pull out from the deal, the public, which originally had trended not liking the deal, was split on whether the United States should be part of the deal. The media has also wavered between good and bad press, which mirrored public opinion. Thus, we found President Trump created policy that initially agreed with public opinion as it appeared under Bush and Obama. However, the popular opinions in the previous administration are not popular in Trump's, which is why he is technically not adhering to public opinion. The news media echoes the different views Americans have on his policies.

At this point, we must now consider what these presidents have in common in order to fully answer our question. As we found with all three presidents, public opinion did not affect any of their policy choices. The media, however, was only slightly more split. President Bush found the media served as a means of supporting foreign policy, but President Obama and President Trump found the media echoed the opinions of the American public, leading us to understand they are seen as attempting to aid the public in influencing the

foreign policy. Therefore, since the most recent presidencies find more media involvement in influencing policy, the overall result is that public opinion does not affect foreign policy making in the Middle East, and the media is beginning to side with the public in its attempts to change policy to follow their opinions. This result was not expected and creates a new hypothesis, as the results did not support any of my previous ones. Ultimately, this new hypothesis leads to more puzzles and the need for further research.

One puzzle that must be addressed is the new relationship that has formed with the media and public during the Obama administration that has since continued into the Trump presidency. The media turned from merely reporting the news to taking a stance with the public that takes of the form of two versus one in creating foreign policy. The puzzle is why this new dynamic took root, and what caused it. There are several theories that could account for this change, such as the media thinking the public's demands are heard but not met, the media wanting more representation of public opinion incorporated in foreign policy, or the media upholding the values of a democracy and giving the public a greater voice. This puzzle is one that should address in future research.

A question that arises is the discourse in public reactions towards Trump's policies. While he did deploy more troops to Afghanistan towards the beginning of his presidency, he has since then followed public demands to withdraw them after getting close to forging a peace deal with the Taliban. However, as we found in his chapter, the public then switched their opinions regarding the question of whether actually wanted the troops to be withdrawn and/or if the withdrawal should be prolonged. One idea as to why this occurred could be because of how the general public views the president as a person. Based on my personal observation, there are many people who find it hard to objectively assess the policies Trump

enacts and thus view all of his policies unfavorably because they dislike him as a person. There has been a large percentage of the American public that views Trump as personally mean, cruel, and unfair and, as a consequence, see the same about his policies. If people cannot take policy seriously because they are unable to take the president seriously, a new dynamic is taking shape with the American public, and more research should be conducted on why people think this and what it could mean for future presidents.

Another question that falls out of the Trump chapter is whether public opinion actually influences foreign policy. As we have seen, public opinion did not influence policies, but this new question only arises when we see a shift into how the public changed their views once President Trump crafted his policies on troop withdrawal. The public held a firm stance in wanting withdrawal during the Bush and Obama administrations, but when Trump introduced it public sentiment shifted drastically. If this quick change, after a long period of uniformity of sentiment occurred “randomly”, then why would the public’s preferences be incorporated into policy? For future presidents, this random shift of opinion may create uncertainty about what the public actually desires, thus promoting the idea not to consider them when formulating and implementing policy.

Overall, we learn that our findings are fairly diverse and conform with the literature discussed in the Introduction. The current relationship between public opinion and foreign policy could be added to the Almond-Lippmann consensus theory that public opinion has little effect on foreign policy. We discovered there was no effect of opinion on any of the policies, which is why their theories hold up. There was also another piece of evidence that supported the Almond-Lippmann consensus, the change in public opinion under the Trump administration. Because of the drastic switch, we can assume that public opinion is, in their

words, “volatile,” leading to public to make irrational decisions on whether to support or oppose policy. The public, not acting as rational actors, is then at risk of preferring wrongheaded or suboptimal policies. However, this thesis adds to the question of understanding the type of impact the media may have in promoting public opinion. The public was known to have received much of its information from the press, and the press has slowly evolved into transmitting its opinions to the government. Thus, we find that the media is trying to impact foreign policy through the transmission of information about public opinion. However, this theory still needs time to develop, because impact is not instantaneous.

The final topic to address in this conclusion is the impact of partisanship on foreign policy. The issue of partisanship in the United States has seem to have risen in recent years, which is why it is important in the discussion of whether or not people support foreign policy. In previous research, there were two hypotheses as to why people supported foreign policy, either (1) “people’s support for foreign policy reflects individuals underlying interests, values, and ideologies,” or (2) “people’s support for foreign policy reflects individuals’ partisanship” (Mayer 2018, 1). This study was also conducted with presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump, but used the countries Russia, China, and North Korea as case studies because they are considered high-profile nations in foreign policy. Overall, the first hypothesis was supported, with a change beginning between 2016 and 2017. This information correlates with this study, as we see the same trends with both parties on most policies. Therefore, partisanship also does not really have an effect on foreign policy, as American citizens as a whole want to see what is best for the nation, not their party.



The Middle Eastern region is a high-profile area that receives a lot of attention in the news media. American citizens constantly hear about recent events, whether a bombing, resurgence of a terrorist group, or claim that a nation has overthrown its government. We also hear a lot on what the American government is doing in the region as well. Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran are three of the most prominent nations with which the United States interacts, for most of the current policy includes one or more of those countries. Therefore, with the issue of salience, the results of this thesis could be expanded upon and potentially find other high-profile nations receive similar news coverage and policies. Previous research found similar results in partisanship in the Middle East from Russia, China, and North Korea, making it plausible similar results on the American public at large could be found Russia, China, and North Korea. The American people have tended to be fairly consistent in their preferences regarding policy until the most recent administration. The same effect occurred in prior research also containing high-profile nations. This finding leads me to believe and predict that public opinion does not affect any type of foreign policy towards a high-profile nation or region, and consequently, a low-profile nation or region.

This research was very surprising in several ways. First, the results were completely unexpected. As mentioned previously, it was theorized that public opinion would have some type influence in determining the course of foreign policies that were pursued in the Middle East. This was not the case. It was also assumed the President Obama would have tailored his policies to the preferences of the public. Even though he did, the public did not recognize it. Lastly, it was assumed President Trump would not adhere to the public and instead pursue policies he thought best. Ultimately, he was the only president who reflected public sentiment, they just happened to have a change in opinion. Public opinion on certain matters

are heard, yet not acted upon. When they are acted upon, opinion can change. These results are puzzling yet cannot be answered until more time has passed. Whatever occurs will prove interesting, because we are still expanding upon the relationship behind the media, public, and government. While this change may be a fluke in the relationship, it could very well reshape how we view foreign policy and whether or not public opinion truly has no say in decisions designed to help them.

## Figures

Figure 2.01

Are you more inclined to agree with the "hawks" or the "doves" (on the issue of fighting in Vietnam)?	
	<b>U.S. adults</b>
	%
Hawks	47
Doves	26
No opinion	27
GALLUP, MARCH 24-29, 1966	

Figure 2.01 courtesy of (Saad 2016)

Figure 2.02

In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?			
	<b>Yes, a mistake</b>	<b>No, not a mistake</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
	%	%	%
Jan 12-15, 1973	60	29	11
May 14-17, 1971	61	28	11
Jan 8-11, 1971	59	31	10
May 21-26, 1970	56	36	8
Apr 2-7, 1970	51	34	15
Jan 15-20, 1970	57	33	10
Sep 17-22, 1969	58	32	10
Jan 23-28, 1969	52	39	9
Sep 26-Oct 1, 1968	54	37	9
Aug 7-12, 1968	53	35	12
Apr 4-9, 1968	48	40	12
Feb 22-27, 1968	49	41	10
Feb 1-6, 1968	46	42	12
Dec 7-12, 1967	45	46	9
Oct 6-11, 1967	46	44	10
Jul 13-18, 1967	41	48	11
Apr 19-24, 1967	37	50	13
Jan 26-31, 1967	32	52	16
Nov 10-15, 1966	31	51	18
Sep 8-13, 1966	35	48	17
May 5-10, 1966	36	49	15
Mar 3-8, 1966	25	59	16
Aug 27-Sep 1, 1965	24	61	15
Trend during Vietnam war; full postwar trend available in Gallup Analytics			
GALLUP			

Figure 2.02 courtesy of (Saad 2016)

Figure 2.03



Figure 2.03 courtesy of (Allen, Samaranayake, and Albrittain Jr. 2007)

Figure 2.04

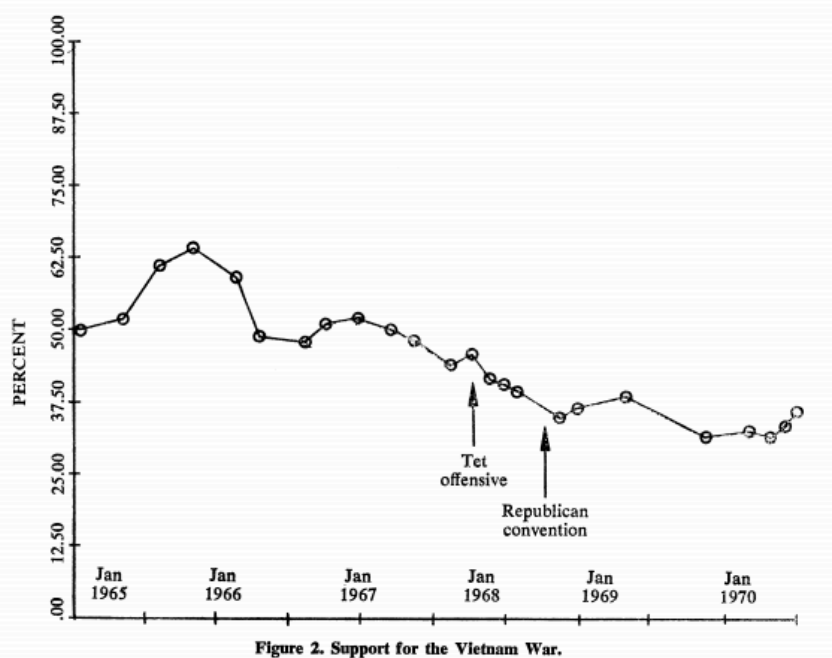


Figure 2.04 courtesy of (Mueller 1971)

Figure 3.01

### U.S. MILITARY ATTACKS AGAINST AFGHANISTAN (OCTOBER 2001)

	All	Reps	Dems	Inds
Approve	90%	97%	85%	87%
Disapprove	6%	1%	10%	6%
Don't Know	4%	2%	5%	7%

As seen in (De Pinto 2009)

Figure 3.02

### IS THE U.S. DOING THE RIGHT THING BY FIGHTING THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN? (NOW)

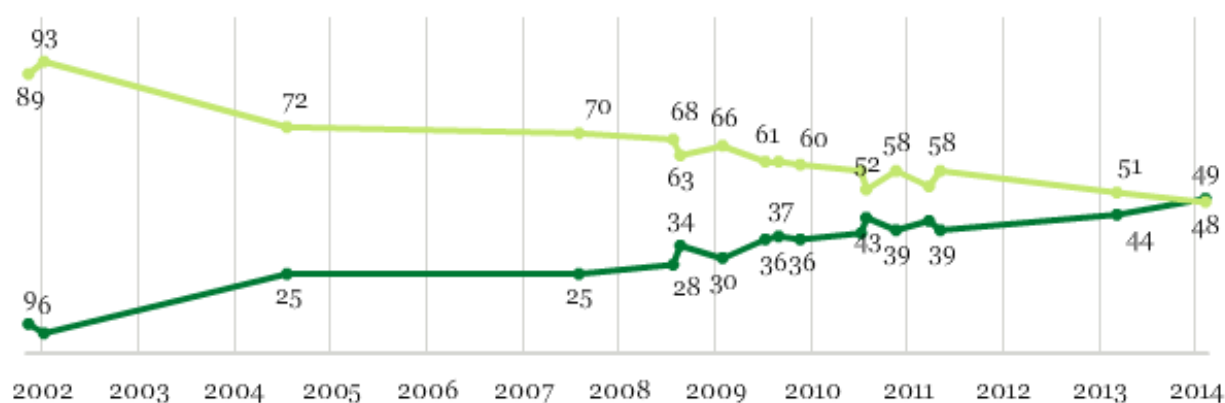
	All	Reps	Dems	Inds
Yes	47%	67%	36%	45%
No	42%	25%	55%	41%
Don't Know	11%	8%	9%	14%

\*Now occurred between September 19 and 23, 2009, as seen in (De Pinto 2009)

Figure 3.03

*Looking back, do you think the United States made a mistake sending troops to fight in Afghanistan in 2001?*

■ % Yes, made a mistake    ■ % No, did not

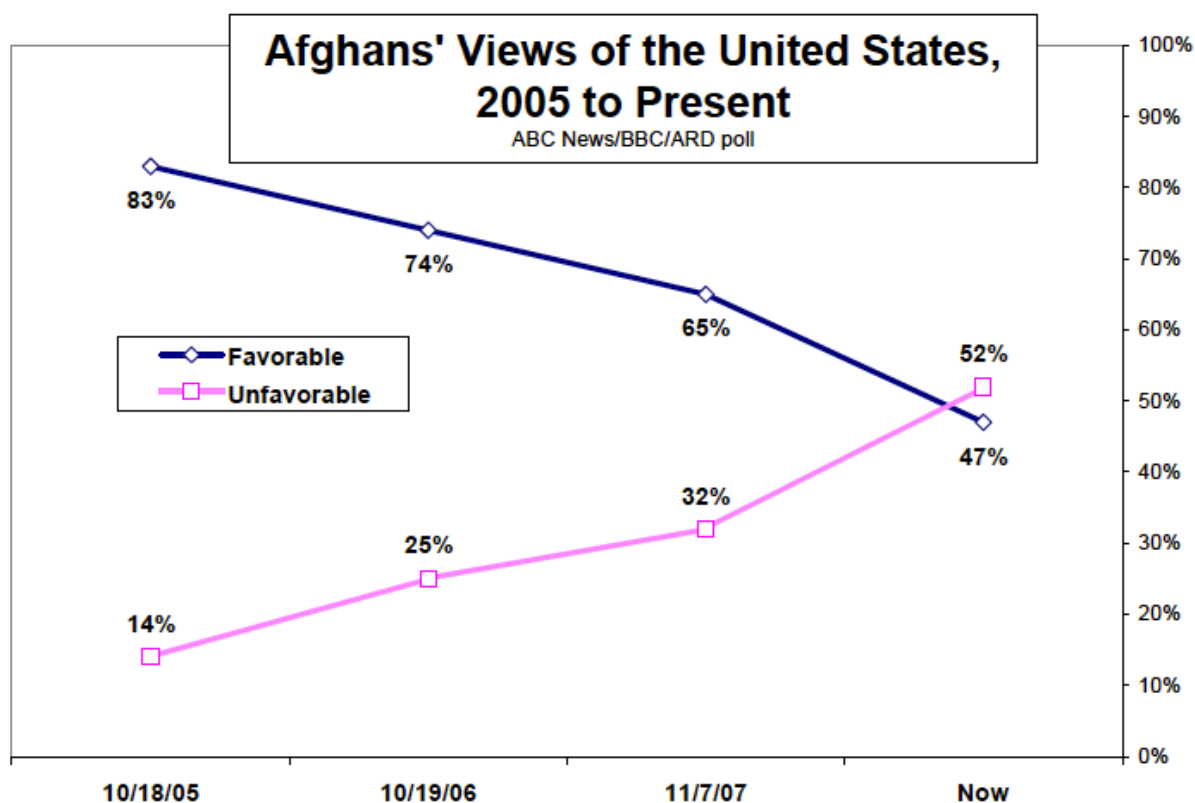


2001-2011 question wording: Thinking now about U.S. military action in Afghanistan that began in October 2001, do you think the United States made a mistake in sending military forces to Afghanistan, or not?

GALLUP®

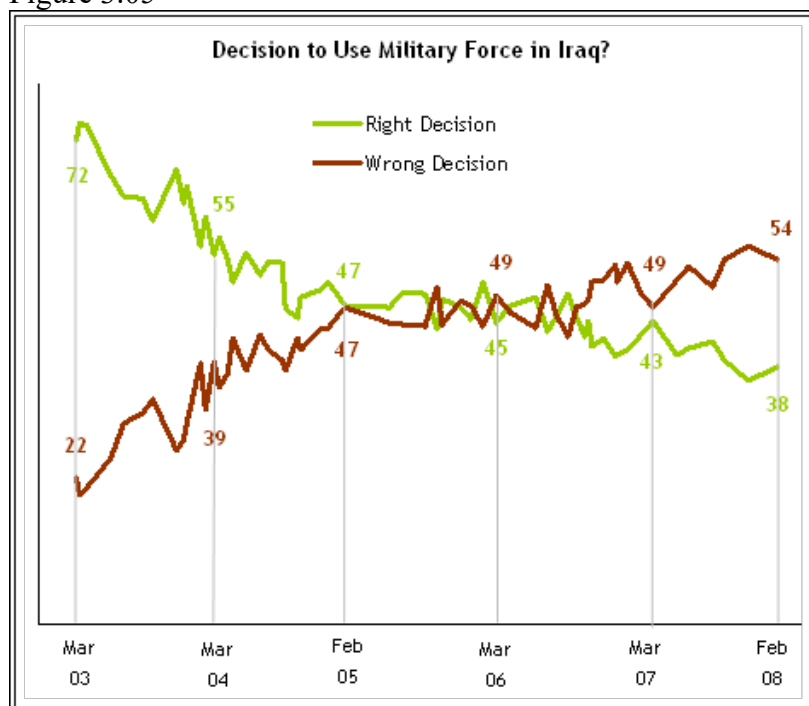
As seen in (Newport 2014)

Figure 3.04



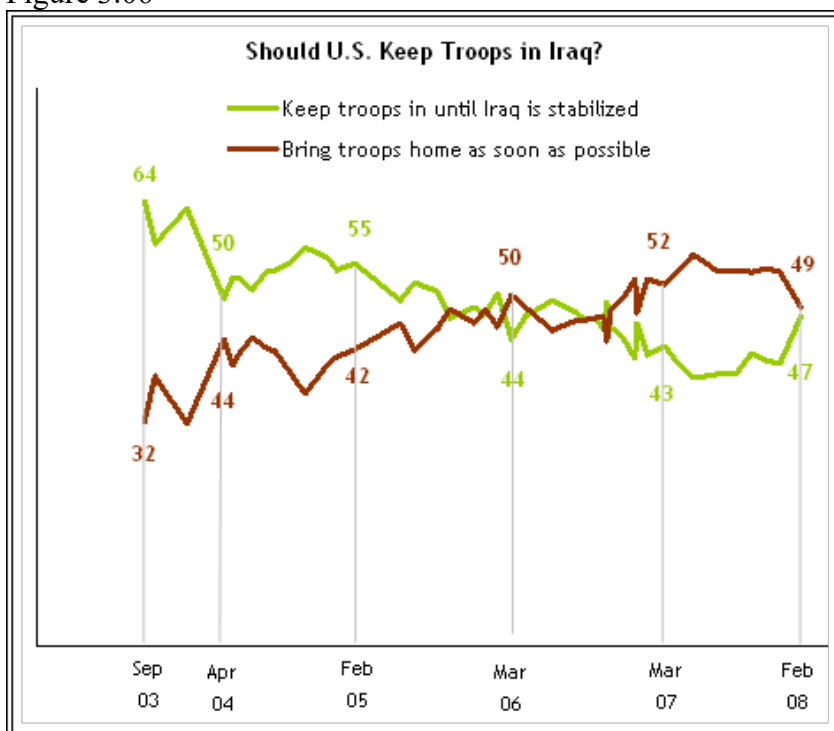
As seen in (Langer 2009).

Figure 3.05



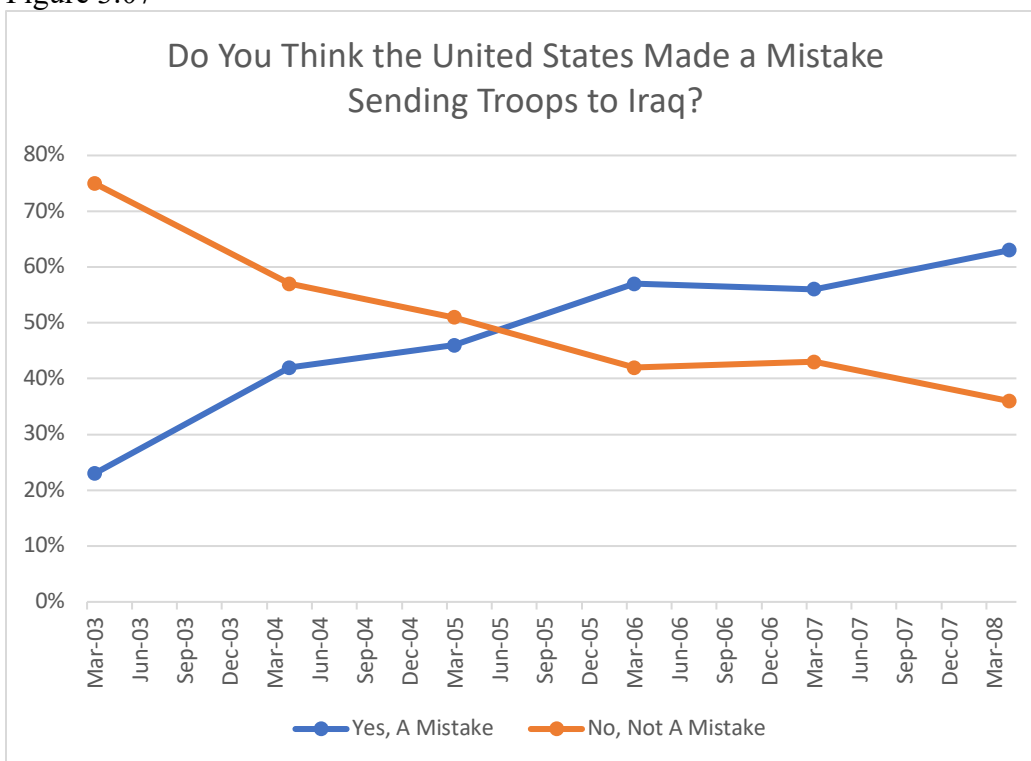
As seen in (Editors of Pew Research Center 2008)

Figure 3.06



As seen in (Editors of Pew Research Center 2008)

Figure 3.07



Data collected from (Gallup Inc n.d.)

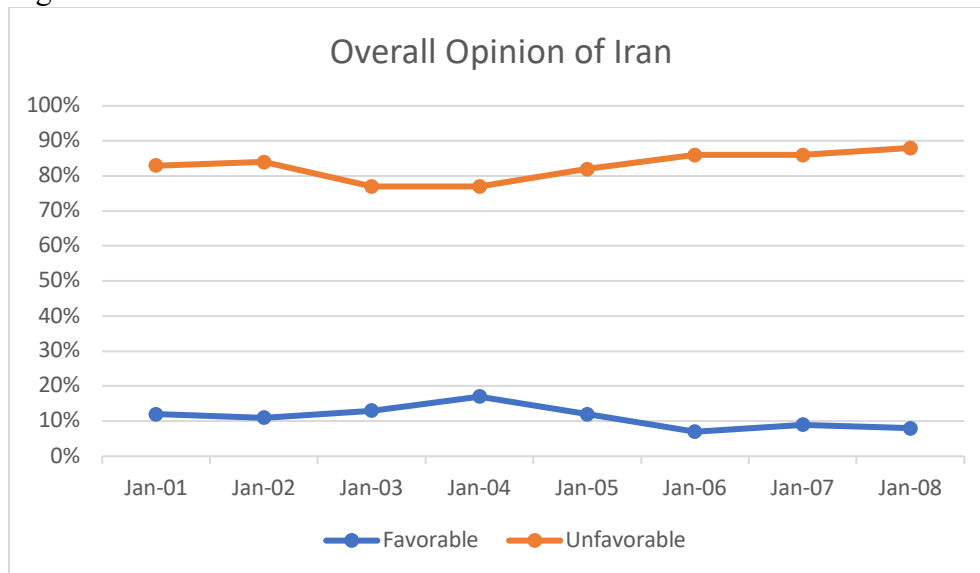
Figure 3.08

**Was the Iraq War Worth the Costs?**

	Worth It	Not Worth It
Aug-03	46%	45%
Mar-08	28%	66%

Data taken from (Dutton et al. 2014)

Figure 3.09



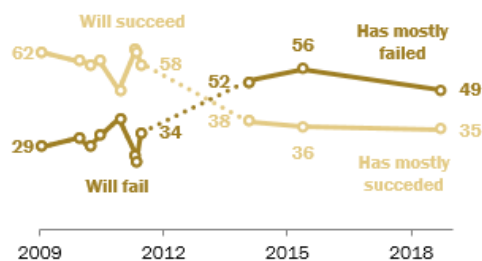
Data collected from (Gallup Inc n.d.)

Figure 4.01

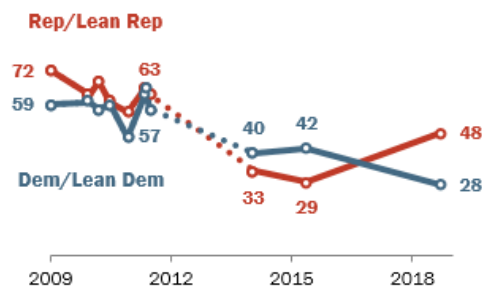


### About half of the public says the U.S. has 'mostly failed' in Afghanistan

% who say that the U.S. \_\_\_\_ in achieving its goals in Afghanistan



% who say that the U.S. has mostly *succeeded* in achieving its goals in Afghanistan



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 18-24, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As seen in (Oliphant 2018b)

Figure 4.02

#### U.S. Support for President Barack Obama's Afghanistan Withdrawal Plans

As you may know, President Obama on Wednesday announced plans to withdraw 10,000 U.S. troops from Afghanistan this year, 20,000 more by the end of summer 2012, and the remainder by the end of 2014. In general, do you favor or oppose this plan?

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
	%	%	%
National adults	72	23	5
Democrats	87	11	2
Independents	74	21	5
Republicans	50	43	8

June 25-26, 2011

GALLUP

As seen in (Saad 2011)

Figure 4.03

*U.S. Views on President Obama's Afghanistan Withdrawal Timetable*

Which comes closest to your view about the timetable President Obama has set for withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan -- you agree with that timetable, you think the U.S. should withdraw its troops sooner than the president specified, or you do not think the U.S. should set a timetable for withdrawing troops from Afghanistan?

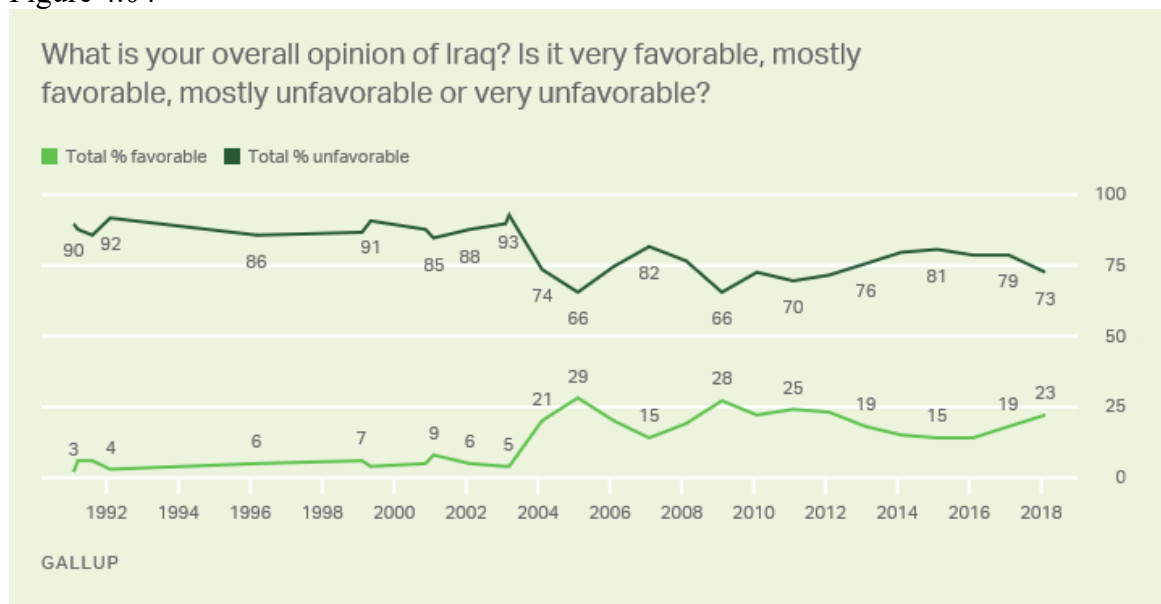
	Agree with timetable	Should withdraw sooner	Should not set timetable for withdrawal	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
National adults	30	33	31	7
Democrats	45	40	13	2
Independents	27	38	29	7
Republicans	19	20	54	8

June 25-26, 2011

GALLUP®

As seen in (Saad 2011)

Figure 4.04



As seen in (Gallup Inc n.d.)

Figure 4.05

### Americans' Opinions on Withdrawal of Nearly All U.S. Troops From Iraq

Turning to Iraq, do you approve or disapprove of President Obama's 2011 decision to withdraw nearly all U.S. troops from Iraq?

	% Approve	% Disapprove	% No opinion
Jun 20-21, 2014	61	34	4
Oct 29-30, 2011 <sup>^</sup>	75	21	5

<sup>^</sup>Question wording: Turning to Iraq, do you approve or disapprove of President Obama's decision to withdraw nearly all U.S. troops from Iraq by the end of the year?

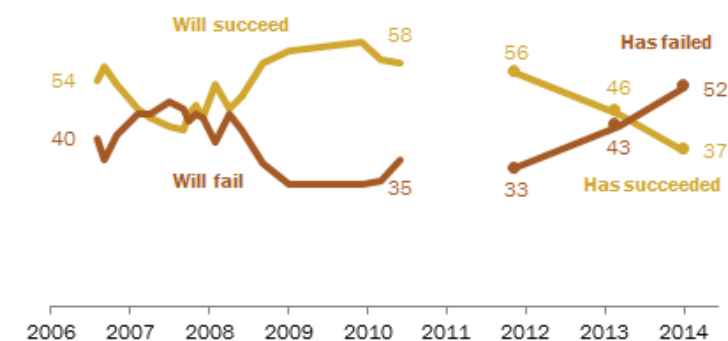
GALLUP<sup>\*</sup>

As seen in (Dugan 2014)

Figure 4.06

### Growing Share Says U.S. Has 'Mostly Failed' in Iraq

*In achieving its goals in Iraq, the U.S. ...*



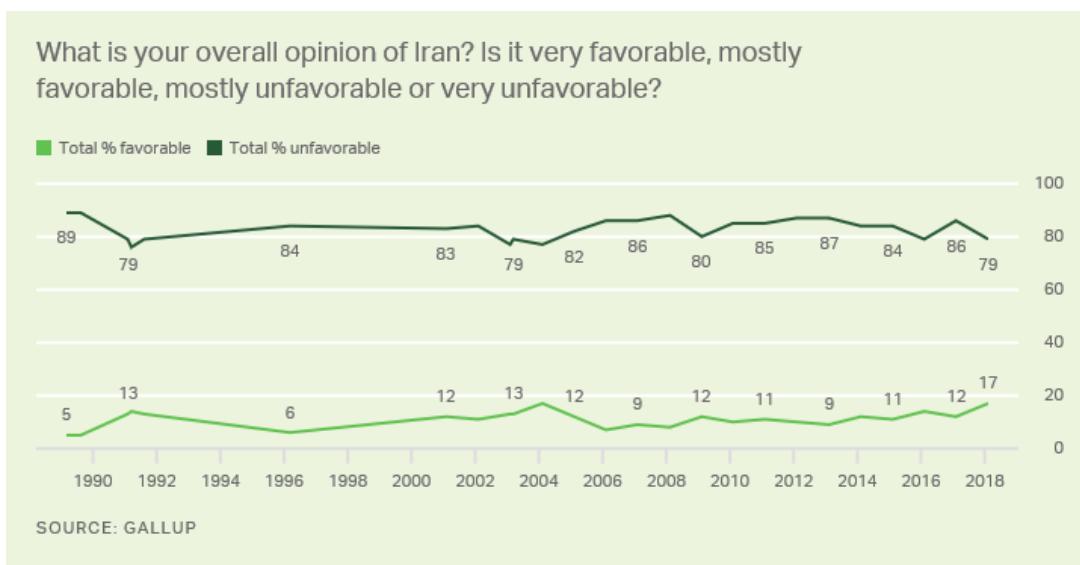
Survey conducted Jan. 15-19, 2014.

Note: Question asked in the future tense from 2006-2010, and in the past tense from 2011-2014.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER/USA TODAY

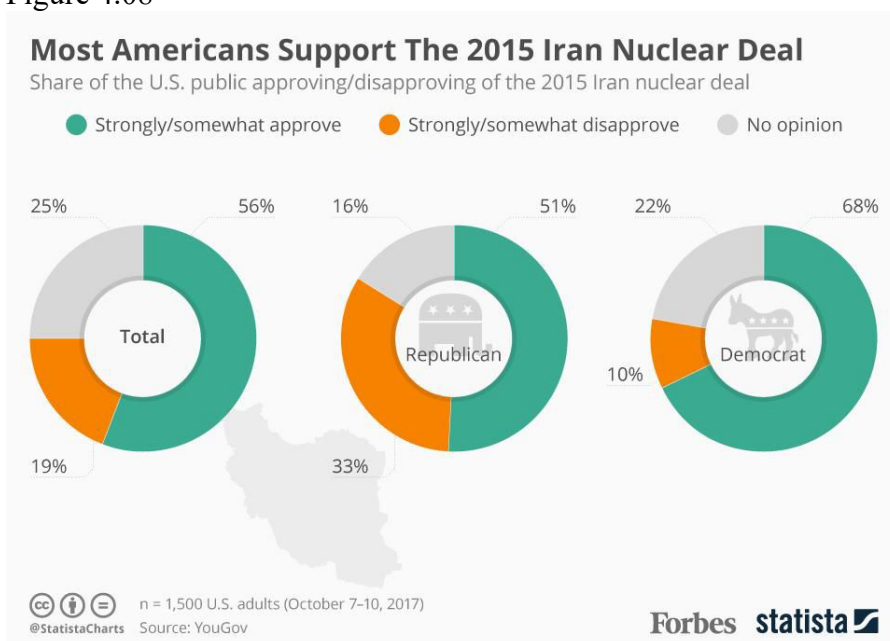
As seen in (Drake 2014)

Figure 4.07



As seen in (Gallup Inc n.d.)

Figure 4.08

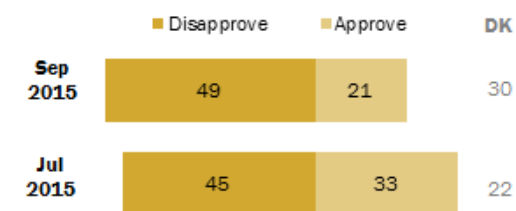


As seen in (McCarthy 2017)

Figure 4.09

## Declining Support for Iran Nuclear Deal

% who approve/disapprove of recent nuclear agreement between Iran, the U.S. and other nations ...



Survey conducted Sept. 3-7, 2015. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

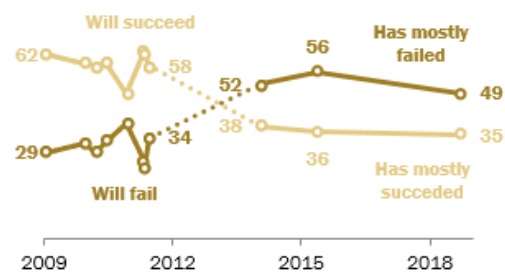
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As seen in (Pew Research Center 2015).

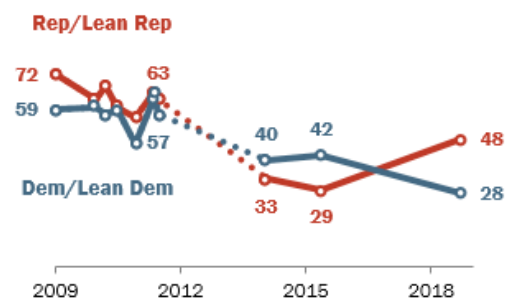
Figure 5.01

## About half of the public says the U.S. has 'mostly failed' in Afghanistan

% who say that the U.S. \_\_\_\_ in achieving its goals in Afghanistan



% who say that the U.S. has mostly *succeeded* in achieving its goals in Afghanistan



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 18-24, 2018.

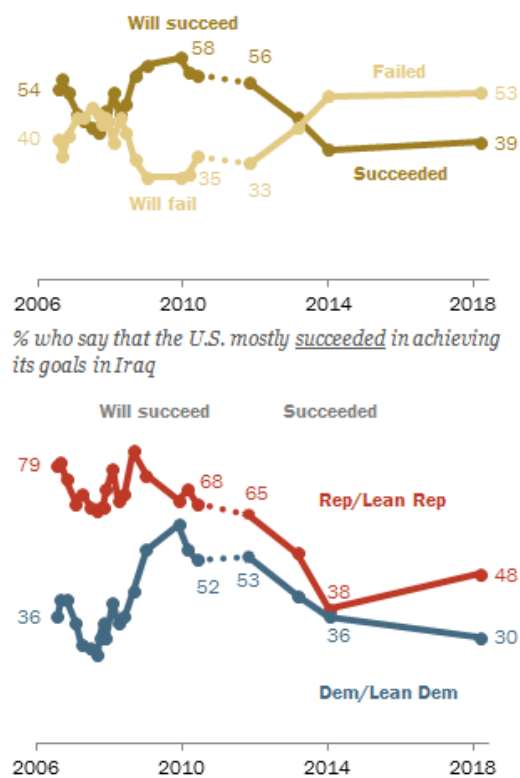
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As seen in (Oliphant 2018b).

Figure 5.02

### Half of Americans say the U.S. 'mostly failed' to achieve goals in Iraq

% who say that the U.S. \_\_\_\_ in achieving its goals in Iraq



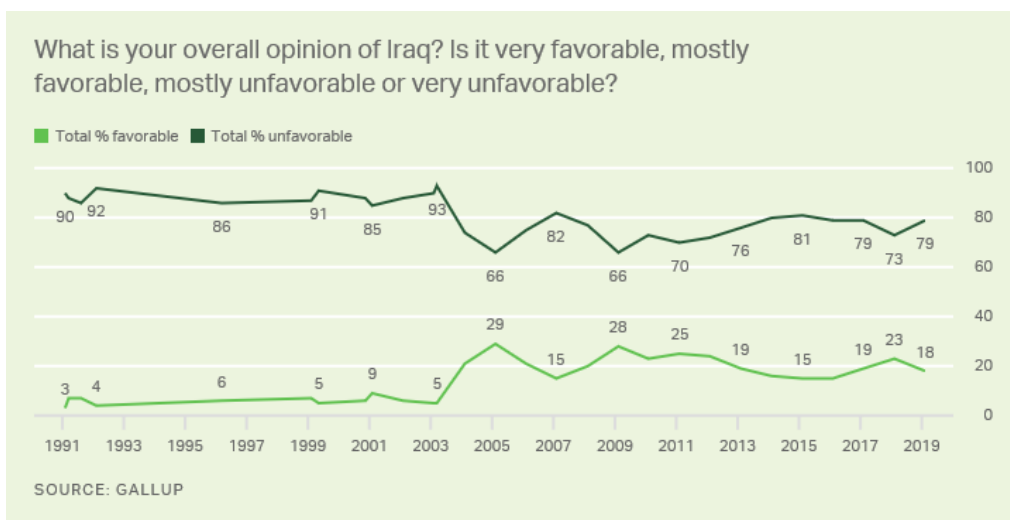
Notes: Question asked in the future tense from 2006-2010, and in the past tense from 2011-2018. See topline for full question wording and trend.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Mar. 7-14, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As seen in (Oliphant 2018a)

Figure 5.03



As seen in (Gallup Inc n.d.)

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