

How Public Opinion Constrains the Use of Force: The Case of Operation Restore Hope

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Most previous research on the influence of domestic politics on international conflict behavior treats public opinion as endogenous to political institutions, leaders' preferences, or both. In contrast, I argue that public opinion is more accurately characterized as partially exogenous. I further argue that, partly as a consequence, public scrutiny can inhibit U.S. presidents from using force as a foreign policy tool, particularly when the strategic stakes in a dispute are relatively modest. The literature on domestic audience costs, in turn, holds that public scrutiny may enhance a democratic leader's credibility in the eyes of a potential adversary, thereby increasing his likelihood of victory in a dispute. Yet, it also raises the potential political price of a bad outcome. Democratic leaders are therefore cross-pressured by the simultaneous advantages and disadvantages of public scrutiny. As a preliminary test of the theory, I conduct a plausibility probe of the influences of public opinion on the decision making of Presidents Bush and Clinton with respect to the 1992-1994 U.S. intervention in Somalia. I find that only by considering the constraining effect of public scrutiny can we fully understand these two presidents' policies regarding Somalia.

At some level, the political decisions preempt in these kinds of operations. . . . Everything that's done is political.

—General Joseph Hoar, USMC (ret.)
Former CINCENT¹

1. Interview with author, Del Mar, CA, July 14, 1999. Unless otherwise explicitly indicated (e.g., by a citation to written work by the referenced individual), all references to comments or observations by Bush or Clinton administration officials throughout this article (with the exception of General Hoar, who was interviewed as noted above) are taken from interviews with the author conducted in Washington DC, Arlington, VA, and Quantico, VA, in June 1999.

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In early 1991, Somalia fell into a state of civil war, precipitating a catastrophic famine.² Almost two years later, in late November 1992, following a year in which the United States first resisted intervening altogether and then did so only relatively modestly, President George H. W. Bush decided to launch a large-scale, American-led military intervention termed Operation Restore Hope. Less than a year later, amid rapidly deteriorating public and congressional support for the mission, President Bill Clinton announced his intent to end U.S. involvement in Somalia.

A review of the myriad studies of the U.S.-led humanitarian intervention reveals numerous proposed explanations for the decision making of Presidents Bush and Clinton, including the rapid turnabout in the Bush administration's attitude toward intervention. While typically presented in the unique context of the Somalia case, most such explanations are merely case-specific variants of several of the most widely employed variables in the theoretical literature on the domestic sources of foreign policy. Such factors include bureaucratic politics and organizational routines (Allison 1969; Sagan 1993; Zegart 1999), the individual preferences, values, and characteristics of leaders (Larson 1985; March and Olsen 1998), electoral incentives (Gaubatz 1991; Smith 1996), and public preferences (Zaller 1994; Ostrom and Job 1986; Powlick 1995; Sobel 2001), including, in the last instance, the constraining effect of public opinion (Holsti 1996; Sobel 1993, 2001; Rosenau 1961; Powlick 1995). I argue that with one exception, these explanations provide only partial insight into the full range of U.S. policy decision making with respect to Somalia between 1992 and 1994. The exception is the constraining role of public opinion.

In this respect, the Somalia intervention exemplifies a more general pattern in presidential decision making. In this study, I develop a theory to explain the circumstances under which public scrutiny is likely to influence presidents in their foreign policy decision making. My argument refines previous theories concerning the influence of domestic political risks on crisis outcomes, allowing more nuanced predictions concerning conditions under which presidents are likely to be willing to use military force abroad. I argue that, unless a president is highly confident of success, an attentive public can, when the strategic stakes are relatively modest, inhibit him from undertaking risky foreign policy initiatives, including using military force. The political costs of failing are greater if the public is attentive because it will be more inclined to punish a president if it is watching closely when he falters than if it is uninterested or distracted. Moreover, this pattern is self-reinforcing. All else equal, a policy fashioned under intense public scrutiny is more likely to fail, because public scrutiny reduces the president's freedom to develop an optimal foreign policy, free from domestic pressure to compromise. This further raises the political risks associated with an attentive public. And when the strategic stakes in a foreign crisis are modest, a president is likely to weigh more heavily the potential political risks associated with a given policy, thereby making public attentiveness a potential constraining factor. Hence, unless they are quite confident of success, presidents are more likely to use force in low-stakes foreign crises when the

2. In 1992 alone, roughly 400,000 Somalis reportedly died from starvation (Lake 1999), including over 25% of Somali children under age five (Woods 1997).

public is inattentive. (See Baum n.d. for a game theoretic extension of the theory and large-N statistical testing.)

After explicating the theory, I illustrate some of its key elements through a case study of Operation Restore Hope, the U.S.-led multinational humanitarian relief operation in Somalia that spanned the G. H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations. Beginning with the former, I show that the fear of a domestic public backlash in the run-up to the 1992 presidential election inhibited President Bush from launching a large-scale U.S. intervention prior to November 1992, while reduced public scrutiny after the November election removed this important barrier to intervention. Despite a congressional joint resolution supporting forceful intervention, as well as popular and United Nations support for an aggressive response, the president resisted using ground forces until late November 1992, nearly two years after the famine began, and almost a year after it was widely publicized in the United States. I then present evidence that similar considerations of public opinion influenced Bill Clinton's Somalia policies as well. In the latter instance, despite the potential credibility-enhancing effect of generating domestic audience costs by attracting public scrutiny (see below), President Clinton, like his predecessor, appears to have sought to minimize the public profile of his Somalia policies.

The remainder of this study proceeds as follows. I begin, in the next section, by first defining my key causal variable—public attentiveness—and then explicating the theory underlying this study. I then derive several hypotheses from the theory, as well as a series of potential alternative hypotheses based on the most commonly cited explanations for U.S. decision making regarding Somalia. I turn next to a discussion of case selection and a brief historical background of the crisis in Somalia. I then present evidence that the constraining effect of public scrutiny influenced President Bush's decision making in important ways. Along the way, I also evaluate the aforementioned alternative hypotheses. After completing my review of the Bush administration's Somalia policies, I turn to a consideration of the influence of public scrutiny on the Clinton administration's decision making with respect to Somalia. The final section summarizes and concludes.

Public Opinion and the Use of Force

Defining "Public Attentiveness"

For purposes of this study, I define my key causal variable—the extent of public attentiveness—as the portion of the public paying attention to a given issue, for whatever reason, at a particular point in time.³ I define *attention*, in turn, as selective processing of information about a given object, where *selective* implies a choice "to process specific sources of information and ignore others" (Kinchla 1980, 214; see also Wickens 1980; Navon and Gopher 1980). This means simply that directing one's focus more

3. This differs from traditional notions of the "attentive public" (Key 1961; Cohen 1973) in that I am focusing not on the general propensities of certain subgroups of the public to tune in to particular issue areas, or to foreign policy in general, but rather on the extent of *mass* public attention to *specific* issues.

toward one thing requires focusing less on other things. Many studies (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1983; Neuman 1990) treat *attentiveness* as essentially analogous to *salience*, which in common usage implies a sense of importance or urgency (e.g., Smith, Bruner, and White 1956; Page and Shapiro 1983; Epstein and Segal 2000), and which research (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1983; Monroe 1998) has shown to be positively related to governmental responsiveness. By my definition, the former construct is, at minimum, a necessary precursor of the latter. After all, one must attend to an object in order to determine whether it is personally important. Yet, for this very reason—because public attentiveness is a leading indicator of the likelihood that an issue will become salient—the distinction between these two constructs is of little practical importance for my theory.⁴

Theory

Fearon (1994) develops the logic of the domestic audience cost argument. Domestic audience costs are the domestic political punishment a leader suffers if she publicly threatens a foreign actor and subsequently backs down. Such costs arise because a leader's domestic audience is likely to view backing down as a sign of incompetence (Guisinger and Smith 2002). Fearon argues that because leaders of democracies are accountable to their domestic populations, they are better able to generate audience costs than are authoritarian leaders. This allows democratic leaders to send credible signals of resolve to potential adversaries. Such costs arise whenever a leader makes a threat, but leaders only suffer their negative consequences if they back down. Recognizing that the democratic leader has tied her own hands by raising the political price of backing down, the adversary is more likely to believe the democratic leader's threat, and so acquiesce without a fight. Hence, by generating audience costs, a democratic leader increases the likelihood that she will win a confrontation without having to resort to using force.

My argument differs from existing theories of domestic audience costs in two principal ways. First, I argue that audience costs are not always worth the domestic political risk they engender, and hence, leaders will sometimes prefer to avoid them, especially if the strategic stakes in a given foreign crisis are relatively modest. And second, I argue that leaders cannot perfectly control the processes through which audience costs are, or are not, generated. I explicate both differences, and their implications, in greater detail below.

Fearon's theory and most other arguments regarding domestic audience costs (e.g., Schultz 1998, 2001; Smith 1998) emphasize their positive value. Their logic implies that a president, faced with a potential conflict, should always prefer to maximize public awareness of the crisis—the source of domestic audience costs—as that enhances his credibility and thereby improves the odds that an adversary will back down. I relax this assumption in order to highlight the inherent tradeoff that frequently confronts leaders between enhancing their credibility by attracting greater public scrutiny, and the resulting increased potential political price of backing down or otherwise failing. I do so by linking the audience cost argument to the broader literature on crisis bargaining. If a

4. For a more thorough treatment of the distinction between attentiveness and salience, see Baum (2003).

leader makes a threat and the adversary does not blink, then she must decide whether to follow through on the threat and risk a military defeat. If she uses force and loses, she is likely to suffer even greater political harm than if she had backed down upon having her bluff called. The consequences of losing a fight may even include expulsion from office (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995; Cotton 1986; Bueno de Mesquita, Siverson, and Woller 1992). An inherent tension therefore arises between the political costs of backing down (Guisinger and Smith 2002; Fearon 1994) and the risk of suffering even greater retribution at home for losing a fight.⁵

Previous theories (Fearon 1994; Smith 1998; Schultz 1998) also implicitly assume that public opinion passively follows a democratic chief executive's lead in foreign crises, thereby creating audience costs whenever a leader makes a public threat. In contrast, I argue that a leader cannot always control whether, or to what extent, audience costs will emerge during a crisis. This is because audience costs can only be created if the audience pays attention to the leader's threat. If the audience remains uninterested, the leader cannot "tie her hands" through public pronouncements. It is not enough for the public to have the institutional capacity to punish a leader for backing down. It must also have the will to do so. And this is far more likely if the public is attentive when a leader reverses course or otherwise fails. In the context of U.S. foreign policy, various factors, including the extent of media coverage, the geographic location of a crisis, and the presence or absence of other high-profile issues competing for the public's attention, may influence whether the public will be attentive to a given crisis (Baum n.d.).

In fact, public interest in U.S. military operations varies widely. Some interventions, like Panama in 1989, Desert Storm in 1991, and Afghanistan in 2001, attract sustained and intense public scrutiny, while others, like the Dominican Republic in 1965, Haiti in 1994, and Bosnia in 1995 attract only moderate and fleeting public interest. Indeed, while as many as 97 percent of the American public reported paying close attention to Desert Storm,⁶ the corresponding maximum for Somalia was just over half as many people (52 percent) paying close attention (see Table 1). By either speaking out publicly on an issue or, alternatively, eschewing the public spotlight in favor of quiet diplomacy, a president can increase or decrease the likelihood that the public will be attentive to it (Kernell 1997; Key 1961; Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1993; Cohen 1995b; Hill 1998). But, regardless of their rhetorical strategies, presidents cannot unilaterally *command* public opinion, including the *extent* of public interest (Edwards 2003; Baum and Kernell 1999; Edwards and Wood 1999; Key 1961; Entman 2000; Wood and Peake 1998; Neustadt 1980). As Neustadt (1980, 72) comments: "One never should underestimate the public's power to ignore, to acquiesce, and to forget. . . ." In short, presidents are both strategic (i.e., *proactive*) and *reactive* with respect to public opinion (Brace and Hinckley 1993; Simon and Ostrom 1989; Ragsdale 1984; Hill 1998).

Public scrutiny, in turn, is a double-edged sword. As demonstrated by the over 50-percentage point drop in President G. H. W. Bush's approval rating in the year following the end of the Persian Gulf War, public opinion is fickle (Rosenau 1961). Short-term

5. I assume that using military force raises the political stakes for the president.

6. Gallup/CBS Poll, January 16-19, 1991.

TABLE 1
Percentage of Public Following Somalia Intervention, 1993

<i>Survey Date</i>	<i>Very Closely</i>	<i>Fairly Closely</i>	<i>Not Too Closely</i>	<i>Not at All Closely</i>	<i>Survey Organization</i>
January 3-6 ^a	52%	37%	8%	3%	Times Mirror
February 20-23 ^b	28%	42%	22%	8%	Times Mirror
June 18-21 ^c	16%	47%	30%	7%	Gallup
June 21-24 ^d	7%	39%	40%	13%	CBS/NYT
September 9-15 ^e	20%	42%	26%	12%	Times Mirror
October 21-24 ^e	34%	41%	16%	8%	Times Mirror

Source: Klarevas (2000, 529).

Questions:

^aNow I will read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely: the civil war and famine in Somalia?

^bI will read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely: accounts about U.S. troops in Somalia?

^cOverall, how closely have you followed the recent events in the African nation of Somalia: very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?

^dHow closely have you followed the situation in Somalia? Would you say you have followed it very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?

^eI will read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely: the situation in Somalia?

support is an unreliable predictor of the eventual political ramifications of a policy, because many of today's supporters are likely to become tomorrow's opponents should a policy be perceived as failing. All else equal, variations in political risk therefore appear to follow more from the extent to which the public is *paying attention*, than from short-term levels of support for a policy. A president facing an uninterested public will pay a smaller political price for backing down in a dispute than one confronting a more engaged public. An attentive public, in turn, is likely to punish the president more severely if he uses force and subsequently loses the fight. Presidents must therefore consider not what the public thinks about a policy today, but what it is likely to think over the long run (Sobel 1993, 2001; Zaller 1994; Key 1961; Holsti 1992). Indeed, in an interview, Jeremy Rosner, Counselor and Senior Director for Legislative Affairs in President Clinton's National Security Council in 1993 and 1994, indicated that President Clinton and the Congress thought in precisely these terms with respect to Somalia in October 1993.⁷

This does not imply that public approval or disapproval does not matter to presidents. Indeed, a virtual mountain of scholarly research clearly indicates that it does (e.g., Simon and Ostrom 1989; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Edwards 1976; Tufte 1975; Ragsdale 1984; Brace and Hinckley 1993; Kernell 1997; Cohen 1995b; Baum and

7. Interview with author, conducted in Washington DC, September 1, 2000.

Kernell 2001; Ostrom and Job 1986; and many others). Rather, the key distinction is between short- and long-term public opinion. While the former is often volatile and hence of limited political significance, the latter—based on more complete information—is likely to be more stable and hence more consequential for leaders. For instance, as the duration of a crisis increases, and the public learns more about it, support or opposition is likely to solidify. Hence, over the long term, public attitudes toward a given policy will matter more to presidents, and attentiveness less. After all, once a president has observed the public's response over the long run, the heuristic value of attentiveness recedes. Similarly, the more intensely held the public's short-term attitude toward a policy, the less likely the public mood is to reverse course (Key 1961), and hence the more likely that this will trump attentiveness as a signal of the long-term political risks or rewards associated with a given policy. Nonetheless, in most cases, initial public approval or disapproval is volatile and subject to dramatic swings in response to changing circumstances. Hence, I argue that it is the anticipation of future public support or opposition that creates politically relevant domestic audience costs.

Of course, only a disapproving public is likely to punish a president for backing down. In this sense, public attentiveness is a useful indicator of the likely long-term political stakes in a crisis.⁸ If the public is attentive throughout a crisis, including early on, it is likely to care more about the eventual outcome than if it is uninterested. This is because people's opinions are likely to be more accessible (Iyengar 1992; Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989) in the long run if they are engaged for an extended period of time, rather than if they tune in only briefly or not at all. And research in cognitive psychology has found that for an attitude stored in memory to influence an individual's opinion, it must first become *accessible*, or retrievable from memory (Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989; Ottati and Wyer 1990). The more attentive an individual is during a crisis, in turn, the more considerations about the crisis will be stored in memory, and thus the more likely that one or more considerations will be accessible if later primed by a political entrepreneur (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller and Feldman 1992).

Similarly, because an attentive public possesses a context for understanding any bases for criticizing the president (Popkin 1994), it is more effective to attack him for a policy failure concerning a salient issue. Indeed, even though many people may rapidly forget *why* they supported or opposed a policy, as it fades from the public spotlight, having paid attention in the first instance, they are likely to remember how they *felt* about it (Lodge and McGraw 1995; Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995). And a president's political opponents presumably have every incentive to remind the public of a foreign policy failure in order to help defeat him and his party in the next election. So, the more attention the public pays to a crisis, the easier it will be for his political opponents to make their case in the event of a perceived failure. The end result is that as public attentiveness to a crisis increases, the potential for success without a fight rises.

8. Long-term public opinion is analogous to "latent" public opinion (Rosenau 1961; Key 1961). *Latent* implies public opinion that has not yet formed or solidified. Rosenau argues that policy makers sometimes respond to perceived latent public opinion, independent of the usual process by which opinions are "submitted" to policy makers. Key, in turn, argues that politicians must attempt to discern how and when latent opinion will be activated, and in what form (pro or con, weak or strong).

Yet, so too does the potential political cost associated with backing down, or following through and failing. Hence, attentiveness, including in the early stages of a crisis, is a good predictor of the likely domestic political price of failure.

An inattentive public is therefore both a hindrance and a help to a president. On the one hand, because he faces fewer domestic constraints, a president can alter his policies without worrying about the public's reaction. And he is likely to be punished less severely in the event of failure. On the other, however, his threats may be less credible and, as a result, his policies less effective (Fearon 1994). If the adversary observes the president *not* "going public" (Kernell 1997), she is more likely to doubt his resolve. This may embolden her to resist more firmly. The president is thus more likely to *need* to escalate, perhaps even to use force, in order to demonstrate resolve. In contrast, if the president goes public and the public is responsive, the president inevitably faces potentially substantial political harm should he back away from a commitment or stand firm and lose a fight. It is precisely this possibility of domestic political punishment that may enhance a president's credibility to a potential adversary and thereby increases the likelihood of winning *without* a fight (Fearon 1994).

A president considering whether to make a threat therefore faces a dilemma. If he does so, and the public is responsive, he may improve his chances of a bloodless victory. Yet, his hands will be politically tied if the adversary does not blink. Ironically, the more successful the president is at generating audience costs, the greater the pressure to escalate further if his bluff is called. And depending on the adversary's assessment of her chances of success in a fight (however she defines "success"), she may not be deterred even if the president goes public and succeeds in attracting public scrutiny.

Hence, as the president's (adversary's) expectation of success declines (rises), he must weigh the increasing likelihood of paying the relatively large political price of failure against a declining probability that, by self-consciously seeking to incur that risk (which, it is worth recalling, is not assured even if he *does* go public), he will deter the adversary, and thereby enjoy the political fruits of success without a fight. Given the many uncertainties surrounding both the generation and effectiveness of domestic audience costs, the range of circumstances under which presidents are likely to anticipate a net political benefit from going public in order to generate audience costs is most likely relatively narrow.

Of course, a more attentive public also means greater rewards for success. Unless, however, the public considers the issue to be of extremely grave national concern, the potential downside risk to a president, given a foreign policy failure, usually outweighs the potential upside, given a success. Increasingly hostile and negative media coverage of the presidency (Groeling and Kernell 1998; Patterson 1996), combined with rising public cynicism about America's political leaders (Bennett 1986; Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997), mean that most major presidential initiatives will be greeted with suspicion by the press and the public.

Moreover, because citizens are less knowledgeable about foreign than domestic policy (Sobel 1989; Graber 1984), they are more likely to assume, absent contrary information, that a president is competent in foreign policy. The public places its faith in a president's competence to a greater extent in foreign relative to domestic policy, where

Congress traditionally plays a more decisive role. Hence, given a foreign policy success, citizens who gave the president a positive *ex ante* evaluation in foreign policy cannot reevaluate upward. In contrast, a foreign policy failure is likely to induce many citizens to downgrade their evaluations. This suggests there should be more downside room to fall than upside room to climb. Stated differently, in the words of presidential historian Allan J. Lichtman, "foreign policy is more likely to defeat than re-elect a president" (quoted in Purdum 2003).

Empirical evidence in support of this argument is available from both the Clinton and G. W. Bush administrations. Despite having campaigned almost exclusively on domestic issues—Clinton's 1992 campaign slogan was "It's the economy, stupid" and Bush's primary 2000 campaign issue was tax reform—and despite their widely reported *lack* of foreign policy experience, during their respective initial months in office both presidents consistently enjoyed their highest approval ratings for their handling of *foreign* affairs.

Given the increased political risk associated with using force when the public is attentive, I expect that in relatively low-stakes crises, unless they are quite confident of success, presidents are unlikely to seek the public spotlight. After all, confident adversaries are unlikely to be deterred by public posturing from the president. Hence, going public in a low-stakes dispute when the president is *not* highly confident of victory is a politically risky proposition. Indeed, most of the time, as public scrutiny increases (independent of their own *efforts* to attract or deflect the public spotlight), presidents will be *less* inclined to risk escalating a crisis or using military force. In other words, presidents are likely to sacrifice some credibility in exchange for greater flexibility and reduced political harm in the event of a policy failure. When important national security interests are involved, however, strategic calculations may outweigh domestic political concerns. And, of course, the more confident the president is of success, the less he will be concerned with suffering the political harm associated with failure, even if the strategic stakes are relatively modest. In either case, presidents are less likely to be deterred by public scrutiny and, in fact, they may even *court* public attention in order to maximize both their credibility to the adversary and the potential political benefit from victory.

Recognizing the president's domestic political calculus, adversaries are likely to view "going public" as a signal of the importance to the president of the issue at stake. Indeed, given the political risks inherent in domestic audience costs, presidents are unlikely to invoke them unless they either place a reasonably high degree of importance on the issue in dispute or they are confident that they will never have to "pay." This would appear to open a window for the president to successfully bluff by going public even though the stakes are not particularly high or he is not particularly confident of a successful outcome in a fight. Yet, as discussed earlier, bluffing is a high-risk strategy. The consequences of having one's bluff called may be severe (Guisinger and Smith 2002). Hence, for the president, when important strategic interests are *not* at stake, unless the likelihood of failure is remote, domestic political considerations will loom large. Even a moderate chance of a bad outcome may inhibit a president from going public in a low-stakes dispute. In fact, the lower the stakes, presumably the higher must be the expectation of success before a president is likely to consider going public to be worth the

risk. After all, why risk paying the substantial price of failure for an uncertain and at best relatively modest potential political gain? And if, despite his efforts to lower the profile of a dispute, the public tunes in *anyway*, the president is likely to feel constrained in his policy options.

Interestingly, this logic suggests that when a strategic adversary observes the president pursuing a strategy of avoiding public scrutiny, she is likely to infer that the issue is *not* particularly important to the president (and perhaps also that the president is not too confident of success). Hence, if the adversary is reasonably confident of success (however she defines it), she may seek to up the domestic political ante for the president by taking actions geared toward attracting the attention of the American public, thereby hopefully inhibiting the president from further escalating the dispute.

In sum, presidents will use audience costs to their benefit when important national security interests are at stake or when they are highly confident of success, and will seek to insulate themselves from potential political costs when a foreign policy success is less imperative or when they perceive a nontrivial possibility of a bad outcome. This, in turn, implies that in circumstances where presidents prefer to avoid audience costs, too much unwanted public scrutiny may inhibit them from escalating a crisis or using military force.

Hypotheses

Numerous hypotheses concerning the crisis behavior of democratic leaders can be derived from the theoretical argument. The remainder of this study, however, focuses on testing two of the central implications for U.S. foreign policy.⁹ The first, concerning the constraining effect of public opinion, is as follows:

H₁: *Attentiveness*. In foreign policy disputes involving relatively modest strategic stakes, unless the president is highly confident of success, as public attentiveness increases, the president will be less willing to escalate or use force. The lower the strategic stakes, the higher must be the president's confidence of success before he will escalate or use force in the face of public scrutiny. Conversely, given relatively modest strategic stakes, as public scrutiny declines, presidents will be more willing to escalate or use military force.

The theory also implies that presidents' *preferences* regarding public attentiveness will vary under differing circumstances. Hence, a second, and closely related, implication of the theory involves presidential efforts to either attract or avoid attracting the public spotlight.

H₂: *Presidential Rhetoric*. Unless they are highly confident of success, presidents will seek to avoid drawing public attention to foreign policy disputes involving relatively modest strategic stakes by minimizing their public discussion of such crises. The lower the strategic stakes, the higher must be their confidence of success before they will seek to attract public attention.

9. Elsewhere (Baum n.d.), I test additional hypotheses derived from the theory.

For my case studies, I operationalize public attentiveness—which I use interchangeably with “public scrutiny”—through four commonly employed (e.g., Baum 2003; Epstein and Segal 2000; Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch 1995; Page and Shapiro 1983) indicators, including: (1) the extent of media coverage of Somalia, (2) survey respondents’ self-reported interest in and attention to Somalia, (3) the percentage of “don’t know” responses to survey questions regarding Somalia, and (4) the extent and valence of congressional activity regarding Somalia. Self-reported interest in and attention to a given topic, though—like most survey instruments—far from a perfect measure of attentiveness, arguably represents about the most direct indicator that one is likely to find outside of a laboratory. Page and Shapiro (1983), in turn, argue that attentiveness can be fairly directly, though not perfectly, measured by the proportion of “don’t know” responses to survey questions. Finally, in interviews with the author, various former Bush and Clinton administration officials indicated that they considered media coverage and congressional attention to a given issue to be among the most reliable indicators of the extent of public interest in the issue. Powlick (1995) reported similar findings in his interviews with mid-level officials from the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy.¹⁰

To determine the applicability of the *Attentiveness Hypothesis* to Operation Restore Hope, I investigate whether, across the Bush and Clinton administrations, there is a consistent inverse relationship between public attentiveness and the scale of U.S. involvement in Somalia, with increases (decreases) in public interest preceding decreases (increases) in U.S. military involvement. Including the Clinton administration in my investigation has the added benefit of allowing me to account for any qualitatively unique effects of the 1992 election.

Turning to the *Presidential Rhetoric Hypothesis*, one primary means of attracting public and media scrutiny is speaking publicly about a crisis (Kernell 1997). Hence, if the theory is correct, we should observe only minimal public discussion of Somalia by Presidents Bush and Clinton in periods *preceding* major escalations of U.S. involvement. After all, the strategic stakes for the United States in Somalia were arguably as small as they have ever been in a U.S. military deployment overseas. Under such circumstances, even a fairly high degree of confidence would in all likelihood be insufficient to prompt a U.S. president to go public. After all, when the stakes are extremely low, only a rapid, decisive, and largely cost-free victory is likely to be *perceived* by the public as a success. And the absence of any discernable national security interests may severely limit the potential political upside, even if the public *does* perceive the mission as a success. This may, for instance, help explain why President Clinton received hardly any political benefit from relatively successful, and largely cost-free (in terms of American lives lost), interventions in Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1995), and Kosovo (1999). Moreover, during the Clinton administration, the primary U.S. adversary in Somalia, General Mohamed Farah Aideed, recognizing the minimal strategic stakes for the United States, was unlikely to be easily convinced of U.S. resolve by public posturing from the president, regardless of whether such posturing generated domestic audience costs. As we shall see, in hindsight,

10. Baum (2003) presents a detailed consideration of the validity of a wide range of survey instruments—including those used in this study—as indicators of attentiveness or salience.

General Aided appears to have made the correct calculation concerning President Clinton's resolve.

Of course, many different domestic political factors can influence foreign policy outcomes. Hence, over the course of my case study, I also evaluate four prominent alternative hypotheses derived from the case study literature on Operation Restore Hope. These include: (1) the *CNN Effect Hypothesis* (Maren 1994; Kennan 1993), which holds that heart-wrenching images of suffering children broadcast to millions of Americans generated intense public pressure on the Bush administration to intervene in Somalia, while dramatic images of a dead U.S. soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu produced decisive public pressure for President Clinton to get out; (2) the *Bureaucratic Dominance Hypothesis* (e.g., Woods 1997), which holds that by controlling President Bush's policy options and access to information, the U.S. bureaucracy inhibited President Bush from intervening forcefully until after the November 1992 election; (3) the *Historical Reputation Hypothesis* (Oberdorfer 1992; Menkhaus with Ortmyer 1995; Wines 1994), which holds that President Bush pursued a postelection intervention in Somalia in order to insure his place in history as a great foreign policy president; and (4) the *Moral Imperative Hypothesis* (Oberdorfer 1992), which attributes Operation Restore Hope to President Bush's personal sense of moral obligation to alleviate the suffering in Somalia.¹¹

These several alternative hypotheses are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is almost certain that numerous considerations factored into the decision making of Presidents Bush and Clinton. Assuming, however, that the evidence supports multiple hypotheses, the question becomes whether my theory contributes to a better understanding of the intervention. Investigating the Clinton administration's decision-making process will help determine which of the various explanations best accounts for the full range of decisions made by both administrations.

Case Selection

According to the theory, Somalia was in most respects an optimal circumstance for a low-stakes U.S. use of military force, one at least initially involving limited political risks and a fairly high probability of success. Along these lines, Acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger noted: "This is a tragedy of massive proportions, and, underline this, one that we could do something about." (Oberdorfer 1992, A1). And President Bush's National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, commented that Somalia was looked upon as "very limited, doable." He added: "We thought the political costs [in Somalia] were low. . . . I think we thought generally it would be a political plus. And since the military costs would be low, and the chances of something going wrong which would turn it into a PR or a political problem were almost non-existent, the net was clearly a plus." Eagleburger and Scowcroft thus concluded that, unlike other humanitarian

11. The final hypothesis, which was favored by several former Bush administration officials interviewed by the author, is similar to March and Olsen's (1998) concept of a "logic of appropriateness."

tragedies unfolding at the time (e.g., Bosnia), the expectation of success in Somalia was relatively high and the risks to U.S. forces relatively small. Indeed, in briefing President Bush on the military's concept of operations for Operation Restore Hope, General Hoar estimated the likely number of U.S. fatalities at about 20.

This combination of a high likelihood of success and low strategic stakes allows me to focus on the influence of public scrutiny. Of course, it also makes Somalia a relatively likely case to find a constraining effect of public opinion. Indeed, as we shall see, given the utter absence of traditional national security interests in Somalia, even the president's relatively high confidence level was insufficient motivation for him to seek to raise the public profile of the intervention. Hence, following common practice in qualitative case study research (e.g., Eckstein 1975; Jentleson 1992; Walt 1992; Achen and Snidal 1989; Drezner 2000), I employ this case study as a "plausibility probe," intended to illustrate some of the key relationships described in the theory as well as to demonstrate the utility of the theory for further empirical testing, rather than as a critical test of my hypotheses.

Close proximity to an election almost certainly magnifies domestic political considerations. Presidents presumably worry about the political implications of their foreign policies because they care about winning reelection either for themselves or their party cohorts in Congress, as well as about their substantive policy agendas and their historical reputations. The closer to an election a foreign policy dispute arises, the greater the likelihood that it will affect the election's outcome. Hence, if ever President Bush was going to worry about public scrutiny of his foreign policy, then the summer and fall before the 1992 election ought to have been the time. Even after the election, President Bush may well have been motivated by a desire to leave office on a high note, while preserving his historical legacy as a great foreign policy president. Each of these objectives is profoundly political and depends in large measure on *public perceptions* of the president's policies. Moreover, even if President Bush's motivation *could* be reduced to "It's the election, stupid," the same could not plausibly be said of President Clinton. (I consider the implications of electoral pressures in greater detail below.)

Finally, Operation Restore Hope spans two administrations and can be usefully divided into four major policy decisions: (1) the August 1992 decision to forego a ground intervention, in favor of a low-risk humanitarian airlift; (2) the November 1992 decision to launch a large-scale intervention; (3) the June 1993 decision to escalate the hunt for Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed; and (4) the autumn 1993 decision to end the U.S. intervention in Somalia. This provides substantial variation in my dependent variables (going public and willingness to escalate/use force) and my key independent variable (public attentiveness), while holding both the strategic stakes and the probability of success constant. Moreover, by including both the Bush and Clinton administrations, I am able to account for any unique, election-specific effects, as well as—by including one circumstance in which the potential benefits of audience costs may plausibly have influenced the president (Clinton) and one in which they almost certainly did not (Bush)—accounting for variation in the potential importance of domestic audience costs. Whereas President Clinton may have wished to attract public scrutiny in order to signal his determination to his primary adversary in Somalia (General Aideed), Presi-

dent Bush faced no clear adversary to whom he might have sought to communicate his resolve.

Historical Background

The first calls for U.S. action in Somalia came in January 1992, when Democratic Senator Paul Simon and Republican Senator Nancy Kassebaum, both members of the Senate Africa Subcommittee, cosponsored a series of resolutions demanding urgent action by the Bush administration.¹² Two months later, on March 25, Herman Cohen, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, declared Somalia to be in a state of disaster (Woods 1997). Nevertheless, Cohen noted that the United States (along with Russia) was the most reluctant member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to intervene in Somalia.

By late April 1992, the situation had so deteriorated that the UNSC passed a resolution establishing UNOSOM (United Nations Operations in Somalia), including the immediate deployment to Somalia of 50 UN observers and a 500-person armed security force (Woods 1997). In early July, Senator Kassebaum visited Somalia to get a first-hand look at the situation. Upon her return, she and Senator Simon cosponsored a resolution, later passed in both the House and Senate, calling for deployment of UN forces (Hirsch and Oakley 1995).

On July 10, President Bush received a cable from U.S. Ambassador to Kenya Smith Hempstone, entitled "A Day in Hell," graphically describing the terrible conditions in Somali refugee camps along the Kenyan border. Brent Scowcroft recalled that this memo, which he hand-delivered to the president, had a strong impact. The memo prompted President Bush to become more personally engaged (Menkhaus with Ortmayer 1995; Oberdorfer 1992).¹³ Bush reportedly wrote in the margins of Hempstone's cable: "This is very, very upsetting. I want more information" (Strobel 1997, 132). According to Oberdorfer (1992, A1), Bush had also been impressed by an earlier plea from UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali concerning the UN's failure to take action to protect a Muslim nation, while exerting so much effort in other locations, such as Iraq. He reports that Boutros-Ghali asked Bush pointedly "Can't we do something about Somalia?"

On July 27, the UNSC voted to dispatch another technical team to Somalia, and to initiate an airlift of food supplies. This precipitated the first stage of a major U.S. involvement in Somalia, in the form of a 24,000-ton food commitment. Then, on August 13, President Bush announced the initiation of a 145,000-ton emergency food airlift, termed "Operation Provide Relief."

Initially, however, the airlift failed to mitigate the famine. Growing frustration prompted the United States to support placing an additional 3,000 armed UN troops in Somalia, as well as to dispatch 2,100 U.S. Marines to the area in mid-September, to provide

12. They also coauthored a *New York Times* editorial urging the United States to take action ("Save Somalia from Itself," *New York Times*, January 2, 1992, p. A-21).

13. Jim Woods, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa, corroborated this depiction in an interview with the author (Arlington, VA, June 14, 1999).

“offshore support.” Also in mid-September, the Joint Staff began planning for a follow-on policy to Operation Provide Relief. Then, in mid-October, the airlift operation was expanded and military and civilian planners began contemplating a more extensive operation. One senior Bush administration official indicated, however, that planning for the possible introduction of ground forces had been initiated in the Pentagon as early as July.

According to some observers, the humanitarian crisis passed its peak during the fall of 1992 (Sahnoun 1994; Maren 1994; ICRC 1993). Nonetheless, by November, President Bush and UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali were becoming increasingly frustrated with the ongoing interference of General Aideed’s supporters, who continued to loot and hijack relief shipments and fire on UN troops and ships carrying relief supplies.

Soon after his defeat in the presidential election, President Bush instructed his staff to develop policy options for Somalia (Menkhaus with Ortmyer 1995). On November 25, Bush surprised the Deputies Committee—an interagency advisory group composed of senior Administration officials—by choosing the most extensive of several options presented to him, a UN-authorized, U.S.-led coalition force using “all necessary means” to provide security to the humanitarian relief operations (Cohen 1995a; Menkhaus with Ortmyer 1995; Oberdorfer 1992). The UNSC endorsed the U.S. plan on December 3. The next day, President Bush announced the operation to the American people. President-elect Bill Clinton immediately endorsed it. And, on December 8, the first U.S. forces landed on the beaches of Mogadishu.

Public Opinion and President Bush’s Domestic Political Calculus

In this section, I argue that President Bush was constrained during the summer and fall of 1992 by the concern that if he sent ground troops to Somalia—an area where the United States had no vital national security interests—any casualties could quickly alienate the public. Under these circumstances, even the absence of substantial media and public attention to Somalia—a permissive public opinion environment—was insufficient to prompt the president to risk a ground intervention.

“It’s the Election, Stupid”

The president’s caution was most likely attributable, at least in part, to the anticipation of enhanced public scrutiny—at what was perceived to be an inopportune moment for the president—that would almost certainly follow the announcement of a more aggressive intervention. A negative political backlash at this late date in the electoral calendar could have seriously damaged the president’s chances for reelection. This concern was heightened by the president’s reputation for being more concerned with foreign than domestic policy, in the midst of a weak economy. As a result, any limited and most likely short-lasting (Meernik and Waterman 1996; Brody 1991) political benefit that might follow a successful intervention was not worth the relatively small, but nontrivial, risk of a political disaster. I further argue that an unusually permissive

postelection political environment in late November, characterized by an uninterested public—due to a largely unengaged but generally supportive media and Congress—and the president's status as a lame duck, presented an ideal opportunity for action.

To a certain extent, this merely recognizes that politicians care about reelection (Mayhew 1974). After all, the primary *reason* politicians care about public opinion is that the public can vote them out of office. In the summer of 1992, President Bush was fighting an uphill battle against a Democratic candidate whose campaign mantra—"It's the economy, stupid"—was clearly intended to highlight Bush's perceived weakness in domestic policy. Scholars have long recognized that in democracies, the link between state (politicians) and society (the public) is tightest during the period leading up to an election (e.g., Gaubatz 1991; Smith 1996). This does not, however, imply that the political factors confronting President Bush were unique. After all, the key question is not "did the election matter?" but *how* and *why* did it matter? Indeed, proximity to an election merely enhances the political pressures that confront presidents any time they contemplate using force abroad. In this instance, the upcoming election brought to the fore of President Bush's decision calculus what might otherwise have been merely one of many considerations in formulating a policy toward Somalia.

The electoral incentive could have motivated President Bush to respond in several different ways. Some scholars have hypothesized that unpopular leaders facing an election that they are likely to lose may pursue the equivalent of a "Hail-Mary" pass in football, by risking a military conflict abroad in the hopes of dramatically changing their political circumstances at home. Downs and Rocke (1994) refer to this as "gambling for resurrection." This argument bears a close resemblance to diversionary war theory, which holds that political leaders, facing domestic problems, will sometimes initiate a foreign use of military force in order to distract the nation's attention from their domestic difficulties (Levy 1989). In the case of Somalia, the president clearly elected *not* to gamble for resurrection. Indeed, that President Bush elected not to employ ground troops until after the November election is fairly strong evidence that the intervention was not a diversionary use of force.

Alternatively, an incumbent facing an uphill reelection battle may pursue a strategy of "fake leadership" (Canes-Wrone, Herron, and Shotts 2001) by pandering to voter demands, even if he has private information that voter demands conflict with their best interests. Canes-Wrone et al. (2001) predict that when a race is relatively close and imminent, as in the summer of 1992, the president will pursue the popular course of action (and pander), which in this instance—as I explain below—would most likely have entailed a larger-scale intervention. If, in contrast, an incumbent is trailing far behind his opponent, as was the case with Bush in the fall of 1992, Canes-Wrone et al. predict that he will want to produce a noticeable, positive policy outcome in order to impress the voters. This suggests that President Bush should have intervened on a large scale in the fall whether or not the policy was popular. Once again, that Bush elected *not* to do so in either the summer or fall therefore also appears inconsistent with fake leadership.

In fact, there is no compelling reason to believe that the public would have been hostile to a successful U.S. intervention in the summer of 1992. Foreign policy was George Bush's strength and Bill Clinton's weakness. A shift of the debate to the realm

of foreign policy would have played to the president's strength. Similarly, Scowcroft indicated that one factor contributing to the August decision to launch Operation Provide Relief was the negative political fallout from the decision *not* to intervene in Bosnia. And Somalia was a popular cause. Testifying before the House Select Committee on Hunger on July 22, Republican Senator Kassebaum stated: "I strongly support sending a United Nations security force to Somalia" (Strobel 1997, 136). The willingness of the Congress to pass a joint resolution in July calling for deployment of UN forces suggests that it would not have been an impediment to a more forceful intervention. Indeed, editorial pages across the country as well as the UN Secretary General and influential members of Congress from both parties were urging the president to "do something" to stop the suffering in Somalia. This suggests that if such an intervention were swift, successful, and casualty free—as later proved to be the case, at least initially—the president would in all likelihood have benefited politically. Hence, while electoral considerations almost certainly influenced the Bush administration's thinking with respect to Somalia, there was nothing inherent in the valence of electoral pressures that should necessarily have prompted the president to oppose a large-scale humanitarian intervention prior to the election.

Nevertheless, despite the seemingly permissive domestic political environment, one Bush aid acknowledged that his campaign advisors were "fearful of accusations that all the President cared about was foreign policy" and had urged him to take a low public profile on all foreign policy issues until after the election (Oberdorfer 1992, A1). The same aid reflected: "Would we have been a little more vigorous otherwise? That's harder to answer" (Oberdorfer 1992, A1). Scowcroft confirmed this account.¹⁴ Indeed, several associates of President Bush recalled that prior to the election the president felt constrained from making such a "hard-nosed" foreign policy decision (Oberdorfer 1992; Oakley interview with author). In explaining why President Bush agreed to a humanitarian airlift, but *not* to the introduction of ground troops, prior to the election, Menkhaus and Ortmyer (1995, 11) observe:

There was tremendous political appeal in limiting the U.S. mission to strictly humanitarian tasks. It offered the promise to the U.S. public—and military—of a quick, easily achieved, and gratifying mission, while minimizing the possibility of U.S. casualties. It also guaranteed an early withdrawal of U.S. forces by excusing the United States from participation in the long-term tasks of state-building.

General Hoar added that the airlift allowed the administration to show that it was "doing something," while taking very little risk. By avoiding any long-term state-building tasks, this policy also promised an early conclusion of the operation (Menkhaus with Ortmyer 1995). Hence, by pursuing a humanitarian airlift, President Bush may have hoped to reap the electoral rewards of a last-minute rally effect (Mueller 1973), without

14. Another Bush administration official recalled that during the spring and summer of 1992, some members of the White House staff had sought to prevent President Bush from being fully briefed regarding the scale of the famine, out of fear that he might be tempted to intervene. Their goal, this official asserted, was to prevent the president from becoming too engaged with Somalia, thereby reducing the likelihood of a preelection intervention.

risking the political fallout that would result from substantial (or perhaps *any*) U.S. casualties in a large-scale military operation involving no U.S. national security interests.

This low-risk policy had the added appeal of a relatively low profile, thereby allowing President Bush to limit his political downside while possibly gaining some political benefit. UNSC and congressional endorsement of the relatively low-risk U.S. airlift further enhanced its political appeal, by both blunting the potential criticism that this was a desperate attempt by an unpopular president to boost his chances for reelection, and by limiting the president's potential political exposure should the operation go badly.

A CNN Effect?

Though media interest in Somalia did increase following the August 12 announcement of Operation Provide Relief, this increase was relatively short lived, as apparently was public interest. By the first week of September, network news coverage of Somalia fell to nearly zero, where it remained until mid-November. And the story in the print media was similar. For instance, the *New York Times* presented five front-page stories mentioning Somalia in both August and September, up from one in June and two in July. *USA Today*, in turn, offered *no* front-page stories on Somalia in August and only two in September. These patterns fly in the face of the logic of the *CNN Effect Hypothesis*. Nonetheless, several senior Bush administration officials claimed in interviews that the CNN effect played an important role in influencing U.S. policy toward Somalia. Exemplifying this perspective, George F. Kennan wrote in a September 30, 1993 *New York Times* editorial "There can be no question that the reason for this acceptance [by Congress of President Bush's intervention] lies primarily with the exposure of the Somalia situation by the American media, above all, television."

Of course, not everyone accepted this view. Several senior Bush administration officials indicated, in interviews, that they did not feel pressure from the media to intervene until *after* President Bush announced the August airlift. Another official recalled Somalia as an "overnight story" that did not resonate with the media, Congress, or the public until *after* the president announced his intention to send U.S. ground forces. In fact, much of the evidence appears to support the latter perspective. Most notably, a series of content analysis investigations (Livingston and Eachus 1995; Strobel 1997; Mermin 1997, 1999; Berens 1999) have found that, *without exception*, the TV and print media appear to have paid scant attention to Somalia until *after* the major intervention decisions by the Bush administration. Figure 1 illustrates these patterns, by tracing the evolution of network TV news (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and newspaper (*New York Times* and *USA Today*) coverage of Somalia. Figure 1A (top graphic) tallies the monthly number of front-page articles mentioning Somalia in the two newspapers between July and December 1992. Figure 1B (bottom graphic) then presents the weekly summary of the number of minutes of coverage of Somalia by the three major broadcast networks' evening newscasts between June 1 and December 7, 1992. These data offer no evidence of a "feeding frenzy" of media coverage.

Along these lines, Arnold Kanter, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, commented: "What I *don't* recall was anything like the sort of human cry that the United

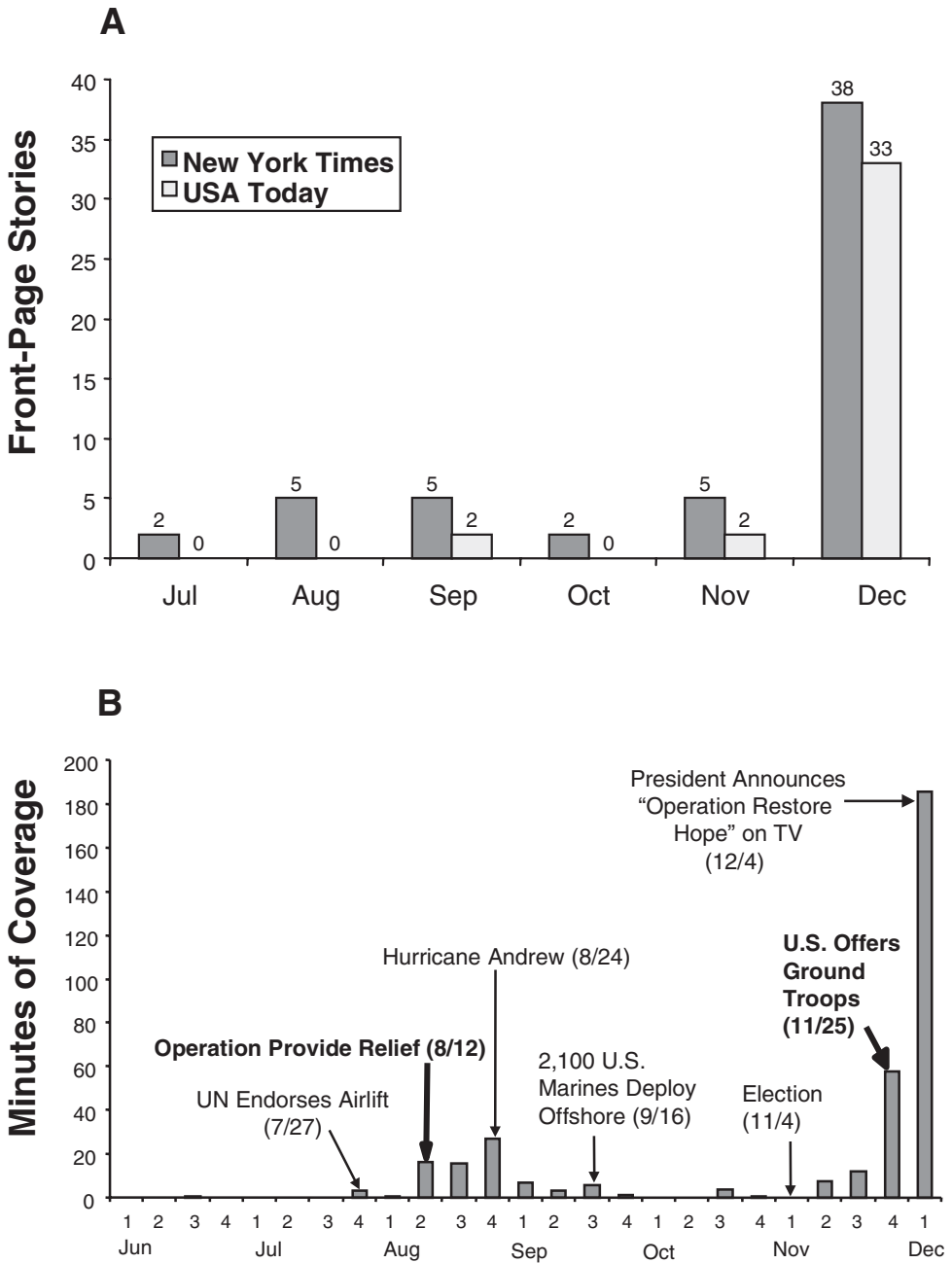


FIGURE 1A. Number of Front-Page Stories on Somalia, July-December 1992.

Note: Two of the *New York Times* articles and both *USA Today* articles in November appeared *after* the Bush administration's offer to provide U.S. troops to lead a large-scale UN ground force into Somalia.

FIGURE 1B. Weekly Minutes of Network News. Coverage of Somalia, June 1-December 7, 1992.

Sources: Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe and Vanderbilt Television News Archives.

States ought to do something about Somalia the way there was considerable public opinion pressure to do something about Bosnia” (emphasis added). Indeed, the decision to intervene appears to have been reached in an environment characterized by only moderate media, congressional, and hence, public interest in the Somali famine. Walter H. Kansteiner, an Africa expert who has served in the Departments of State and Defense and on the National Security Council, thus observed: “Ironically, the media was taking less interest in Somalia in November 1992 than they had in August 1992. . . . Likewise, Congress had ceased being an input. . . . It was only after Bush announced Operation Restore Hope that the media regained any interest in Somalia” (Kansteiner 1996, 108).¹⁵

Public Scrutiny and Presidential Agenda Setting

Even after President Bush appeared on national television to announce Operation Restore Hope, a majority of the public remained inattentive to Somalia. In a December 6 CBS News poll, 39 percent claimed to have been paying “a lot” of attention to Somalia. This figure later peaked at 52 percent in early January. Though not insignificant, these figures pale in comparison with the over 90 percent of the public who consistently claimed to be closely following the Persian Gulf War in 1991 or the over 80 percent of the public who claimed to have closely followed the controversy in Florida in the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election.¹⁶ This further suggests that the notion of a Bush administration driven to intervene by a frenzy of media and public pressure is unsubstantiated by the evidence.

No poll data on Somalia exist prior to September 1992, so it is impossible to directly gauge public opinion on the issue during the summer of 1992. There is additional evidence, however, that the public was not particularly interested in Somalia. A survey conducted for the Times Mirror Center by Princeton Survey Research Associates on September 10–13, 1992—less than two weeks after the start of Operation Provide Relief—found only 11 percent of respondents claiming to be following Somalia “very closely,” compared to 33 percent who claimed to be following Somalia “not at all closely.” In the same survey, only 2 percent identified Somalia as the story they had followed most closely during the past month, less than either Iraq (4 percent) or Bosnia (3 percent).

And President Bush himself appears not to have *sought* to rally the public’s attention to Somalia. A review of the *Public Papers of the President* (1998), illustrated in Figure 2, indicates that the president mentioned Somalia publicly—verbally or in writing—only once in July, four times in August, and once in September. If the presi-

15. There is some evidence that a brief flurry of media coverage between December 1991 and February 1992 may have initially drawn the Bush administration’s attention toward Somalia. For instance, NBC’s *Today* show broadcast two minutes of stark pictures of Somalia in February (Goodman 1992). The *New York Times* carried a front-page story on Somalia in December 1991, and Senators Paul Simon and Nancy Kassebaum coauthored an op-ed article in January calling attention to the worsening famine in Somalia. Indeed, Scowcroft asserted that the media can help place issues on the policy agenda. Moreover, by framing the famine as a U.S. moral obligation, the media may have affected policy makers’ perceptions of the public’s willingness to support an intervention (Riley 1999; Sobel 1998). Yet, the initial response of the Bush administration was to resist any significant U.S. involvement.

16. Source: Various Gallup and Pew Center surveys, January and February 1991, and December 2000.

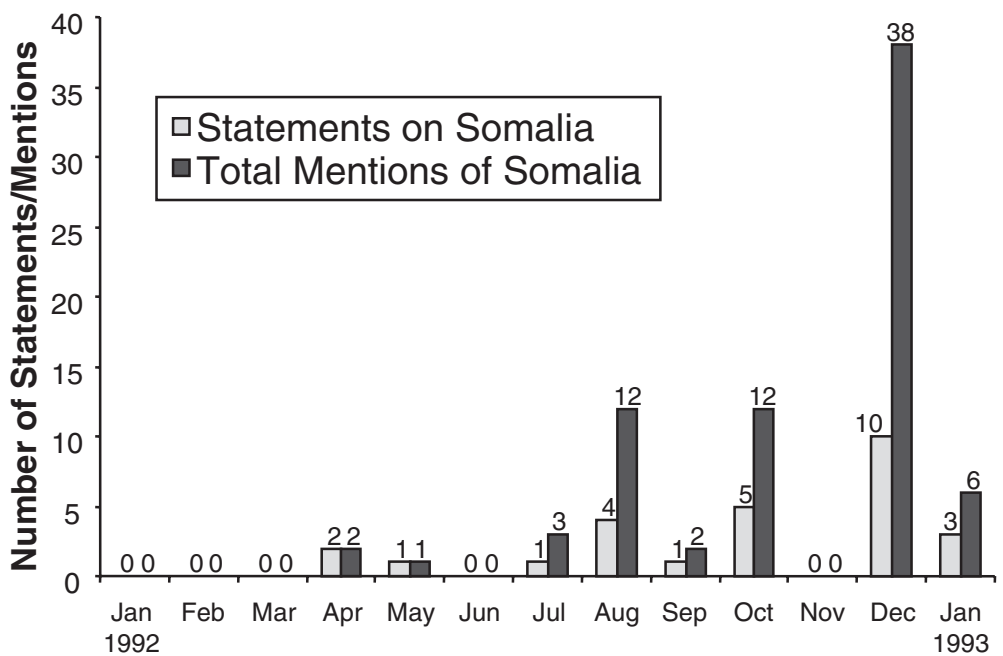


FIGURE 2. President Bush's Public Statements and Total Number of Public Mentions of Somalia.

dent's goal was to attract attention to this foreign policy initiative, his relative silence on the issue gives no indication of this intent.¹⁷

In fact, consistent with the *Presidential Rhetoric Hypothesis*, this suggests that the president's goal, following the advice of his campaign advisors, was to maintain a low profile regarding Somalia, while preserving his ability to claim credit for any near-term positive results. And the president's job approval rating did improve by nine points (from 47 to 56 percent) in the month following initiation of the humanitarian airlift. The relative absence of sustained media attention to Somalia in the fall suggests that the president was at least somewhat successful in both respects.

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the true "rally event" producing this short-lived spike—President Bush's approval ratings were back down to 47 percent in October—may well have been Hurricane Andrew, rather than Somalia. Hurricane Andrew, the costliest natural disaster in American history, struck the Florida peninsula on August 24, 1992. In the aforementioned Times Mirror Center survey, over half (51 percent) of respondents named Hurricane Andrew as the issue they had followed most closely. The emergence of Andrew demonstrates both the potential for exogenous events to influence public opinion, independent of presidential preferences, as well as the

17. In December 1992, President Bush mentioned Somalia 38 times, in 10 public statements or documents. By comparison, during December 1989, when 24,500 U.S. troops invaded Panama (Quigley 1992), President Bush mentioned Panama 103 times, in 19 public statements and documents. In January 1991, during the Gulf War, President Bush mentioned Iraq 139 times, in 34 statements. In February 1991, Bush mentioned Iraq 121 times, again in 34 separate statements and documents.

capacity of a president to influence the public agenda. On the one hand, the Bush administration could not, of course, have anticipated Hurricane Andrew when they decided to launch Operation Provide Relief. Yet, on the other, once Andrew emerged, the president took full advantage of the opportunity it afforded him to appear in the most presidential of all roles, as a nonpartisan leader offering both comfort and tangible relief to large numbers of Americans harmed by a domestic natural disaster.

In sharp contrast to his virtual silence on Somalia, President Bush devoted a great deal of public rhetoric to Hurricane Andrew. Between August 24 and September 16, the president mentioned the hurricane 49 times across 29 separate occasions (e.g., speeches and press conferences). Media coverage of Andrew was also far more intense than its coverage of Somalia. During the same time frame, the major broadcast networks' evening newscasts covered the hurricane in 106 stories, while the *New York Times* and *USA Today* featured it in 34 and 29 front-page stories, respectively. The emergence of Hurricane Andrew—and resulting media, presidential, and public attention to the hurricane story—clearly shows, consistent with the theory, that public opinion surrounding the initial U.S. intervention in Somalia was at most partially endogenous to the president's apparent *ex ante* preference for a relatively low public profile.

These data are also consistent with the *Attentiveness Hypothesis*, which predicts that presidents will prefer to employ military force in low-stakes crises if the public is relatively *inattentive*, thereby minimizing the potential political downside. Indeed, Kanter's recollection that the public applied far greater pressure on the Bush administration to intervene in Bosnia than in Somalia suggests that even strong public *support* may be insufficient to induce a president to undertake a risky use of force when U.S. national security interests are not at stake.

The decision to intervene more aggressively in late November is also consistent with the *Attentiveness Hypothesis*. President Bush decided to launch Operation Restore Hope in an environment characterized by only moderate media, public, and congressional scrutiny, and the absence of traditional electoral pressures. Indeed, right up until the moment the Bush administration informed the press of its intent to launch Operation Restore Hope, neither the media nor the public was particularly attentive to Somalia. If anything, the media and Congress—and, hence, presumably the public—were paying closer attention to Somalia in August, when President Bush elected *not* to introduce ground troops. For instance, during the first three weeks of August, the three major networks presented almost 32 minutes of Somalia coverage. This compares to 19.5 minutes during the first 3.5 weeks of November. This pattern is more easily understood when one considers that, consistent with the *Presidential Rhetoric Hypothesis*, the president himself made not a single public reference to Somalia during the entire month of November! This clearly shows that the president's preference for maintaining a low public profile for his Somalia policy cannot be attributed entirely to electoral pressures, which were obviously absent after November 4.

Postelection Politics and the Shadow of History

Given his apparent concern with how the operation would be perceived by the American public, my theoretical argument predicts that the president would seek to

maintain a relatively permissive domestic political environment within which to fashion a policy, and frame it for the American public, free from intense public scrutiny. Along these lines, Scowcroft indicated that, while such opportunities are relatively unusual, “ideally, the best way to [conduct a military intervention] . . . would be to . . . initiate a response to a problem before most people knew it was a problem, because then you can mold the public response and build . . . acceptance, rather than start out with a shock.”

Moreover, the substantial conditions set by the president on his offer of U.S. troops to the UN suggest that domestic political considerations—including the fear of a public backlash—continued to influence his decision calculus even after the election. For instance, President Bush insisted on an explicit endorsement by the UNSC, involvement by other UN member states, including Muslim and African nations, and an early hand-over of responsibility for the mission to a multinational peacekeeping force. Each of these demands was consistent with a mission explicitly designed, at least in part, to minimize the political downside risk to the president. By insisting on UN endorsement and a multilateral operation, the United States sought to diffuse responsibility, thereby maximizing domestic and international political support, while at the same time limiting the potential political fallout should the mission fail.

Though his decisions in late November were almost certainly not influenced by concern for his personal future in politics, it does seem likely that in deciding to intervene in Somalia, President Bush had at least one eye directed toward his place in history. Some of his own aides acknowledged that it was no coincidence that the president undertook this last show of American military power for such a noble cause. One senior official indicated that the president wished to be seen finishing his term in office as a decisive leader, rather than a “vanquished politician” (Wines 1994). A senior Defense Department official added “I had the feeling that no matter what was said, he [President Bush] would not want to leave office with 50,000 people starving that he could have saved” (Oberdorfer 1992, A1). A poor outcome that could be blamed on the president might have damaged his historical reputation. Hence, President Bush clearly had reason to consider the domestic political consequences of his policies, including the public’s response to those policies.

Nevertheless, if Bush’s motivation was *primarily* to guarantee his place in history, as suggested by the *Historical Reputation Hypothesis*, he could just as easily—and perhaps more effectively—have done so in July or August, rather than waiting until December, by which time his political fate had been sealed.¹⁸ In fact, for the reasons noted above, an early intervention would likely have found a sympathetic domestic audience, and had things gone well, might even have *improved*, rather than harmed, his chances for reelection. Yet the president resisted these calls to action. Moreover, Bush’s historical reputation as an outstanding foreign policy president had already been assured with his triumph in the Persian Gulf War and his management of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hence, while it is likely that President Bush was mindful of his historical reputation, this motivation appears insufficient to account for his major decisions with respect to Somalia.

18. Ironically, President Bush’s job approval rating spiked to over 50% in a December 12 CBS/*New York Times* poll, following the announcement of Operation Restore Hope.

“The Right Thing to Do”

For some of the same reasons, it is difficult to explain Operation Restore Hope solely through reference to President Bush’s moral convictions (the *Moral Imperative Hypothesis*). As noted, the trajectory of the famine during the fall of 1992 is a subject of debate. Nonetheless, even if we grant that the situation was deteriorating in the fall (which is at most uncertain), it remains clear that circumstances were sufficiently dire for at least a year prior to Operation Restore Hope to justify the intervention on moral grounds. If intervening in Somalia was “the right thing to do” in November 1992, then it was certainly also the right thing to do the previous January, or even in the latter part of 1991. Indeed, Senators Kassebaum and Simon had publicly called for a forceful U.S. response to the famine in Somalia in January 1992. Reflecting this sense of urgency, State Department officials were called to Capital Hill on six occasions between January and June to testify on Somalia (Woods 1997).

And, as noted, there were several plausible earlier opportunities in 1992, prior to late-November, when circumstances appeared favorable for a military intervention. One opportunity arose in May, when Boutros-Ghali pleaded with the president to take action. Stevenson (1995) reports that the Pentagon and Joint Chiefs of Staff may have initiated planning for a large-scale U.S. military intervention in Somalia as early as June. Woods (1997) added that, also in June, contingency plans, including the possible use of ground forces, were discussed at the interagency level. And one senior Bush administration official recalled that a planning team from the Special Operations Command began exploring the possibility of employing ground forces as early as July. This timing suggests President Bush may have recognized the gravity of the situation in Somalia following his May discussions with Boutros-Ghali.

Another potential opportunity arose in July, when Boutros-Ghali urged the UNSC to immediately undertake a substantial relief effort, including the dispatch of an armed security force. In fact, also in July, and following Eagleburger’s admonition, the Deputies Committee considered recommending that the United States sponsor a UNSC resolution endorsing “all necessary measures” allowing the use of force against those who might block relief operations (Hirsch and Oakley 1995, 38-39).

A third plausible opportunity for intervention arose in September, following UN authorization on August 28 to expand the Somalia security force from 500 to 3,500 and following a mid-September deployment of 2,100 U.S. Marines off the coast of Somalia. When, in late-September, U.S. aircraft finally delivered the initial 500-man Pakistani battalion to Mogadishu, General Aideed’s forces pinned the battalion down at the airport, while refusing to consent to expansion of the Pakistani contingent. At roughly the same time, several planes were struck by ground fire, leading to the suspension of airlift flights. In fact, according to an unclassified chronology of Marine Corp activities pertaining to Somalia, the Marines began planning for a ground force intervention in September.¹⁹

19. The chronology indicates that in September 1992, the Marines conducted “STAFFEX/MAPEX” of Somalia (i.e., a military exercise) in order to prepare for a humanitarian intervention in Somalia. (Task Force Mogadishu Chronology Paper 3B21, PC#109. Document available at the Marine Corps Historical Center, Archives Section, Washington Navy Yard.)

While the option of employing ground forces was not popular in the Pentagon, neither was it considered implausible. General Hoar noted that planning for Operation Restore Hope was facilitated by a major military exercise conducted the *prior year* involving a hypothetical famine in Ethiopia. And Hoar recalled discussions with General Colin Powell during the summer and fall of 1992 regarding the possible expansion of the U.S. commitment to Somalia. General Hoar believed that the August airlift was merely a first step in a longer-term U.S. involvement in Somalia, which was likely to expand. And he and General Powell discussed at length the possible use of U.S. ground forces, in a non-combat role, as early as October.²⁰

It is also worth bearing in mind that only about two weeks passed from the time the president instructed his planning staff to prepare policy options on Somalia to the time he dispatched his secretary of state to the UN with an offer to lead Operation Restore Hope. This strongly suggests that, given long-term Pentagon preparations for humanitarian relief operations, Operation Restore Hope could have been launched at almost any point during the summer and fall of 1992 with very little lead-time. Hence, while President Bush's moral convictions almost certainly influenced his ultimate decision to intervene, the evidence clearly indicates that factors beyond President Bush's personal convictions influenced his policy decisions.

Did the Bureaucracy Drive the Policy?

It remains possible, however, that the true driving force in shaping the Bush administration's Somalia policy was the bureaucracy. And at first glance, the *Bureaucratic Dominance Hypothesis* appears plausible. After all, it was apparently not until Admiral David Jeremiah, Vice Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Deputies Committee that U.S. ground troops could do the job that the group decided to present the option to the president (Oberdorfer 1992: A1). Moreover, it was the proactive stance of agencies such as AFDA and AID that, at least in part, placed Somalia on the administration's radar screen in the first place. Yet, as previously noted, General Scowcroft recalled that it was the president himself who demanded more information on Somalia, after reading the "Day in Hell" memo as well as a poignant editorial in the *New York Times*. Soon thereafter, also in July and at the president's request, Secretary Eagleburger instructed the Deputies Committee to be more "forward leaning" on Somalia. According to Woods (1997), it was only then that the Deputies Committee prepared specific plans for Operation Provide Relief.

Similarly, in November, it was only upon President Bush's instruction that the Deputies Committee prepared specific policy options for Operation Restore Hope. Indeed, observers (e.g., Oberdorfer 1992) have noted, and Scowcroft recalled, that *political* rather than *policy* considerations were primarily responsible for the administration's unwillingness to use ground troops before the election. And the president ultimately

20. Hoar recalled that Powell did not overtly indicate his support for introducing U.S. forces into Somalia in a noncombat role. Yet, Hoar added that Powell did not object, and seemed to support this view. His impression was that Powell had most likely advocated this position in top-level discussions, but, at that time, had not prevailed.

opted for an operation larger in scale than any of the options prepared by the Deputies Committee. Each of these factors suggests that, while the foreign policy bureaucracy clearly played a significant role in developing and executing U.S. policy toward Somalia, at every turn it was the most senior administration officials, not the bureaucracy, that demanded information and policy options and made the key decisions. The actions of the Deputies Committee were primarily reactive, taken in anticipation of or in direct response to the administration's presumed or stated preferences.

Indeed, far from demonstrating bureaucratic dominance, the manner in which the two major Bush administration decisions regarding Somalia were reached, the numerous steps taken to minimize the potential political risks to the president, the relatively low profile of U.S. actions, particularly the August airlift, and the relative vacuum of public and media scrutiny leading up to the major decisions all attest to the president's dominance of the decision-making process with respect to Somalia, as well as to the importance he and his staff ascribed to anticipated public reactions. Most importantly for our purposes, these factors strongly suggest that public scrutiny—favorable or otherwise—was considered a potential risk factor to be minimized, rather than a desirable goal to be pursued. Along these lines, President Bush's decision making in Somalia and elsewhere led his Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs (1991-1993), Arnold Kanter, to observe that the desire to “minimize the need for political support and the risk of negative political consequences” was one of the principal, albeit informal, foreign policy guidelines followed during the Bush administration (Kanter 1996, 172). Kanter adds:

Paradoxically, the desire to avoid an intervention issue becoming fodder for political pundits is probably strengthened as a consequence of the growing importance of domestic political considerations in foreign policy. Put simply, the greater the chances of controversy, the lower the probability that the United States will intervene, and the higher the premium on keeping the intervention quick, clean and cheap.

Ultimately, the administration's domestic political strategy proved successful. Operation Restore Hope was extremely popular with the public. Several polls conducted in the immediate aftermath of President Bush's December 4 address to the nation found 66 to 75 percent of the public approving the operation.²¹ In fact, the substantial popularity of the intervention, combined with the political “cover” afforded by highly publicized editorial, UN, and (bipartisan) congressional support for direct and substantial U.S. intervention in Somalia, represent perhaps the best available evidence that, assuming a swift and decisive success, the president might well have *benefited* politically had he initiated Operation Restore Hope prior to the election. Yet, absent any national security rationale, even a relatively high likelihood of a rapidly achieved success, and whatever political benefits would have ensued, proved insufficient to prompt the president to risk a large-scale intervention in a situation where even a relatively minor setback might be perceived as a major policy failure.

21. Source: Gallup polls, December 4, 1992, December 6, 1992, and December 8, 1992.

The Clinton Administration in Somalia

Based on the rapidly improving situation in Somalia, the Clinton administration believed Operation Restore Hope could be completed in three to four months. According to General Hoar, in various briefings on the mission's progress, the UNITAF (United Nations Task Force) forces reported continuing success at restoring the flow of relief supplies, that the rate of starvation was declining substantially, and that the warring Somali factions appeared to be heading toward a peaceful political settlement.²² Much of the fighting that had precipitated the famine had been successfully halted. Indeed, General Hoar recalled that the pacification of Mogadishu was so successful that General Johnston felt comfortable taking daily five-mile runs, unescorted, through the city. On March 26, under U.S. pressure, the UNSC authorized the initiation of UNOSOM II, a follow-on force to the UNITAF in which U.S. forces were to play a less central role.

General Hoar described circumstances in Somalia during the first few months of 1993, when things were going smoothly, as, from the media's perspective, "a non-event." A review of the media's reaction to the apparent early successes of Operation Restore Hope lends credence to Hoar's assertion. Strobel (1997, 200) reports that following the initial flurry of 164 network news stories addressing Somalia in December 1992 and 46 stories in January 1993, news coverage dropped dramatically to levels comparable to the fall of 1992: 21 stories in February, 11 in March, 4 in April, and 12 in May. The picture is similar for the print media. In Figure 3A, I list the number of front-page stories per month in the *New York Times* and *USA Today*. These figures indicate that neither newspaper devoted significant attention to Somalia during the first five months of 1993. During this period, the *New York Times* presented a total of 13 front-page stories, while *USA Today* presented 11 front-page stories, over half of which appeared prior to President Clinton assuming office.

Like his predecessor, President Clinton did little to encourage the media to focus on Somalia. Following some initial credit claiming, Clinton's public discussion of Somalia declined substantially, from 12 total mentions of Somalia (verbally or in writing) in February, to seven mentions in March, to three in April. While the president's public discussion of Somalia increased to eight mentions in May, in conjunction with the official handover to UNOSOM II, it was not until June, after the situation began to deteriorate, that media and presidential attention were again significantly drawn to Somalia. This latter pattern is consistent with the *Presidential Rhetoric Hypothesis*. Given the relatively modest strategic stakes involved, it was not in the administration's interest to focus the nation's attention on Somalia, beyond claiming credit for the mission's apparent successes, preferably after its successful completion.

Public opinion polls conducted in early 1993 suggest this was a successful political strategy, at least in the short run. The public gave Clinton high marks for his handling of the Somalia intervention, while at the same time public attention to Somalia declined. A survey conducted by Market Strategies and Greenberg Research in late March

22. Briefing slides provided to the author by Oakley.

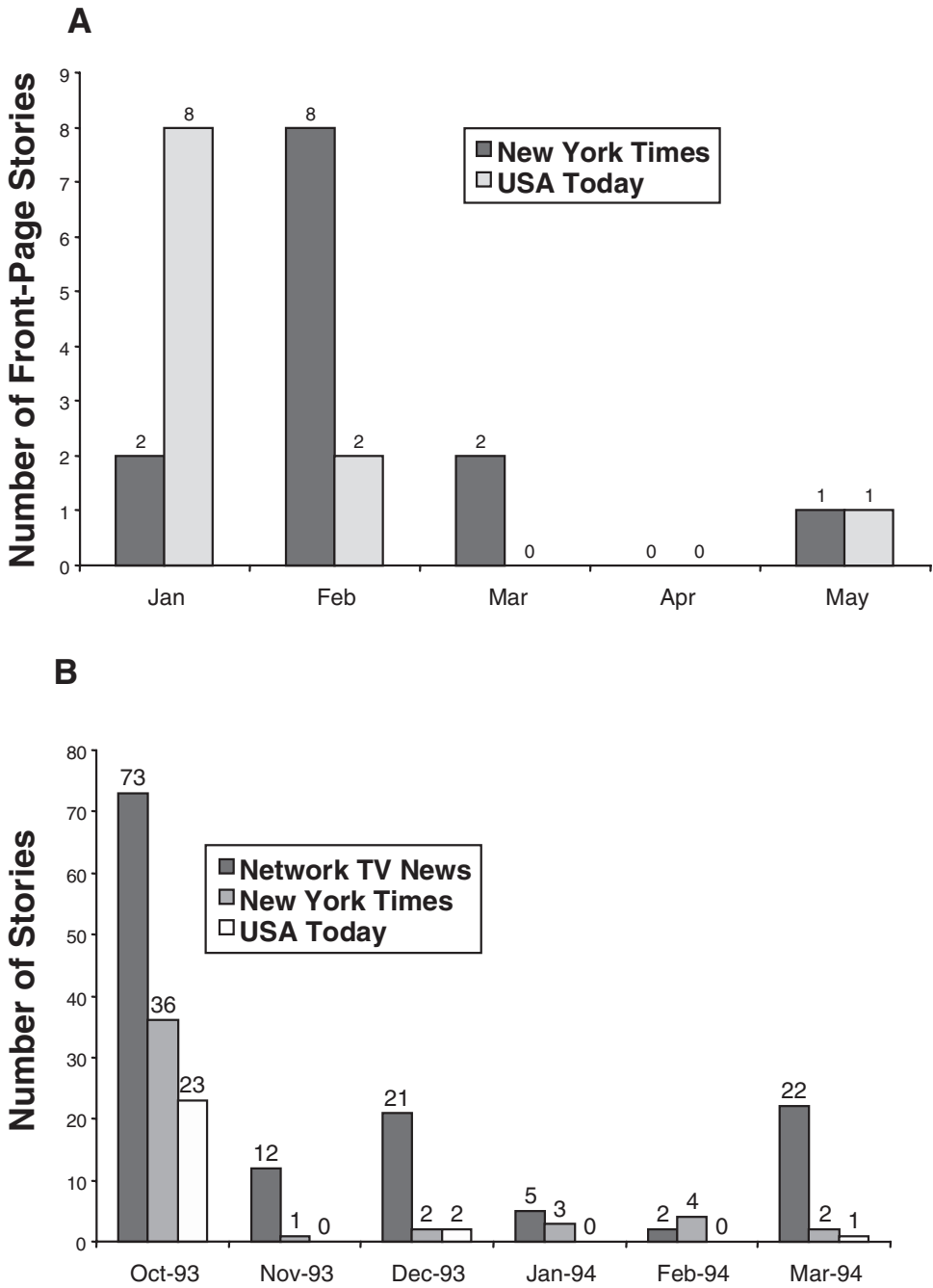


FIGURE 3A. Number of Front-Page Stories on Somalia, January-May 1993.
FIGURE 3B. Number of Network News Stories and Front-Page Newspaper Stories on Somalia, October 1993-March 1994.
Sources: Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe and Vanderbilt Television News Archives.

found 77 percent of respondents indicating that President Clinton had done a “good job” in handling the situation in Somalia.

As shown in Table 1, the percentage of the public who claimed to be paying “very close” attention to Somalia declined steadily from a high of 52 percent in early January to a low of 7 percent in mid-June, before recovering somewhat in the fall of 1993—following a series of highly publicized military and political setbacks that precipitated renewed media and presidential attention to Somalia.

Consistent with the *Attentiveness Hypothesis*, these figures suggest that the handover of authority to UNOSOM II took place in the context of a highly permissive U.S. domestic political environment. Neither the media nor the public was focusing on Somalia in early 1993, and President Clinton’s modest public discussion of Somalia suggests he was not particularly interested in refocusing public attention on the issue. Indeed, Colonel Gary Anderson, USMC, who served in Somalia as military advisor to the U.S. liaison to UNOSOM in the summer of 1993 and subsequently directed Marine Corp training for humanitarian operations, recalled that by the spring of 1993 “The vast majority of the people in the United States had no idea we were there at all.”

While the direct U.S. military role in Somalia was reduced, UNOSOM II carried with it an expanded mandate—including promoting political reconciliation among the major Somali clans—authorized by the UNSC on March 26, with full U.S. support. This new mandate contributed to the erosion of cooperation between UN forces and the Somali warlords. Beginning on June 5, in an ambush that left 24 Pakistani soldiers dead and 59 wounded, UNOSOM II forces engaged in a series of fierce battles with forces loyal to General Aideed. The UNSC responded by authorizing the secretary general to take “all necessary measures” against those responsible for the attack (Woods 1997, 162). The United States immediately joined the battle. Beginning on June 12, UN forces, with U.S. political and military support, initiated a counteroffensive against Aideed, launching a series of attacks against the warlord’s strongholds. This, again, is consistent with the *Attentiveness Hypothesis*, which predicts that presidents will prefer to escalate low-stakes crises when the public is relatively inattentive, which appears to have been the case in June 1993.

Initially, at least, this military escalation enjoyed, by Gallup and CBS/*New York Times*, respectively, widespread support in the United States. Two polls, conducted on June 18-21 and 21-24, found 65 percent and 66 percent of respondents, respectively, approving of military operations against General Aideed, while, in both polls, only 23 percent disapproved. Similarly, as shown in Table 2, more than twice as many respondents in the aforementioned June 21-24 CBS/*New York Times* poll approved of President Clinton’s handling of the situation in Somalia (51 percent) as disapproved (21 percent).

According to another CBS/*New York Times* poll (see Table 1), only 7 percent of the public was paying “very close” attention to Somalia in late June, and of those who had an opinion, the vast majority supported an aggressive response to Aideed’s provocations. The 27 percent “don’t know” response rate in the June 21-24 survey represents further evidence that the public was not particularly engaged with Somalia in June 1993. President Clinton could hardly have asked for a more permissive domestic political environment in which to formulate and execute U.S. policy.

TABLE 2
Public Support for President Clinton's Handling of Somalia Intervention, June-November 1993

<i>Survey Date</i>	<i>Approve</i>	<i>Disapprove</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>Survey Organization</i>
June 21-24	51%	21%	27%	CBS/NYT
September 9-15	41%	39%	19%	Times Mirror
October 5	33%	53%	14%	ABC
October 6	30%	49%	21%	NBC
October 6	21%	58%	21%	CBS
October 6-7	26%	56%	18%	CBS
October 7	36%	52%	12%	ABC
October 7	31%	58%	11%	Time/CNN
October 7-10	36%	58%	6%	Washington Post
October 8-10	32%	59%	9%	Gallup
October 12	34%	62%	4%	ABC
October 18-19	29%	58%	13%	CBS
October 21	29%	63%	8%	Time/CNN
October 21-24	33%	54%	13%	Times Mirror
November 11-14	35%	57%	8%	ABC/Washington Post

Sources: Klarevas (2000, 532-33) and Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

As the summer of 1993 wore on, however, it became increasingly clear that efforts to capture or neutralize Aideed were failing. The media's attention was refocused on Somalia in response to the military escalation and rising casualties. Strobel (1997, 200) reports that the broadcast networks mentioned Somalia in 34 stories in their evening newscasts in August, well over the total of 27 such stories in March, April, and May, combined. Print media coverage in August also increased, with the *New York Times* presenting six front-page stories mentioning Somalia and *USA Today* presenting five front-page stories. Public attention to Somalia was also on the rise. One early September survey, conducted by Princeton Research Associates, found 62 percent of respondents claiming to have followed news about Somalia "very" or "fairly" closely, up from 46 percent in late June (see Table 1).

This substantial rise in public attention took place despite a notably low level of public presidential rhetoric devoted to Somalia. During the entire month of August, President Clinton mentioned Somalia a total of only eight times, across four public appearances. And in the first half of September, President Clinton mentioned Somalia *not once*. This clearly shows that the president's capacity to set the public agenda through the strategic use, or avoidance, of the bully pulpit is not without limits. President Clinton's virtual silence on Somalia during the summer of 1993 reveals a clear preference for limiting the public profile of his Somalia policy, this despite the presumed value associated with generating domestic audience costs to signal his resolve to General Aideed. Yet, as the conflict in Somalia escalated, media coverage followed suit and the public's attention was again drawn to Somalia, despite the president's virtual silence on the subject. Hence, as was the case during the Bush administration, it would clearly be misleading to treat public opinion regarding Somalia as entirely endogenous to the pres-

ident's preferences. Moreover, in this instance, the president appears to have concluded that whatever bargaining advantage he might have gained by generating domestic audience costs was not worth the political risk. Yet, audience costs—in the form of media and public scrutiny and the resulting rise in domestic political risks to the president—emerged anyway.

Given an attentive public and modest strategic stakes, the *Attentiveness Hypothesis* predicts that presidents will, absent a sufficiently strong expectation of success to outweigh the potential downside risk, be hesitant to escalate a crisis. In fact, faced with growing frustration among senior administration officials and rising media, congressional, and public scrutiny, the administration began rethinking its policy toward Somalia in August—at a time when a plurality, if not a majority, of Americans continued to support the operation—culminating on August 27 with a major policy address by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. Aspin called for a fundamental overhaul of the UN's approach to Somalia, with a renewed emphasis on political reconciliation and nation-building efforts.

Public support for the U.S. mission in Somalia began to wane during the summer. Yet, as shown in Table 2, as late as mid-September, according to a survey conducted by the Times Mirror Center, more Americans approved of Clinton's handling of Somalia (41 percent) than disapproved (39 percent). Moreover, while congressional critics were growing increasingly vocal through the summer, Congress took no official action on Somalia. Congressional inaction throughout the summer was presumably attributable, at least in part, to the partisan makeup of the Congress. Throughout 1993 and 1994, President Clinton enjoyed a relatively unusual period of unified Democratic control of both the House and Senate. And recent research (Howell and Pevehouse n.d.) suggests that as the strength of the president's party in Congress rises, Congress becomes less likely to constrain the president concerning large-scale uses of military force.

Whatever the reason, the first formal congressional action was a nonbinding resolution, passed in the Senate and House on September 9 and 28, respectively, calling on the president to report to Congress on the mission and to seek congressional authorization for continued troop deployments in Somalia following November 15. This was a compromise, passed with the administration's cooperation and support (Palmer 1993, 2399). Hence, it appears that while public and congressional criticism was on the rise, the Clinton administration's decision to reemphasize the political track was undertaken largely absent domestic political pressure. Indeed, Ted Dagne, an aid to Rep. Harry Johnston, Chairman of the Africa Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, asserted that absent the tragic events of October 3 (see below), the Clinton administration most likely would have been able to win a congressional resolution in support of continued U.S. engagement in Somalia.

On September 20, two weeks prior to an ill-fated U.S. Army Ranger attempt to capture General Aideed and a week prior to passage in the House of the aforementioned congressional resolution, Secretary of State Warren Christopher informed the UN of Washington's intention to withdraw its troops in the near future. My theory suggests that the *anticipation* of potential future public displeasure in the event of a continued military stalemate and increasing U.S. casualties most likely contributed to the Clinton administration's decision to reassess its policy.

Unfortunately for the Clinton administration, its worst fears came to fruition before the planned policy changes could be implemented. On October 3, a special unit of U.S. Army Rangers conducted a raid on a meeting of top Somali National Alliance (SNA) officers in Mogadishu, in an attempt to capture Aideed. In the course of the ensuing firefight, a Black Hawk helicopter was shot down and 100 Rangers were pinned down by SNA gunfire as they sought to protect the helicopter crew. At the end of the battle, 18 Rangers had been killed and 75 wounded. One American, pilot Michael Durant, was captured. Events of the next 72 hours effectively ended the U.S. mission to Somalia.

Media coverage of the firefight was intense and harshly critical. Videotape of the interrogation of an apparently mistreated Durant, combined with video images of a dead U.S. soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu as crowds of Somalis cheered, produced intense shock and outrage among the public and in Congress. A series of surveys conducted over the next few days showed public support for Clinton's handling of Somalia plummeting to as low as 21 percent in one CBS survey (see Table 2). According to a CNN/*USA Today* poll, by October 5, nearly 6 in 10 Americans had seen footage of the dead U.S. soldier being dragged through Mogadishu's streets. At the same time, public attentiveness to Somalia rebounded sharply, with 75 percent of respondents in an October 21 survey claiming to have followed the situation in Somalia "very" or "fairly" closely, up from 62 percent a month earlier.

The administration resisted calls for an immediate withdrawal, out of fear that a "cut and run" strategy would undermine U.S. credibility in future military operations. Nevertheless, following intense negotiations with congressional leaders, President Clinton effectively ended the U.S. proactive policy in Somalia in a nationwide television address on October 7 in which he called for withdrawal of all U.S. forces no later than March 31, 1994.

In an October 5 meeting, senior administration officials had considered, and rejected, a policy of massive retaliation in response to the incidents of October 3-4.²³ Instead, the administration reversed its policy of seeking to remove General Aideed from the Somali political landscape and sought to bring Aideed back into the political process. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff thus acknowledged on October 19 that any political reconciliation talks "must involve the leaders of the Aideed faction and probably Aideed himself" (Menkhaus with Ortmayer 1995, 23).

President Clinton's decision to gradually deescalate and then conclude the Somalia operation, rather than risk the potential fallout of escalating the military confrontation with General Aideed, is also consistent with the *Attentiveness Hypothesis*. The theory predicts that intense public scrutiny will deter presidents from escalating low-stakes crises, unless they are highly confident of success. Along these lines, Jeremy Rosner, at the time the National Security Council staff's chief liaison to Capitol Hill, indicated "The lack of perceived security stakes ended up shaping things more than anything else" (Strobel

23. General Hoar recalled that most key administration officials attended this 20-hour strategy meeting. Tellingly, included among the group were President Clinton's political and media advisors, including David Gergen and George Stephanopolis.

1997, 178).²⁴ Similarly, President Clinton's Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers noted "The decision was made [that] it wasn't worth a lot of American lives to go after this guy" (Strobel 1997, 178). General Hoar, who participated in the October 5 strategy meeting, recalled the administration's view at that time as being that Somalia "was a foray into international power politics that went bad big time, and the minute that they got burned the trick was to get it out, put out the fire, finish it and get out of town as quickly as possible." Hoar added that "[The] overriding consideration of all of that is domestic politics; how bad do you look?" Hence, it appears that, recognizing the absence of any significant U.S. national security interests, the administration was unwilling to risk the potentially huge political fallout that would have almost certainly ensued if the U.S. public were confronted with additional media images of American casualties—a likely scenario if the United States further escalated the conflict.

As noted above, the administration had decided to alter its Somalia policy, and reduce the U.S. role, months earlier, but the incidents of October 3 forced it to speed up the timeline for withdrawal. This suggests, consistent with my earlier theoretical assertion, that sufficiently intense contemporaneous public disapproval (see Table 2) may, at least in part, trump attentiveness as an influential factor. This is because, as noted, *intense* public approval or disapproval may override the heuristic value of attentiveness as an indicator of the likely longer-term political risks associated with a given policy.

Following the president's nationally televised address, the administration appears to have again sought to minimize public attention by reducing the president's public discussion of Somalia. General Hoar recalled that neither he nor Anthony Lake, the president's National Security Advisor, was called to testify at a series of congressional hearings on the administration's Somalia policy, which were conducted in response to the October 3 incident. The absence of such key policy makers, presumably the result of advance negotiations between the administration and the Congress, effectively insured that the hearings would not produce a high-profile embarrassment for the president.

In November, the president's public rhetoric regarding Somalia fell back to its pre-summer level (14 mentions of Somalia in 6 public statements), and the president mentioned Somalia in only one public statement in December. This is, again, consistent with the *Presidential Rhetoric Hypothesis*. Whether due to administration efforts or not, after October, the media once again appeared to lose interest in Somalia. Figure 3B, above, lists the monthly total number of network television news stories mentioning Somalia, as well as the number of front-page stories in the *New York Times* and *USA Today*, from October 1993 through March 1994. These data indicate that both the television and print news media paid substantially reduced attention to Somalia following October 1993, when the broadcast television networks had presented 73 stories mentioning Somalia, while the *New York Times* and *USA Today* presented 36 and 23 front-page stories, respectively, mentioning Somalia.

Finally, while I have not presented any specific hypotheses concerning the adversary's behavior, my theory does hold implications for the reactions of strategic adver-

24. In an interview with the author, Rosner commented that President Clinton was profoundly influenced by his perception of what average Americans were likely thinking about Somalia after the events of October 3.

saries. For instance, I conjectured that if an adversary in a dispute with the United States observes a president *avoiding* the public spotlight, she may infer that the issue is not particularly important for U.S. national security (and perhaps also that the president is not too confident of success), and might therefore attempt to raise the political stakes for the president by seeking to attract the attention of the American public. And this appears to be precisely the strategy pursued by Aideed and his supporters. Throughout the summer of 1993, while President Clinton sought to lower the public profile of the hunt for General Aideed—mentioning Aideed by name only about 5.5 times per month (across an average of about 2.5 public statements per month) between June and October²⁵—the Somali warlord and his senior advisors repeatedly sought out the international media, conducting press conferences and granting interviews. Indeed, one analyst recalled that Aideed and his supporters refused to speak publicly unless CNN was present. This further suggests that public scrutiny is at most partially endogenous to presidential preferences. It also suggests, consistent with the theory, that America's adversaries do, in at least some circumstances, view public scrutiny as a constraint on U.S. presidents.

Fluctuations in public attentiveness most likely do not by themselves explain the Clinton administration's Somalia policies. Yet, the evidence presented in this review of the Clinton administration's decision-making process does suggest that President Clinton's major policy decisions were influenced, at least to some extent, by the relative absence of public attention to the Somalia intervention in the first half of 1993 and relatively intense public scrutiny in the late summer and fall of 1993. Moreover, the pattern of President Clinton's public statements on Somalia also appears consistent with the *Presidential Rhetoric Hypothesis*, which predicts that presidents will prefer to minimize public attention prior to deciding to take aggressive military action abroad, at least when the strategic stakes involved are relatively modest and they are not highly confident of a successful outcome.

Conclusion

This study explicated a theory concerning the constraining effect of public scrutiny on foreign crisis decision making, as well as presidential preferences with respect to domestic audience costs (i.e., public scrutiny) and then undertook a plausibility probe of the theory. I found evidence that concerns over public attentiveness figured prominently in all major Bush and Clinton administration decisions on Somalia.

In the former case, the numerous steps taken to minimize the potential political risks to President Bush—including the near absence of public discussion of Somalia by the president—certainly represent highly suggestive, if not definitive, evidence of this concern. Indeed, the media was paying closer attention to Somalia in August, when President Bush elected *not* to introduce ground troops, than in November, when the presi-

25. By way of comparison, in December 1989 and January 1990, when the United States invaded Panama, President Bush mentioned General Noriega by name 66 times in 18 public statements.

dent opted to send ground troops. This suggests that, if anything, media—and, by extension, public—attention (even given a pro-intervention slant) *inhibited*, rather than incited, the Bush administration. Moreover, the relative silence of the Congress in November 1992, relative to July, also suggests that pro-intervention domestic sentiment was viewed less as an incentive to act than as raising the potential political risks of an aggressive policy. Scowcroft summarized the contrasting Bush administration attitudes toward the domestic political implications of Desert Storm, Bosnia, and Somalia, as follows:

It was quite clear to us that our national interests were intimately involved in Desert Storm, and we would have done it regardless of public opinion . . . even if he [the President] had gotten a negative vote in Congress. Somalia was almost the other extreme. We did some testing, or looking at polls and so on, and found that public opinion and opinion on the Hill was okay about doing something in Somalia. But for us . . . it was purely humanitarian. Unlike Bosnia, we thought we could do it without the risks that we would run in Bosnia . . . it was very limited [and] doable.

The story is similar for the Clinton administration. Consistent with the *Attentiveness Hypothesis*, the June decision to escalate was taken amid a relative absence of public and media scrutiny, while the decisions first to alter and then effectively end the U.S. intervention followed heightened public, media, and congressional scrutiny. And *both* major decisions were taken *before* a majority of the public turned against President Clinton's Somalia policies. This suggests that in an environment characterized by rising public scrutiny, the president was more concerned with the longer-term political ramifications of his policy than with contemporaneous levels of public support or opposition. Moreover, consistent with the *Presidential Rhetoric Hypothesis*, prior to his decision to escalate, President Clinton uttered hardly a word about Somalia. Finally, the evidence from both administrations clearly shows that while presidents *can* exercise a good deal of influence over the public agenda through strategic employment of the bully pulpit, they *cannot* unilaterally control it. In other words, public opinion is at most *partially* endogenous to presidential preferences.

Additional test cases are needed to determine whether the theory can shed light on presidential decision making even when the strategic stakes involved in a crisis are more substantial. The present study nonetheless strongly suggests that public attentiveness can constrain presidential decision making in at least some foreign crises involving limited U.S. strategic interests. This holds potentially important implications for America's national security. Recent U.S. interventions in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo suggest that Operation Restore Hope may be indicative of a class of international crises that are likely to continue to arise in the future. This makes further exploration of presidents' domestic political calculations an important component of future studies of American foreign policy decision making.

More generally, my theory and evidence suggest that treating public opinion as entirely endogenous to either political institutions or the whims of leaders, or taking a one-sided view of their potential effects on crisis outcomes or on leaders' political fortunes, can lead to misspecified models and misleading predictions. Future models of

international crisis decision making—especially those *not* focused on crises involving the highest strategic stakes—would therefore benefit from a more nuanced characterization of the domestic political constraints confronting democratic leaders.

Appendix: List of Interview Subjects

- Colonel Gary Anderson, USMC, Military Advisor to U.S. Liaison to UNOSOM II, 1993.
 Ambassador Herman J. Cohen (ret.), Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, 1989-1993.
 Mr. Ted Dagne, Legislative Aid to Hon. Harry Johnston, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, 1991-1994.
 Hon. Robert Gallucci, Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs, 1992-1993.
 General Joseph Hoar, USMC (ret.), Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command, 1989-1994.
 Hon. Arnold Kanter, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, 1991-1993.
 Ambassador Robert B. Oakley (ret.), U.S. Special Representative in Somalia, 1992-1993.
 Mr. Jeremy Rosner, Counselor and Senior Director for Legislative Affairs, National Security Council, 1993-1994.
 General Brent Scowcroft, USAF (ret.), National Security Advisor, 1989-1993.
 Hon. James L. Woods, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, 1986-1994 and Chair, Office of the Secretary of Defense's Somalia Task Force, 1992-1993.
 Note: Several additional background interviews were conducted with former officials in the Departments of State and Defense in June 1999 and September 2000.

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