

Government's Little Helper:  
U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945-1999\*

by

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It is a truism that journalists find it difficult to report critically on government activity during foreign policy crises. They must contend not only with officials who strain to control the news, but with fear that tough reporting will undermine the government's ability to deal with the crisis. As a result, journalists often simply "rally round the flag" and whatever policy the government favors.

Yet journalists do not invariably support government foreign policy in times of crisis. Perhaps the most notable case of a journalistic "failure to rally" occurred during the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War, when reporters quickly concluded and began to report that Viet Cong attacks represented a failure of American policy. In several other cases — for example, the Angola crisis during the Ford administration — press support for government policy has been notably restrained.

The aim of this paper is to explain both the general tendency of the press to support the government during foreign policy crises and exceptions to this tendency. The inquiry is organized around Lance Bennett's (1990) theory of press indexing, which holds that reporters "index" the slant of their coverage to reflect the range of opinion that exists within the government. On the basis of a study of 42 foreign policy crises from the Soviet takeover of Poland in 1946 to the Kosovo War in 1999, the paper finds strong evidence that reporters do, as Bennett suggested, appear to wax hawkish and wane dovish as official sources lead them to do.

The bulk of this paper was initially published in 1995 and covered crises only through the beginning of the Gulf War. In this revision, we include data from seven additional cases in the 1990s. The new data suggest that the dynamics of media politics are importantly different in the post-Cold War era. In particular, the media tend to be more independent of Congress and the President, though not necessarily more independent of government officials generally.

### **Theoretical Background**

A standard finding in studies of the mass media is that reporters will regard as newsworthy that which their "legitimate" or "official" sources say is newsworthy (Cohen, 1963). The dependence of reporters on official sources is so great that, as Leon Sigal (1973) put it,

Even when the journalist is in a position to observe an event directly, he remains reluctant to offer interpretations of his own, preferring instead to rely on his news sources. For the reporter, in short, most news is not what has happened, but what someone says has happened (p. 69).

An editor of one of the national newsweekly magazines was even more blunt: "We don't deal in facts," he said, "but in attributed opinions" (cited in Gans, 1980, p. 130). David Halberstam explained the dependency of foreign policy reporters on their sources during the Vietnam War as follows:

... they had come to journalism through the traditional routes, they had written the requisite police stories and chased fire engines and they had done all that a bit better than their peers, moving ahead in their profession, and they had finally come to Washington. If after their arrival in Washington they wrote stories about foreign policy, they did not dare inject their own viewpoints, of which they had none, or their own expertise, of which they also had none. Rather they relied almost exclusively on what some American or possibly British official hold them at a briefing or at lunch. The closer journalists came to great issues, the more vulnerable they felt (p. 517-518).

As this and other evidence suggests, dependence on sources goes beyond the need to have someone to quote; it is one of the most ingrained features of modern journalism (Hallin, 1984; Althaus, Edy, and Phaelen, 1994; Mermin, forthcoming).

On both theoretical and empirical grounds, one of the most important studies of press dependence on sources is Bennett's (1990) study of coverage of U.S. policy toward Nicaragua. Taking as given the general proposition that journalists are heavily dependent on sources, he deduces that variation in coverage across time should depend on variations in the opinions of "prominent officials and institutional power blocs" (p. 106-107).

This theoretical deduction, though long implicit in the scholarly literature on the press and foreign policy, had never been explicitly drawn or systematically tested. Nor was it obvious that it could survive testing. Journalists might, for example, have used officials as sources but either done so selectively or distorted their views so as to produce the results that journalists rather than sources wanted.

To test what he called the "indexing hypothesis," Bennett used stories in the *New York Times* on U.S. policy-making in Nicaragua from 1983 to 1986, as abstracted in the *Times Index*. Coders were asked to rate the degree to which articles appearing on the op-ed page of the *Times* agreed or disagreed with the administration's policies on Nicaragua, which were generally hawkish throughout the period of the study. The coders were also asked to rate the extent to which, according to information contained in the abstracts, members of Congress agreed or disagreed with the administration's hawkish policies.

Dividing coder ratings of article content and Congressional opinion into 17 discrete time periods, Bennett found that the correlations between the two sets of ratings were between .63 and .76. Thus, the *New York Times* did, as hypothesized, appear to "index" its editorial coverage of this issue to the range of opinion within the government.

Bennett's study is not above criticism. One concern is that it failed to develop a measure of Congressional opinion that was independent of what the *Times* claimed it was. Thus if, for example, the *Times* gave a distorted impression of Congressional opinion so as to make it seem consistent with its own editorial slant, it would create the impression that the *Times* was following the views Congress even though it was not.

Another insidious possibility is that members of Congress follow the editorial line of the *New York Times*, or the media more generally, rather than vice versa. If members of Congress regarded media opinion as a rough proxy for public opinion, and if, as is often suggested (e.g. Arnold, 1991), members are more concerned about re-election than promoting their own views of public policy, they might find it safest simply to follow press opinion. The possibility that public officials rather than reporters are the real followers cannot be ruled out from the straightforward correlation Bennett reports. Finally, Bennett's study limited its analysis to a single, possibly idiosyncratic issue. The study was thus unable to investigate other factors that might either disrupt press indexing or independently affect the slant of press coverage, such as the nature of the crisis, the type of foreign adversary, or the time period.

In this study, then, we take a fresh look at the relationship between press slant and government opinion, re-testing Bennett's hypothesis and adding a few of our own.

## **Design and methods of study**

### Overview of research.

The study is organized as an effort to explain variations in the hawkishness or dovishness of coverage of foreign policy crises. Following Bennet, we hypothesize that degree of press hawkishness will depend on degree the hawkishness in the government.

What exactly constitutes hawkishness or dovishness is relative to each crisis. In one crisis, doves may want to rely on diplomacy while hawks favor military aid, while in another crisis the doves may favor military aid and the hawks may favor the introduction of U.S. troops. What we will be examining, thus, is

support for policies that are, within the context of each particular foreign policy crisis, supportive military assertiveness.

#### Selection of cases.

For purposes of this study, a U.S. foreign policy crisis is an emergency situation in which the U.S. uses, threatens to use, or considers using military force or aid as a means of pursuing its foreign policy objectives. Major escalations of force within an ongoing conflict are also considered foreign policy crises.

U.S. foreign policy crises are sufficiently rare that it is feasible to examine the entire universe of them. For an unbiased compendium of events that might qualify as foreign policy crises, we turned to the 12th edition of John Spanier's *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, which contains a list of "Selected Principal Events" in U.S. foreign policy from 1945 to 1991. Some of Spanier's events have nothing to do with crises, as, for example, "Reagan denounces Soviet Union as 'Evil Empire.'" Others, however, fall within our definition of crisis, such as "Soviets blockade ... West Berlin and the Western airlift starts" or "The United States attacks Libya for terrorist attacks." From Spanier's list, we selected 39 cases that met our definition of a foreign policy crisis. They include not only historically important events, such as the Korean and Vietnam wars, but also many smaller-scale incidents, such as the invasion of Grenada and the U.S. peace-keeping operations in Lebanon. The cases we selected also include multiple references to some ongoing crises, especially the Korean and Vietnam wars. Despite some unavoidable arbitrariness, we believe that this list of crises is a fair representation of all U.S. foreign policy crises in the period 1945 to 1991. The list is shown in Appendix A.

Since Spanier did not provide specific dates for events, and since some developed over a period of weeks or months rather than on a single day, we had to assign plausible dates to each event. This information is available upon request.

#### Measurement of "official" opinion.

Like Bennett, we will use congressional opinion as the primary indicator of the official views that reporters are hypothesized to reflect in their coverage. In so doing, we do not assume that Congress is the only, or even the most important, source of the official views that the reporters attempt to reflect. We assume only that, owing to the openness and ideological diversity of Congress, congressional opinion is likely to be roughly representative of official opinion more generally. The great advantage of congressional opinion for

purposes of this study is that, thanks to the *Congressional Record*, it is far easier to measure than other forms of official opinion, thus making it possible to test the indexing hypothesis in a wide variety of cases.

To assure unbiased measurement, we determined to measure congressional opinion independently of media coverage of it. In 11 of the crises Spanier identifies, we were able to find votes in which members of Congress expressed themselves on the issue at hand. Congressional votes on the Vandenberg Resolution during the Czechoslovakia crisis of 1948, on the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1964, and on the Gulf War resolution in 1991 are examples of such cases. In 22 other cases, we used speeches made on the floor of the House or Senate as indicators of Congressional opinion. As shown below, the two indicators of congressional opinion produced almost identical empirical results.

In three cases, Congress was out of session during the crisis, leaving us no way to gauge its opinion except by relying on the media, which we declined to do. Hence, these cases were lost from the analysis. A fourth case, a reference by Spanier to several terrorist incidents in 1985, was also dropped because we felt it was not sufficiently distinct from the Libya bombing of 1986, which we did include in the sample.<sup>1</sup>

In two final cases, Congress was in session and capable of expressing an opinion, but did not do so. Not a single speech was given. These two cases, as it happened, were among the most important in the whole set — the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe after World War II, and President Kennedy's decision to send U.S. military advisers to Vietnam in 1961. The more closely we examined these cases, the more determined we became not to permit them to fall out of the analysis.

Spanier lists the Soviet occupation of eastern Europe, which involved several countries, as one event. Occupation occurred in the closing year of World War II at a time when American diplomats were struggling behind the scenes to maintain Soviet cooperation with U.S. plans for the postwar period. We focused on the Polish case, where there was some activity in Congress. Two resolutions objecting to the Soviet takeover were introduced by Polish-American members of Congress, but for reasons impossible for us to ascertain, the resolutions were never voted on (See Lukas, 1978, p. 204).

There was even less overt Congressional reaction to President Kennedy's decision to send military advisers to Vietnam. The decision, taken in the context of the Berlin Wall crisis of 1961, was not officially announced. Nonetheless, press reports at the time indicate that an American commitment of military personnel was an open secret on the streets of Saigon, where American military forces were moving in and

U.S. warships were taking up positions offshore. As other evidence also indicates, Congress was not kept in the dark about the American troop buildup in Vietnam (see *Newsweek*, November 27, 1961, p. 40).

In view of the fact that Congress was aware of events in each case but chose not to react, it seems appropriate to regard its non-action as tacit support for administration policy. Hence in the analysis that follows, we code Congress as supporting a dovish policy in 1945 and a hawkish policy in 1961 (See Goldberg, 1979 pp. 118-119). (These coding decisions, as we show below, do not greatly affect the results.)

Altogether, then, we were able to measure congressional opinion for 35 cases — 11 by means of roll call votes, 22 by means of floor speeches, and two by imputing opinions to Congress when it acquiesced in major executive decisions.

For the 22 cases in which speeches were coded, the coding was done by Chiu from the *Congressional Record*. He tried to code as many as 25 speeches per case, but was often unable to find that many within close temporal proximity to the crisis. On average, he found 15 codable speeches per case, with a standard deviation of 7. No reliability analysis was performed on Chiu's codes, since he found that identifying individual Congressional speeches as hawkish or dovish in overall thrust seemed straightforward.

#### Measurement of media coverage.

Our analysis is based on stories appearing in *Time* and *Newsweek*. The advantage of using newsmagazines is that, although all media slant the news, magazines are self-consciously interpretive and hence make less effort to disguise their slant. Even so, their stories contained few explicit statements of opinion; in most cases, they conveyed opinion implicitly, by what they chose to cover or ignore and by the tone of coverage.

Three student coders were employed to rate the newsmagazine data. Two of the students, one graduate and one undergraduate, had extensive prior coding experience; the third, a graduate student, had none. All three specialized in American politics and were familiar with American history in the post-War period. To avoid biasing the coders, we provided them no "training" in their coding task, choosing instead to instruct them by means of a written communication. Except for some verbal instruction in the physical details of record keeping and innocuous progress checks, a one-page written communication was the only instruction the coders received from us. We include the written instructions as Appendix B of this paper.<sup>2</sup>

As in the case of congressional opinion, we wished to capture the extent to which newsmagazine coverage was hawkish or dovish. The unit of analysis was the paragraph, which could be rated hawkish, dovish, neutral or (rarely) both hawkish and dovish. We based the content analysis on 25 paragraphs per crisis, where the paragraphs were taken from the beginning of each magazine's main story and were divided as evenly as possible between the two magazines. Dates of the magazines used are available upon request .

Following are two sample paragraphs. The first was rated hawkish and the second dovish:

Led by tanks with 90-mm. cannon and armored troop carriers, the 2nd Battalion of the 6th U.S. Marines ... moved cautiously into the war-torn capital of the Dominican Republic. As the columns churned down Avenida Independencia ... people suddenly appeared in the windows and doorways. Some waved. Others stared. A few spoke. "I wish the Americans would take us over," muttered a woman. A man near by sighed and nodded... (*Time*, May 7, 1956, p. 28)

The face of [the Batista] dictatorship in Cuba was the padlock on Havana University, the bodies dumped on street corners by casual police terrorists, the arrogant functionaries gathering fortunes from gambling, prostitution and a leaky public till. In disgust and shame, a nervy band of rural guerrillas [led by Castro] ... started a bloody civil war that cost more than \$100 million and took 8,000 lives. Last week, they smashed General Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship... (*Time*, January 12 1959, p. 82)

As these examples make clear, the press slant we seek to capture has little to do with either official sources or direct statements of opinion. It consists mainly of images that, as they cumulate over the course of a story, may induce a reader to feel more or less supportive of hawkish policies. Because of the inherent difficulty of deciphering the contemporary meaning of such images, we felt it necessary to use three coders.

For each crisis and coder, we computed the following measure of hawkishness:

$$\frac{\# \text{ hawkish paragraphs} - \# \text{ dovish paragraphs}}{\# \text{ hawkish paragraphs} + \# \text{ dovish paragraphs} + \# \text{ neutral paragraphs}}$$

Each coder's scores correlated with the scores of the other coders at the level of .75, with none of the coders standing out from the others as especially good or bad.<sup>3</sup> When combined, the three sets of ratings produced a scale with an alpha reliability of 0.87.

The theoretical range of the media scale is from -1.0 to +1.0, with 0 as the mid-point. To facilitate interpretation of the results, however, the scale was recoded to a theoretical range of 0 to 1, with .50 as the



neutral point. The actual range of ratings on the recoded scale was from .15 to .92, with a mean of .60 and a standard deviation of .21.<sup>4</sup>

## Empirical results

### Congressional opinion and media coverage.

In Bennett's test of the indexing hypothesis, the correlation between opinions expressed on the op-ed page of the *New York times* and congressional opinion was found to be 0.63 in one test and .76 in a related one. In our study, the correlation between thrust of news content and congressional opinion was 0.63 ( $t=4.7$ ,  $df=34$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). If we restrict the analysis to the subset of cases for which we have the best measures of Congressional opinion — either roll call votes or 10 or more floor speeches — the correlation rises slightly to .65. Corrected for the reliability of the media scale, this correlation is about .70.

What this correlation means is that an increase of one standard deviation in the hawkishness of Congress is association with an increase of .70 SDs in the hawkishness of media coverage. This is obviously a strong relationship – and, even so, it may still understate the real strength of the relationship. This is because twenty-five paragraphs per crisis, even if coded with perfect reliability, would still be an imperfect indicator of overall news coverage, which consists of thousands of paragraphs and electronic sound bites. Floor speeches and even votes, no matter how accurately measured, are likewise imperfect indicators of congressional opinion. For example, the percent of members of Congress who support a floor resolution will depend, independently of the actual degree of hawkishness of congressional opinion, on how toughly worded the resolution is.

Altogether, then, our results strongly corroborate Bennett's notion of press indexing. The considerable range of cases in our study, however, raises an obvious question : Does the relationship between congressional opinion and press slant hold as well in all time periods and types of situations? Or does it hold in only certain kinds of cases?

To answer these questions, we have broken the data into subsets, exploring the press-congress relation within each. Since, for this type of investigation, the correlation coefficient is notoriously unreliable, we report the results in the form of unstandardized coefficients for regressions in which the independent variable is congressional hawkishness and the dependent variable is press hawkishness. Typical results are shown in Table 1. (The data in this and other tables, along with the SPSS code necessary to reproduce them, are

available in a folder called "government's little helper" on my UCLA website,  
www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/ .)

#### INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Given the very small sample sizes on which these results are based, one should pay little attention to particular coefficients. The point is the overall pattern of results, which indicates that the relationship between congressional opinion and media slant reflects a broad tendency within the dataset as a whole.

#### Who is leading whom?

Our interpretation of the co-variation between press and congressional opinion is that, in Bennett's terms, reporters "index" coverage to the range of opinion that exists in the government. This interpretation comes from outside the data — from prior studies that stress, on the basis of qualitative observation, the dependence of reporters on sources.

As far as the data alone are concerned, there is nothing that either supports or refutes this interpretation. The empirical results are equally consistent with the thesis of press dependence on Congress, with a thesis of Congressional dependence on the press, and with a thesis that some "third factor" causes both press slant and congressional opinion, thereby inducing a spurious correlation between them (but see Mermin, forthcoming).

The data we have collected have only limited value for assessing causal issues of this kind.<sup>5</sup> They do, however, permit some exploration. Let us consider, first of all, the hypothesis of "reverse indexing," that is, that congressional opinion follows press slant rather than vice versa. That argument may be developed as follows: By the tone of its coverage, the press frames foreign policy crises for both the public and politicians. Members of Congress have no strong reason to dispute these frames, and since many care only about re-election, they may seek safety in going along with the press slant.

Although this argument imputes a great deal of power to the press, it has an element of plausibility. Risk avoidance is, according to literature on congressional behavior, a constant feature of legislative life (Jacobson, 1993). In a recent analysis of how members of Congress (MCs) decided to vote on the Gulf War resolution, Zaller (1994) found that many wanted to avoid voting on the issue altogether. As he wrote,

Some legislators ... were eager to play the role of partisan gladiators. But the majority of members were more hesitant. They would get little credit no matter how the war turned out, but might face retribution if they either opposed a successful war or supported a disastrous one. In

this situation, many members saw no reason to commit themselves to a position any sooner than necessary, and a few .... wanted to avoid taking a position even at the very end.

One would expect risk averse MCs to maintain low profiles in foreign crises, waiting for the dust to settle before putting themselves on record. They would make few speeches and would reveal their positions only when forced to do so on a vote. Hence, if there is any inflation of the Congress-press association arising from a tendency of MCs to echo press opinion, it should be at its maximum on votes, where the risk-averse are most heavily represented. By parallel reasoning, we would expect representatives who volunteer public positions in floor speeches to be among the more risk-accepting members of Congress — "partisan gladiators" with respect to the issue at hand. When they speak out, one would expect to find them expressing their own ideologies and convictions. Hence, whatever Congress-press association exists in such cases would be hard to explain on the grounds that MCs were simply following the media.

To test this line of argument, we divided the data according to whether congressional opinion was measured by speeches or votes (excluding the two cases in which it was measured by imputation). We found that the strength of the press-congress association was slightly stronger when opinion was measured by means of floor speeches ( $b=.52$ ) than by means of votes ( $b=.41$ ). This difference, though not close to statistical significance (two-sided  $p$ -value = .53), is the opposite of what we should have found if the press-congress association were driven by risk-averse MCs who simply echoed the media line.

A recent paper by Althaus and Edy (1995) suggests an additional test. In a study of the 1986 bombing of Libya, these authors found that, particularly in the Senate, floor speeches bore little relation to a legislator's electoral vulnerability, but a strong relation to the member's ideological orientation. As the authors concluded with evident surprise, many Senators seemed to be "genuine iconoclasts who said what they thought regardless of the consequences" (p. 31).

In light of this conclusion, we examined indexing for 26 cases in which we could measure congressional opinion from the speeches or votes of Senators alone. The press-Congress correlation for these cases was .68, or slightly higher than in the dataset as a whole. If we accept that Senators are more independent-minded than members of the House, this constitutes another reason for believing that the association between congressional opinion and press slant is not due to the followership of risk-averse politicians.

Neither of these tests is definitive, but together they complement the qualitative literature and its emphasis on the dependency of the press on official opinion.

### Indexing coverage to a common culture?

Throughout this analysis, we have assumed that if any two actors take the same "slant" on a crisis, it must be because one has influenced the other. But there is another possibility: That MCs, Presidents, and reporters are all members of the same political culture, and so tend to have the same culturally-conditioned response to events.

This view is hard to dismiss out of hand. Consider, on one hand, the fall of Saigon in 1975. After more than 10 years of struggle in Vietnam, it seems unlikely that many reporters would need cues from Congress to conclude that this was not the time for a renewal of American hawkishness in South Vietnam. Or consider, on the other hand, the Soviet downing of Korean Airlines Flight 007 in 1983. How could anyone be other than outraged by this event? If reporters, Presidents and MCs had the same internally-generated reactions — dovish to the first event and hawkish to the second — it could produce the pattern of associations we have found even if there were no indexing at all.

The contention that all members of a culture have the same culturally conditioned response to events is difficult to defeat, since it posits a universal factor that is fully capable, at least in principle, of explaining whatever associations might exist. Even the most ardent exponent of culture would, however, have to concede that there are some aspects of the international situation for which culture does not provide clear cues. Within our dataset, we have identified the following cases for which, we believe, the influence of common U.S. culture would be minimal:

- The firing of General MacArthur by President Truman
- The decision on whether to intervene in Indochina in 1954
- The marine peace-keeping missions to Lebanon in 1958 and 1982
- The takeover of Cuba by the forces of Fidel Castro
- The question of U.S. intervention in Angola
- The Soviet invasion of its former satellite nation, Afghanistan
- The question of U.S. involvement in Nicaragua
- The decision to put oil tankers under U.S. protection during the Iran-Iraq war
- The decision to launch the Gulf War (before fighting began)

The effect of congressional opinion on press slant in these cases is, as it turns out, almost identical to that in the dataset as a whole. Also, the elimination of any one of the nine cases leaves the results substantially

unchanged. Finally, the pattern holds when the nine cases are split into groups according to whether communism was involved or not.

Other press rules.

Up to this point, we have focused on Bennett's indexing rule. We turn now to an entirely different subject, namely, whether the press has values or prejudices of its own that affect coverage independently of the views of officialdom. We devised several hypotheses concerning the effects of press prejudices, as follows:

- The press will be less hawkish in situations when the U.S. uses forces against a militarily weak foe than in other cases. Our reasoning was that weaker foes will induce less martial excitement and hence less hawkishness. Cases so classified are Bay of Pigs, Dominican Republic, Mayaguez, Grenada, Libya, Panama.

- The press will be less hawkish, all else equal, in reporting military setbacks or defeats than in other cases. Our reasoning was that military setbacks encourage critical re-thinking of military commitments and hence less hawkishness. Cases classified as setbacks are Chinese entry into Korean War, Bay of Pigs, Tet, fall of Saigon, failed Iranian hostage rescue attempt, and terrorist bombing of Marine barracks in Lebanon.

- The press will be less hawkish, all else equal, in situations of "continuing crisis," that is, situations, like the Tet offensive in Vietnam, in which one or more crisis points have already occurred. Our reasoning was that "continuing crises" indicate lack of policy success, which is likely to engender re-thinking of the commitment to force.

- The press will be more hawkish, all else equal, when the U.S. foe is associated with communism. Our reasoning was that the press tends to be reflexively anti-communist.

- The press will be more hawkish, all else equal, at the onset of military conflict. Our reasoning was that the press tends to depict the onset of fighting in sensationalist terms, which may tend to give coverage a hawkish tone. These cases are start of Korean war, Gulf of Tonkin incident, Dominican Republic invasion in 1965, Mayaguez incident in 1975, Iranian hostage rescue attempt, Grenada invasion, Libya bombing, invasion of Panama, Gulf War.

- The press will be more hawkish, all else equal, in major wars (Korea, Vietnam, Gulf) than in other types of crises. Our reasoning was that it is more difficult to be critical when large-scale fighting is under way than in lesser crises.

- Media patience will wear thin in drawn-out crises. But what should be counted as cases of "drawn-out crisis" requires judgment. For example, was the Berlin Wall crisis of 1961 a continuation of the 1948 crisis or a separate event? Were the 1954 and 1961 crises associated with Vietnam the first and second crises in a series that included the Vietnam war, or separate events? In each of these cases, we judged them as separate events. The crises that we judged as "continuation crises," then, were Chinese entry into Korea and the firing of MacArthur; the Vietnam escalations of 1965 and 1972, Tet offensive, the Cambodian invasion, and the fall of Saigon; the failed Iranian hostage rescue; bombing of the marine barracks in Lebanon; and start of the Gulf War.

- To the extent that Congress and the President take different stands, both will affect media coverage. As it turns out, the President is hawkish in the vast majority of cases. This is no accident: If the president were dovish, there might be no question of using military force and hence no foreign policy crisis, by our definition of the term. There were, however, five cases in which we considered that a crisis existed even though the President was dovish. These were the Soviet takeover of Poland and eastern Europe, which the administration might have contested but did not; Truman's firing of the hawkish General Douglas MacArthur in 1951; the fall of Dienbienphu in 1954, when serious consideration was given to U.S. intervention; Castro's takeover of Cuba in 1959, which, contrary to the view of the administration, some in Congress wanted to resist; and the fall of South Vietnam, where the President ordered U.S. personnel to clear out of harm's way.<sup>6</sup> We created a dummy to capture these five cases.

Four tests of these hypotheses are shown in Table 2. In column 1, the dependent variable is the average of the media scores of all three coders, which is the measure used in the paper so far. In columns two to four, the dependent variables are the ratings of each coder alone. Thus we have three independent tests and one that is dependent on the other three. The purpose of multiple tests is to assess the stability of the overall results.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Let us look first at the effects of congressional and presidential opinion. In the overall results, congressional and presidential opinion have impacts that easily achieve statistical significance (t-ratios are 3.40 and 2.34). However, these impacts look a bit ragged when examined separately by coder: When Coder 1's media scores are used as the dependent variable, Congress has a big impact on the press but the

President does not; when Coder 2's scores are used, Congress has a small impact and the president a big one; and when Coder 3's scores are used, both have significant impacts.

Although these results are more variable than one might wish, they appear to be within the range of chance instability that lurks in small datasets, and, as such, no threat to our analysis. So long as the overall results are reflected to some degree in all subsets of the data, they can be accepted as the best single estimate of actual effects.<sup>7</sup>

The primary purpose of the multiple tests was to assess the stability of the situational dummy variables, which were created after preliminary exploration of the data and could therefore represent "overfitting" of the data. Here the results are, happily, more consistent across coders. Communist foe, Continuation crisis, Setback, and Minor force all have comparable effects in all four estimates. The effects, moreover, are fairly large, running from about .5 SDs on the media scale to about .75 SDs. The press, thus, is not wholly a creature of officialdom. In a variety of situations — most notably, those in which there was a communist foe, a continuing crisis, or a setback — it can strike out in its own direction.

The combined effect of all variables in the model can be quite large. Consider the difference between press coverage of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which was overwhelmingly hawkish, and coverage of the Tet offensive, which ran in a dovish direction. (The raw media scores were .88 and .31. on a 0-1 scale with an SD of .21.) The House vote on the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 was 388-0, or 100 percent hawkish, while congressional speeches made at the time of the Tet offensive were only 16 percent hawkish. Given this shift in congressional opinion, press coverage of Tet is expected to be about 1.2 SDs less hawkish than it had been during the Tonkin crisis.<sup>8</sup> Several situational factors also come into play: In contrast to the Tonkin incident, the Tet offensive was a "setback," a "continuation crisis," and part of a War; also the Tonkin incident, but not Tet, was an instance of Start of Fighting. From the coefficients in Table 2, it can be calculated that the net effect of these factors should be to make coverage of Tet an additional 1.75 SDs less hawkish than it had been at the time of the Tonkin crisis.<sup>9</sup> Thus, our expectation is that press coverage will become 2.95 SDs more dovish at the time of the Tet Offensive, which is fairly close to the actual swing (2.70 SDs). The swing could, moreover, have been greater, except that the President remained hawkish and the foe remained communist, both of which lead to more hawkish coverage.

These results show that the dramatic swing toward dovishness in press coverage of Tet — a swing that has been widely noted and is often considered anomalous (e.g., Braestrup, 1979) — was not anomalous at

all, but rather typical of the way the press behaves in situations of ebbing congressional hawkishness, military setback, and continuing crisis. The results show further that situational factors, when they occur in combination, can be an even more important determinant of press slant than indexing.

#### Amount of press coverage

We did not measure variation in overall amount of media coverage of crises because we had no reason to believe it would be important. All crises, we assumed, would be heavily covered. This assumption turned out to be wrong. Although most were, two were hardly covered at all. These were the Soviet takeover of Poland in 1945 and the American buildup in Vietnam in 1961, for which the best we could do were pairs of magazine issues containing a total of six paragraphs and 10 paragraphs, respectively. Because of its intrinsic interest, we reprint a part of this coverage, a *Time* report that the Soviet Union had unilaterally taken a major province from Germany and annexed it to Poland. We show the whole story, including headline:

#### POLAND

##### Major Development

Tass, the official Soviet news agency, last week noted a major development: Major General Alexander Zawadzki, former political commissar of the Soviet-trained Polish Army, has been appointed Governor General of Silesia, thus officially expanding the new Poland as far as the Oder River (*Time*, March 19, 1945, p. 38).

This case vindicates our determination, as noted earlier, not to drop cases because of the difficulty of measuring congressional opinion. For, as it appears from this case, the press may downplay crises which congressional elites are unwilling to address — even when, as *Time* admitted by its headline on the bulletin on the latest partition of Poland, the story was a "major development." The press, in other words, may index not only the slant but the amount of its coverage to the balance of opinion within the government.

#### **New cases from the 1990s**

The data for the original version of this article were gathered in a period that coincided almost exactly with the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. With the Cold War now ended, an obvious question is whether the dynamics of media politics have remained the same.

It is readily possible to find out. From the end of the Gulf War in 1991 through the Kosovo War of 1999, the following events qualify as foreign policy crisis points:



Emergency aid to the Kurds, 1991  
Humanitarian aid to Somalia, 1992  
U.S. military losses in Somalia, 1993  
Invasion of Haiti, 1994  
American peace-keeping troops to Bosnia, 1995  
Bombing campaign in Iraq, 1998  
Launch of War in Kosovo, 1999  
Apparent stalemate in Kosovo, 1999

In gathering data on these cases, the same procedures were followed as in the original study, with this exception: rather than relying on three coders to code the media coverage, we were constrained, for logistical reasons, to use only one. He was coder #3 from the original study. This coder also gathered the data on congressional opinion. One of the eight cases, the initial intervention into Somalia, had to be dropped from the analysis because Congress was out of session at the time it occurred.

The new data provide only modest support for indexing. The slope summarizing the relationship between congressional opinion and media slant is only about a fifth (.14) as large for the seven new cases as in the original 35 cases.<sup>10</sup> The overall relationship between congressional and media opinion remains highly statistically significant when all cases are combined into a single test ( $P < .001$ ), but the new cases from the 1990s undermine the strength of the originally reported relationship.

The reason for this change turns out to be quite clear. In the original analysis, we examined the relationship between congressional opinion and media opinion within several subsets, as shown in Table 1 above. One of these tests distinguished cases that involve communist foes from cases that do not. The relationship between congressional and media opinion was much weaker within the subset of non-communism cases than in any other subset. But this relationship was bound to exhibit chance variation, and since we were examining several small subsets in an atheoretical manner, we felt that it would be a mistake to pay too much attention to results from any particular subset.

Now, however, the accumulation of seven additional non-communist cases makes it clear that crises involving non-communist foes really are different. Figure 1 summarizes the evidence. The figure presents data from coder #3 alone, since his are the only data that are comparable across the full set of crises. The

figure distinguishes crises involving communist and non-communist foes (solid dots versus clear ones); it shows separate regression lines for the two kinds of crises; and it labels some of the most interesting cases.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The main point of the figure is the difference in slopes cases that involve or do not involve communism. The slope for crises involving communist foes is .79 -- a magnitude that implies a nearly one-to-one relationship between congressional and media opinion -- but the slope for crises involving non-communist foes is only .17. This difference in slopes is statistically significant at the .01 level, two-tailed.<sup>11</sup>

If, then, we want to know why the relationship between congressional and media opinion is weaker in the 1990s, the answer is clear: Foreign policy crises in the current period have involved non-communist foes, and the Congress-media relationship has always been weak for such cases.

What is not so clear is what this implies for the indexing hypothesis. Should we conclude, for example, that indexing occurs only for cases in which there is a communist foe?

There is no straightforward answer to this question. We can, however, approach an answer by returning to Figure 1. There we see that the media are not, as might have been expected, more likely to be hawkish when communism is involved. In fact, the mean level of hawkishness is almost exactly the same in communist and non-communist cases. A more subtle but equally important point in Figure 1 is that the media are less prone to extreme slants in cases that do not involve communism. That is, there are fewer cases in which the media are either extremely hawkish or extremely dovish when the foe is non-communist. Rather, the media take more balanced positions. Both of these tendencies are demonstrated quantitatively in Table 3, which shows that the mean level of hawkishness is nearly the same for communist and non-communist cases, and that the standard deviation across cases is greater when communism is involved. The higher standard deviation indicates that the news magazines are more prone to vacillate between extreme positions when communism is involved ( $p < .001$ <sup>12</sup>).

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Table 3 makes one other important point. Not only are the media more prone to extreme slants in cases involving communism, members of Congress are too. Congress, that is, is more prone to one-sided views -- either one-sidedly hawkish or one-sidedly dovish -- when communism is involved than when it is not. This shows up, once again, as a higher SD across cases in which communism is involved. (The p-values for

equality of variance within columns two and three of Table 3 are both .09.<sup>13</sup>) Note also that, as in the case of media slant, Congress is not more hawkish when communism was involved; legislators are merely more prone to one-sided-positions, whether pro-intervention or anti-intervention.

There seem, then, to be three patterns when communism is involved: news coverage is more extreme (whether hawkish or dovish); congressional politicians are more prone to unity of opinion; and journalists are more inclined to index their coverage to congressional opinion. Or, to put it the other way, news is more balanced, politicians are more fractious, and the slant of the news is more independent of Congress when the nation's adversary is not a communist.

We emphasize that none of these findings is entailed, in any direct statistical sense, by any other. For example, it is possible that Congress might become more fractious, but that journalists might continue to follow such Congressional cues as remained.<sup>14</sup> Yet this has not been the case. Even when Congressional opinion has been one-sided in a crisis involving a non-communist foe, as in the case of Haiti (see Figure 1), the news magazines have gone their own way.

None of this means that indexing is dead. It only means that journalists are now less tied to congressional -- and, we would guess, presidential -- opinion than in the Cold War. But they might have other kinds of ties. We can best investigate the nature of these ties by examining qualitative evidence.

We begin with the case of humanitarian aid to Somalia in 1992. Following a several month period in which U.S. media highlighted starvation and anarchy in Somalia, President Bush ordered U.S. troops to the country to restore order and organize the distribution of food. The media response, however, was negative. After months of generally pro-intervention coverage -- coverage that was, as Mermin (1999) reports, orchestrated by various government officials -- *Time* and *Newsweek* turned decidedly dovish. In fact, the slant of their coverage was more dovish than for any other foreign policy crisis in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup>

This coverage was, in retrospect, prescient. Its basic point was, as *Newsweek* put it, that "Operation Restore Hope is more a generous impulse than a thought-out policy." Both magazines vividly described the problems that would eventually lead to a humiliating defeat for the U.S., notably the difficulty of carrying out food relief in the presence of well-armed militias and the question of whether any lasting good could be done without a long-term and expensive commitment to "nation-building." And both magazines relied on expert sources to tell their story, as in the following example:

...if hostility does develop between the clans and the international force, relief workers worry that their efforts -- the point of the humanitarian exercise -- may suffer. "We have people out there in the bush saving lives, " says Ben Foot, a field representative of the Save the Children Fund. "We would like someone to explain what is going to happen, because we're in the middle of it."

Somalia is a country with no working economy, no police force, no government ... Many experts doubt that military steps to guard food convoys can, or should, be separated from rebuilding the nation. The use of troops initially is a good idea, say Howard Bell, acting director of CARE-Somalia, "but only if it is put within a well thought-out program of national recovery..." A Western diplomat in Somalia agrees. "The troops will be able to achieve their objective of securing relief shipments," he says, "But the bigger question is, Then what?"<sup>16</sup>

Here or elsewhere, this is little evidence that reporters are indexing their Somalia coverage to the views of American government or, still less, to the views of Congress or the President. The views of the president are certainly reported in the story (though we have not excerpted them), but they do not frame or dominate the account. Rather, the bulk of the coverage seems, as in the preceding excerpt, to reflect the opinions of a range of expert sources, many of them non-Americans.

This is not to say, however, that American national interest gets short shrift in the cases we have examined. To the contrary, U.S. interest is often the touchstone for evaluating the soundness of policy. What does get short shrift -- much shorter shrift, we suspect, than in the Cold War period -- is the interest of politicians qua politicians, particularly when those interests appear partisan or self-serving. Thus, when Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott expressed suspicion that President Clinton had provoked a crisis with Saddam Hussein in order to divert attention from impeachment proceedings in Congress, *Newsweek* pointedly took issue, juxtaposing Lott's remarks with what it took to be national interest.

When the majority leader of the Senate disavows in advance an armed American exercise, as Trent Lott did last week, what incentive is there for wavering votes in the United Nations to support Washington's actions?

This is the true connection between the impeachment of Clinton and the crisis in Iraq. There is not the slightest evidence that Desert Fox was launched to divert attention from the impeachment vote...<sup>17</sup>

In reprimanding Lott for allowing partisanship to interfere with the national interest, and yet exonerating Clinton of the same criticism, *Newsweek* sets itself up as the guardian of national interest against partisan interests, whether in Congress or the White House. This, we suspect, may be a common posture of the elite media in the post-Cold War era.

The largest disjuncture between media slant and political authority occurred at the time of the Haiti invasion in 1994. Although 81 percent of Congressional speeches opposed military action against Haiti, the news magazines took a moderate but firm pro-intervention stance. They acknowledged that democracy would be difficult to achieve in Haiti, but felt that the existing regime was an abomination. Insofar as the magazines were critical of Clinton's policy, it was mainly for failing to make a public case that invasion was necessary. As *Newsweek* concluded its main article:

This intervention is not like the one in 1915, which was designed to expand American hegemony and protect U.S. bank loans. The 1994 version has more respectable motives: to protect life, to build democracy and to head off a new wave of boat people. As long as the goals remain modest, the endgame can be within reach. Most Americans, however, are still not convinced that their country should be in the game at all.<sup>18</sup>

Again, then, we see a stance that is both assertive of national interest and independent of political authority.

The contrast with reporting of the Gulf of Tonkin incident at the beginning of the Vietnam War could scarcely be more stark. The incident centered on what the Johnson administration said was the second unprovoked attack on U.S. naval vessels in a week. Yet, as official information later showed, only one attack occurred and it was not unprovoked. Stanley Karnow gives the following overview of media accounts of the second, non-existent attack:

...the American press published vivid eyewitness accounts of the incident, dramatized by news editors with inspiration from Pentagon officials. As "the night glowed eerily," wrote *Times*, the Communist "intruders boldly sped" toward the destroyers, firing with "automatic weapons," while *Life* had the American ships "under continuous torpedo attack" as they "weaved through the night sea, evading more torpedoes." Not to be outdone, *Newsweek* described "U.S. jets diving, strafing, flattening out...and diving again" at the enemy boats, one of which "burst into flames and sank." Now, having won the battle, *Newsweek* concluded, "it was time for American might to strike back."<sup>19</sup>

This is the kind of coverage that helped propel the nation into the Vietnam war. Halberstam has provided the following description of the reporters who produced similar coverage for CBS News:

A few [reporters] were made uneasy by the rush to decisions, the haunting lack of information. Among them was Ed Murrow [the legendary CBS newsman]... he called up his one-time protégé Fred Friendly, by then the head of CBS News, and tore into him... "By what God-given right did you treat it this way? What do we really know about what happened out there? Why did it happen? How could you not have [Dan] Rather and the boys do some sort of special analysis?" Friendly was shocked by his anger, and felt a certain guilt because he had that day been on the phone with Dan Rather, and Rather had said that it all smelled a bit tricky, and Friendly had told Rather for God's sake not to say anything like that line on the air. Friendly simply did not know how to cover something as elusive as this, how to raise questions. He was still, like the country, more hawk than dove, and the whole thing scared him. And he was also in quite close contact with the Johnson administration. There was some talk about coming back on the air later that night -- perhaps a midnight special -- but that too was dropped.<sup>20</sup>

It seems unfair to argue, as Murrow did, that reporters should have developed independent information about a naval engagement that had occurred half-way around the world. But it was well within the capacity

of reporters for *Time* and *Newsweek*, who had several days to prepare their stories, to analyze the likely effects of U.S. retaliatory action against North Vietnam, as authorized by the open-ended Gulf of Tonkin resolution. The government sources necessary for such forward-looking analysis were surely available since, by many accounts, officials within the State Department and Pentagon were divided at the time about the wisdom of escalation in Vietnam. Yet nowhere in the crisis coverage in *Time* and *Newsweek* was there any such analysis. Reporters contented themselves with digging out colorful details about the alleged battle.

The reason that Halberstam adduces for this spiritless coverage -- that reporters were scared and uncertain -- may go a long way toward explaining why, as Figure 1 shows, crisis coverage in the Cold War was indexed to opinion in the political branches of government. Reporters were afraid to go it alone, at least in the heat of crisis.

Today, by contrast, reporters are surely less scared and hence less reflexive in their support for official policy. This does not mean, as Table 3 has shown, that journalists have turned dovish. Nor, as we have more speculatively argued, does it imply that reporters no longer index stories to what sources tell them. Insofar as we can tell, reporters now index stories to a wider range of sources, using a conception of national interest, rather than fear of opposing the President, as the basis for choosing among them.

### **Conclusion: Alternative modes of indexing**

If, as Halberstam colorfully put it, many journalists came to foreign policy reporting as the culmination of a successful career of chasing fire engines, what else can journalists do besides index their stories to the sources they encounter? Even if most have undergraduate degrees in international relations or history, there is little choice but to rely on sources.

The question for any notion of indexing, then, is how exactly reporters use their sources. There are at least three possibilities that need systematic elaboration and testing. One possibility is that enterprising reporters simply make the rounds among persons familiar with an issue -- aid workers, foreign diplomats, presidential aides, or whoever -- and wrote stories that summarize what they have been told. Reflecting this ethos, the Alsop brothers wrote that "His feet... are a more important part of a reporter's body than his head."<sup>21</sup> As Cohen writes,

It is hard to avoid the implication that ... the production of news is less an act of limited creativity ... than a process of accidental discovery as he

stumbles across something that looks good to him and has not been published before (1963, p. 86).

What drives indexing, on this view, is the pervasive and direct dependence of journalists on sources for everything they report.

Another, more sophisticated possibility is that journalists may consider information newsworthy in proportion to its capacity to foretell or affect future events. This idea was first proposed by Entman and Page (1995), who found that in Senate hearings on the Gulf War, reporters paid disproportionate attention to the statements of Bush administration officials, apparently because, far more than other witnesses at the hearings, these officials were in a position to determine whether the U.S. went to war or not. A tendency by reporters to highlight information that they thought would foretell future events could have broad implications for how they do their job. If, for example, government decision-makers were convinced that Vietnam must be saved from communism, journalists might report everything they could find about whether Vietnam was likely to fall to communism, since this information would affect whether U.S. intervention occurred. By the same token, they might ignore information that policymakers regarded as irrelevant, such as whether Vietnam was embroiled in a civil war, since this information would not affect what policymakers would do. If one half of officialdom were concerned about a communist take-over and the other half believed that South Vietnam was embroiled in a civil war, journalists would report information relevant to both frames, since both may affect U.S. willingness to continue its military commitment.

The first of these mechanisms might be called Source Indexing, the second Power Indexing. A study by Althaus, Edy, Entman, and Phalen (1994) tends to support the notion of Power Indexing. From the more fine-grained analysis that is possible in a single case study, these authors found that, during the Libya crisis in 1986, reporters for the New York Times did a poor job of reflecting the political thrust and specific content of congressional opinion. Among other things, the Times neglected to report on esoteric policy options favored by members of Congress but not taken seriously by the Administration, and gave disproportionate attention to any congressional discussion of the War Powers Act, which might become the basis for congressional action if Congress were to act. Also, the Times gave much more attention to the pronouncements of foreign governments, which constrained the Administration's capacity to act against Libya, than to pronouncements by members of Congress, which had little capacity to constrain Administration action. In short, Times reporters seemed to engage in Power Indexing rather than Source Indexing.



A third form of indexing is suggested by the earlier discussion why reporters have begun to act more independent of political authorities in the post-Cold War period. It might be called Political Indexing. Whether from fear or uncertainty, reporters report the story that political authorities want to have reported. This is what seems to have happened in the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and it no doubt happened in other Cold War crises.

We suspect, therefore, that Political Indexing is the form of indexing that underlies the relationship that existed between congressional opinion and media slant during the Cold War period. Some combination of Source and Power Indexing, tempered by reporters' suspicion of self-serving motivations, is probably the dominant mode now. We therefore suggest scholars turn their attention to these notions of indexing.

Yet, systematic study of indexing in any of its forms will be impeded by a subtle issue of reverse-causation. Suppose that some President X faces two issues, either of which he may escalate into a crisis. Fearing that the media and Congress would oppose hawkish initiatives on Issue 1, President X chooses to escalate on Issue 2 instead, where he correctly anticipates greater media and congressional support. By this action, President X assures that later observers (like us) will both fail to study Issue 1 (because it never became a crisis) and misleadingly conclude from study of Issue 2 that the media and Congress reflexively follow the president's lead in foreign policy crises.

The problem, generally stated, is that the process by which potential crises are converted to actual crises may lead to biased conclusions about the relationship between media and government. This endogeneity problem came up several times in our research. One case was the seizure of the U.S.S. *Pueblo* and its crew by North Korea in 1968, an event that President Johnson chose to de-emphasize, perhaps because he feared that, in the midst of the Vietnam War, the press or Congress would not follow him into another crisis. Reflecting this de-emphasis, Spanier failed to include the *Pueblo* incident on his list of principal U.S. foreign policy events, thus preventing us from counting it as a crisis (despite our inclination to do so). Thus, a potential crisis in which other elites might have failed to follow presidential leadership failed to become an actual crisis. In contrast, consider the Gulf War, which did make Spanier's list. This was a crisis that could easily have been a non-crisis, except that President Bush chose to make it one. Although we have no evidence on this point — and, in the nature of things, are unlikely ever to have evidence — it seems likely that Bush would not have chosen to go to war against Iraq unless he had anticipated that he could mobilize adequate congressional and press support for doing so. From these two, obviously speculative accounts, it

seems plausible that the likelihood of mobilizing press support may be a positive factor in whether crises occur.

It is hard to say exactly how serious this endogeneity problem is. On the one hand, the pressures of "real politick" may be so strong that presidents and other government decision-makers typically ignore the press in deciding what to do. And yet there may be media-conscious decision-makers who shy away from commitments that afford the press too many opportunities for pot shots and second-guessing.

As these concluding indicate, this study has only scratched the surface of a difficult problem. Its central finding — the existence of an association between government opinion and the slant of press coverage of foreign policy crises during the Cold War but not afterward — is nonetheless a tantalizing empirical generalization.

## **Appendix A: List of Foreign Policy Crises**

1. 1945 - Soviet military forces occupy eastern Europe.
2. 1946 - United States confronts the Soviet Union over Iran.
3. 1947 - Truman Doctrine commits the United States to assist Greece and Turkey.
4. 1948 - Soviet coup d'état takes place in Czechoslovakia.
5. 1948 - Soviets blockade all ground traffic from West Germany to West Berlin.
6. 1950 - North Korea attacks South Korea by crossing the thirty-eighth parallel.
7. 1950 - Communist China intervenes in Korean War.
8. 1951 - Truman fires General Douglas MacArthur.
9. 1954 - France is defeated at Dienbienphu in Indochina.
10. 1956 - Suez War breaks out after Israel attacks Egypt. Canceled - Congress recessed.
11. 1958 - United States lands marines in Lebanon.
12. 1959 - Castro seizes power in Cuba.
13. 1961 - Kennedy launches abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.
14. 1961 - Kennedy sends first military advisers to South Vietnam.
15. 1961 - Soviets build Berlin Wall.
16. 1962 - Cuban Missile Crisis. Canceled - Congress recessed.
17. 1964 - Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin resolution.
18. 1965 - United States starts bombing North Vietnam and sends American land forces.
19. 1965 - United States intervenes in the Dominican Republic.
20. 1968 - Tet offensive in South Vietnam.
21. 1970 - U.S. invasion of Cambodia.
22. 1972 - North Vietnam invades South and Nixon retaliates by expanding air war.
23. 1975 - South Vietnam collapses and a unified Communist Vietnam is established.
24. 1975 - Cambodians seize U.S. merchant ship Mayaguez.
25. 1976 - Soviet-Cuban forces in Angola win victory for Marxist-led faction.
26. 1979 - U.S Embassy in Tehran seized and employees held hostage by militants,
27. 1979 - Soviets send 80,000 troops into Afghanistan .
28. 1980 - U.S. mission to rescue hostage in Tehran ends in disaster.

29. 1982 - U.S. marines are sent into Beirut.
30. 1983 - Two hundred forty-one marines killed in suicide truck-bomb attack in Beirut.
31. 1983 - Soviet Union shoots down Korean 747 jetliner with 269 passengers aboard.
32. 1983 - Invasion of Grenada.
33. 1984 - Congress cuts off all military assistance to the contras in Nicaragua.
34. 1985 - Various Arab terrorist actions in Europe. Canceled - following item used.
35. 1986 - The United States attacks Libya for terrorist acts.
36. 1987 - The United States reflags and escorts Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf.
37. 1989 - Invasion of Panama.
38. 1990. U.S. sends troops to Persian Gulf. Cancelled - Congress in recess.
39. 1991 - Persian Gulf War.

## Appendix A: Instructions to Coders

For each assigned paragraph of each news story, your task is to answer this question:

WOULD AN ORDINARY MIDDLE-OF-THE ROAD AMERICAN READING THIS PARAGRAPH IN ITS ORIGINAL CONTEXT HAVE BEEN INDUCED TO TAKE A MORE HAWKISH OR A MORE DOVISH VIEW OF THE FOREIGN CRISIS DESCRIBED IN THE STORY.

Hawkish and dovish should be understood in their colloquial senses, that is, more inclined or less inclined to use some form of military force (including military aid to an ally), rather than purely diplomatic means, to resolve a given crisis.

Throughout the content coding, you should allow for the possibility that the same information or facts could have different actual meanings in different contexts. Reports of U.S. deaths or battlefield defeats, for example, could be framed so as to indicate that U.S. honor or national security require a military threat or response; but they could also be framed so as to suggest that threats or further fighting would be hopeless. Detailed descriptions of military operations or troop movements could contain an element of ridicule, in which case they should be coded dovish, or they could be imbued with a tone of martial expectancy, in which case they would be hawkish. The description of an enemy's skill or strength, or the weakness of the U.S., might suggest the senselessness of military action, or it might excite greater resolve or a more vigorous military response by the U.S. In all such cases, ratings should depend on your judgment of how an ordinary reader, in the context of his or her times, would tend to read the paragraph.

Try to rate each paragraph for a predominant message. In some cases, however, a paragraph may contain sharp inducements toward both hawkishness and dovishness; such paragraphs should be rated as having both hawkish and dovish content. In other cases, a paragraph may have no implications for either hawkishness or dovishness, in which case it should be rated as neutral. Some paragraphs, however, might be neutral if rated as stand-alone units, but yet contribute to the development of a point that, in its eventual implication, is hawkish or dovish; such paragraphs should be rated for the larger theme to which they contribute. (This implies that some paragraphs may have to be coded in light of the paragraphs that follow them.)

Among the contextual factors to which you may pay attention are the photographs, illustrations, and headlines that accompany the story. Do not code these contextual factors as such; nor should you consider them as "biases" that invariably color all associated verbiage. But when the meaning of an otherwise

ambiguous passage takes on a reasonably distinct coloration when viewed in light of the associated pictures or headlines, your coding should aim to capture the actual effect of the communication.

In sum, your task is to capture, on a paragraph by paragraph basis, the hawkish or dovish slant of each story as it would tend to effect an ordinary, contemporaneous reader.

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Table 1. The effect of Congressional opinion on media slant in selected subsets of cases

	Regression coefficient
<u>Whole sample</u> (n=35)	.47
<u>Time period</u>	
Pre-Tet Offensive (n=17)	.40
Post-Tet Offensive (n=18)	.44
<u>Area of world</u>	
Americas (n=6)	.22
Asia <sup>1</sup> (n=14)	.62
Europe (n=5)	.37
Middle East (n=9)	.38
<u>Type of adversary</u>	
Communist (n=26)	.52
Non-communist (n=9)	.20

*Note:* Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, where dependent variable is media slant and independent variable is congressional opinion. Coefficients are calculated within various subsets of cases, as indicated

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<sup>1</sup> We include Afghanistan in Asia but exclude all Middle Eastern states.

Table 2. Models of media hawkishness

	All coders	Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 3
Congress opinion (range 0 to 1)	0.30 (.09)	0.22 (.09)	.14 (.13)	.54 (.12)
Executive branch (0-1)	.16 (.07)	0.02 (.07)	0.25 (.10)	.21 (.09)
Full War (0-1)	.03 (.09)	.01 (.09)	.00 (.12)	.09 (.11)
Start fighting (0-1)	.07 (.06)	.10 (.06)	.07 (.08)	.04 (.08)
Communist foe (0-1)	.11 (.06)	.12 (.06)	.10 (.08)	.10 (.08)
Setback or defeat (0-1)	-.17 (.06)	-.13 (.06)	-.22 (.09)	-.16 (.09)
Continuation crisis (0-1)	-.16 (.09)	-.10 (.10)	-.16 (.13)	-.23 (.12)
Minor use of force (0-1)	-.16 (.07)	-.18 (.07)	-.11 (.10)	-.21 (.09)
Year (scaled to 0-1 range)	-.07 (.09)	-.01 (.10)	-.17 (.14)	-.02 (.13)
Intercept	.27	.39	.35	.08
Adjusted r <sup>2</sup>	.72	.47	.55	.72
N of cases	35	35	35	35

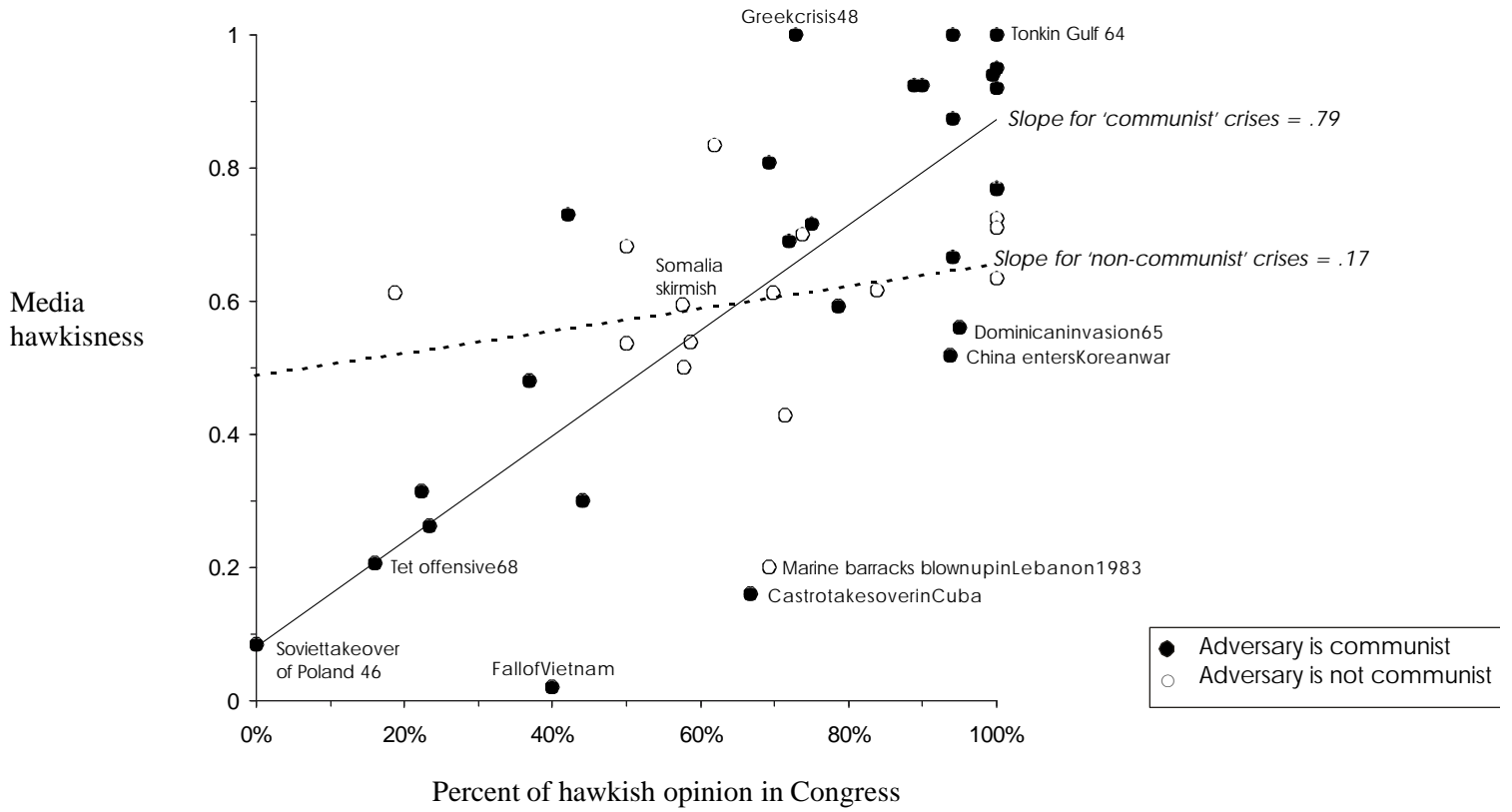
*Note:* Dependent variable, which has a range of .15 to .92 when averaged across all coders, is hawkishness of newsmagazine coverage; standard errors are shown in parentheses.



Table 3. The effect of communist adversaries on media and congressional opinion

	Media coverage (coder #3)	Congressional opinion (speeches + votes)	Congressional opinion (votes only)
<u>Non-Communist foe</u>			
Mean hawkishness:	0.61	.70	.65
SD across cases:	0.15	.23	.16
N of cases:	16	16	7
<u>Communist foe</u>			
Mean hawkishness:	0.63	.70	.78
SD across cases:	0.31	.31	.30
N of cases:	26	26	8

Figure 1. Congressional and media hawkishness for communist and non-communist foes



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Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This decision was made without examining media coverage of the terrorist acts.

<sup>2</sup> From prior experience, the senior author felt that he could "train" coders to produce significantly higher levels of agreement. Such training, however, often consists of giving coders clear rules for handling certain kinds of inherently ambiguous data. In applying these rules rigidly, coders can boost inter-coder reliability without necessarily doing a better job of capturing the actual content; in this way, rigid use of rules can create high reliability *at the expense of* the actual validity of ratings. For example, the problem alluded to in note xx could probably have been solved with more detailed coder training.

<sup>3</sup> The ratings of coder 1 correlated with those of coders 2 and 3 at the level of .73 and .75. The ratings of coders 2 and 3 correlated at the level of .77.

<sup>4</sup> The means of the individual coders were .59, .57 and .62; the SDs were .15, .24, and .29. The low SD for coder 1 reflects his reluctance to assign non-neutral codes in the absence of a strong slant; yet, despite this threshold difference, coder 1's relative ranking of crises correlated well with rankings of the other coders.

<sup>5</sup> In designing this study, we considered collecting media data just before and after measurement of congressional opinion, so as to establish causal precedence. This, however, did not prove feasible. In some cases, events moved so quickly — as in the start of the Korean War — that it was impossible to measure media content before Congress had reacted. In other cases, the pattern of media and congressional opinion had been stable for so long before we made our measurements — as in, for example, the fall of Saigon in 1974 — that it made no sense to pretend that one had actually preceded the other by a significant amount of time. Hence we abandoned this approach.

<sup>6</sup> Although President Reagan withdrew the marines from Lebanon shortly after their barracks were bombed, his initial response was vaguely hawkish.

<sup>7</sup> If, incidentally, the media scores of coders 2 and 3 are combined, congressional and presidential opinion have significant effects (b's of .18 and .14; t-ratios of 1.89 and 1.83, respectively). Coder 1 is the graduate student without coding experience; coder 3 is an undergraduate (Mark Hunt) who has worked with Zaller on other projects. It is interesting that inter-coder reliability statistics, as reported in note 8, contain no hint that findings would differ so strongly by coder.

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<sup>8</sup> The coefficient for the effect of congressional opinion is .30; given that  $.30 \times (1.00 - .16) = .25$ , we expect media hawkishness to be .25 units lower. Since the SD of media hawkishness is .21, this amounts to 1.2 SDs.

<sup>9</sup> The calculation is  $(-.17 - .16 + .03 - (+.07)) / .21$ , which equals -1.76 SDs.

<sup>10</sup> The comparable slope for coder #3 in the original 35 cases was .73

<sup>11</sup> The comparable p-value in the original 35 cases was only .30.

<sup>12</sup> This is the p-value for equality of variance across the two types of cases, according to Levene's test for equality of variance.

<sup>13</sup> This empirical finding can and should be checked in a larger sample of congressional opinion.

<sup>14</sup> Technically, our calculation of the association between congressional and media opinion in Figure 1 is based on unstandardized coefficients, which are unaffected by the variance of the variables involved

<sup>15</sup> The score was .28 on the measure of media hawkishness. The next lowest score in the 1990s was .43,

which was for the start of the Gulf War, over which Congress was divided.

<sup>16</sup> Time, December 14, 1992, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> December 28, 1998, p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> February 19, 1994, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Vietnam: A History. 1997 Penguin edition, p. 386-87.

<sup>20</sup> Powers That Be, p. 619-620.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Cohen, 1963, p. 85.