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Author(s): Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick

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The Cold War Consensus: Did It Exist?*

Eugene R. Wittkopf
Louisiana State University

James M. McCormick
Iowa State University

A bipartisan consensus about the means and ends of American foreign policy is generally thought to have been part of the American political environment during the Cold War era. This consensus is also commonly thought to have been a casualty of the Vietnam War, when disagreements arose about the threat of communism, the use of American troops abroad, and relations with the Soviet Union. This article uses public opinion data from the decades following World War II pertaining to these areas of assumed change to measure whether a consensus ever existed and whether it eroded in the wake of Vietnam. The authors conclude that evidence of change can be found but that it is less dramatic in some respects than might be expected.

*Eugene R. Wittkopf is Professor of Political Science at Louisiana State University. He is author of *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* and coauthor of *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process*.*

*James M. McCormick is Professor of Political Science at Iowa State University. He is author of *American Foreign Policy and American Values*.*

Building domestic support for their foreign policy initiatives has been a primary concern of American policymakers throughout the post-World

*The Chicago Council public opinion data were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. Most of the remaining data came from Robert Y. Shapiro of Columbia University and the Harris archives of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The paper is an abbreviated version of a chapter in Wittkopf's *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, recently published by Duke University Press.

War II era. President Harry Truman found it prudent to “scare the hell out of the American people” to build popular support for the emerging design of postwar American foreign policy, whereas President Dwight Eisenhower and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, adopted a strategy that emphasized bipartisan support in Congress. The idea of a “bipartisan foreign policy consensus” came eventually to describe the domestic context of American foreign policy during the Cold War years: the United States would cooperate with others to solve global as well as national problems, but if need be would also intervene in the affairs of others, using force when necessary to protect its self-defined interests. The arrows and olive branch in the talons of the eagle in the great seal of the United States symbolize this dual approach.

The Vietnam War, however, shattered the Cold War consensus, yet it continued to charm policymakers. President Richard Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew appealed to the “silent majority” to support the Nixon Administration’s Vietnam policies against a perceived vocal minority; President Ronald Reagan castigated members of Congress for deserting what he felt had been the bipartisan support of the administration’s Middle Eastern and Central American policies; and President George Bush called in his inaugural address for a restoration of the “old bipartisanship” missing since the divisiveness caused by Vietnam.

In the wake of Vietnam, conflict and cooperation abroad came to divide rather than unite Americans, as is evident on three core issues: (1) the threat of communism, (2) the use of American troops abroad, and (3) relations with the Soviet Union.¹ If a foreign policy consensus existed prior to Vietnam, it seems reasonable to expect a majority of the American people would have supported similar positions on matters related to these issues, each of which was central to the containment strategy which came to define American foreign policy after World War II. Majority support, certainly not division, is a necessary albeit perhaps insufficient condition of consensus.²

1. See Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, *American Leadership in World Affairs* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984), and “The Structure of Foreign Policy Attitudes Among American Leaders,” *Journal of Politics*, 51 (February 1990): 94–125; Eugene R. Wittkopf, “On the Foreign Policy Beliefs of the American People: A Critique and Some Evidence,” *International Studies Quarterly*, 30 (December 1986): 425–45, “Elites and Masses: Another Look at Attitudes Toward America’s World Role,” *International Studies Quarterly*, 31 (June 1987): 131–59, and *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

2. Despite the ubiquitous use of “consensus” as a portrayal of the domestic political environment in the postwar era, no consensus about its meaning exists. Holsti’s depiction of the convergence of leadership opinion around a set of propositions that resulted in “a politically effective centrist coalition that supported the main contours of a globalist

In the analysis that follows, we probe the historical record on these core issues to determine whether public opinion on foreign policy questions satisfies the necessary condition for a consensus. The period prior to U.S. disengagement from Vietnam is our primary concern, but some evidence from the mid-1970s onward has also been examined and is reported where appropriate. In this way, the temporal variations in public attitudes about American foreign policy in the decades following World War II can be examined in order to assess the character of the pre- and post-Vietnam eras.³ The empirical base consists of the marginal frequencies on over 500 public opinion questions on these core issues asked by leading polling organizations during the past four decades. Space precludes reporting all of these frequencies, but a representative number of those especially germane to the analyses are included.⁴ Inevitably, differences in question wording, in the meaning of similar words and phrases used in polls over such long stretches of time, and in survey design and measurement, require that the available information be approached with caution. Still, a probe of the historical record is in order as the continuing and perhaps growing importance of domestic politics to an understanding of the role of the United States in world affairs demand a better understanding of the historical record than now exists.

foreign policy” describes the nature of the consensus in terms applicable to its use by others and in other settings. Ole R. Holsti, “The Three-Headed Eagle: The United States and System Change,” *International Studies Quarterly*, 23 (September 1979): 342. Other discussions of the concept can be found in Gabriel A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1960); Richard J. Barnet, “Reflections: The Four Pillars,” *The New Yorker*, 9 March 1987, pp. 76–84, 87–89; James Chace, “Is a Foreign Policy Consensus Possible?” *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1978): 1–16; I. M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984); Richard Falk, “Lifting the Curse of Bipartisanship,” *World Policy Journal*, 1 (Fall 1983): 127–57; and Ralph B. Levering, *The Public and American Foreign Policy, 1918–1978* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1978).

3. Bipartisanship in congressional-executive relations is another element of the presumed foreign policy consensus which we have examined, in James M. McCormick and Eugene R. Wittkopf, “Bush and Bipartisanship: The Past as Prologue?,” *Washington Quarterly*, 13 (Winter 1990): 5–16.

4. The complete set of items on which the analyses are based is available from the authors on request. In addition to the three core issues described above, the opinion items that are the focus of our attention are those repeated more than once in public opinion surveys in the postwar period or whose wording and/or substantive content was sufficiently close to the repeated items to warrant inclusion in the data set. Thus the empirical base on which the analyses rest may not exhaust all items relevant to the three core issues, but it is believed to include all of those that were asked more than once. The emphasis on repeated items is intended to minimize the impact that question wording may have on the survey responses.

I. The Threat of Communism

Fear of communism is intimately related to the anticommunist and anti-Soviet thrust of postwar American foreign policy, as well as to the associated foreign policy strategy of containment, yet the meaning of the phrase, "threat of communism," is itself ambiguous in the public mind. For some, it might be understood primarily in terms of a threat from within, as during the McCarthy period in the early 1950s. In that instance the broad anticommunist consensus at the general philosophical level in the United States actually permitted McCarthyism to thrive.⁵ Evidence from Gallup polls in the late 1940s and early 1950s showed that, of the most important problems facing the nation, the threat of communism at home was often uppermost in the thinking of many Americans.

More often, however, the threat of communism is conceived as external in nature and frequently linked to the behavior of the Soviet Union. In 1951, a vast majority of the respondents in a National Opinion Research Center (NORC) survey explained the importance they attached to stopping the spread of communism: "Communism is a real threat to U.S. security and to our free way of life. Only a few based their position on philosophical or ideological grounds."⁶ Nearly four decades later, in March 1986, a poll sponsored by the National Strategy Information Center found that 85 percent of the respondents tended to be "suspicious of the Soviet Union," and more than half of these attributed their beliefs to the Soviets' "aggressive international behavior." "Communist ideology" was a distant second choice. For most Americans, then, we may assume that the communist threat is more than simply the threat of alien ideas and that "containing communism" means primarily containing an external politico-military threat. Although anticommunism and anti-Sovietism do not necessarily go hand-in-hand, it appears that, for most Americans, "containing communism" refers to an external security threat, not an ideological or internal subversive one.

Attitudes Toward the Containment of Communism and the Threat from Abroad

How important is containing communism? In 1974, the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations initiated a series of quadrennial foreign policy

5. See William Bragg Ewald, Jr., *McCarthyism and Consensus?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986).

6. U.S. Department of State, *Popular Attitudes toward the World Communist Threat*, August 29, 1951 (Washington, DC: Division of Public Studies, Office of Public Affairs, 1951), p. 1.

surveys.⁷ Each posed a series of foreign policy goals the United States might have and asked respondents to indicate how important they regarded each of them. One goal was “containing communism.” In the 1974 survey, 54 percent of the respondents thought containing communism was a very important goal, 26 percent regarded it as somewhat important, and 13 percent saw it as not at all important (7 percent were not sure). Three subsequent Chicago Council surveys produced much the same results, with only slight variations in the percentages.

How do these response patterns compare with the historical record? Interestingly, NORC asked an analogous question in three surveys in the early 1950s (in January and April 1950, and in June 1951): “In general, how important do you think it is for the United States to try to stop the spread of Communism?” In all three cases the overwhelming proportion of the American people believed the goal to be “very important,” and almost none believed it unimportant. It appears, then, that containing communism is an enduring theme in public perceptions of postwar American foreign policy. Whether anticommunism and containment remain as salient is, however, another matter to which we will return.

The Chicago Council also gathered evidence from the post-Vietnam period about Americans’ perceptions of the threat of communism, shown in Table I. It suggests considerable variability in the salience the mass public attaches to the countries and regions where communist forces might come to power insofar as such developments would be a threat to the United States. Communism in Japan or in Europe or Latin America is clearly seen as threatening, but even in these cases there is considerable variation in the apparent importance Americans attach to different countries. A clear majority, for example, perceives communism in Mexico as a “great threat” to the United States, but there is a measurable difference between the salience attached to the threat of communism in Mexico as compared with El Salvador. Similarly, there is wide variation in how threatening the American people think a communist Italy or France would be, even though both are Western European allies of the United States. While there are no countries or regions in which the majority of the American people regard the rise of communism to be no threat or not much of a threat to the United States, it is clear that policy-

7. John E. Rielly, ed., *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1975* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1975); *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1979* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1979); *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1983* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1983); and *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1987* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1987).

Table I. Attitudes Toward the Threat of Communism, 1974-1986

	DATE	THREAT	NO THREAT	NOT SURE/ ASCERTAINED
		%	%	%
Western Europe	12/74	71	19	10
Latin American countries	12/74	69	20	10
Japan	12/74	68	23	11
African countries	12/74	51	35	14
Italy	12/74	50	37	14
Portugal	12/74	47	39	14

If . . . were to become communist, do you think this would be a threat to the United States, or not?

	DATE	WORDING	GREAT THREAT	SOMEWHAT A THREAT	NOT VERY MUCH	NO THREAT AT ALL	DON'T KNOW
			%	%	%	%	%
Mexico	11/78	A	53	26	9	5	7
	11/82	B	61	19	8	4	9
	11/86	B	62	18	10	5	5
Iran	11/78	A	35	35	11	6	13
	11/82	B	24	35	22	10	10
France	11/78	A	26	41	17	7	10
	11/82	B	31	38	17	6	9
	11/86	B	30	38	18	8	6
Italy	11/78	A	18	40	24	9	9
Chile	11/78	A	17	35	24	9	15
Saudi Arabia	11/82	B	49	31	8	3	9
	11/86	B	39	35	12	5	8
El Salvador	11/82	B	21	43	21	6	10
	11/86	B	27	43	17	4	8
Taiwan	11/82	B	17	37	23	11	13
The Philippines	11/86	B	37	35	15	6	7
South Africa	11/86	B	21	40	22	9	9

A. I am going to read a list of countries. For each, tell me how much of a threat it would be to the U.S. if the Communists came to power in that country through peaceful elections. First, what if the Communist Party came to power through peaceful elections in . . . Do you think this would be a great threat to the U.S., somewhat of a threat to the U.S., not very much of a threat to the U.S., or no threat at all to the U.S.?

B. I am going to read a list of countries. For each, tell me how much of a threat it would be to the U.S. if the Communists came to power. First, what if the Communist Party came to power in . . . Do you think this would be a great threat to the U.S., somewhat of a threat to the U.S., not very much of a threat to the U.S., or no threat at all to the U.S.?

Note: 1974 survey conducted by Louis Harris & Associates, 1978-1986 by the Gallup Poll.

Table II. Attitudes Toward the Threat of Communism, 1948

	DATE	WORDING	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
			%	%	%
Western Europe	7/48	A	80	10	10
Germany	7/48	B	80	9	11
China	7/48	C	73	14	13
South America	7/48	D	70	15	15
China	11/48	E	71	17	12
Mexico	11/48	F	82	8	10
South America	11/48	G	80	8	12

- A. Do you think it makes much difference to the United States whether the countries in Western Europe go Communist or not?
- B. Do you think it makes much difference to the United States whether Germany goes Communist or not?
- C. How about China? [Do you think it makes much difference to the United States whether China goes Communist or not?]
- D. And how about the small countries in South America? [Do you think it makes much difference to the United States whether they go Communist or not?]
- E. Do you think it makes much difference to our country whether China goes communist or not?
- F. How about Mexico—Do you think it would make much difference to our country whether or not Mexico were to go Communist?
- G. And how about the countries in South America? [Do you think it makes much difference to our country whether they go Communist or not?]

Source: National Opinion Research Center (NORC).

makers would face varying degrees of difficulty in selling an anticommunist program to the public depending on how and where the threat occurred.

This conclusion does not seem to apply to the limited comparable historical evidence, shown in Table II, which goes back to the late 1940s. From these data, it would appear that policymakers would have enjoyed broad support for pursuing an anticommunist strategy virtually anywhere. On closer inspection, however, it is not entirely clear that the 1940s differ all that much from the 1970s and 1980s. In each year between 1978 and 1986, for example, roughly four-fifths of the American people regarded the possibility of communism in Mexico as either somewhat or a great threat to the United States. In 1948, 82 percent thought "it would make a difference to our country [if] . . . Mexico were to go Communist." Other comparisons of the data in Tables I and II raise as many questions as they answer. Would the American people have

attached any greater salience to the threat of communism in South Africa in 1948 than they did in the 1980s? Or in Saudi Arabia? Or Chile, or El Salvador, or Italy, or Iran?

Combating Communism

Although the foregoing suggests continuity in public attitudes toward containment and the perceived threat of communism in other countries, there is considerable evidence that challenges the proposition that anti-communism is as salient in the post-Vietnam era as it was in the period between the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 and Congress's approval of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in 1964. Eleven possible foreign policy goals were specified in all four of the Chicago Council surveys. If we look at the rank order of these goals to determine the relative, as opposed to absolute, salience Americans attach to different foreign policy objectives, we find that "containing communism" ranks either fourth or fifth in terms of the proportion of the respondents who regarded the goal as "very important," consistently placing behind protecting the jobs of American workers, securing adequate supplies of energy, and worldwide arms control. It is also interesting to note that "protecting weaker nations from foreign aggression," arguably a major tenet of postwar American foreign policy interventionism, comes in tenth among the eleven goals in all four of the surveys. More recently, a March 1988 survey by the Americans Talk Security (ATS) project found that "combating international drug traffic" was deemed to be the most important national security goal by a plurality of Americans (22 percent). "Keeping communist governments out of Central and South America" and "containing Soviet aggression around the world" followed in fourth (13 percent) and fifth place (12 percent), respectively.

Contrast these findings with responses to the question asked by NORC in 1951 and again in 1952: "If you had to choose, which would you say is more important—to keep Communism from spreading, or to stay out of another war?" Roughly two-thirds chose "keep Communism from spreading"; less than 30 percent chose "stay out of another war." Similarly, in five surveys between September 1950 and June 1952, NORC asked: "If Communist armies attack any other countries in the world, do you think the United States should stay out of it, or should we help defend these countries, like we did in Korea." While the responses reflected growing disillusionment with the Korean War in which the United States was then mired, "help defend" others consistently out-poll "stay out"—by a 66 to 14 percent margin at its peak in September 1950 and by a 45 to 33 percent margin at its low point in June 1952. Furthermore, if those responding "it depends" (presumably on the circumstances or

countries involved) are added to those opting to help others, a majority of Americans always chose involvement over noninvolvement.

At another level relating the ends and means of American foreign policy, consider responses to a series of questions asked by Gallup and NORC between 1955 and 1957, which asked respondents whether they approved the use of economic assistance for purposes of supporting countries willing "to stand with us" in opposing communist aggression. Although some variations in wording exist on this item, the average level of support across eight NORC surveys between January 1955 and January 1956 was 81 percent. Contrast this with the support, which averaged only 46 percent, for the following proposition posed in 1956 and 1957: "We have also sent economic aid to some countries like India, which have not joined us as allies against the Communists. Do you think we should continue to send economic aid to these countries, or not?" Comparable data linking foreign aid to anticommunism are not available in the post-Vietnam period, but public support since the 1950s has generally fallen far short of these levels.⁸

Military aid grounded at one time in the Mutual Security Act has also figured prominently as an anticommunist instrument in American foreign policy and, like economic assistance, has historically enjoyed considerable, if not always overwhelming, popular support when cast in an anticommunist framework. In 1948 and 1949, for example, NORC asked respondents in several polls if they approved or disapproved of sending military supplies to help the Chinese government in its battle with "the Chinese communists." Only about one-third responded favorably in February 1948, but support was higher thereafter and reached 55 percent in an April 1948 survey. More striking are responses to the question "Do you think the United States should send military supplies to help those governments in Asia that are threatened by Communism?" In six surveys taken in 1950 and 1951, the proportion of favorable responses averaged 57 percent and never fell below 50 percent. A similar question asked in 1952 elicited a 54 percent approval rating, and in July 1950, a month after the North Koreans invaded South Korea, nearly two-thirds of the American people were willing "to help those governments in Asia [other than Korea] that are threatened by Communism."

Aid to Western Europe, the focal point of American foreign policy in the immediate postwar years and throughout the 1950s, combined the use of military and economic assistance to combat communism.

8. Cf. Christine E. Contee, *What Americans Think: Views on Development and U.S.-Third World Relations* (Washington, DC: Overseas Development Council, 1987), p. 23.

Although public opinion surveys conducted during this period did not tie questions about support for economic and military aid to its anticommunist roots directly, there is little doubt that the rhetoric of the period did so.⁹ Interestingly, both the Marshall Plan and sending military supplies to Europe enjoyed considerable popular approval. Even before the Marshall Plan was publicly unveiled, between 70 and 80 percent of the American people approved “sending machinery and other supplies to help the countries of western Europe get their factories and farms running again.” Once the plan was in place, support in 1949–1950 for “continuing to send economic aid to western Europe” rarely dropped below 60 percent and frequently ran higher. Similar levels of support were registered for supplying Western Europe militarily. Noteworthy is that the proportion of favorable responses grew from less than a majority in much of 1949 to over 60 percent a year later, and it remained at that level throughout the rest of the decade.

II. The Use of Force

The Vietnam syndrome reflects the anti-interventionist dispositions of the American people that surfaced in the 1960s and 1970s in the wake of the Southeast Asian war. Trends in attitudes toward the war itself are illustrated by responses to the Gallup question: “In view of developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?” In early 1966, only about a quarter of the American people responded affirmatively, but the proportion grew steadily thereafter, crossing the 50 percent threshold in August 1968 and the 60 percent mark in May 1971. Growing antagonism to the war generally, especially apparent from late 1968 onward, reflects a growing bipartisan conviction that the war was a mistake. Democrats had consistently supported the war in greater numbers than Republicans, at least while Lyndon Johnson was in office, but once Richard Nixon became President, party differences largely disappeared.¹⁰ The lasting impact of these views is suggested in responses to a series of questions asked by the Harris and Gallup organizations about the “morality” of the Vietnam war. The evidence indicates that sometime during 1971 an

9. See Gilbert R. Winham, “Developing Theories of Foreign Policy-Making: A Case Study of Foreign Aid,” *Journal of Politics*, 32 (February 1970): 41–70.

10. We do not mean to suggest that the reasons for the growing opposition to the war were always the same, for there is evidence they were not. See Godfrey Hodgson, *In Our Time: America from World War II to Nixon* (London: Macmillan, 1977); and Milton J. Rosenberg, Sidney Verba, and Philip E. Converse, *Vietnam and the Silent Majority* (New York: Harper, 1970).

Table III. Circumstances that Might Justify the United States Going to War in the Future, 1969–1971

	DATE	WORTH	NOT WORTH	NOT SURE
		%	%	%
Western Europe were invaded by the Communists	10/69	50	34	16
	8/70	45	35	20
	7/71	47	31	22
The Communists invaded Australia	10/69	49	35	16
	8/70	40	40	20
	7/71	40	38	22
The Russians took over West Berlin	10/69	37	46	17
	7/71	32	47	21
The Russians tried to take over West Berlin	8/70	39	42	20
Castro took over a country in South America	10/69	35	50	15
	8/70	34	47	19
	7/71	31	50	19
Communist China invaded Formosa	10/69	25	57	19
	7/71	18	58	24
Israel were losing the war [1970: a war] with the Arabs	10/69	16	67	18
	8/70	19	57	24
The Russians occupied Yugoslavia	10/69	12	70	18
	7/71	11	66	23

There has been a lot of discussion about what circumstances might justify the United States going to war again in the future. Do you feel if . . . it would be worth going to war again, or not?

Source: Louis Harris & Associates.

overwhelming proportion of the American people became convinced that the Vietnam war was fundamentally misguided. That viewpoint has persisted ever since.

Alternative Scenarios

The impact of Americans' beliefs about the Vietnam war on their disposition to use American troops in potential conflict situations elsewhere is suggested by the data in Table III, which reports responses to questions asked by the Harris organization between October 1969 and July 1971 about "what circumstances might justify the United States going to war again in the future." Only those situations that were probed more than once are recorded. The results are unambiguous: with the single exception of the hypothetical situation in which Israel was losing in a war to

the Arabs, all of the proposed scenarios for America going to war again show a decline in support by the American people. Moreover, in a majority of these, the balance between the "worth" and "not worth" responses tipped in the latter direction.

The data in Table III, while somewhat ambiguous, generally register an erosion of support during the short period between 1969 and 1971 for the interventionist thrust characteristic of postwar American foreign policy. More difficult to answer is whether strong public support for interventionism and war ever existed. The survey data from the early 1950s indicating a preference for stopping communism rather than averting war, summarized above, support an affirmative conclusion. Other historical data also suggest the answer may be "yes."

In 1950 Gallup asked, "Do you think the United States should or should not go to war with Russia if any of these things happen?" The scenarios were attacks by communist troops on the Philippines, the American zone in Germany, and Formosa. Whereas the 50 percent response rate in support of going to war "if Western Europe were invaded by the Communists" is the highest recorded in Table III, 80 percent of the respondents in the 1950 survey were willing to go to war over Germany, and an even larger number, 82 percent, was willing to go to war over the Philippines. Less support was evident in the case of Formosa, but even there nearly three-fifths responded the U.S. should go to war in its defense. Recognizing that question wording as well as the context of the times may affect the responses, the contrast with public attitudes two decades later is nonetheless striking.

In the early 1960s Gallup, Harris, and Roper also began to ask about the willingness of the American people to defend West Berlin against Soviet encroachment. Once more the pattern is clear: strong majority support (averaging 67 percent) during the 1960s, is followed by a marked decline (to an average of 40 percent) in the 1970s.

Other situations are less easily characterized. In the case of Western Europe, only 50 percent of the respondents in a 1970 Harris poll indicated a willingness to use American troops to oppose a communist takeover, and the proportion so disposed in analogous questions asked thereafter ranged from only 40 percent in 1974 to 68 percent in 1986. Entirely comparable questions in the historical record do not exist, but, interestingly, these figures are not dramatically different from responses to two NORC polls taken in 1947 and 1949 in which only 52 and 55 percent of the respondents approved the use of armed forces to stop an attack by Russia on "some small European country" or by "some big country" on "a western European nation." Other data from this period indicate strong support for the North Atlantic alliance. In 1949, over three-

quarters of the American people supported Senate approval of the NATO treaty, and support for the alliance grew thereafter, with some 87 percent of the respondents in a 1955 NORC survey viewing favorably the mutual commitment of the U.S. and Western Europe "to defend each other against attack."

In the case of U.S. mutual defense commitments in Asia, 58 percent of the respondents in a June 1954 NORC survey approved the idea of the United States signing a defense agreement with "the Philippines, Siam, and Australia," and in November of that year over three-quarters approved the just-signed Southeast Asia treaty that created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). However, when asked whether it was more important for the United States "to keep the Communists from taking over Asia, or to keep the Communists from taking over Europe," Europe won out by margins of 32 to 16 and 31 to 12 percent in two 1951 surveys and by a margin of 43 to 15 percent in 1953, with between 30 and 40 percent of those sampled attaching equal importance to both regions.

Outside of Western Europe and the SEATO framework, Yugoslavia has often been the focus of pollsters' attention. In 1951, NORC asked: "If Communist armies were to attack Yugoslavia, do you think the United States should stay out of it, or should we help defend them?" Forty-two percent of the respondents favored helping the Yugoslavs. A similar question asked by Harris in 1969 found only 27 percent willing to help Yugoslavia. Even less support (11-18 percent) was registered in three polls taken in 1974 and 1978 in which the use of troops to defend Yugoslavia was the focus of attention. In two 1980 polls, however, an average of 34 percent of the respondents favored the use of U.S. troops if Soviet troops invaded Yugoslavia. The trends thus generally mirror attitudes toward the defense of West Berlin, but at a generally lower level of support throughout.¹¹

These findings have a parallel in the case of Iran, in which the United States has had long-standing interests and a history of close involvement. Twice in 1951 a national cross-section was asked: "If Communist armies were to attack Iran (Persia), do you think the United States should stay out of it, or should we help defend them?" Between 47 and 48 percent of the respondents preferred to help defend Iran. Sending troops in addition to military supplies was also preferred by a majority of those willing to defend Iran which, extrapolated across the entire sample, translates

11. Cf. John E. Mueller, "Changes in American Public Attitudes Toward International Involvement," in *The Limits of Intervention*, ed. Ellen P. Stern (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1977), p. 332.

into about a quarter of the American people willing to use American troops to defend Iran against a Communist attack. Contrast these findings with the results of an early 1973 Harris poll: 57 percent of the respondents opposed U.S. military involvement, including the use of troops, in the event "there were a danger of a communist takeover of Iran." Only 23 percent supported the idea. Although this proportion compares favorably with those willing to use troops in Iran's defense in the early 1950s, the clear majority opposed to military involvement does not. Less clear perhaps is the meaning that should be ascribed to these results given the widely discrepant circumstances to which they apply.

Two other non-European countries that have figured prominently in postwar American foreign policy, and to which the United States has been tied in mutual defense treaties, are South Korea and Nationalist China (Taiwan). In the case of Korea, of course, the United States did commit troops to its defense, and, as the data summarized above indicate, in July 1950, a month after the U.S. became involved in the Korean conflict, a clear majority of the American people were willing to go to war over the defense of Formosa, which at the time must surely have seemed a likely possibility. Somewhat less enthusiasm was expressed later in response to a 1956 item which asked: "If the Chinese Communists attack Formosa, do you think the United States should help defend Formosa, even if other countries do not join with us?" Still, over half of the respondents responded affirmatively, and only a third negatively. Since the 1950s, however, the American people have been decidedly unwilling to support the use of troops to defend either South Korea or Taiwan. In 1969, for example, 48 percent of the respondents in a Harris poll were willing to support the use of U.S. troops in the event there "were a danger of a Communist takeover of South Korea," and 38 percent were similarly disposed in the case of Taiwan (Formosa). By 1974, however, the proportions had dropped to 15 and 17 percent, respectively, and the support level has hovered around 20 percent ever since.

Various nations in the Western hemisphere have from time to time figured prominently in postwar American foreign policy. The available opinion data suggest some rather dramatic shifts in attitudes toward the use of troops. At several points between 1947 and 1965, as Table IV shows, Americans indicated a willingness to come to the defense of their southern neighbors. In 1965, for example, NORC asked: "Suppose there is a revolution in one of the countries of South America, and it looks as though a Communist government will take over. Do you think the United States should or should not send in American troops to prevent this?" Nearly three-quarters said the U.S. should. But when confronted with a situation in El Salvador in the early 1980s that arguably fit the

Table IV. Attitudes Toward the Use of Troops in Central and South America, 1947–1983

DATE	WORDING	FAVORABLE	NOT	DON'T KNOW/ QUALIFIED/ NO OPINION
		RESPONSE	FAVORABLE	
		%	%	%
6/47	A	72	12	16
4/49	B	62	19	19
9/49	C	50	30	20
6/54	D	65	26	9
6/65	E	73	19	8
3/82	F	18	79	4
5/83	F	14	80	6

- A. Suppose some country attacked one of the countries in South America. Would you approve or disapprove of the United States sending armed forces along with other American countries to stop the attack? (NORC)
- B. Suppose some big country attacks a South American nation. Would you approve or disapprove of the United States using its armed forces to help stop the attack? (NORC)
- C. How about South America—Would you approve or disapprove of the United States using its armed forces to help stop any attack on a country in South America? (NORC)
- D. Suppose some country in South or Central America does set up a Communist government. Would you favor trying to get them out, even if we have to use armed force? (NORC)
- E. Suppose there is a revolution in one of the countries of South America, and it looks as though a Communist government will take over. Do you think the United States should or should not send in American troops to prevent this? (NORC)
- F. And would you approve or disapprove of the United States sending troops to fight in El Salvador? [Followed “If the El Salvadoran government cannot defeat the rebels, do you think the United States will eventually send American soldiers to fight in El Salvador or not?”] (ABC News)

scenario posed a decade and a half earlier, less than a fifth of the American people were willing to send in American boys. Notably, however, the question did not include any reference to communism.

Israel is a particularly interesting case because the United States has been tied so closely to it. Surprisingly, the willingness of the American people to defend Israel militarily has been rather low and, indeed, has not differed markedly from the Korean and Chinese cases. In 1969, 44 percent of the American people responded affirmatively when asked: “Suppose war breaks out again between Israel and the Arab countries. What if it looked as though Israel would be overrun by the Arabs with Russian help, do you think the U.S. should help Israel or stay out?” A

Table V. Attitudes Toward Eastern Europe and Cuba, 1951–1963

DATE	WORDING	FAVORABLE	NOT	DON'T KNOW/ NOT SURE/ NO OPINION
		RESPONSE	FAVORABLE	
		%	%	%
6/53	A	30	58	12
6/55	A	40	52	8
11/55	A	35	55	10
6/61	B	24	65	11
9/62	B	24	63	13
2/63	B	20	64	16
11/63	C	32	44	24

- A. As you probably know, a number of countries of Eastern Europe, like Poland and Czechoslovakia, have been under Russian control in the last few years. Do you think our government should do anything at the present time to try to free these countries from Communist rule? (NORC)
- B. Some people say that the United States should send our armed forces into Cuba to help overthrow Castro. Do you agree or disagree? (Gallup)
- C. If the Russians do not remove their troops from Cuba, do you think we should invade Cuba with American troops or not? (Harris)

year later, however, in response to a similar question, only 27 percent supported the use of U.S. troops. Since that early 1970 poll, the proportion of Americans willing to use troops to defend Israel, as measured by ten surveys taken between late 1970 and late 1986, has ranged from only 17 to 39 percent.

Aid versus Troops

Historically, Americans have been especially reluctant to support “rolling back” the Iron Curtain. As shown in Table V, which reports items drawn from the period 1953–1963, neither in Eastern Europe nor in Cuba has a majority of the American people supported efforts to topple Soviet-supported regimes. Little had changed by the 1980s. In late 1980 (Carter administration) and again in early 1981 (Reagan administration), Harris asked what the U.S. should do in the event of a Russian invasion of Poland designed to quiet worker unrest there. The “diplomatic option,” as Table VI reports, was the overwhelming favorite, with support for economic sanctions close behind. Unambiguously the most unpopular tactics were “threatening to go to war with Russia if they don’t get out of Poland” and “going to war to liberate Poland from Russian Communist control.”

Table VI. Attitudes Toward a Soviet Invasion of Poland, 1980-1981

	DATE	FAVOR	OPPOSE	NOT SURE
		%	%	%
Getting the United Nations General Assembly to condemn Russian aggression	12/80	87	10	3
The U.S. and its allies in Western Europe ending all trade with the Soviet Union	12/80 2/81	80 75	17 19	3 6
The U.S. and its allies sending in money and military supplies to help the Polish workers and militia to resist the Russian invasion	12/80 2/81	66 53	30 42	4 6
The U.S. refusing to discuss any further arms control agreements with the Russians	12/80	63	34	3
The U.S. staying out of a conflict that is between two Communist countries	12/80	58	37	5
The United States withdrawing its ambassador from Moscow and breaking diplomatic relations with the Russians	12/80 2/81	46 44	51 50	3 6
The U.S. threatening to go to war with Russia if they don't get out of Poland	12/80 2/81	28 22	68 73	4 5
The U.S. going to war to liberate Poland from Russian Communist control	12/80	25	71	4

1980: The Russians have 750,000 troops near the Polish border. It is possible that they will go into Poland to repress the labor unrest, as they went into Czechoslovakia in 1968. The U.S. and Western European leaders have warned Russia not to invade Poland. There is a well-trained Polish army and air force of 350,000 that might resist a Soviet invasion. If Russia sends troops into Poland would you favor or oppose . . .

1981: If the Russians invade Poland militarily to put down worker and farmer unrest, would you favor or oppose . . .

Source: Louis Harris & Associates.

Using military aid to cope with the Polish situation ranked high on the list of policy options preferred by Americans. In the abstract, however, neither military aid nor sales has enjoyed strong support as a policy instrument in recent years. Since 1974, respondents have been asked in each of the Chicago Council surveys whether they favor or oppose giving or selling military equipment to other nations. Only between 23 percent (1974) and 33 percent (1986) have favored the former, and between 34 percent (1978) and 39 percent (1982) the latter. However, when asked in a

context where aid becomes a tradeoff for the use of troops, aid is clearly the preferred instrument of policy. In 1971 and again in 1975, Gallup asked respondents their preferences about how to deal with attacks by communist-backed forces against several different nations—send troops, send supplies, or refuse to get involved. In few situations was one option preferred by a majority over the others (using troops was the majority preference in one case and refusing to get involved in four), but aid was preferred over the use of troops in 19 of the 24 situations posed.

More recently, the Americans Talk Security project asked in 1988 which of four options was the strongest action the United States should take in situations where military force might be called for—stay out, use diplomatic and political pressure only “against the aggressor nation,” send military aid “to the country under attack,” or “send American troops to assist the attacked country.” The scenarios were the crossing of the border into Honduras by Nicaraguan troops to destroy Contra bases, a Soviet occupation of Poland following strikes and protests that weaken the Polish government, and the invasion of Israel by Arab forces, Taiwan by the People’s Republic of China, Saudi Arabia by Iran, Pakistan by India, and West Berlin by Soviet and East German forces. In five of the seven scenarios, “stay out” was the option preferred by a plurality. Berlin and Poland were the two exceptions. Among the remaining options, diplomatic and political pressures were typically the most popular, and in the choice between sending supplies and sending troops the latter won out twice by only a single percentage point (18 and 17 percent in the cases of Saudi Arabia and Israel).

The data in Table VII suggest an historical counterpart to the tradeoff between aid and troops revealed by Gallup in the 1970s and reinforced by the ATS findings a decade later. During 1953–1954, as the French were fighting to maintain their colonial empire in Indochina, the American people were presented with several options regarding the situation. When asked in May 1954 if they thought the United States should join with others to prevent a communist takeover of Indochina (question wording A), an overwhelming majority of 69 percent said “yes.” When asked if “our own air force should take part in the fighting” (wording B), support dropped to the 50–60 percent range. When sending air and naval forces to help the French (wording C) was posed, support dropped to around one-third. And when “sending United States soldiers to take part in the fighting” was suggested (wording D), favorable responses ranged from less than 10 to less than 25 percent.

These response patterns arguably reflect the retrospective judgments of Americans about the Korean War in much the same way that attitudes toward the use of force in the 1970s are hypothesized to have been influ-

Table VII. Attitudes Toward the Use of U.S. Military Force in Indochina, 1953-1954

DATE	WORDING	FAVORABLE	NOT	NO OPINION/ NOT SURE/ DON'T KNOW
		RESPONSE	FAVORABLE	
		%	%	%
5/54	A	69	23	8
5/53	B	55	35	10
9/53	B	53	34	13
4/54	B	61	31	8
5/54	C	36	52	12
5/54	C	33	55	12
6/54	C	33	56	12
8/53	D	8	86	5
2/54	D	11	82	8
5/54	D	22	69	9
5/54	D	20	72	8
6/54	D	18	72	10

- A. If other countries are willing to join with us, do you think the United States should or should not take part in the fighting, to keep the Communists from taking over all of Indo-China? (NORC)
- B. If it looks like the Communists might take over all of Indo-China, do you think our own air force should take part in the fighting? (NORC)
- C. Would you approve or disapprove of our sending air and naval forces, but not ground forces, to help the French? (Gallup)
- D. The United States is now sending war materials to help the French fight the Communists in Indochina. Would you approve or disapprove of sending United States soldiers to take part in the fighting there? (Gallup)

enced by the Vietnam experience.¹² Table VIII records responses to Gallup and NORC questions about whether “the United States made a mistake in going into the war in Korea” and whether the war was “worth fighting.” The data illustrate growing dissatisfaction with the war while it was being fought (1950-1953), but less clear-cut feelings after the war than in the case of Vietnam. Nonetheless, the rough similarity in the attitudinal responses of the American people to their two experiences in limited war deserves attention, for it cautions against accepting too

12. In fact, it has been shown that trends in attitudes during the two wars follow similar patterns, with declining support for the wars closely correlated with the casualties suffered in each. John E. Mueller, “Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam,” *American Political Science Review*, 65 (June 1971): 358-75.

Table VIII. Attitudes Toward the Korean War, 1950–1956

DATE	WORDING	NOT WORTH FIGHTING/ MISTAKE	WORTH FIGHTING/ NO MISTAKE	NO OPINION/ DON'T KNOW
		%	%	%
8/50	A	20	65	15
1/51	A	49	38	13
3/51	B	50	39	11
3/52	B	51	35	14
11/52	B	43	37	20
10/52	C	56	32	12
11/52	C	58	34	8
12/52	C	52	39	9
4/53	C	55	36	9
6/53	C	58	32	10
8/53	C	62	27	10
11/53	D	50	38	12
11/54	D	51	39	10
9/56	D	41	46	13

- A. In view of developments since we entered the fighting in Korea, do you think the United States made a mistake in deciding to defend Korea, or not? (Gallup)
- B. Do you think the United States made a mistake in going into the war in Korea, or not? (Gallup)
- C. As things stand now, do you feel that the war in Korea has been worth fighting, or not? (NORC)
- D. As things stand now, do you feel that the war in Korea was worth fighting, or not? (NORC)

readily that the response to Vietnam uniquely shaped American attitudes toward the appropriate role of the U.S. in world affairs.

In summary, then, there is much evidence to suggest that the American people were more willing to support the use of force abroad prior to the Vietnam War than during and after it, but this is not unambiguously the case. Nor is it unambiguous that Vietnam had a distinctive and unique impact on public attitudes toward the use of force.

III. Relations with the Soviet Union

Détente as a phase in the Soviet-American relationship is typically associated with 1970s, but the question of how to deal with the Soviet Union, and in particular how to avoid military conflict with it, has dominated American foreign policy for more than a generation. Arms control issues

figure prominently on the Soviet-American agenda, and for many years the American people have supported efforts to utilize arms control to dampen Soviet-American hostility. In 1968, for example, Harris asked: "If you had to choose, would you prefer that our government put greater emphasis on building up U.S. military power or in trying to come to arms control agreements with the Russians?" Thirty percent of the respondents chose to emphasize United States military power, but more than twice that number—61 percent—preferred more emphasis on arms control agreements. A decade later, when the SALT II treaty was being negotiated and then actively debated, the American people once more demonstrated their support for arms control. In twelve polls taken by NBC News between 1977 and 1981 in which respondents were asked whether they favored an agreement (or a new agreement) between the U.S. and Russia that would limit nuclear weapons, the level of favorable responses never fell below 60 percent and averaged nearly 70 percent. Similar levels of support were registered in a series of Harris surveys taken between 1975 and 1979 in which SALT was specifically mentioned.

Despite this long-term and apparently broad-based support for reaching accommodations with the Soviet Union, it appears not always to have been the case. Between April 1948 and November 1953, NORC posed the following question in ten different surveys: "How do you feel about our dealings with Russia—Do you think the United States should be more willing to compromise with Russia, or is our present policy about right, or should we be even firmer than we are today?" "Be even firmer" was typically the choice of about three-fifths of the respondents; "compromise" never enjoyed more than 10 percent support. During this period strong support was also registered for going to war against Russia "with all our power, if any Communist army attacks any other country," including throughout much of the time support for the use of atomic and nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union. Not until the mid-1950s did support for the thermonuclear option fall below the 50 percent mark.

The one significant arms control proposal during this period, President Eisenhower's "open skies" proposal offered at the 1955 Geneva summit, failed to win the approval of a majority of the American people. Lack of support for Eisenhower's plan may have been a direct consequence of a lack of confidence that the Soviets would live up to such an agreement. When asked in three surveys taken in the summer and fall of 1955 whether "we could count on Russia to live up to whatever agreements may result" from the Geneva summit, the judgment was "no" by an overwhelming margin of 40 to 50 percent. The lack of support for Eisenhower's proposal is noteworthy nonetheless, especially so given the

understandable tendency of Americans to support presidential foreign and national security policy initiatives, however questionable they may sometimes seem.

Apart from the issues of war and arms control, the prospect of increasing trade with the Soviet Union, presumably as a route not simply to economic gain but also to positive political payoffs, has a long history. Responses to a variety of different public opinion questions are shown in Table IX. Recognizing that question wording may account in part for the variations shown, the overall picture is clear nonetheless: there is an unambiguous step-level increase in support for increased Soviet-Ameri-

Table IX. Attitudes Toward Expanding Soviet-American Trade, 1953-1986

DATE	WORDING	FAVORABLE RESPONSE	NOT FAVORABLE	DON'T KNOW/ NOT SURE
		%	%	%
8/53	A	40	48	12
2/54	A	42	44	14
6/55	B	55	29	16
6/56	C	63	32	5
6/57	D	50	33	17
11/57	D	46	33	21
1/58	E	57	21	21
2/59	D	55	27	18
10/63	D	55	33	12
8/70	F	75	14	12
6/71	F	76	14	10
2/72	F	75	12	13

- A. Should the United States and Russia work out a business arrangement to buy and sell goods to each other? (Gallup)
- B. Should the United States and Russia work out an arrangement to buy and sell goods to each other? (Gallup)
- C. Do you approve or disapprove of Americans carrying on trade with Russia, if this trade does not include war material? (NORC)
- D. Should the United States and Russia work out a business arrangement to buy and sell more goods to each other? (Gallup)
- E. In a recent meeting with the U.S., Bulganin, the Russian Prime Minister, made these suggestions. Do you think that the U.S. and its Western allies should or should not agree to expand East-West trade? (Gallup)
- F. Do you favor or oppose agreement between the United States and Russia on expanding trade between the two countries? (Harris)

can trade between the 1950s and 1960s, on the one hand, and the 1970s and 1980s, on the other.

If the changes recorded in Table IX are indicative of a broad shift in public attitudes away from confrontation with the Soviet Union and toward cooperation, we might expect the changes to be reflected on other issues as well. Regrettably, the trade issue—defined broadly and abstractly—is the only one among several that have been the focus of the Soviet-American dialogue since the Nixon presidency for which there is much historical data. But what is available again raises as many questions as it answers.

Consider, for example, the question of selling wheat and other grains to the Soviet Union. In 1963 Harris asked whether respondents would favor or oppose “selling Russia surplus wheat and other food.” Fifty-four percent said they would favor such a move. Little more than a

Table IX. (continued)

DATE	WORDING	FAVORABLE RESPONSE	NOT FAVORABLE	DON'T KNOW/ NOT SURE
6/73	G	72	14	14
11/73	H	72	16	12
12/74	I	66	21	14
12/75	H	52	25	23
3/77	J	67	16	17
4/78	J	71	17	12
11/78	K ^a	46	39	14
11/82	H	70	26	4
11/82	K ^a	40	47	13
11/86	K ^a	52	37	11

G. Let me read you some possible areas of agreement that might come out of the Nixon-Brezhnev talks in Washington this month. For each, tell me if you would favor or oppose such an agreement. . . . Expanding trade between the two countries. (Harris)

H. Let me read you some proposals that have been made for possible agreements between Russia and the United States. For each, tell me if you would favor or oppose such an agreement. . . . Expanding [1975: expand] trade between the two countries. (Harris)

I. For each of these proposals that have been made for possible agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union, tell me if you would favor or oppose such an agreement. . . . Expanding trade between the United States and the Soviet Union. (Harris)

J. Would you favor the U.S. and Russia increasing trade with each other? (Harris)

K. Relations between the Soviet Union and the United States have been the subject of disagreement for some time. Please tell me if you would favor or oppose the following types of relationship with the Soviet Union. . . . Restricting U.S.-Soviet trade.^a (Gallup)

^aResponse categories reversed so “restricting trade” is treated as an unfavorable response.

decade later, an analogous question (Do you favor or oppose an agreement to “sell wheat to Russia on a long-term basis?”) elicited support from only 29 to 32 percent of the respondents in the two surveys where it was asked. Then again, about another decade later, in the 1986 Chicago Council survey, 57 percent of the respondents approved “increasing grain sales to the Soviet Union.” In many respects the trends in these data are the exact opposite from what might be expected. The suspicion is that domestic politics—particularly adverse reactions to “The Great American Grain Robbery” of 1972—sourer American attitudes regarding this particular element of détente.

Automobiles, machinery, machine tools, computers, and advanced computers have been mentioned as possible trade items in several different surveys between 1948 and 1986. If these are conceived broadly as “high technology exports,” as each might properly have been regarded in its appropriate historical context, then it is clear the American people have never supported trade in such goods. In 1963, 51 percent of the respondents to a Harris survey supported the idea of “selling Russia U.S. automobiles,” but this is the only instance in the eight surveys in which the foregoing items are mentioned where a majority supported the specified relationship.

On the other hand, space exploration seems to have become accepted as a legitimate area of Soviet-American cooperation. In 1963, only about a third of the respondents in a Harris survey approved of the idea of “sending a man to the moon with the Russians.” A decade later it was commonplace for two-thirds of the public to support joint Soviet-American space ventures. Perhaps because the U.S. had “won the race” to be the first to place a person on the moon, space was no longer regarded as a primary area of Cold War competition.

Much the same is true in the area of scientific exchanges. Again using 1963 as the base point, only about a third of the public in that year supported “exchanging engineers, physicists, and other scientists with Russia.” In December 1974, 64 percent supported “exchanging scientists and other technical missions” with the Soviet Union.

Most of the data summarized here are consistent with the proposition that the American people have been more willing to build bridges of accommodation to the Soviet Union in the post-Vietnam era than they were before the war in Southeast Asia. This conclusion is not unambiguous, but clearly it makes little sense to talk about joint exploration of space with the Soviet Union—as was preferred in the 1970s—in an environment where using nuclear weapons against Moscow in the event of a communist attack elsewhere is widely supported—as it was in the 1950s. Neither Vietnam nor other developments of the 1960s and 1970s that

contributed to the change in public attitudes toward foreign policy, including *détente* itself, may explain that change—the growing capability of the Soviet Union to destroy the United States with nuclear weapons is a better bet—but the change in attitude is no less real.

IV. Summary and Conclusions

Did a Cold War consensus in American popular opinion ever exist? Was it shattered by the Vietnam experience? Generating answers to these important questions is difficult, and the historical data and analytical approach used here may be inadequately tailored to the task. Any number of different partisan, ideological, educational, and regional configurations might produce the opinion patterns examined here.¹³ There are, furthermore, other elements of the consensus that might be examined, such as attitudes toward the United Nations and other international organizations and toward elements of the liberal international economic order created after World War II, that may reveal patterns at variance with those unearthed here. Nonetheless, our analyses offer important insight into the domestic context of American foreign policy in the decades immediately following World War II. Specifically, our probe of the historical record suggests a cautious but affirmative response to both of the questions posed above: a foreign policy consensus seems to have existed in American popular opinion prior to Vietnam, but it has since eroded.

Evidence for the existence of a foreign policy consensus and for its erosion in the wake of Vietnam is clearest in the attitudes of the American people toward the threat of communism. Throughout the postwar period, the American people have regarded the containment of communism as an important goal of American foreign policy, and they continued to see communism as a threat in the 1980s, just as they did in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Still, the need to combat this threatening force is less enthusiastically embraced today than it was earlier. A key to understanding the changing climate of opinion lies in the choice of roughly two-thirds of the American people in the early 1950s to stop the spread of communism rather than avert war. Another key is found in the

13. Unfortunately, the requisite data that would permit a complete examination of the propositions from this viewpoint are not readily available—although, it should be added quickly, those that are do not contradict the findings summarized above. See Robert Y. Shapiro and Benjamin I. Page, "Subgroup Trends in Policy Choices: A Preliminary Report on Some Theories and Findings," (Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 11-14, 1984).

broad support for the use of economic and military aid for purposes of combating communism evident in the 1940s and 1950s. Although questions worded in the same way since then are not available, the enthusiasm for using aid as an anticommunist instrument early in the postwar years compared with the general dissatisfaction with aid of any sort in the 1970s and 1980s cannot be overlooked.

Whether the Vietnam experience contributed to these changes is not easily determined, and the data do not point to any direct causal connection. But to many people Vietnam symbolized the bankruptcy of military solutions to political problems, and in this sense it doubtless contributed to growing divisiveness about how best to deal with the communist threat. It is also true, however, that the world today is more complex and diverse than it was in the 1950s, and this fact, often pointed to by analysts concerned with the question of whether (or why) the Cold War consensus has broken (did break) down, may likewise account for the apparent lack of clarity on how best to cope with the communist menace. As issues that once seemed black and white coalesce into shades of gray, devising appropriate responses becomes more problematic.

The evidence based on mass public attitudes that best supports the view that Vietnam was a causal factor as well as watershed in American foreign policy is that regarding the use of force. In the immediate post-Vietnam years the disposition to use force in a broad range of overseas conflict situations was severely restricted. Yet there is also evidence that as the memory of Vietnam recedes, the willingness of the American people to use force has grown once more. But there is a perceptible difference: public support for the use of force has not regained the same level that seems to have existed prior to Vietnam. Majority support—an admittedly timid criterion for the existence of consensus—was frequently but not always realized before Vietnam but more often failed to be realized once overt American military involvement in Southeast Asia began.

Evidence relating to cooperation in Soviet-American relations also points toward change in the postwar years, but in this case it is difficult to relate changes in attitudes to the Vietnam experience in the same way that attitudes toward the use of force seem causally related to it. Vietnam doubtless influenced mass attitudes toward America's world role, which in turn affected Americans' views of the Soviet Union just as it also affected attitudes toward the threat of communism, but the impact is less clearly identifiable and hence less dramatic than might have been expected.

Even the conclusion that changes in public attitudes toward Soviet-American relations have occurred is somewhat circumstantial in that it is drawn less from what Americans approve than from what they disap-

prove. Clearly they have registered greater support over time for increased trade with the Soviet Union, but there is no clear indication of what particular commodities or items should be exchanged in greater quantities. Instead, the important evidence derives from the contrast in support for increased trade and greater cooperation in some spheres, e.g., space, compared with the willingness of large numbers of Americans in the 1940s and 1950s to support a "firmer" policy toward the Soviets, including a widespread willingness to go to war with them. By the 1970s and thereafter, the general climate of opinion was clearly more favorable to accommodations with the Soviets than to confrontations with them. This is not to say that the Soviets may have become either more trusted or less feared than earlier—the contrary may in fact be the case—but only that "compromise" with the Soviets seems to have replaced "firmer" as the preferred approach to them.

In summary, the public opinion data examined here show some erosion of the foundation on which the Cold War consensus was built, but they are less than definitive in showing that the Vietnam experience produced dramatic shifts in public attitudes. In this sense, one might easily conclude that the Cold War foreign policy consensus has eroded but not entirely dissipated. The findings thus provide important but inconclusive support for both the old conventional wisdom, which leaves little question that a foreign policy consensus governed the Cold War years, and for the new conventional wisdom, which asserts that the post-Vietnam era has been marked by greater levels of partisanship and ideological dispute.