

ELITE MILITARY SUPPORT AND THE USE OF FORCE¹

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Abstract: Can elites influence Americans' foreign policy views? We find senior military officers are a powerful shaper of public support for use of force abroad. The military's influence extends to proposed humanitarian and realpolitik interventions alike, military leaders' impact on public opinion is greater when they oppose (rather than support) interventions abroad, and the military brass's leverage varies considerably across segments of the American public. This study's large, survey-based experiments advance our understanding of how individuals form opinions about complex subjects, how voters use elite signals and how the military influences politics and policy in a democracy.

¹The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not reflect the position of the United States Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense. We would like to thank Chris Gelpi, Justin Grimmer, Ken Schultz, Michael Tomz, Hugh Liebert and participants at the Workshop on Civil-Military Relations at the University of North Carolina. We thank the Center for a New American Security for generous financial support.

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Americans pay limited attention to international news and are generally uninformed on foreign policy matters [Holsti, 2004]; yet, public opinion on these matters can alter elite foreign policy decisions and incumbents' electoral performance [Powlick and Katz, 1998]. We study how elites, in this case senior military leaders, influence Americans' views on foreign policy matters with a series of experiments embedded in surveys.

Senior military officers often are involved in public debates, either intentionally or inadvertently, about how and when to use military force.³ For example, Gen. Stanley McChrystal expressed doubt about a military option that the White House reportedly favored in Afghanistan (2011), Gen. David Petraeus vigorously defended President George W. Bush's surge in Iraq (2007), Gen. Eric Shinseki expressed concerns with troop deployment levels in Iraq in Senate testimony (2003) and Gen. Colin Powell opposed air strikes in Bosnia (1992).

Previous research has demonstrated that domestic and foreign opinion leaders can influence foreign policy views [Baum and Groeling, 2009, Grieco et al., 2011]. However, no systematic research has examined whether public disclosure of military views influences public opinion. We fill this gap in the literature by administering large, nationally representative survey-based experiments that prime respondents to think about the military's views when considering whether to support or oppose military action abroad. Our use of force scenarios examine support for a range of relevant real-world and hypothetical missions – military action in Iran, coalition air strikes in

³Political campaigns from both parties cite evidence of military support to bolster their electoral prospects or gain support for proposed policies [Golby et al., 2012].

Syria, sustained military operations in response to a terrorist attack and small-scale interventions to prevent further humanitarian atrocities.

We find that military opposition exerts a sizable seven point negative effect on public support for the use of force abroad, while military support increases overall public support by three percentage points, a statistically significant increase. These elite cues are most influential among Republican respondents, the military's influence extends to proposed humanitarian and realpolitik interventions alike and the military's impact on public opinion is greater when they oppose (rather than support) interventions abroad.

Our research contributes to and integrates a series of scholarly literatures. First, this research has relevance for literatures concerning attitude formation and the effects of trusted signals. Second, this study contributes to the study of civil-military relations and democratic accountability. It advances our understanding of how the military may influence politics and policy in a democracy and it informs normative debates regarding the appropriate behavior of military officers and political leaders.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we discuss our theory, hypotheses and previous empirical work. Next, we discuss our research design. Third, we describe our findings. Finally, we briefly conclude.

The Impact of Military Endorsements

There are large informational asymmetries between citizens and foreign policy elites such as the President, Congressional leaders, international organizations and the military [Chapman and Reiter, 2004, Chapman, 2007, 2009, Fang, 2008, Thompson, 2009]. On one hand, opinion leaders such as the President and military officers have access to classified information concerning the military capabilities of American forces and potential threats. On the other hand, research indicates Americans have limited knowledge of domestic and foreign policy matters [Almond, 1950, Bennett and Paletz, 1994, Edwards, 1983, Sobel, 1993, Canes-Wrone, 2005, Holsti, 2004, Kriesberg, 1949],⁴ and, even politically motivated Americans have difficulty evaluating leaders' claims about foreign policy matters because intelligence and details of complex military operations are classified [Grieco et al., 2011, p. 580-81].

When individuals lack knowledge, they make decisions based on informational shortcuts, or heuristics [Popkin, 1994, Sniderman et al., 1993]. At a broader level, research indicates that individuals may accept or reject messages based on how credible and informative they view the source [Druckman, 2001, Howell and Kriner, 2008, Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994, Lupia and McCubbins, 1998, Sniderman et al., 1993]. Specifically, scholars have demonstrated that Americans' views on foreign policy matters can be influenced by Congressional leaders and international organizations such as the United

⁴While 55 percent of Americans say they follow national news "most of the time," just 39 percent say the same about international news. (August 2008 Pew Poll. <http://www.people-press.org/2008/08/17/key-news-audiences-now-blend-online-and-traditional-sources/>)

Nations [Chapman and Reiter, 2004, Chapman, 2007, 2009, Fang, 2008, Grieco et al., 2011].

Military officers spend long careers developing expert knowledge regarding military strategy, have direct access to classified information concerning the military capabilities of American forces and potential threats and the military is the most respected public-institution in America, with an 81 percent confidence rating.⁵ Overall, Americans' relative lack of knowledge on foreign policy matters, the information asymmetries between citizens and military leaders, and widespread respect for the military suggests individuals' views on using force abroad are susceptible to influence from senior military officers. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: Elite military support or opposition for use of force abroad will influence Americans' foreign policy views.

Beyond the average effect of military views, scholars have argued that the impact of endorsements varies across individuals. Partisan bias shapes the way individuals translate information into their political attitudes and opinions [Bartels, 2002, Campbell et al., 1980, Gaines et al., 2007, Taber and Lodge, 2006], especially on foreign policy matters [Berinsky, 2007, Gaines et al., 2007, Nie and Andersen, 1974, Golby, 2011, Howell and Kriner, 2008, Wittkopf, 1990]. Specifically, 92 percent of Republicans have confidence

⁵Gallup Poll. More broadly, previous research finds that voting decisions and political attitudes are substantially influenced by the endorsements of candidates by political groups [Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009, Lau and Redlawsk, 2001, Lupia, 1994], media groups [Chiang and Knight, 2011, DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007, Dropp and Warshaw, 2012, Ladd and Lenz, 2009], celebrities [Nownes, 2011, Pease and Brewer, 2008] and international organizations [Grieco et al., 2011]. Grieco et al. [2011], for example, find that "cues from IOs [international organizations] regarding the use of force in a particular mission are generally likely to influence aggregate public support for that mission" [Grieco et al., 2011, p. 580]

in the military, compared with only 67 percent of Democrats [Golby, 2011]⁶ largely because the mass public views the military as primarily conservative and Republican.⁷

Scholars have found that Americans rely on cues from party leaders in matters of war [Zaller, 1992, Larson, 1996, Berinsky, 2007], suggesting that the impact of a message depends on who receives it:

H2: Senior military leaders' views will be more influential among Republican than among Democrats.

Previous research suggests that surprising or unexpected signals are particularly informative and influential, especially when the preferences of the person receiving a message differ from those of the individual sending the signal [Crawford and Sobel, 1982]. In Securing Approval, Chapman [2012] finds elites signals are effective when they contradict previously assumed biases, such as when President Richard Nixon visited China in 1972.

Since the mass public generally views the military as conservative and Republican, an elite military signal opposing intervention in a mission with a “realpolitik” goal will be more credible than a signal supporting intervention. On the other hand, a message

⁶Senior military officers overwhelmingly identify as Republicans and conservatives [Holsti, 1998, Feaver and Kohn, 2001, Urban, 2010, Dempsey, 2009] and evidence suggests that the mass public still views the military primarily as conservative and Republican. Recent research, however, has demonstrated that the enlisted ranks of the military are significantly more diverse and representative of the American public than the officer corps [Dempsey, 2009]

⁷Four times as many Americans said that most members of the military are Republicans than said that most members are Democrats (39 percent to 9 percent). According to our post-test questionnaire item including 5,500 respondents. Overall, 53 percent said that the military has about equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats, 39 percent said most members are Republicans and nine percent said most members are Democrats.

supporting intervention in a “humanitarian” crisis will be more informative than an opposition message.

H3: Military support for missions with “humanitarian” goals (Humanitarian, Syria) or opposition to missions with “realpolitik” goals (Iran, Terrorism) will be viewed as more credible and informative signals.

Conservatives and Republicans are more likely to support missions involving “realpolitik” goals, but less likely to support missions with “humanitarian” goals; in contrast, liberals and Democrats are likely to support interventions with “humanitarian” goals [Wittkopf, 1990, Feaver and Gelpi, 2005, Golby, 2011].⁸

H4: Support for humanitarian interventions (Syria, Humanitarian crisis) by senior military leaders will be more influential among Democrats than support by military leaders for realpolitik missions (Iran, Terrorist Attack).

H5: Opposition for humanitarian interventions (Syria, humanitarian crisis) by senior military leaders will be less influential among Democrats than opposition by military leaders for realpolitik missions (Iran, Terrorist Attack).

Finally, we propose that elite actors will exercise more power when they oppose an action abroad compared with when they support military action. We expect to find asymmetric treatment effects because military actions abroad have much clearer, more direct costs than the long-term, diffuse costs of not taking action. Second, Americans may view the military as hawkish on foreign policy and likely to support use of force abroad. Popular culture often reinforces the view that senior military officers are aggressive and hawkish on foreign policy. Signals contradicting this view, such as opposition prompts, may be both more powerful and credible to Americans. Third, modest treatment effects in support conditions are consistent with the military’s role

⁸Other scholars have used the term “militant internationalist” to describe missions with “realpolitik” goals and “cooperative internationalist” to describe missions with “humanitarian” goals.

in American democracy and may appear more plausible to respondents. The military usually does not set the agenda for military policies and foreign interventions; rather, senior officers typically provide ‘expert’ advice regarding the costs and risks associated with policies in response to civilian proposals. Similarly, individuals may believe it is improper for active military members to take a public stand in favor of military action.

H6: Elite actors will exercise more power when they oppose an action abroad compared with when they support military action.

Data and Research Design

We conducted a controlled, randomized survey experiment of a nationally representative sample of 5,500 adult Americans during the summer of 2012.⁹ We asked respondents a range of questions designed to draw out their views on politics and public affairs and, in particular, to test whether statements by elite military leaders have any discernible effect on public policy views. Specifically, respondents saw a series of vignettes describing proposed military actions, and treatment groups viewed an additional sentence indicating that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the regional combatant commander either supported or opposed use of force abroad.

⁹We previously fielded two surveys from February 15-21, 2012, on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk online platform with 928 and 890 respondents, respectively. We found that perceived military support or opposition for use of force abroad affects the level of public support for military operations in four out of six survey experiments. Pooling across all scenarios, we found that Republicans were 16 percent more likely to support the use of force when they received the military support treatment condition than under the baseline condition. Among Democrats and Independents, however, we found no effects for military support. By contrast, the data suggest that all partisans respond to military opposition in a similar way. Respondents who received the military opposition treatment were 7 percent less likely to support a military opposition than if they had received the baseline condition.

Treatment Groups:

Respondents were assigned to one of the three groups for a series of four proposed military actions regarding military action in Iran, coalition air strikes in Syria, sustained military operations in response to a terrorist attack and a small-scale intervention to prevent further humanitarian atrocities. Respondents in the control group ($n \sim 1,800$) viewed the following four scenarios without any additional information and then agreed or disagreed with the proposed action.¹⁰

Iran: “As you may know, U.S. officials have considered initiating military action to destroy Iran’s ability to make nuclear weapons if Iran continues with its nuclear research and is close to developing a nuclear weapon. The U.S. should initiate military action against Iran”

Syria: “As you may know, there has been civil unrest in Syria, where antigovernment groups have been fighting to overthrow the current regime led by President Bashar al-Assad. The U.S. and its allies are considering bombing Syrian military forces to protect antigovernment groups. The United States and its allies should bomb Syrian military forces to protect antigovernment groups”

Terrorism: “Consider the following hypothetical situation. The U.S. government has identified and stopped a major terrorist attack on the mainland. A foreign government that had not previously supported terrorism helped to plan this operation. The U.S. is considering initiating sustained military operations against this foreign government to prevent future attacks. The United States should initiate sustained military operations against this foreign government to prevent future attacks.”

Humanitarian: “Consider a country whose citizens have begun to protest against the ruling dictator who has committed large-scale atrocities against his own people. The country’s military is weak, and the U.S. could intervene to prevent further humanitarian atrocities without suffering many casualties. The U.S. military should intervene to prevent further humanitarian atrocities.”

¹⁰Response options were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Two other randomly assigned groups ($n \sim 1,800$ in each) viewed a version of the scenarios containing an additional sentence indicating that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the regional combatant commander either supported or opposed the use of force abroad: “According to recent reports, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and regional combatant commander [support/oppose] [military action against Iran / military action against the Syrian government / this military operation].” The form of military endorsement we test, therefore, is an explicit, but unsourced, report of the views of the relevant senior military leaders.

We asked about a range of missions because public support for a proposed use of force varies greatly depending on the type of mission. In summary, we primed respondents to think about the views of senior military leaders when considering a potential use of force scenario by randomly assigning participants to see a one sentence prompt describing the military’s stance.¹¹

Models

We study whether military support or opposition influences foreign policy views using a series of models. Our primary specifications utilize proportional-odds logistic regres-

¹¹We administer both a between-subjects and within-subjects design. We randomize the order in which respondents see the vignettes and ask respondents a series of questions between treatments to reduce the potential for experimental decay or biased treatment estimates. We use an experimental design because elites may tend to make public statements opposing unpopular policies or supporting popular policies. If this occurs, then we may conclude spuriously that military opinion is strongly associated with public opinion.

Two our of scenarios, Iran and Syria, contain deception. We vary whether the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a regional combatant commander support or oppose use of force abroad, regardless of the military leaders’ actual stance on the interventions. We do not explicitly say that these leaders support or oppose military action – we reference “recent reports” indicating their views.

sions because our primary dependent variable is ordered and contains more than two values [Greene, 2003].¹² Our baseline model is as follows:

$$(1) \text{ Agree}_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Group}_i + \beta_2 * \text{Controls}_i + u_i$$

where Agree_i is the response variable where strongly agree is recorded as 5 and strongly disagree is coded as 1. Group_i is the treatment group assignment (No Signal, Support Signal, Oppose Signal), Controls_i are a series of background variables that may impact overall support for using force abroad including age, gender, educational attainment, party affiliation and political ideology, and u_i is error unexplained by the model. In the baseline specification, β_1 gauges the main effect of elite opinion for each treatment group. For example, a positive value of β_1 in the Oppose condition indicates that relative to the control condition senior military opinion decreases support for use of force abroad.

A second set of models includes an additional term capturing the interaction between treatment group assignment and party affiliation:

$$(2) \text{ Agree}_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Group}_i + \beta_2 * \text{PID}_i + \beta_3 * (\text{Group}_i * \text{PID}_i) + \beta_4 * \text{Controls}_i + u_i$$

where PID_i is the respondent's party affiliation. β_3 gauges the effect of the elite military signal contingent on an individual's characteristics. For example, a positive value of β_3 in the oppose condition for Republicans means that opposition military signals increase the chance that Republicans will disagree with an intervention abroad; a negative value

¹²We separately run logistic regressions with a dichotomous support dependent variable and a dichotomous oppose dependent variables. The results obtained from these models are very similar to results from the proportional-odds logistic regressions.

of β_3 in the support condition for Republicans means that support military signals increase the chance that Republicans support use of force abroad.

Results

This section describes our primary findings across the four use of force scenarios. The first four columns in Table 1 present the main results for each use of force scenario. The fifth column documents the effects pooled across the four scenarios.

Military opposition exerts a large, statistically significant and negative effect on support for interventions abroad. Compared with no military endorsement, military opposition reduces support by between 6 and 8 percentage points in each of the four scenarios. In the Terrorism scenario, for example, 46 percent of those in the control group supported a bombing campaign, whereas only 38 percent of those in the opposition group did – an effect of 8 percentage points.

Military support for using force abroad increases overall support by three percentage points compared with the control group, and the difference between the support treatment group and control group is significant in three out of four use of force scenarios.

These results are roughly similar to results from previous research on the effects of other kinds of endorsements. For instance, priming the public with information about support or opposition from the U.N. and NATO produced 20- to 30-point swings in

either direction [Grieco et al., 2011]. Likewise, partisan-cued differences on public attitudes during the Korean War and other actual uses of force showed similar, or larger, swings [Larson, 1996]. Other scholars found 15- to 20-point swings within political parties when they presented respondents with partisan cues for hypothetical scenarios in Iraq, Eritrea and Liberia [Kriner and Howell].

Figure 1 presents these main results in graphical form. It captures differences in overall support across the use of force scenarios and main treatment effects. The Terror scenario proposing a response to a failed attack on the homeland draws the broadest support, followed by the hypothetical humanitarian crisis and the Iran scenario proposing military action. The vignette proposing military action in Syria garners the least support. The plots contain point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for each treatment group.

Table 2 displays a measure of net support, the proportion of respondents who agree minus the proportion who disagree. We establish that the military exerts the most influence when it offers a negative signal about a proposed intervention. On average, a negative signal depresses net support by 15 points, while a military support signal increases net support by about four points.

Compared with the control group, net support for respondents in the opposition treatment group declines 17 percentage points in the Syria scenario, 16 points in the failed terrorist attack prompt, 15 percentage points in the humanitarian crisis scenario and 14 points in the Iran vignette.

Party Identification Filters Military Endorsements

Table 3 displays the percent of Americans who agree or strongly agree with proposed use of force by party identification.¹³ The fifth column of Table 3, which pools the findings from the four use of force scenarios, demonstrates that the support condition increases support by four points among Republicans and the opposition prompt reduces their support for use of force abroad by 10 percentage points, a 14-point swing overall. Among Democrats, the support prompt increases support by 3 points and the opposition signal reduces support by about five points, an 8-point swing overall. Finally, independents are no more likely to support interventions abroad in the support condition; however, the opposition prompt reduces their support by six percentage points for a 6-point swing overall.

In general, Republicans are more supportive of military action across all four scenarios than are either Democrats or Independents. Consistent with our expectations that Republicans would be especially supportive of ‘realpolitik’ missions, they support operations in Iran and military responses to a failed terrorist attack at high rates; clear majorities of Republicans support operations in Iran and in the terrorism scenario in all groups except the oppose condition.

Republican respondents are less likely to support military action for operations in Syria and in response to the hypothetical humanitarian crisis, though they are not

¹³We divide groups into pure independents, Republicans (including leaners) and Democrats (including leaners).

less likely to support action than are Democratic respondents. In fact, Democrats and Republicans support these operations at very similar rates. Independent respondents appear to have moderate views on the realpolitik questions with responses between those of Democrats and Republicans, but they have rather dovish views on the questions involving Syria and the humanitarian response.

Figure 2 displays plots for each use of force scenario by party identification of the respondent. Consistent with our expectations, signals from military elites generally are more influential with Republican respondents than they are with Independent and Democratic respondents. An opposition signal from military leaders causes statistically significant decreases in support when compared to the baseline among Republican respondents in all four cases.

Partisan differences do appear to play a critical role in shaping the circumstances under which a respondent will respond to an elite military cue. Republicans are especially likely to listen to senior military officers on use of force decisions, especially on matters related to terrorism and national defense. It also is clear that Democrats and Independents listen to the advice of military leaders when they oppose the use of force, but that these signals are less influential than they are among Republicans. Nevertheless, surprising military advice that supports a humanitarian operation may be particularly influential.

The results suggest, though, that factors beyond party identification are important in determining the size and direction of the treatment effects. First, the saliency of an issue

is negatively related to the size of the treatment effects. The influence of military leaders on Iran, a prominent foreign policy case, is smaller than the influence of opinion on Syria, a developing crisis. We see much more movement on the hypothetical scenarios, where, by virtue of being hypothetical, respondents do not have fixed views.

Second, the ideological bent of the proposed use of force scenario affects the size and direction of treatment results. In the humanitarian scenario, which may appeal more to Democrats or cooperative internationalists, Democrats are moved significantly by the support condition while Republicans exhibit no effect. Consistent with our expectations, military support for the Iran and terrorism scenarios did not influence Democrats. However, military support for the Syria scenario did not lead to a statistically significant increase in support among Democrats like we expected it would. There are several reasons why the Syria results are not consistent with our expectations. First, Democrats' views already may be somewhat crystallized on this topic. Second, although Syria clearly involves many serious humanitarian issues, there also are other strategic and economic interests at stake in the region. Perhaps respondents think of this crisis primarily in terms unrelated to the humanitarian issues at stake. Third, our choice of the phrase 'anti-government groups' may prime respondents not to think of this situation in purely humanitarian terms. Finally, it may be that recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have colored respondents' views of operations in this region of the world in particular.

Third, our results also offer mixed support for the "second-opinion" explanation, pro-

posed by [Grieco et al., 2011], the idea that people who distrust the president may be likely to seek outside validation of a presidential decision on the use of force. In our sample, Republicans obviously fit this category. Thus, the relatively strong Republican response to military endorsements, both positive and negative, seems to be an example of skeptics seeking outside validation. However, Republican respondents in the control group showed a high level of support for the use of force in each of our four scenarios, which does not seem consistent with the second-opinion hypothesis. We would expect their support to be lower if they were basing their opinions on their faith in President Obama's decisionmaking. This evidence also is consistent with an explanation in which Republicans listen to military endorsements because they believe that the military shares their beliefs about foreign policy and Democrats and independents do not listen because they think that military preferences diverge from their own. Military opposition caused statistically significant decreases in Republican support in all four scenarios, and military support led to statistically significant increases in support in the Syria and Terrorism scenarios, although not in the Iran or Humanitarian scenarios.

The somewhat anomalous result of Democrats responding markedly, and Republicans not responding, to a military endorsement in the Humanitarian scenario may help to adjudicate among these three explanations. Democrats should not need a second opinion on Obama, and yet they respond to the support signal for a humanitarian operation. Republicans should be just as surprised by news of military support for a

humanitarian intervention, and yet that news does not shift them much. Perhaps the inclination of the Republican control group against such interventions is so strong that a military endorsement – particularly the modest one in our signal – is not sufficient to change the calculus.¹⁴

We also found that the effects of the support signal were much larger (a 5-percentage-point shift overall) for Republicans who believed that most members of the military were Republican, whereas there was no effect on Republicans who thought the military consisted of an equal number of partisans. The opposition signal led to slightly smaller shifts among Republicans who believed that most members of the military were Republican than among Republicans who thought the military had a partisan balance, although the difference was not statistically significant. However, perceptions of military partisanship did not appear to have a similar effect on Democrats' responsiveness to military endorsements.

Fourth, the military's influence also is strongest when it opposes rather than supports interventions abroad. On average, military opposition reduces support for an intervention by about 10 percentage points, compared with the baseline condition, while military support increases support by about five percentage points.

¹⁴Our survey did uncover other evidence that the public believes the military to be politicized. Approximately 59 percent of respondents said that most members of the military belonged to a political party. Interestingly, however, perceptions of military partisanship differed significantly among partisan respondents. Only 38 percent of Democratic respondents believed that most members of the military belonged to the Republican party, whereas 59 percent of Republican respondents believed that most members of the military identified with the Republican party. Another 50 percent of Democrats responded that "the military has about equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans." In contrast, only 39 percent of Republicans thought the military had an equal balance of partisans. And very few respondents said that most members of the military identified as Democrats (12 percent of Democrats and 3 percent of Republicans).

Fifth, the survey shows only limited evidence that veterans are more likely than non-veterans to respond to elite military cues. Veterans are not statistically more likely than nonveterans to respond to support cues in any of the four scenarios. When they receive opposition cues, however, veterans are slightly less likely to support the use of force than nonveterans. Across all four scenarios, veterans who receive an opposition signal are 10 percentage points less likely to support the use of force compared with the control group. In contrast, the corresponding change for nonveterans is 7 percentage points.

Table 4 presents results from a proportional-odds logistic regression, where the dependent variable is support for use of force abroad and treatment assignment is interacted with party affiliation. The coefficients are displayed with respect to a respondent in the opposition treatment group. The positive and significant coefficients on the Support variable indicate that public opinion for using force abroad is highest in the Support treatment group. The positive and significant coefficients on the Party ID variable in the Iran and Terror scenarios correspond with the bivariate results where Party ID influences support in these ‘realpolitik’ scenarios.

Finally, the interaction between Party ID and Support is significant in three out of the five models. This indicates that Republicans in the support group are significantly more likely to support use of force abroad, compared with Independents or Democrats.

Conclusion

Americans' relative lack of interest in foreign affairs, the information asymmetries between citizens and military leaders, and the complex nature of foreign policy subjects suggest that Americans' views on the use of force abroad are susceptible to elite influence. We conduct a series of large-scale survey experiments and find that elites are powerful shapers of Americans' support for the use of force abroad. We establish that military leaders influence individuals who pay limited attention to foreign policy news and whose beliefs are ideologically congruent with the endorsing source. Furthermore, we find that the military's influence on public opinion is greatest when it opposes (rather than supports) interventions abroad. This study dovetails a series of important research literatures and advances our understanding of how individuals form opinions about complex subjects in which they have little substantive knowledge, how voters use elite signals and how the military may influence politics and policy in a democracy.

Our results have important implications for the policy debate. Policymakers have good political reasons to be concerned about military opinion regarding the use of force. Policymakers must work to build public support for any such use, and positive military endorsements can be a powerful aid – and, as this survey shows, military opposition can be an even more powerful hindrance – to forging public support.

Our results suggest that there is a significant incentive for political leaders to get public endorsements from senior military leaders, which necessarily increases the bargaining

power of senior military leaders vis-a-vis their elected civilian leaders. Our survey also suggests that there is an even larger incentive for opponents of a particular military scenario to court generals and admirals to speak out against an administration’s proposed policy, particularly through Congressional testimony.

Finally, the public regularly exhibits less trust in institutions that it considers partisan, and military leaders’ regular, public involvement in use of force debates could reduce trust in the institution.

Our experimental manipulation prompts respondents with a simple statement indicating military support or opposition. More complex treatments could examine the impact of military leaders’ opinion contingent on their justification for action or inaction. For example, future studies could say that the military supports an operation because “it will save lives” or “it is protecting our national interest,” whereas opposition prompts could say “it will lead to too many casualties” or “it is not furthering our national security interests.”

We also can examine more closely how the direction of the endorsement message influences individuals. Psychological research has shown that consensus leads to conformity and that individuals associate consensus with correctness [Asch, 1956, Chaiken and Eagly, 1989], and we expose respondents mainly to consensus treatments.¹⁵ While

¹⁵Asch [1956] asked participants – one subject and a few confederates hired by the researcher – whether three lines were the same length. When each of the confederates answered incorrectly (“the lines are the same length”), the subject conformed and also answered incorrectly; however, when the confederates were divided, the subject provided the correct answer. Similarly, Chaiken [1980] have studied the impact of source cues and argue that individuals may be more likely to agree “with messages that most other persons appear to endorse, and so on, without having absorbed the semantic content of persuasive argumentation” [Chaiken, 1980, p. 214].

we expose a subset of approximately 1,300 individuals to treatments indicating division among top military leaders and test whether the the influence of elite cues wanes in these situations, future work can examine the relative impact of consensus versus dissensus.

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Table 1: % of Respondents Who Agree or Strongly Agree with Proposed Use of Force

	Iran	Syria	Terror	Humanitarian	All 4
Oppose Signal	33	17	38	33	30
No Signal	41	24	46	39	37
Support Signal	41	27	51	44	40
Divided Signal	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	n/a

Figure 1: Main Effects by Scenario and Treatment Assignment

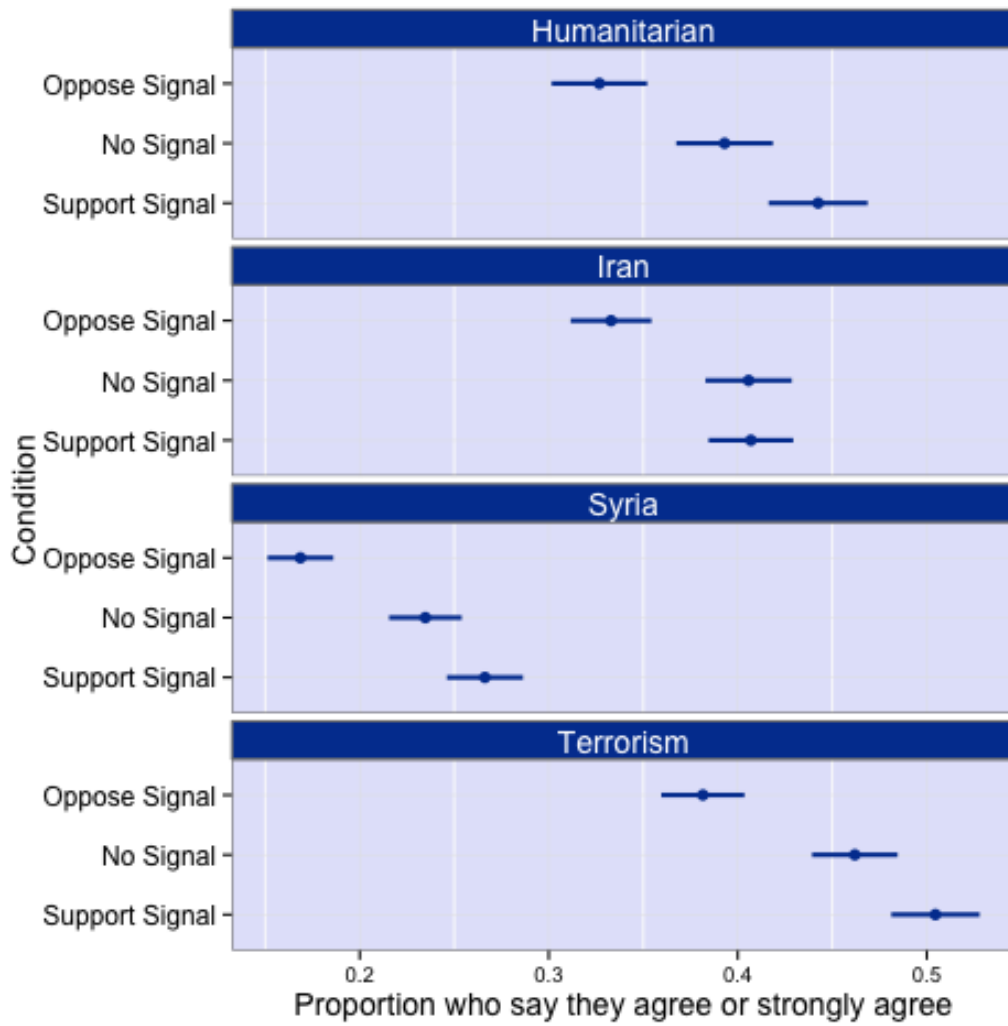


Table 2: Net support % of Americans who Agree or Strongly Agree with Use of Force
 - % of Americans who Disagree or Strongly Disagree)

	Iran	Syria	Terror	Humanitarian	All 4
Oppose Signal	-5	-34	+6	-3	-9
No Signal	+9	-17	+22	+12	+6
Support Signal	+8	-11	+29	+18	+10
Divided Signal	n/a	n/a	n/a	+12	n/a

Table 3: % of Americans who Agree or Strongly Agree with Use of Force by Party Identification

	Iran	Syria	Terror	Humanitarian	Overall
Democrats					
Oppose Signal	21	17	33	34	26
No Signal	26	24	35	39	31
Support Signal	28	25	39	47	34
Republicans					
Oppose Signal	49	19	48	33	38
No Signal	60	27	61	44	48
Support Signal	62	33	69	46	52
Independents					
Oppose Signal	25	11	33	27	24
No Signal	33	16	41	26	30
Support Signal	33	14	42	34	30

Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents who Agree or Strongly Agree with Use of Force for the Four Scenarios

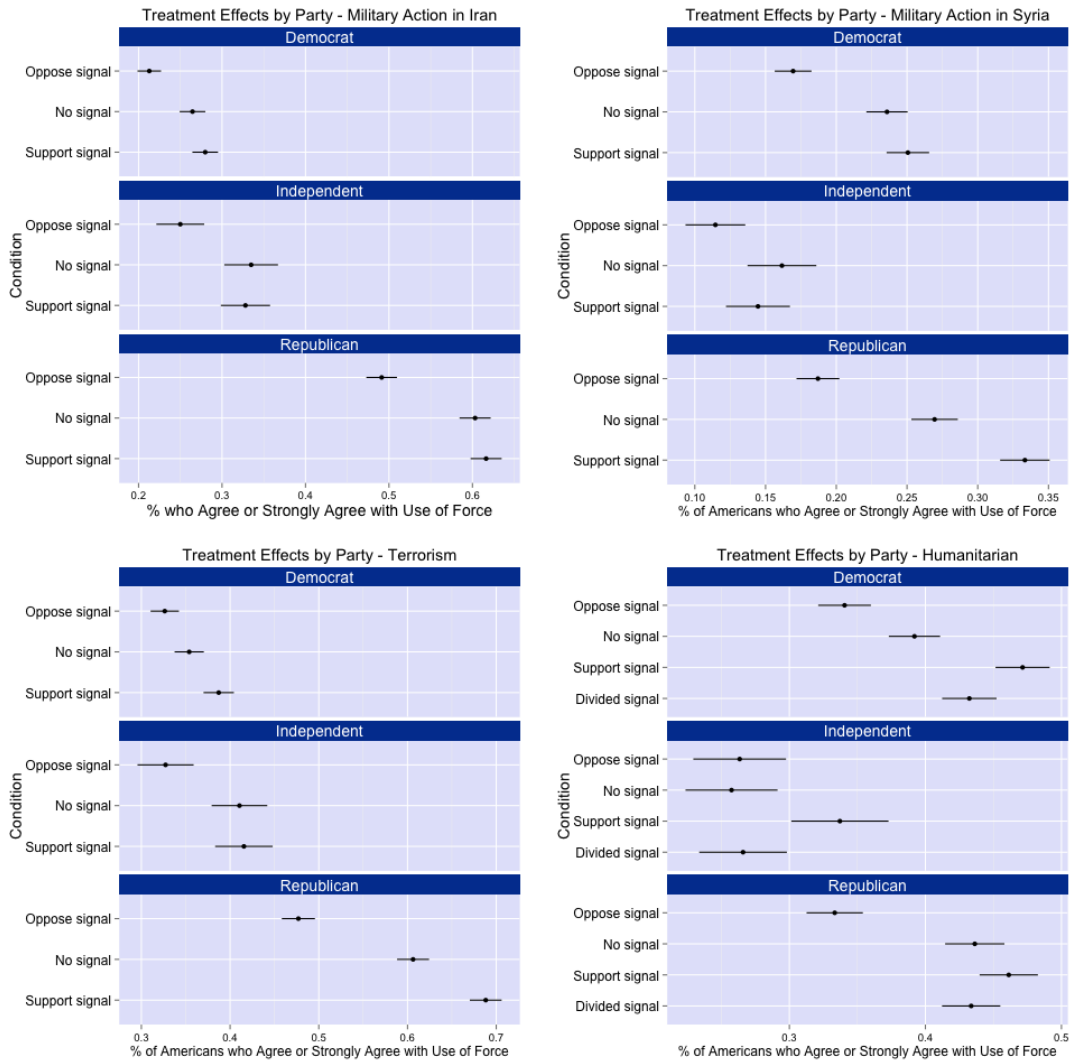


Table 4: Proportional Odds Logistics Regressions of Support for Use of Force on Party Identification and Treatment Assignment

	Iran	Syria	Terror	Human.	Pooled
No Signal	0.159 (0.116)	0.346* (0.115)	0.159 (0.115)	0.135 (0.132)	0.229* (0.059)
Support Signal	0.253* (0.115)	0.361* (0.116)	0.251* (0.117)	0.325* (0.135)	0.301* (0.060)
Party ID (7-pt)	0.270* (0.019)	0.0147 (0.019)	0.157* (0.019)	-0.014 (0.022)	0.120* (0.010)
No Signal *	0.050* (0.026)	0.012 (0.026)	0.061* (0.026)	0.040 (0.031)	0.031* (0.014)
Party ID					
Support *	0.022 (0.026)	0.042* (0.027)	0.085* (0.027)	0.030 (0.031)	0.035* (0.014)
Party ID					
N	5342	5342	5342	4004	20030
Resid. Dev.	16034	15681	15643	11932	60848
AIC	16062	15709	15671	11960	60876

All Models control for age, race, education and gender

Party ID (7-pt): 1 = Strong Dem, 7= Strong Rep

Coefficients are with respect to a respondent in the oppose group.

The dependent variable is 5 if the respondent strongly agrees with using force abroad and 1 if the respondent strongly disagrees.

POLR Thresholds available upon request

* significant at the $p < .1$ level