

14. Congress, the President, and the Iraq War's Domestic Political Front

William G. Howell and Douglas L. Kriner

Though the Constitution vests Congress with the preponderance of war-making authority, in the modern era it has been presidents who have tended to lead the nation into war. Moreover, when trying to influence the conduct of either prospective or ongoing wars, Congress has rarely exercised its legislative powers. After reflecting on recent inter-branch struggles over the Iraq War, we examine the nonlegislative mechanisms by which members of Congress more regularly engage the issue of war—namely, public appeals. Drawing on both experimental and observational data, we demonstrate that congressional appeals can materially affect the content of public opinion about war. Congress retains a vital, albeit constitutionally diminished, role in the domestic politics of war.

On November 6, 2006, Americans headed to the polls and for the first time since 1952 swept the majority party in Congress from power during a time of war. Democrats made startling gains in both the House and Senate. And when the final ballots of a closely contested Senate race in Virginia were counted, the Democrats seized the reins of power in both chambers. Although sex scandals, federal corruption charges, and concerns about a flagging economy all did their part, the war in Iraq proved to be the single most important reason for the Democratic takeover.¹ The day after the election, Speaker-in-waiting Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., claimed a mandate for Congress to chart “a new direction” in the Middle East. Incoming Senate majority leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., echoed the sentiment and declared that the 110th Congress’s “first order of business” would be to press the administration sharply on its Iraq policy.

Riding a popular wave of desire for change, the new Democratic majority received additional backing from the Iraq Study Group (ISG). A month to the day after the midterm elections, the ISG issued its formal report recommending a dramatic change of course in Iraq. Concluding that the United States “must not make an open-ended commitment to keep large numbers of American troops deployed in Iraq,” the bipartisan commission, led by former George H. W. Bush secretary of state James Baker III and Democratic representative and 9/11 Commission member Lee Hamilton, urged the government to redefine the role of American forces in Iraq from engaging in combat operations to training Iraqi security forces. The ISG set a goal of having all American combat forces out of Iraq by March 2008.²

The president, however, would have none of it. On January 10, 2007, George W. Bush raised the political ante by announcing to the nation in a prime-time address his intention to commit tens of thousands of additional troops to Iraq as part of a “surge” to stabilize the country and foster political reconciliation in

Baghdad. After outlining the continued threat posed by “Al Qaida terrorists and Sunni insurgents,” the president reflected on the challenge ahead: “Times of testing reveal the character of a nation, and throughout our history, Americans have always defied the pessimists and seen our faith in freedom redeemed. Now America is engaged in a new struggle that will set the course for a new century. We can and we will prevail.”³

Which branch of government would set the course in Iraq? Though newly elected Democrats appeared poised to dismantle a highly unpopular war, the president retained extraordinary advantages—both institutional and tactical—to undercut their plans. As we shall soon see, Democratic efforts to legislate an altogether new foreign policy in the Middle East ultimately would fail. Instead, as it so often does in foreign policy, Congress’s capacity to make headway ultimately rested more on its ability to frame the national debate on war. In this chapter we draw upon both experimental and observational data to illustrate the larger consequences of Congress’s public appeals on matters involving war.

Interbranch Conflicts in the 110th Congress

For a brief moment in early 2007, it looked as though Congress might have its way on Iraq. That spring, the new Democratic majority amended the supplemental war funding bill, HR 1591, to mandate the beginning of a phased redeployment of American troops from Iraq within six months; the timetable set a further goal of complete withdrawal by March 2008. As the debate drew to a close, Speaker Pelosi descended from the dais to the well of the House and addressed her colleagues. Noting that the U.S. commitment in Iraq had already exceeded the time it took to achieve total victory over the Axis powers in World War II, Pelosi called for the troops to return home: “The American people want a new direction in Iraq. Today the Congress will provide it. The American people do not support a war without end, and neither should this Congress.”⁴ The bill passed the House 218–212, and a week later it also passed the Senate 51–47. For the first time since Vietnam, Congress had exercised its power of the purse in an attempt to end a major presidential war.

Congress’s triumph, however, proved short-lived. Turning the political tables, President Bush publicly accused Democratic legislators of abandoning the nation’s men and women in uniform: “If Congress fails to pass a bill to fund our troops on the front lines the American people will know who to hold responsible. Our troops in Iraq deserve the full support of the Congress and the full support of this Nation.”⁵ On May 1 the president vetoed the supplemental appropriation. Predictably, Democratic efforts to override failed. As long as the vast majority of Republicans stood firmly behind the White House, the Democrats could not muster the supermajorities needed to write their policy preferences into law. The only alternative—refusing to appropriate any funds for the war’s continuation—was politically a nonstarter.⁶ Democratic leaders ultimately caved in before Bush’s demands for a “clean” spending bill that appropriated the requested funds with no strings attached.

The remainder of 2007 did not produce any better results for the majority party. Democrats introduced a variety of measures to require a change of course in Iraq, including House Armed Services Committee chairman Ike Skelton’s bill mandating that redeployment begin within 120 days (HR 2956); Virginia Republican senator John Warner’s proposal to tie funding for continued U.S. military operations to demonstrated Iraqi progress in meeting established benchmarks (HR 2206); and the proposal by Virginia Democratic senator Jim Webb (HR 1585) to undercut the surge by requiring minimum stateside rest and training periods between foreign deployments. Time and again, steadfast support among Democratic ranks ensured a majority supporting change. In every instance, however, allies of the administration prevented the Democratic leadership from securing the sixty votes needed to break a Senate filibuster.

Pundits and politicians alike were quick to pounce on the Democrats’ alleged weakness. With 30,000 more troops on the ground in Iraq than when the Democrats were elected, *USA Today* called 2007 “a lesson in power’s limits” for congressional Democrats. Former CNN analyst Bob Franken expressed the frustration of many on the left when he described himself as “impatient with the impotence” and lamented “the failure of congressional Democrats to deliver on their election promises to rein in the president.” According to conservative war critic Pat Buchanan, the Democrats were “psychologically damaged by sixty years of GOP attacks on them as the party of retreat and surrender” and lacked the “courage” to stand up to a president fully committed to seeing his war through to the end.⁷

Democrats themselves, meanwhile, placed the blame for legislative failures at the feet of Republican obstructionists. In the words of Rhode Island Democrat Jack Reed, “What was always missing, and continues to elude us, is the ten to twelve Republicans who will come over to our side and help us break the logjam.” In a similar vein, Out of Iraq caucus leader Barbara Lee of California answered critics on the left: “We need to do civics 101 and talk about what that sixty votes really means: the filibuster. That sixty votes becomes a real obstructionist tactic, and people need to focus on that and do what it takes to end it.”⁸

What has the 110th Congress taught us, more generally, about the balance of power in Washington in times of war? Some lessons are plain and have already received ample attention. Congress is outmatched by a unitary executive who dominates U.S. foreign policy making. Throughout history, but particularly since World War II, the American public has looked to the president for leadership in foreign policy crises. And they do so, at least in part, because the president is uniquely equipped to address those crises. Unlike Congress, the president stands alone atop his governing institution and hence speaks with one voice and responds to emergent threats with appropriate celerity. On this score, Edward Corwin’s observations resonate today as much as they did in 1946 when he delivered the William Cook Foundation lectures at the University of Michigan:

Immeasurably the greatest single force in setting the course of American foreign policy has been presidential initiative . . . Only in the office of

President are to be found those qualities of unity, energy, superior access to pertinent information, and the ability to act swiftly and secretly which answer to the protean nature of international relations and their ever present tendency to slide into some unanticipated condition of crisis.⁹

A half-century later, presidents have further consolidated their influence over foreign policy, such that now they manifestly dominate both the formulation and implementation of U.S. security policy.

It is difficult to see how Congress can keep pace with the president, especially a president who steadfastly insists on unilaterally directing a war abroad. Riddled with collective action problems and veto points, occupied by members with powerful electoral incentives to focus primarily on domestic policy concerns, and beholden to the executive branch for up-to-date assessments of actual operations abroad, Congress cannot possibly maintain its status as a coequal branch of government in decisions involving military deployments, much less fulfill its more prominent constitutional obligations to lead the nation into (and out of) war. It should come as little surprise, then, that the new Democratic majority has repeatedly failed to enact legislation compelling President Bush to change course in Iraq, despite the mandate of 2006 and strong popular support for the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Political observers, nonetheless, have overlooked other important lessons about the 110th Congress. Though they failed to fundamentally redirect the Iraq War, the 2006 midterm elections did breathe new life into the antiwar movement. Extended public debates about the costs of the Iraq War surrounded every one of the legislative proposals identified above. Independently Democratic committee chairs in both chambers launched numerous hearings and investigations into the various mishaps, scandals, and tactical errors that have plagued the Iraq War. The topics of the hearings have ranged from the plight of Iraqi refugees, to the halting progress of Iraqi security forces, to war profiteering. And though Congress continues to fund the war, it does so for considerably shorter periods of time, and that has continually forced the administration to justify the ongoing financial commitments made to Iraq's Maliki regime. As of spring 2008, Democrats had approved less than 10 percent of the administration's requested \$189 billion in that year's supplemental appropriation.

And herein lies the more fundamental point, which we hope to develop in this chapter: If enacting legislation to legally compel the president to abandon his preferred military policies constitutes its sole means of influence, then Congress will perpetually reside at the margins of U.S. foreign policy making. Yet a singular focus on legislation obscures other means through which Congress can influence presidential decision making in the martial arena. Most important, by investigating the administration's military policies, introducing and voting on legislative initiatives to constrain the president, and more generally advancing public arguments, members of Congress can influence public opinion and bring popular pressure to bear on the president and his conduct of military affairs. Congress's

ultimate involvement in foreign policy making assuredly pales in comparison to the role that the Framers envisioned for it in military matters. The full panoply of Congress's actions, though, amount to somewhat more than its detractors are willing to admit.¹⁰

Beyond Lawmaking

During both the lead-up to, and the ongoing course of, costly military gambits abroad, Congress's legislative machinery occasionally whirs to life. Over the past seventy years, Congress has managed to enact binding legislation that redirected ongoing wars and prevented altogether new ones: The Neutrality Acts of the late 1930s effectively kept the United States out of World War II for years longer than Franklin D. Roosevelt would have liked; in the latter half of the Vietnam War, Congress enacted a series of appropriations bills that restricted the number of troops sent into battle, the fronts on which they were allowed to operate, and the amount of time they could remain in the field; in 1976 Congress prohibited the use of any funds to support military actions in Angola, which was then roiled in a civil war; in the early 1980s, Congress forbade any military support to the Nicaraguan Contras, a provision that the Reagan administration subsequently violated, thereby triggering one of the greatest presidential scandals in the post-Vietnam era; in the aftermath of highly publicized U.S. casualties in Mogadishu, Congress set a firm timetable for the return of troops from Somalia in 1994; and shortly thereafter, Congress proscribed U.S. military involvement in the Rwanda genocide.

As a matter of course, though, it has been presidents who have made the vast majority of actual decisions involving modern wars. As a percentage of all foreign policy crises, Congress has successfully enacted laws circumscribing the discretion of the commander in chief in only a small handful of cases. And when Congress decides to use the power of the purse, as it does slightly more frequently, it usually waits until troops already have been committed to the field: In most instances, Congress does not attempt to pass legislation that creates security policy *de novo*. Rather, it seeks to amend or overturn policies that presidents have established on their own. With Angola and Rwanda being important recent exceptions, members of Congress rarely stand out in front of a brewing international crisis and formally block a prospective U.S. military intervention. Consequentially, on matters involving war, members quite typically find themselves in a reactive posture vis-à-vis the president.

What should we make of such a state of affairs? On the one hand, piddling efforts to enact war legislation reveal deep imbalances of powers in U.S. foreign policy making. As we have seen, the institutional design of Congress, the electoral incentives of its members, and the lack of readily available information about foreign affairs significantly reduce the possibility of building a winning coalition against the president.¹¹ Moreover, the specter of the presidential veto and other supermajoritarian requirements, including the Senate filibuster, make it all but impossible for Congress to pass legislation compelling a recalcitrant president to

redirect a war effort.¹² If legislation is the “most direct route for Congress to reassert influence over decisions on war and foreign affairs,” as Christopher Deering notes, then Congress would appear permanently relegated to the sidelines of foreign policy making.¹³ The relative paucity of security legislation would appear to confirm Barbara Hinckley’s observation that congressional involvement in war-making is “less than meets the eye.”¹⁴

On this matter, two points bear mentioning. The first speaks to the logic of anticipated response and the inherent difficulty of discerning influence in a system of separated powers. In some instances, members of Congress may not enact security legislation because the president is satisfactorily executing their collective interests. In other instances, though, members would outwardly appear incapable of legislating at all. The trouble, of course, is that arguments about preference convergence across the branches of government and congressional abdication of its warmaking authority typically yield predictions that are observationally equivalent. Without an independent measure of congressional preferences, it is impossible to distinguish between the two arguments, and by extension, it is impossible to diagnose the resultant imbalance of powers in the U.S. system of governance.

It is a second point, however, that occupies us here. Beyond legislation one discovers considerably more to Congress’s involvement in foreign affairs. Indeed, a growing number of scholars have begun to recognize alternative mechanisms through which Congress can influence military policy making, even when it cannot legislatively compel the president to abandon his preferred policy course. In particular, members of Congress regularly exert influence across the gamut of policy areas, but particularly in foreign affairs, by “making moves” in what David Mayhew recently called the “public sphere.”¹⁵

Central to Mayhew’s insight is that members of Congress do a lot more than just pass laws. In addition to legislating, members of Congress throughout American history have spent considerable time and energy “investigating, impeaching, taking public stands, intruding into foreign policy, and, as important as anything else, staging opposition to presidential administrations.”¹⁶ Why do members of Congress routinely perform such actions, even when they may have no hope of enacting their policy preferences into law? According to Mayhew, the reason is that members of Congress are not automatons who rigidly respond to changes in public opinion that they observe in the polls. Rather, members of Congress routinely battle with presidents and other political actors in attempts to shape public opinion. In Mayhew’s words, “the politics involving members of Congress needs to be modeled not just as opinion *expression*—the custom in political science analysis—but also as opinion *formation*.”¹⁷

These insights have a long intellectual lineage in Mayhew’s work. In the *Electoral Connection*—the very book that, some thirty-five years ago, laid much of the theoretical foundation for arguments about Congress’s abdication of its foreign policy responsibilities—Mayhew reflected on Congress’s involvement in the Vietnam War. He noted,

Often the voicing of public opinion has policy effects without any laws being passed; presidents, bureaucrats, and judges, anticipating trouble with Congress, take action to avoid it. Thus the congressional uprising during the Tet Offensive of 1968 (no legislation was passed) was a contributing element in President Johnson’s decision to stop escalating the Vietnam War.¹⁸

As Mayhew points out, a simple count of Congress’s legislative interventions during the Vietnam War reveals very little about the actual influence Congress wielded over foreign policy toward Southeast Asia. Similarly, simply counting statutes fails to adequately characterize Congress’s influence on the current “war on terror.” And because legislative inactivity does not necessarily connote congressional abdication, a resumption of congressional activity need not allay the deeper concerns that scholars justifiably raise about the appropriate balance of policy powers across the legislative and congressional branches.

Precisely because the barriers to checking the president legislatively are so high, Congress has repeatedly turned to the more informal means of challenging presidential power. Almost a full quarter of the more than 2,300 “actions” that Mayhew identified over 200 years of American history involved foreign policy, and of those, a large majority were nonlegislative actions. Even when their legislative initiatives fail, members of Congress routinely hold high-publicity investigations of presidents’ conduct of military actions; they introduce and debate legislation to alter presidential conduct of military operations in order to shine the public spotlight on administration policies; and they take public positions in the hope of shaping public opinion on pressing questions of military policy. “It is impossible to appreciate the place of members of Congress in foreign policy,” Mayhew reminds us, “without considering these non-lawmaking roles.”¹⁹

Nonlegislative Checks on the President’s Foreign Policy

As substitutes for actual legislation, congressional speeches, investigations, and media appearances would appear to make rather thin porridge. In the words of Stephen Weissman, a former staff director on the House Armed Services Committee, such actions “amount to no more than putting up a fuss, unless they actually culminate in significant legal constraints on presidential power.” Political scientists Louis Fisher and Ryan Hendrickson agree and warn against confusing congressional efforts to “bark its complaints about a military mission in progress” with genuine checks on presidential power, which presumably come strictly in the form of legislation.²⁰ Public postures, hearings, and the like are not legally binding. They do not formally amend or overturn any of the decisions that presidents unilaterally make when committing the nation to war. Presidents, then, can freely choose to ignore them, opting instead to advance a set of military policies over the expressed objections of numerous members of Congress.

There are at least three reasons, however, for taking Congress seriously when it publicly objects to a president's war. For starters, domestic political dissent can make it more difficult for the nation to convince an enemy to stand down and also more difficult to build a coalition of allies in its fight. As a rich body of work by scholars of international relations demonstrates,²¹ a nation's inability to convey resolve abroad has critical implications for the conduct of war: Specifically, it encourages adversaries to fight longer and discourages allies from joining in at all. When members of Congress openly object to a president's war, enemies may infer that he lacks the domestic political support needed to see a deployment through to the end, giving them cause to fight longer or issue larger demands. If congressional opposition emboldens enemies, it may dissuade allies from committing manpower or materiel to the fight itself. And either eventuality can substantially increase the costs of war borne by the United States.

Second, congressional dissent against a war may have repercussions for the president's domestic policy agenda. Issue by issue, the commander in chief is likely to win when he squares off against a Congress incapable of legislating a change in military policy. Victories in the military arena, however, may come at significant costs in the domestic realm. Amid an unpopular war, Bush in his second term had an extraordinarily difficult time advancing important elements of his domestic policy agenda. With immigration and Social Security reform being obvious examples, members of Congress steadfastly refused to rally behind the president during his last several years in office. As a feature article in the *National Journal* observed, the specter of Iraq and the president's lame duck status corroded support for the president's broader policy agenda. "Medicaid rules, pay-discrimination legislation, meat inspections, student loans, relief for salmon fishermen—on these too, congressional Republicans have been veering away from the White House. Legions of GOP lawmakers have snubbed the president on the farm bill."²² Nor is the damage limited to goings-on in Congress. During the 2008 election, Republican nominee John McCain made a point of breaking with Bush on energy and conservation issues, a political move made at least in part to distance himself from a president profoundly discredited by an unpopular war in Iraq.

In this essay we explore a third possibility: that nonlegislative actions resonate beyond the halls of Congress and shape the public's understanding of, and support for, a war. In the words of veteran Congress watchers Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, even when Congress cannot act legislatively, it "can leverage public and expert opinion, initially through committee hearings but eventually through ever-stronger legislative steps, to bring about a change in course. Oversight, even more than direct legislation, is key to movement."²³ A small but growing literature in political science is beginning to explore how diverse actions taken in Congress shape public opinion on military affairs. Recent research examining opinion dynamics on a range of military crises from small interventions (such as Ford's rescue mission of the *Mayaguez*) to major wars (such as Korea, Vietnam, and World War II) emphasizes the importance of vocal congressional opposition in eroding popular support for the president. If congressional opponents of the president's policies remain quiet,

public opinion frequently rallies behind the commander in chief. However, when the administration's opponents in Congress raise questions, hold hearings, and cast policy decisions in a different light, many begin to turn against the president.²⁴

A growing number of studies has begun to explore the relationships between congressional position-taking and changes in public support for war. In a study of popular reactions to a range of U.S. military interventions over the last twenty-five years, Matthew Baum and Timothy Groeling showed that support for the president in the wake of a military deployment coincided with the tenor of congressional rhetoric reported in the mass media. Above all, signals of opposition party support for the president or copartisan criticism of his actions reported on television news broadcasts correlated with the largest swings in public opinion.²⁵

Another recent study by William Howell and Jon Pevehouse found that popular support for the president's plan to invade Iraq varied considerably across the country. Specifically, they found that support for war in fall 2002 was heavily concentrated in media markets that aired a disproportionate share of local news stories affirming the president's position. Survey respondents exposed to greater congressional opposition to the administration's war plans through their local news media were considerably less likely to support the impending invasion than were respondents in areas where news media featured greater congressional support for the president's policy.²⁶

Qualitative research by Douglas Kriner reminds us that congressional actions also shape public opinion prospectively. Archival records from the 1980s reveal that the Reagan administration openly worried about the effect of congressional criticism of the Marine Corps peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, even when public support for the mission at the moment remained steady. After the Beirut barracks bombing killed 241 marines in October 1983, the public rallied behind President Reagan and the Marine Corps mission; popular support for both the president's job performance and his handling of Lebanon in particular surged by an average of more than six percentage points. The bombing, however, also rekindled opposition to the Lebanon deployment in Congress and triggered investigative hearings in both chambers. Responding to the growing drumbeat of opposition on Capitol Hill, Reagan adviser David Gergen warned, "If Reagan has the troops out of there in six weeks, he'll be a hero. If not, you will see the support fade."²⁷ The concerns of Gergen and others within the administration were well placed. In December, both the House Foreign Affairs and Armed Services Committees released damaging reports of their investigations into the bombing. The Armed Services Committee went so far as to publicly urge the president "in the strongest terms" to reevaluate his policy in Lebanon. And when Congress reconvened in January 1984, legislation demanding the marines' withdrawal—including binding requirements that they be redeployed offshore by April 1—began to move through both the House and Senate. By early February 1984, support for the Lebanon mission had declined from its high of 62 percent in a November 1983 poll to near 30 percent. On February 7, less than two weeks after warning the country in his State of the Union address that the United States "must not be driven from our objectives for

peace in Lebanon by state-sponsored terrorism," President Reagan gave the order to redeploy the marines offshore.²⁸

How might actions in Congress, particularly in the committee room, bring about changes in popular support for war? Surely, the vast majority of Americans are not riveted to C-SPAN coverage of the events unfolding on Capitol Hill. Any influence of congressional actions on public opinion is almost certainly indirect. The literature highlights two mechanisms that facilitate the transmittal of elite messages from Congress to the larger public.

The first concerns the mass media. Because congressional investigations—what Mayhew termed “publicity probes”—are consciously designed to attract press coverage, there are good reasons to believe that the news media are key allies in bolstering congressional capacity to influence popular attitudes.²⁹ An extensive literature in political communications argues that the press relies heavily on official sources and “indexes” the scope and tone of its foreign policy coverage to the range of voices being heard in Washington, particularly within the executive and legislative branches.³⁰ Moreover, because journalistic and marketing norms see conflict as inherently newsworthy, critical congressional oversight hearings provide particularly attractive material for reporters. By extracting the strongest congressional challenges to the administration’s war policies and packaging them into a brief, readily accessible format, the news media may both amplify congressional critics’ attack and broaden the audience that their message reaches.

Congressional opposition may also shape the perceptions and calculations of other opinion makers and through them make its way into average citizens’ households. Most Americans lack the time or inclination to acquire detailed information on which to base their policy preferences, particularly in foreign affairs. Instead, when forming their policy attitudes and beliefs, many routinely rely on information cues and other heuristics from friends, acquaintances, and political elites.³¹ Congressional opposition to administration policies may foster new voices and legitimate existing ones arguing against the administration’s conduct of a war. By encouraging a more open and critical debate in the public sphere, congressional oversight hearings may prove a catalyst for larger shifts in mass opinion.

Experimental Findings

To explore the relationship between congressional cues and public opinion in the contemporary war in Iraq, we conducted a simple survey experiment. In the context of a larger, nationally representative, online survey conducted in the spring of 2008, we randomly assigned subjects to one of the three vignettes that we show in Box 14-1. In the first vignette, subjects were told of the president’s unqualified support for an ongoing troop surge that began in early 2007. The next two vignettes, by contrast, presented dissenting voices within Congress. Respondents again learned about the president’s support for the surge but then were exposed to congressional concerns about the limits of U.S. military capabilities and the rising costs of the Iraq War.

Box 14-1 Experimental Conditions

Vignette 1. According to the President, the troop “surge” in Iraq is working. It is stabilizing the military situation in Iraq, and it is taking the fight to terrorists in Iraq.

Vignette 2. According to the President, the troop “surge” in Iraq is working. It is stabilizing the military situation in Iraq, and it is taking the fight to terrorists in Iraq. Many in Congress, however, worry that the U.S. military is bogged down in a civil war in Iraq. They argue that this has hurt the mission against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and leaves America vulnerable to other potential threats at home and abroad.

Vignette 3. According to the President, the troop “surge” in Iraq is working. It is stabilizing the military situation in Iraq, and it is taking the fight to terrorists in Iraq. Many in Congress, however, worry about the cost of the war in Iraq, which runs into the hundreds of billions of dollars each year. This cost, they argue, limits the government’s ability to meet other priorities including education, renewable energy, border security, and tax relief.

After reading one of the vignettes, respondents answered a series of questions about their views on the Iraq War and their support for two prospective military deployments. Because respondents were randomly assigned to each vignette,³² differences in their answers to the subsequent questions can meaningfully be ascribed to the experimental treatment, and not to any observed (or unobserved) background characteristics of the respondents.

We first asked a series of questions about respondents’ support for the Iraq War, their assessment of progress within the country, and their preferred course of action in the future. We did not find any evidence that respondents’ answers differed materially across the three experimental conditions. Though the public remains highly divided along partisan lines, exposure to different forms of congressional dissent did not elicit dramatically different responses among Democrats, Republicans, or the respondents as a group. These null findings, perhaps, should not come as a great surprise. At the time this experiment was conducted, the nation had been at war for over five years. Consequently most citizens had made up their mind about this war, and the modest treatment cues offered in the experiment proved incapable of dislodging them from their prior positions. According to Gary Jacobson, as early as 2005 many of the public’s views about the president specifically, and the Iraq War by implication, had become “ossified.”³³

Interestingly, though, exposure to congressional dissent on the Iraq War had a marked impact on the public’s willingness to stand behind the president on two altogether new military ventures. Having posed a series of questions about the Iraq War, later in the survey we asked about possible new military deployments. In the first, respondents were told, “According to the president, Eritrea (a small country on the East coast of Africa) is harboring terrorists. President Bush is prepared to use military force against this country. Do you support or oppose sending

U.S. troops to Eritrea?" And in the second, they were told, "According to the president, there is a worsening humanitarian crisis in the country of Chad. The president is prepared to send U.S. troops to help the victims of this crisis. Do you support or oppose sending U.S. troops to Chad?" In both instances, respondents only learned about the president's support for military action. Other than what they gleaned from the previous Iraq War vignettes, respondents learned no additional information about Congress's views on the president's policies. And it was not until after the survey ended that we informed respondents that the two military ventures were strictly hypothetical.

The vignettes on the Iraq War nonetheless had a residual effect on respondents' opinions. Take a look at Table 14-1. Having been told about the damaging effects of the Iraq War on the nation's ability to confront other international crises and deal with problems at home, respondents appeared distinctly less likely to stand behind their president on a new military venture. Overall levels of support for a war against Eritrea among the respondents who saw vignettes 2 and 3 were roughly 10 percent (or 4 percentage points) lower than among those who saw vignette 1; and though the differences are not statistically significant, they are consistently observed among Democrats, Republicans, and independents. In the case of Chad, support drops by roughly a quarter. Forty-six percent of respondents in the vignette 1 group professed support for a military venture to confront a humanitarian crisis in Chad, compared with 37 percent in the vignette 2 group and 38 percent in vignette 3. In both instances, the observed differences from vignette 1 are statistically significant.

Obviously, these findings raise new questions at the same time that they answer old ones. Had we conducted this experiment in summer 2003, rather than spring 2008, we might have found very different results, both for the questions on

Table 14-1 The Public's Views on Two Hypothetical Wars

	Vignette 1	Vignette 2	Vignette 3
<i>Eritrea</i>			
Support	33.8%	29.5%	29.8%
Neither support nor oppose	25.6	28.3	24.7
Oppose	40.6	42.3	45.5
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Chad</i>			
Support	46.2%	37.4%*	38.4%*
Neither support nor oppose	24.2	30.1*	31.3*
Oppose	29.7	32.5	30.4
Total	100.0%	100.0%*	100.0%*

Note: Vignettes 1 through 3 are described in Box 14-1. Numbers may not sum due to rounding. Proportions in columns 2 and 3 that are statistically significantly different from proportions in column 1 denoted by * ($p < .10$, one-tailed test). Survey contained 1,000 total respondents. At the survey's completion, subjects were told that these prospective military ventures were strictly hypothetical.

hypothetical new wars and for the unreported items on public evaluations of the Iraq War. And during a period of unified Democratic control, still different results might emerge. It also is quite possible that the partisan affiliation of members of Congress may interact with the partisan affiliation of different survey respondents in important ways. Additionally, these findings do not rule out the possibility that other political elites advancing similar arguments might also influence the content of public opinion.

It bears emphasizing, however, that this experiment constitutes a hard test of the proposition that congressional appeals can influence the content of public opinion, even in a policy arena long held to be dominated by the president. The treatment in this experiment was extremely mild: Respondents received their cues about congressional opposition to the Bush administration's Iraq policies no less than five computer screens before the questions on Eritrea and Chad were posed, and as previously noted, the experiment was conducted at a time when most members of the public had made up their minds, once and for all, on the Iraq War and the president who waged it. It is of some note, then, that we observe consistent evidence that congressional opposition to an ongoing war suppresses the public's willingness to back future wars. In an era when foreign threats are bountiful and international expectations of the United States are high, these findings have important implications for the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

Congressional Investigations and the War in Iraq

Undoubtedly when members of Congress decide how to engage popular debates on war they both *reflect* and *shape* public opinion. Accordingly, the causal arrows linking Congress and the public run in both directions: The public influences congressional positions on the war, and once taken, congressional positions on the merits or progress of a military operation shape future public opinion. The clear strength of our experimental findings, then, lies in their ability to untangle the complicated causal relationships linking the behavior of political elites and shifts in public opinion.

Experimental research, however, is subject to other concerns about external validity. In the real world, claims about military action are rarely presented in the simple, stark terms of our experiment, wherein the president presents one interpretation of events and congressional leaders a single alternative. Politicians persistently and dynamically engage one another and challenge each other's evidence and motives. In this more chaotic and combative political environment, can opinions expressed in Congress compete with those uttered from the presidential bully pulpit in shaping public opinion on war?

To address this question, we analyzed polling data on public support for the war in Iraq. These data, we emphasize, do not support causal claims. Any statistical correlations observed between actions in Congress and changes in popular support for the war may show the public responding to open criticism of the president's policies in the legislature, but they may also be the result of Congress

taking its cues from the public. Rather than advance causal claims, in this section we merely want to demonstrate that congressional actions in the real world often covary with public opinion on war in interesting and important ways.

Congressional Hearings during the Iraq War

To assess the relationship between congressional appeals and public support for war, we must first devise some measure of congressional position-taking. As we have already noted, members of Congress can engage in a variety of activities to influence popular debate on major questions of foreign policy: They can introduce and debate legislation, give speeches on the floor, and reach the American people through television and print media. Here we focus on one specific institutional forum that enables members to shape the political agenda, publicly question administration officials, and offer their own perspectives on military actions—the committee hearing room.

Throughout American history, the investigatory and oversight capacity of the legislative branch has afforded members of Congress the opportunity and the means to challenge presidential policies. From the inquest into the reasons why the Truman administration purportedly “lost China,” to the denunciations of a secret war in Cambodia during the early 1970s, to the investigation into the Reagan administration’s illegal funneling of monies to the Nicaraguan Contras, committee hearings have been a valuable tool in Congress’s strategic arsenal in foreign affairs.³⁴ Moreover, the informal check that investigative oversight affords may be particularly important in the contemporary, intensely polarized political environment, in which formal legislative challenges to presidential authority, such as those described in the introduction, are unlikely to succeed.

To assess Congress’s oversight of the war in Iraq, we searched Congressional Information Service listings of all war-related hearings from the invasion in March 2003 through the end of April 2008. A search of the CIS Abstracts database on Lexis Nexis Congressional Universe for “Iraq,” in all fields except full text, from March 20, 2003, to April 30, 2008, yielded 389 entries. Because many of these hearings involved Iraq only tangentially, we then read each hearing’s summary and individual testimony descriptors to identify the hearings that explicitly discussed progress in Iraq and cast the military venture in a positive light, and those that contained at least some critical analysis of the administration’s conduct of the war.³⁵ Figure 14-1a traces the monthly frequency of the hearings that emphasized successful aspects of the war and military and governmental accomplishments; Figure 14-1b traces patterns in critical congressional hearings. Both figures report the relevant number of days of hearings and pages of hearing transcripts.³⁶

The scales of the two figures reveal that the critical hearings outnumbered the positive by roughly five to one.³⁷ Overtly positive hearings tend to be clustered in the first half of the time series, whereas explicitly critical hearings peak in the second half. Indeed, one of the most striking characteristics of the two series is the sharp drop-off in congressional hearings emphasizing progress in Iraq, and the concomitant increase in committee-led investigations of the war effort, that

Figure 14-1a Positive Congressional Hearings on the War in Iraq

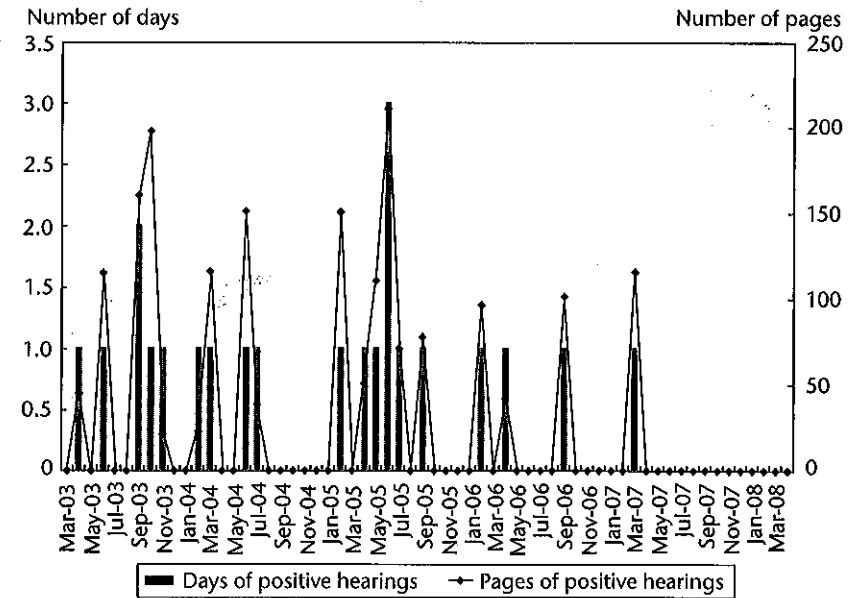
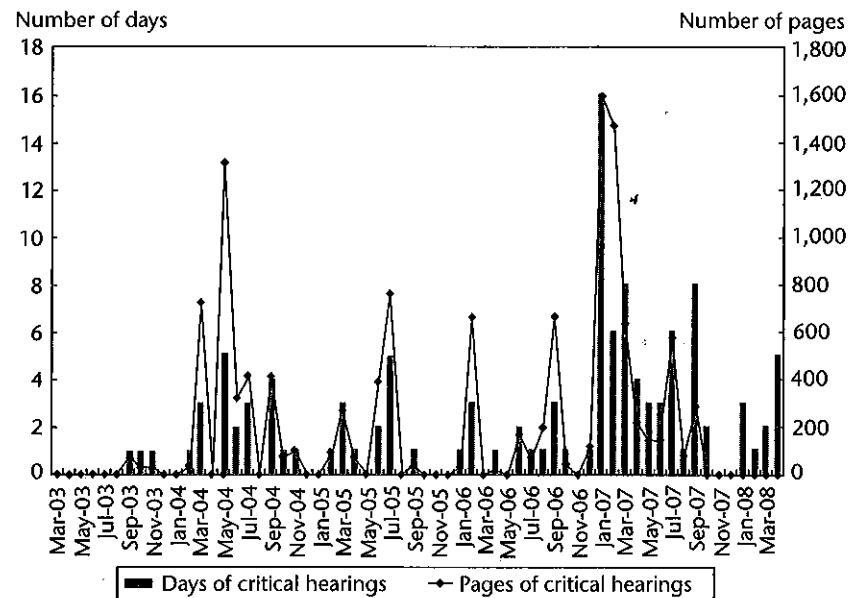


Figure 14-1b Critical Congressional Hearings on the War in Iraq

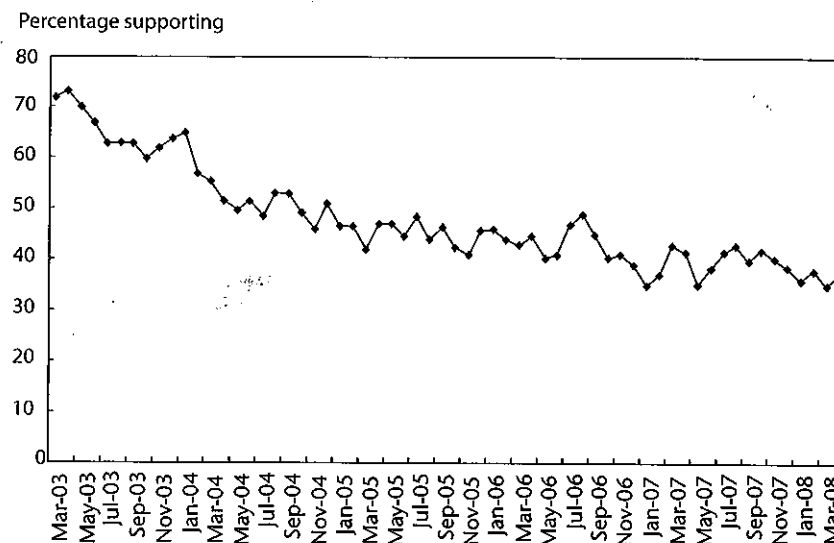


accompanied the advent of divided government following the 2006 midterm elections. With but one exception, every single positive hearing was held by the Republican-controlled 108th and 109th Congresses.³⁸ In those hearings, the Republican majority provided another forum for White House officials to trumpet successes in Iraq on both the military and diplomatic fronts. The hearings focused public attention on progress in the American reconstruction effort, the successful Iraqi elections, the drafting of an Iraqi constitution, and the transfer of sovereignty to a provisional Iraqi government.

During Republican rule, critical hearings were much rarer. From March 2003 through the end of 2006, Congress held 50 hearings that were at least partially critical of the administration's conduct of the war; four, or almost 10 percent, were informal hearings held by the Democratic Policy Committee. The biggest surge of investigative activity occurred in spring and summer 2004, when Congress investigated revelations of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. Aside from the abuse scandal, however, Republican committee chairs successfully blocked most inquiries into potentially embarrassing questions about the administration's conduct of the war and military strategy. Indeed, the Republican-controlled 108th and 109th Congresses emphasized the progress being made in Iraq and held almost as many investigative hearings on the prewar failures of the UN oil-for-food program in Iraq as they did on problems with the American invasion, occupation, and reconstruction efforts. In sharp contrast to the Democratic investigations into awful conditions and neglect of wounded American servicemen at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, one of the only hearings held by the Republican Congress mentioning the facility hailed its role in helping to provide wounded soldiers with a "seamless transition" back to civilian life. According to Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., the Republican-controlled Armed Services Committee held only five hours of testimony on Abu Ghraib, compared to 140 hours of House testimony on whether Bill Clinton improperly used the White House Christmas card list.³⁹

The moment they seized the committee gavels in January 2007, however, Democrats set out to make up for lost time. In their first fifteen months in power, Congress managed to hold more than sixty-five investigative hearings on the war. In the first 100 days alone, Democrats used the forum of the hearing room to question the president's rationale for the surge, investigate continued body armor shortages for troops in the field, highlight abuse by Blackwater, Halliburton, and other private contractors, and perhaps most detrimental for the administration, to uncover and publicize evidence of the maltreatment of wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. In September 2007 Democrats held another wave of hearings, this time in anticipation of General David Petraeus's report to Congress. Attempting to head off administration claims of progress, Democrats downplayed the tenuous gains in stability in Iraq and instead emphasized the Iraq government's failure to meet most of the administration's benchmarks for political progress. Finally, as the administration tried to capitalize on decreased casualty rates to boost popular support for the war in early 2008, congressional Democrats used their oversight powers to remind the public instead of the continued budgetary costs of the war and its lasting economic and social ramifications.⁴⁰

Figure 14-2 Invading Iraq Was the "Right" Thing to Do



Public Support for War

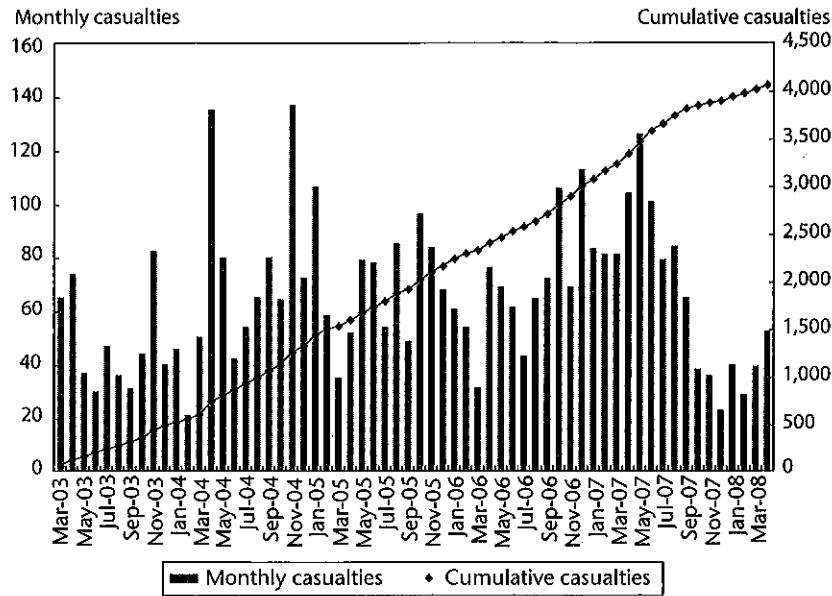
With great regularity since the war's outbreak pollsters have asked the public whether the United States did the "right thing" by invading Iraq. Figure 14-2 summarizes their answers over time.⁴¹ Immediately after the invasion, public support for the war peaked at 70 percent. But as major combat operations ended and the Iraqi insurgency kindled, support for the war effort declined steadily, though with a strong uptick at the end of 2003 following the capture of Saddam Hussein. By the time of Bush's 2004 reelection, support for the war hovered around 50 percent. Since that time, support has continued to erode, and by April 2008 only 37 percent of Americans agreed with the initial decision to invade.⁴²

Linking Congressional Actions with Public Opinion

Month-to-month trends in congressional hearings tend to covary with public support for the Iraq War. Our two measures of positive hearings correlate with *increased* support for the war ($r = .26$ and $r = .23$ for days and pages of hearings respectively), while critical congressional oversight hearings are correlated with *decreased* support for the administration's decision to invade Iraq ($r = -.38$ and $r = -.22$, respectively).

Obviously, though, many other factors also figure into public support for a war. For instance, an extensive literature in American politics has explored the strong inverse relationship between U.S. combat casualties and support for military action. In conflicts from Korea and Vietnam to more recent engagements in Somalia and Iraq, scholars have found that as cumulative casualties mount, support for

Figure 14-3 Monthly and Cumulative American Casualties in Iraq



war decreases.⁴³ Other scholars have emphasized the importance of short-term shocks in casualties, arguing that surges in American war deaths may decrease public support for war.⁴⁴ Accordingly, we constructed a measure of logged cumulative casualties and casualties suffered in the most recent month. Figure 14-3 presents trends in both measures over the course of the war.

Major developments in Iraq might also shape popular attitudes on the war. Accordingly, we surveyed the annual chronologies of the *World Almanac* and the *Time Almanac* to identify a series of major positive and negative events.⁴⁵ Examples of positive events include the capture of Saddam Hussein, the transfer of sovereignty from the United States to a provisional Iraqi government, and the January 2008 passage of legislation allowing some ex-Baath Party members to hold government positions. Examples of negative events include the bloody Falujah offensive after the mutilation of five American contractors, the issuance of the final report finding no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the failure of government forces to oust the Mahdi Army from its strongholds in Basra. To further track the success of the American reconstruction effort we also collected monthly data on electricity production in Iraq.

The public's willingness to support the war may also depend on its general outlook on the economy and the president. We therefore collected information on the additive monthly misery index of unemployment and inflation, as well as President Bush's approval ratings. With additional information on casualties, conditions in Iraq, the domestic economy, and the president's overall approval ratings in

hand, we revisited the relationship between congressional hearings and public support for the Iraq War. Specifically, we estimated two least squares regressions that posited support for the war as a function of elite cues and background controls.⁴⁶

Table 14-2 presents the results. The first model operationalizes congressional support for, and opposition to, the war as days of positive or critical hearings in the current month; the second model replicates the first, but with the number of pages of hearings. Moving to a multivariate context, we find that the previously observed correlations between positive hearings and public support for the war entirely disappear. The relationship between congressional committee-led opposition and

Table 14-2 Congressional Investigations and Support for the War in Iraq

	(1)	(2)
Days of critical hearings	-0.29** (0.15)	—
Pages of critical hearings (1,000s)	—	-2.34** (0.94)
Days of positive hearings	-0.16 (0.65)	—
Pages of positive hearings (1,000s)	—	-2.89 (6.81)
Ln cumulative casualties	-7.98*** (1.09)	-7.88*** (1.11)
Monthly casualties (100s)	-4.24*** (1.48)	-4.20*** (1.53)
Positive events	0.74 (0.74)	0.64 (0.71)
Negative events	-0.44 (0.67)	-0.33 (0.67)
Electricity production (1,000s of megawatts)	0.47 (0.61)	0.54 (0.60)
Misery	-1.34*** (0.51)	-1.38*** (0.52)
Presidential approval	0.16 (0.12)	0.19* (0.12)
Constant	111.50*** (12.33)	109.40*** (12.10)
R ² (N)	.93 62	.94 62

Note: Least squares regressions estimated. Robust standard errors reported in parentheses. The dependent variable is average monthly support for the Iraq War, as depicted in Figure 14-2.

* Significant at $p < .10$, one-tailed test; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

support for war, however, remains negative and statistically significant.⁴⁷ The first model suggests that every ten days of hearings critical of the administration's conduct of the war is associated with a three percentage point decline in support for the conflict. Similarly, model 2 suggests that every thousand pages of committee documents from critical hearings corresponds with almost a two-and-a-half-point decline in popular support for the war and its premise.

Although both models reveal robust correlations between congressional position-taking and changing popular support for the war in Iraq, the largest observed correlations are between war support and casualties. As the number of American war deaths increased, more and more Americans began to question the decision to invade Iraq.⁴⁸ Marginal casualties also correlate strongly with shifts in public opinion, as support for war frequently decreases in the wake of high monthly casualty tolls. In both models, the coefficients for positive and negative events are in the expected directions. None of them, however, is statistically significant. After controlling for American casualties and maneuverings in the legislature, the models find little evidence of any correlations between major events and popular support for the war. The objective measure of Iraq reconstruction progress (electricity production) is also positively correlated with support for the war. Substantively, however, the relationship is small, and statistically it is insignificant. Both models also find evidence of a strong negative correlation between economic misery at home and support for military action abroad. Each point increase in the additive misery index of unemployment and inflation is correlated with more than a one point decrease in support for the war. And lastly, the models find some evidence of a correlation between support for the war and public approval of the commander in chief. The estimated effect is quite modest, however. A ten percentage point swing in Bush's approval rating correlates, on average, with a drop of less than two points in popular support for the war in Iraq.

Over the last five years, congressional position-taking and public support for the Iraq War have tracked one another quite well. Though positive hearings appear unrelated to public opinion, negative hearings correlate highly. Again, we do not suggest that these findings, on their own, support causal inferences. In combination with the experimental data, however, they do speak to the possibility that congressional opposition to the president leads at least some members of the public to update their opinions about war.

Conclusion

When the nation goes to war, no politician matters nearly so much as the president. For a host of reasons—some having to do with the rising public expectations of the presidency in the modern era, others concerning the institutional design of the legislative and executive branches, still others having to do with exigencies of foreign policy making—the president bestrides national debates about war.

These debates, though, occasionally are defined by much more than the president. In a wide variety of public settings—floor debates, investigations, hearings,

media appearances, and the like—members of Congress can advance arguments that the president would just as soon ignore. And when they do, substantial portions of the U.S. public take notice. In a series of survey experiments that posit extremely mild treatments within the context of a highly polarized war, we observe a public that is remarkably sensitive to criticisms advanced by members of Congress. Reviewing the first five years of the Iraq War, we also find a public whose views systematically covary with the level of negative investigative hearings held on Capitol Hill. We find a Congress that is more active, and more relevant, than its paltry legislative record would seem to imply.

But do not misunderstand us. In no way are we arguing that Congress, by issuing public appeals, is fulfilling its basic, Article I responsibilities in matters involving war. It is not. We are not claiming that Congress stands on equal footing with the president on foreign policy making. It does not. Nor are we arguing that hearings are perfect substitutes for binding legislation. Plainly, they are not. In matters involving war, deep imbalances pervade the U.S. system of governance—imbalances that would offend the sensibilities of the overwhelming majority of the Constitution's signatories, and imbalances that are not corrected through rhetoric and oratory alone.

Our claim is more modest. In foreign policy generally, and security policy in particular, Congress rarely legislates. For the most part, wars are managed through presidential directives that come straight out of the White House. Legislative inactivity, however, should not be misinterpreted as congressional dormancy. Members of Congress, after all, say a great deal about matters involving war. And what they say often resonates well beyond their institution's hallways. As presidents attempt to drum up public support for war, they must contend, considerably more than they would prefer, with Congress.

Notes

1. For studies assessing the war's influence on the midterm contests, see Douglas Kriner and Francis Shen, "Iraq Casualties and the 2006 Senate Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32 (2007): 507–530; Christian Grose and Bruce Oppenheimer, "The Iraq War, Partisanship, and Candidate Attributes: Variation in Partisan Swing in the 2006 Election," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32 (2007): 531–557.
2. James A. Baker III and Lee Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report*, United States Institute for Peace, online at www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/index.html, p. 7.
3. George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the War on Terror in Iraq," January 10, 2007, Public Papers of the President. Available online at www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=24432.
4. Nancy Pelosi, *Congressional Record*, 110th Cong., 1st sess., March 23, 2007, H2981.
5. George W. Bush, "Remarks to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association," March 28, 2007, Public Papers of the President.
6. Repeated polls throughout spring 2007 showed that while a majority of Americans supported a phased withdrawal from Iraq, a clear majority also opposed restricting funds for the troops as a means to achieve that end. See www.pollingreport.com/iraq6.htm.

7. "For Democrats in Congress, a Lesson in Power's Limits," *USA Today*, December 21, 2007; Bob Franken, "Impatient with the Impotence," *Huffington Post*, October 9, 2007, www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-franken/impatient-with-the-impote_b_67727.html; Patrick Buchanan, "Why the Antiwar Democrats Will Retreat," September 12, 2007, online at www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2007/09/retreat_of_the_antiwar_democra.html.
8. Liriel Higa, "Hill Braces for Supplemental Veto," *CQ Weekly*, April 2, 2007, 964-967.
9. Edward Corwin, *Total War and the Constitution: Five Lectures Delivered on the William W. Cook Foundation at the University of Michigan* (New York: Knopf, 1947), 12. See also William Howell, *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); William Howell and Jon Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
10. Numerous critiques of Congress's failure to enact binding legislation on the Iraq War can be found in the media. For recent scholarly critiques, see Louis Fisher, *Congressional Abdication on War and Spending* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Neal Kumar Katyal, "Internal Separations of Powers: Checking Today's Most Dangerous Branch from Within," *Yale Law Journal* 115 (2006): 2314-2349.
11. Barry Weingast and William Marshall, "The Industrial Organization of Congress; or, Why Legislatures, Like Firms, Are Not Organized as Markets," *Journal of Political Economy* 96 (1988): 132-163; David Epstein and Sharyn O'Halloran, *Delegating Powers: A Transaction Cost Politics Approach to Policy Making under Separate Powers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Terry Moe and Scott Wilson, "Presidents and the Politics of Structure," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 57 (1994): 1-44; Terry Moe and William Howell, "The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action," *Journal of Law, Economics and Organization* 15 (1999): 132-179.
12. Keith Krehbiel, "Institutional and Partisan Sources of Gridlock: A Theory of Divided and Unified Government," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 8 (1996): 7-40; Keith Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); David Brady and Craig Volden, *Revolving Gridlock: Politics and Policy from Carter to Clinton* (Boulder: Westview, 1998); Charles Cameron, *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Christopher Deering, "Foreign Affairs and War," in *The Legislative Branch and American Democracy: Institutions and Performance*, ed. Paul Quirk and Sarah Binder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
13. Deering, "Foreign Affairs and War," 350. Not surprisingly, there is a voluminous literature on Congress's varying capacity to enact legislation. For instance, scholars have examined how changes in the ideological composition of Congress affect the production of legislation. See Sarah A. Binder, *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Joshua Clinton and John Lapinski, "Measuring Legislative Accomplishments, 1877-1994," *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (2006): 232-249; Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics*; Joshua Clinton, "Lawmaking and Roll Calls," *Journal of Politics* 69 (2007): 455-467. They have studied the effects of divided government on lawmaking; see James J. Coleman, "Unified Government, Divided Government, and Party Responsiveness," *American Political Science Review* 93 (1999): 821-835; William Howell, Scott Adler, Charles Cameron, and Charles Riemann, "Divided Government and the Legislative Productivity of Congress, 1945-94," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25 (2000): 285-312; Sean Kelly, "Research Note: Divided We Govern? A Reassessment," *Polity* 25 (1993): 475-484; David Mayhew, "Wars and American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (2005): 473-493. Others have addressed Congress's variable willingness to enact elements of the president's foreign and domestic policy agendas: Brandice Canes-Wrone, William Howell, and David Lewis, "Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential

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14. Barbara Hinckley, *Less Than Meets the Eye: Foreign Policy Making and the Myth of the Assertive Congress* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also Joanne Gowa, *Balloons and Bullets* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); James Meernik, "Presidential Decision-Making and the Political Use of Force," *International Studies Quarterly* 38 (1994): 121-138; Will Moore and David Lanoue, "Domestic Politics and U.S. Foreign Policy: A Study of Cold War Conflict Behavior," *Journal of Politics* 65 (2003): 376-396; Louis Fisher, *Presidential War Power* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995); Fisher, *Congressional Abdication on War and Spending*; Andrew Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power after Watergate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).
15. David Mayhew, *America's Congress: Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison through Newt Gingrich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
16. *Ibid.*, xii.
17. *Ibid.*, 18.
18. David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 107.
19. David Mayhew, "Actions in the Public Sphere," in *The Legislative Branch*, ed. Paul Quirk and Sarah Binder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81. For the efforts of members of Congress to influence public opinion in foreign policy, see also Dan Caldwell, *The Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Arms Control* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).
20. See Letters to the Editor, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2008, online at www.foreignaffairs.org/20080501faletter87371/louis-fisher-ryan-hendrickson-stephen-r-weissman/congress-at-war.html.
21. See, for example, Kenneth Schultz, "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises," *American Political Science Review* 92 (1998): 829-844; Alastair Smith, "International Crises and Domestic Politics," *American Political Science Review* 92 (1998): 623-638; James Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88 (1994): 577-592.
22. Will Englund, "Cut and Run," *National Journal*, May 17, 2008, 20-26.
23. Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann, "The Hill Is Alive with the Sound of Hearings," *Foreign Affairs*, March 21, 2007, online at www.foreignaffairs.org/20070321faupdate86276/norman-j-ornstein-thomas-e-mann/the-hill-is-alive-with-the-sound-of-hearings.html.
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25. Baum and Groeling, "What Gets Covered?"
 26. Howell and Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather*.
 27. Memorandum, Gergen to Deaver, November 1, 1983, Folder "ND016 184505," WHORM, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library; Douglas Kriner, "After the Rubicon: Congress, Presidents and the Conduct of Military Action," typescript, Boston University.
 28. Ronald Reagan, "Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," Public Papers of the President, January 25, 1984.
 29. See David Mayhew, *Divided We Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking, and Investigations 1946-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
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 31. There is a large literature on the importance of elite cues and other heuristics in opinion formation. *Inter alia*, see Samuel Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
 32. To ensure that the randomization worked, we compared the demographic profiles of respondents across the three experimental conditions. We did not observe any statistically significant differences in their education, race, income, gender, or political orientations.
 33. Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 238.
 34. Linda Fowler, "Congress at the Water's Edge," typescript, Dartmouth University.
 35. To code hearings as positive or negative, we examined both the summary descriptors provided for each hearing and the descriptions of individual witnesses' testimonies. For a hearing to be coded as "positive," we looked for explicit arguments that the U.S. military or the fledgling Iraqi government was making progress toward achieving its goals and stabilizing the situation on the ground. We also coded hearings that emphasized Iraqi elections, plans for the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi provisional government, and progress in democratization as positive in valence. Negative hearings explicitly mentioned military setbacks, contractor fraud, allegations of prisoner abuse, and the human and financial costs of the war. Hearings that merely mentioned Iraq without including any information that was explicitly positive or negative were not included in our counts.
 36. The CIS information for many of the hearings at the end of 2007 and 2008 is incomplete. As a result, the actual volume of critical oversight of the war during this period is higher than that reported in Figure 14-1b.

37. Given the difficulties of identifying explicitly pro-war arguments from the summary and testimony descriptors alone, this ratio may overstate the disproportionate number of negative hearings.
38. The lone exception was a Democratic hearing that reviewed successes in Veterans Administration treatment plans to transition returning soldiers back to civilian life.
39. Henry Waxman, *Congressional Record*, vol. 151, no. 83, June 21, 2005, H4829.
40. This resurgence in congressional activity is consistent with recent research by Kriner and Schwartz, which demonstrates that congressional investigative probes typically increase during periods of divided government. See Douglas Kriner and Liam Schwartz, "Divided Government and Congressional Investigations," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 33 (2008): 295-321.
41. Several polling outfits asked virtually identically worded questions. Multiple polls in each month were averaged. The question was not asked in only four of the 62 months since March 2003; for those months the value was linearly interpolated.
42. Polling data taken from Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter* and updated by the authors.
43. See John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley, 1973); Eric Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corp., 1996); Richard Eichenberg and Richard Stoll, with Matthew Lebo, "War President: The Approval Ratings of George W. Bush," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6 (2006): 783-808.
44. See Scott Gartner and Gary Segura, "War, Casualties, and Public Opinion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (1998): 278-320; Matthew Baum and Samuel Kernell, "Economic Class and Popular Support for Franklin Roosevelt in War and Peace," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65 (2001): 198-229; Douglas Kriner, "Examining Variance in Presidential Approval: The Case of FDR in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 70 (2006): 23-47.
45. Our method follows that of previous attempts to identify positive and negative "rally" events. See Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, *Follow the Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Paul Gronke and John Brehm, "History, Heterogeneity, and Presidential Approval: A Modified ARCH Approach," *Electoral Studies* 21 (2002): 425-452.
46. Dickey-Fuller tests of the residuals from both models showed no evidence of a unit root.
47. This finding holds when only measures of negative hearings are included in the models.
48. Cumulative casualties correlate highly with the passage of time. It is possible, then, that the estimated effect for cumulative casualties merely reflects the steady erosion of public support for the war over time. We note, however, that models that also include linear and quadratic representations of time yield virtually identical results.