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"A Closer Look at Case Studies on Democracy, Selection Effects, and Victory"
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Are democracies more likely to win the wars they fight? This question has been of interest to historians and philosophers since Thucydides. During the Enlightenment, the question was highly relevant to the great issues of the day, as thinkers such as Thomas Paine wondered how emerging republics like the United States and France would fare in war against monarchies. It reemerged in the twentieth century, when some worried whether the Western democracies had the stuff to stand up to Nazi Germany and its fascist allies. After World War II, Westerners fretted that an American Athens would ultimately fall short against a Soviet Sparta.

Allan Stam and I explored whether democracies win their wars in our 2002 book, *Democracies at War*. In it, we examined the historical record back to 1815 and found strong empirical evidence that not only are democracies not disadvantaged in war, but actually they are more likely to win their wars than are other kinds of states. We explored a variety of different explanations for why democracies win their wars, and ultimately found strong support for what we termed the selection effects explanation. This theory posits that democracies are especially likely to win the wars they start, for two reasons. First, elected leaders are likely to initiate wars only when they are very confident they will win. If an elected leader starts a war the country goes on to lose, then that leader faces a high risk of losing office. The prospect of losing office discourages an elected leader from initiating wars other than those she is highly confident she can win, meaning that when democracies initiate wars they are very likely to win. Conversely, if an autocrat starts an ultimately unsuccessful war, he can use the tools of repression to stay in power even in the face of popular discontent. Knowing that losing an initiated war does not present great risks of getting thrown from power, autocrats are more willing to initiate wars when they have a lower chance of winning, meaning that autocrats win their initiated wars less often than elected leaders win their initiated wars.

Second, elected leaders enjoy higher quality information about whether the country will win a war. The marketplace of ideas provided by open societies enjoying freedom of the press and speech produces better public information about policy issues. Also, the lesser politicization of civil-military relations in democracies means that military leaders provide better advice to the civilian leadership, both because military leaders in democracies are more likely to have been promoted on the basis of merit rather than political reliability, and because democratic military leaders are more confident that they can speak freely without risking personal punishment for having told the civilian leader something he or she does not want to hear. Higher quality information means that democratic leaders can assess more accurately than autocratic leaders whether a possible war will go well or poorly, meaning that democracies will be better than autocracies at identifying winnable wars, and hence will be more likely to win the wars they initiate.

To our delight, our book has attracted substantial scholarly attention. The book inspired debate over issues of theory, methodology, and quantitative empirical analysis. It has also attracted attention over the application of the theory to individual case studies. This paper addresses some of these case study critiques. It avoids methodological debates about whether failure to predict individual cases can falsify a probabilistic theory. Instead, it considers the specifics of the cases, assessing the critics' claims that these cases provide evidence against selection effects theory. Specifically, it assesses four of the cases Michael C. Desch examines in his 2008 book, *Power and Military Effectiveness*: the 1920 Russo-Polish War, the 1956 Sinai War, the 1967 Six Day War, and the 1982 Lebanon War. It also evaluates the arguments regarding the Vietnam War made by

Alexander Downes in his 2009 *International Security* article.[1] These two scholars have contested some of the independent and dependent variable codings in these cases, and have also posited that some of these cases did not demonstrate the processes predicted by selection effects theory. For reasons of space, the goal of this paper is not to present full blown case studies of all five cases, but rather to address the specific critiques within each case offered by Desch and Downes.

Closer examination of these cases reveals that they offer far greater support for selection effects theory than the critics have allowed. Consistent with selection effects theory, in all cases the decisions to attack were popular and were made with the approval of the political oppositions. In the Russo-Polish War, Sinai War, Six Day War, and Lebanon War, elected leaders initiated wars they went on to win. The Vietnam War is perhaps an exception that proves the rule: it is a case in which a democracy (arguably) initiated a war it was only moderately confident it would win. Selection effects theory both explains the decision to initiate under these conditions as well as a number of other aspects of how the war was fought.

Though the cases generally provide support for selection effects theory, they do point to two aspects of the theory that need further scholarly attention. First, though elected civilian leaders often enjoy higher quality advice from their military leadership, civilian decision-making can be hampered when civilian leaders are insufficiently informed about military affairs, and rely heavily and uncritically on the recommendations of military leaders. The Lebanon War demonstrates this dynamic most clearly. Second, secrecy poses a real dilemma for the theory. Sometimes planning for war must be taken in secret to preserve military advantage. However, planning in secret runs counter to one of the predictions of the theory, that in democracies open debates precede decisions for war, and these debates help better inform the leader's decision-making, decreasing the chances that the democracy will initiate a foolish war. The paper provides a more extensive discussion of the role of secrecy for selection effects theory, considers its presence in several of the cases, and offers suggestions for future research on this topic.

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[1] Michael C. Desch, *Power and Military Effectiveness: The Fallacy of Democratic Triumphalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), and Alexander B. Downes, "How Smart and Tough are Democracies? Reassessing Theories of Democratic Victory in War," *International Security* vol. 33 no. 4 (Spring 2009): 9-51. Selection effects theory critics also discuss the 2003 Iraq War. Risa Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Chaim Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," *International Security* 29:1 (Summer 2004), 5-48.   Space precludes examination of this case, and the public historical record is as yet incomplete. Gil Merom examined why democracies lose small wars, looking at Vietnam, Lebanon, and the French war in Algeria, but did not test selection effects theory. *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failure of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the US in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). John M. Schuessler used Franklin Roosevelt's actions in 1941 as a critique of selection effects theory. "The Deception Dividend: FDR's Undeclared War," *International Security* 34 (Spring 2010), 133-165. For a rebuttal to Schuessler's argument, see Dan Reiter, "Correspondence," *International Security* (forthcoming). For reasons of space, this paper is also unable to examine case study critiques of other explanations of democratic victory, including that democracies win because of economic advantages, that democracies enjoy larger and more effective alliances, and that democratic soldiers fight with higher battlefield effectiveness. See Lake, "Powerful Pacifists"; Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*; Choi, "Democratic Synergy" and "The Power of Democratic Cooperation"; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); Benjamin E. Goldsmith, "Defense Effort and Institutional Theories of Democratic Peace and Victory: Why Try Harder?" *Security Studies* 16 (April-June 2007): 189-222.

I. Search for Victory: Democracy, Initiation, and War Outcomes.

Many have proposed that democracies do not fight each other because publics hate war, elected leaders must answer to publics, and such leaders are unlikely to initiate war and risk getting removed from office. Tyrants need not answer to their publics, and hence are freer to start wars.[2] Scholars built on this basic insight to understand how democratic political institutions might shape other aspects of conflict behavior. One idea posited that if the public's opposition to war was based on aversion to paying the costs of war, as opposed to a normative opposition to war, then public opposition might relax if war promised to bring benefits at acceptable costs. A simple proposition from this insight is that an elected leader is less likely to suffer domestic political punishment when he or she initiates a war that the state goes on to win. The testable proposition is that democratic leaders are likely only to start wars when the chances of winning are high, meaning that among the observed wars democracies initiate, democratic initiators are quite likely to win. Autocratic leaders are less fearful of being thrown from power if they start wars and lose. Hence, autocracies are more likely than democracies to start risky wars, so autocratic initiators are less likely to win their wars than are democratic initiators. A robust marketplace of ideas means that democratic leaders are likely to make more accurate guesses about whether or not they can win wars they are considering launching. As noted, Stam and I developed selection effects theory in our book, and the rigor of the logic has since been demonstrated formally.[3]

Selection effects theory has attracted a substantial body of quantitative empirical support. We and others found that since 1816 democracies and democratic initiators in particular have been more likely to win their wars.[4] Many other quantitative studies have offered support for the idea that democratic political institutions shape foreign policy behavior, and that institutions guide leaders to avoid costly, high risk military ventures. Quantitative empirical studies have found that democracies fight significantly shorter wars,[5] and that democracies win because they start short wars.[6] Relatedly, democratic initiators are especially likely to win

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[2] Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace:Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: Norton, 2000).

[3] Bueno de Mesquita et al, *Logic of Political Survival*; Darren Filson and Suzanne Werner, "Bargaining and Fighting: The Impact of Regime Type on War Onset, Duration, and Outcomes," *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (April 2004): 296-313.

[4] Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*. See also Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, "Democracy and War Outcomes: Extending the Debate," presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Chicago, IL, March 2, 2007; David A. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review* 86 (March 1992): 24-37; David H. Clark and William Reed, "A Unified Model of War Onset and Outcome," *Journal of Politics* 65 (February 2003): 69-91.

[5] D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam III, "The Declining Advantages of Democracy: A Combined Model of War Outcomes and Duration," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (June 1998): 344-366; Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, chapter 7.

[6] Branislav Slantchev, "How Initiators End Their Wars: The Duration of Warfare and the Terms of Peace," *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (October 2004): 813-29.

interstate crises,[7] and crises involving democracies are significantly shorter in duration.[8] Democracies become increasingly likely to initiate conflict as the balance of power becomes increasingly favorable.[9] Public support for war declines as casualties accumulate and as the prospects for victory recede.[10] Hein Goemans' latest and most sophisticated research on the post-conflict political fates of leaders offers further support. He findsthat elected leaders who lose wars face significantly higher chances of losing office through extralegal means, thereby facing higher likelihoods of severe personal punishments such as death, prison, or exile.[11]   And of course, the general idea that political institutions constrain the conflict behavior of elected leaders underpins the widely verified empirical finding that democracies are unlikely to fight each other. Notably, there have been some critiques of the quantitative findings that democratic initiators are especially likely to win their wars. We in turn have published rebuttals to these critiques.[12]

II. Case Studies and Selection Effects Theory.

The quantitative support for selection effects theory is impressive. However, some scholars have presented case studies critiques of selection effects theory, arguing that in some instances the key variables of democracy, initiation, and/or victory were miscoded in the quantitative data sets, meaning that statistical analysis provided inaccurate correlative support for selection effects theory. They also propose that process tracing reveals that the dynamics predicted by selection effects theory did not actually occur. Desch (6) discussed the Russo-Polish War, the Sinai War, the Six Day War, and the Lebanon War, cases commonly thought to be of

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[7] Jean-Sebastien Rioux, "A Crisis-Based Evaluation of the Democratic Peace Proposition," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 31(June 1998): 263-283; Christopher F. Gelpi and Michael Griesdorf, "Winners or Losers? Democracies in International Crisis, 1918-94," *American Political Science Review* 95 (September 2001): 633-647.

[8] Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Michael T. Koch, and Randolph M. Siverson, "Testing Competing Institutional Explanations of the Democratic Peace: The Case of Dispute Duration," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 21 (Winter 2004), 255-267.

[9] Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, chapter 2; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alastair Smith, "Testing Novel Implications of the Selectorate Theory of War," *World Politics* 56 (April 2004): 363-88.

[10] John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985); Gartner, Scott Sigmund and Gary Segura, "War, Casualties, and Public Opinion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (June 1998): 278-300; Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War: American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Scott Sigmund Gartner, "The Multiple Effects of Casualties on Public Support for War: An Experimental Approach," *American Political Science Review* 102 (February 2008): 95-106.

[11] "Which Way Out? The Manner and Consequences of Losing Office," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* vol. 52, no. 6 (December 2008): 790.

[12] Desch's first published critique was "Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters," *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Fall 2002), pp. 5-47, and was rebutted by Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, "Understanding Victory: Why Political Institutions Matter," *International Security*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Summer 2003), 168-179. Downes' 2009 critique was rebutted by Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, "Another Skirmish in the Battle over Democracies and War," *International Security*, vol. 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009), 194-204.

democratic initiators winning their wars and which "are instances of democratic states prevailing when the most likely alternative explanation—material power—would have predicted they would have lost."[13] Downes describes why he chose the Vietnam War as a case, though conceding that Vietnam might be an outlier: "In Vietnam, however, we observe a democratic leader entering a war even though he knew the odds of victory were slight. …[I]n certain circumstances democracy may propel leaders to engage in wars with a low probability of success, this causing democracies to suffer the occasional draw or loss. I do not claim these circumstances are common."[14]

Before getting into the cases themselves, three methodological issues require discussion. The first concerns the difficult task of coding the dependent variable, war outcomes.[15] The conventional approach taken by many data sets, including the one used by Stam and I,[16] is to code which side better achieved its military operational goals by the end of the war, allowing for the possibility of a draw. An alternative approach might be to code a state as winning a war if the war provided that state long term strategic benefits, operational success aside, and/or to frame operational success in the context of costs suffered. Some have argued that some wars coded in the quantitative data sets as victories for democracies did not provide longer term benefits, and in line with the logic of the second, "long term effects" approach, ought to be recoded as draws or losses.

It is much more difficult to reach consensual codings using this latter approach than it is using the operational goals approach. Coding whether or not an army is destroyed or which side conquered territory is much easier than coding long term strategic gains or losses. Further, assessing whether a war provided long term geopolitical costs or gains can become an ideologically charged debate. For example, leftists claim that the Six Day War was a disaster for Israel because it created the problems of the occupied territories, while rightists claim that it was a success because it boosted Israeli deterrence and territorial security.

A related issue to the ideological problem is that judging long term benefits may turn on one's definition of "long term." A war may be deemed net beneficial five years out, net costly ten years out, but net beneficial twenty years out. In December 2003 following the capture of Saddam Hussein and before the flowering of the insurgency, the Iraq War seemed like a benefit to American interests. In 2005, when no weapons of mass destruction were found and the country had slid into civil war, it seemed like an unmitigated disaster. If Iraq emerges by 2014 or so as a reasonably democratic, reasonably stable, reasonably pro-American oil exporting country, then many may view the 2003 war as net beneficial to American interests.

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[13] In the remainder of this paper, references to page numbers in the text and notes are to page numbers in Desch's book, *Power and Military Effectiveness*.

[14] Downes, "How Smart," 31.

[15] See Dominic D. P Johnson and Dominic Tierney, *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[16] See Correlates of War (COW); Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*; Slantchev, "How Initiators End Their Wars."

Again, some critics of the democracy-victory thesis claim that the long term approach makes democratic military successes appear more modest, as, for example, one should code the Sinai and Lebanon Wars as draws for Israel rather than victories (see below). However, embracing this standard would change many other war codings, including converting wars which are autocratic victories under the operations approach to autocratic defeats under the long term strategic approach. Examples include: German victories over Belgium and Russia in World War I; German victories over Norway, France, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, and Yugoslavia in World War II; the 1990 Iraqi victory over Kuwait; the Soviet victory over Finland in the Winter War. Hence, embracing this alternative approach to coding war outcomes would not necessarily overturn the systematic finding that democracies win the wars they initiate (or fight).

A second methodological issue concerns what kinds of evidence case studies examining selection effects theory should look for. The heart of selection effects theory is that elected leaders seek to avoid launching unpopular wars because they want to remain in power. The central hypothesis is that because losing wars will likely be unpopular, elected leaders are only likely to launch wars when they are confident that they will win. The theory, as described by Stam and I, also allows that leaders are more likely to launch wars for popular causes, and relatedly that publics gripped by war fever may drag a reluctant leader into war.[17] So, the kinds of processes envisioned are that elected leaders will launch wars when they are confident they will win and when they think the wars will be popular. Leaders may vet the popularity of a potential war by examining public opinion data or by seeking approval for a war within the government, either by consulting with the cabinet or the elected legislature. Approval by the opposing party of military action can be especially important in winning public support for the action, as it is a powerful signal.[18]

One important question is whether the theory predicts that an elected leader will make decisions for war in consultation with society and/or other components of government.[19] The theory makes no prediction that elected leaders are driven by normative imperatives to engage in open, democratic debate of policy options. Indeed, Stam and I discussed a number of instances in which elected leaders subverted democratic norms, for example by undermining elected governments in other countries.[20] However, the theory does predict that elected leaders are motivated to include other actors in the decision-making process in order to provide themselves political cover, to gather evidence of and to demonstrate public support, and to minimize political fallout if things go poorly. For example, the January 1991 Congressional votes in favor of Operation Desert Storm provided critical reassurance to President George H.W. Bush, who reported that, "I felt the heavy weight that I might be faced with impeachment lifted from my shoulders as I heard the [Congressional voting] results."[21]

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[17] Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, chapter 6.

[18]Adam Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion From World War II to Iraq* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[19] On covert action and the democratic peace, see Alexander B. Downes and Mary Lauren Lilly, "Overt Peace, Covert War?: Covert Action and the Democratic Peace," *Security Studies* vol. 19 no. 2 (2010), 266-306.

[20] Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, chapter 6.

[21] George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 446.

Stam and I addressed the issue of democracy and secrecy in our book.[22] We discussed it in the context of covert action, in which elected leaders sometimes take steps to overthrow foreign governments secretly, in order to circumvent the constraints of public opinion. We argued covert actions such as the Bay of Pigs invasion often fail because secrecy increases the risks of policy failure by cutting out the marketplace of ideas. That is to say, we identified an internal tension between different components of our theory. Though the theory declares that the constraints of public opinion and the marketplace of ideas increase the likelihood that democratic foreign policy initiatives are more likely to succeed, leaders in some cases may be motivated to circumvent public constraints by acting covertly. However, acting covertly can have the effect of shortcircuiting the marketplace of ideas and thereby increasing the risk of policy failure.

Unlike covert action, secret deliberation over launching an overt war does not circumvent public constraints. The war will be common knowledge once launched, and if it goes badly, the elected leader will still suffer adverse domestic political consequences. Conversely, leaders may have more confidence that "plausible deniability" will enable them to escape or mitigate the negative consequences of a failed covert plot. Therefore, deliberating in secret should not make elected leaders more willing to launch riskier wars.

However, secret deliberation before overt war does prevent the marketplace of ideas from operating fully. Though when deciding secretly on war elected leaders still benefit from higher quality advice from their military leadership than do autocratic leaders, they do not benefit from extensive public and government discussion of a proposed war, and hence are less likely to make an accurate guess about the outcome of the war. That being said, in the context of making decisions for military attack, there may be important benefits of making the decision in secret, as secrecy may make victory more likely. A plan for victory may rest on the tactical advantages of a surprise attack, an innovative military strategy, a new military technology, and/or secret diplomatic arrangements. Revelation of any of these factors through public discussion or leaks may make victory less likely. Keeping the decision-making process secret and contained to a small group decreases the chances of leaks, and may under these conditions increase the chances of victory.

In summary, examples of leaders deliberating in secret have complex implications for the theory. First, selection effects does not forecast that elected leaders have a normative imperative to consult broadly. Second, military or diplomatic conditions may push elected leaders to keep the decision-making group as small as possible to avoid leaks and increase the odds of victory. The desire to maximize the chances for victory through secrecy is consistent with selection effects theory's premise that elected leaders have a very strong incentive to avoid military defeat. Third, even when elected leaders need to maintain secrecy, they may include at least some members of the political opposition in the decision-making process to maximize political support and minimize possible political fallout. Fourth, though secrecy may mean gathering some military advantages, it also means increasing the risks of policy failure by cutting out much of the marketplace of ideas.

A third methodological issue concerns the pertinence of evidence about what material factors (such as the balance of power, allies, and military strategy) helped determine a war's outcome. Importantly, such factors do not directly speak to the empirical support for or against selection effects theory. Selection effects theory predicts that an elected leader is more likely to attack when a war seems winnable, regardless of exactly why the war seems winnable. So, observing that one side won because it had a larger army does not provide

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[22] Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, esp. 159-162.

evidence against the selection effects theory, as it may just mean that the elected leader correctly observed before the war that his/her country's numerical superiority would permit victory. Note that in the quantitative studies, democratic initiators are still more likely to win even when controlling for material factors such as strategy, terrain, troop quality, military-industrial capabilities, and allies.[23]

III. The Russo-Polish War.

In April 1920, Polish forces invaded Ukraine, ultimately defeating Soviet Russian forces and acquiring Russian territorial concessions in the 1921 Treaty of Riga. The 1920 Russo-Polish War is, according to the quantitative data sets, an example of a democratic initiator, Poland, winning a war against an autocracy, Russia. Desch makes a number of critiques of this interpretation. They are addressed in turn.

Did Poland Initiate the Russo-Polish War?

We and others argued that Poland initiated the Russo-Polish War in April 1920.[24] Desch argues that either Soviet Russia started the war before 1920, or it is not clear exactly which side started the war.

Low-level hostilities between Russia and Poland did commence prior to April 1920. However, there are two problems with the claim that one should code Russia as initiating war before 1920: Poland initiated the pre-1920 violence, and the pre-1920 violence was relatively minor, far below the threshold of what is commonly thought of as "war" (armed conflict killing at least 1000). Proving these points requires working through the specific events Desch describes in support of his critique.[25] In arguing that war-scale violence predated April 1920, Desch refers to Russo-Polish clashes near Bialystock and Brest-Litovsk in December 1918. However, these conflicts were very limited in scope, as the presence of German forces prevented any substantial violence at that time.[26] Desch (74) refers to a conflict between Russian and Polish forces at Bereza Kartuska in February 1919. However, Polish forces initiated military conflict by entering this small township. Further, this was a very minor incident involving only 62 Polish soldiers capturing about 80 Soviet soldiers.[27] The insignificance of this clash is demonstrated by the perseverance of political contacts between Poland and

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[23] Reiter and Stam, "Understanding Victory."

[24] Stam, *Win, Lose, or Draw*; Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*; Slantchev, "How Initiators End Their Wars"; M. B. Biskupski, "Pilsudski, Poland, and the War With Russia, 1919-1920," *Polish Heritage* 35 (Winter 1984): 5; Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1500-2000* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 387.

[25] Desch (74) includes a quote from Leon Trotsky, but that quote does not appear on the page or in the source Desch cites, Viscount d'Abernon, *The Eigthteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931, esp. 14.

[26] Richard Debo, *Survival and Consolidation: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1918-1921* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 57.

[27] Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920* (London: Orbis, 1983), 27.

Russia.[28] Desch refers to Poland "repulsing" Russian moves in the Baltics in March and April 1919. These events are clearly Poland initiating actions against Russia, not the reverse. Russia had taken control of Wilno in sovereign Lithuania, and Poland reacted by dispatching forces to eject the Russian forces, accomplishing this mission in late April.[29] Note that during this period it was Poland that took the initiative to seize territory in the turmoil of the Russian Civil War, capturing from February to October 1919 contested border areas with substantial numbers of ethnic Poles. The Poles renewed their offensive when Russia demanded Polish evacuation of these areas.[30] In his definitive history of the war, Norman Davies claims that in this first phase "the initiative lay with the Poles."[31] This is not surprising, as the Russians wanted to avoid conflict with Poland to focus on fending off foreign forces during its own civil war.[32]

Desch mentions Soviet Russia's "Target Vistula" plan, declared in November 1918 (not 1919, as noted by Desch, 74). Despite its grandiose vision of a march to Warsaw, it amounted to nothing more than revolutionary rhetoric, the formation of the Soviet Western Army, and a reconnaissance in depth as far as the River Bug. Tellingly, there were no notable military clashes in this operation, as Soviet forces were entering territory just evacuated by German forces and did not seek to engage Polish forces. Davies wrote: "It is problematical whether …'Target Vistula' was intended to bring the Red army as conquering heroes into Warsaw. Its name suggests so. Yet the extremely tentative phrasing of its directives and the extremely parlous state of the Western Army suggest otherwise. 'Target Vistula' was probably no more than a phrase inspired by revolutionary bravado."[33] Another scholar notes, "The Russian Western Army had never been intended to fight its way to the Vistula: it was far too weak."[34]

Desch notes (74) that "a more reasonable argument" is that it is not clear which side started the war, as Poland and Russia entered the vacuum created by the withdrawal of German troops. It is probably accurate that both Poland and Russia were opportunists, seeking to make geopolitical gains following Germany's withdrawal. However, the violence that did occur before April 1920 was initiated by Poland and far below

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[28] Andrzej Garlicki, *Jozef Pilsudski, 1867-1935*, John Coutouvidis, ed. and trans. (Aldershot, UK: Scolar, 1995), 96.

[29] Adam Zamoyski, *The Battle for the Marchlands* (New York: East European Monographs, 1981), 7; Davies, *White Eagle*, 25; Garlicki, *Pilsudski*, 93. It is difficult to know exactly what military operations Desch is referring to. Desch cites Sidney Brooks, "America and Poland 1915-1925," *American Relief Administration Bulletin*, ser. 2 no. 44 (April 1925), 25, who says merely, "The repulse of Bolshevik troops by the Poles during the months of March and April 1919 opened up a large territory needing immediate relief."

[30] Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, 387. See also Orlando Figues, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), 697.

[31] *White Eagle*, 396. See also Clodfelter, *Warfare*, 387.

[32] Debo, *Survival*, 58; Zamoyski, *Marchlands*, 8.

[33] *White Eagle*, 26-27.

[34] Zamoyski, *Marchlands*, 7.

the level of interstate war. The action which clearly escalated the conflict to the "war" level of intensity was Poland's April 1920 invasion with some 52,000 soldiers.[35]

Was Poland Democratic?

Desch argues that Polish leader Jozef Pilsudski was a dictator, unconstrained by public opinion, though multiple cross-national data sets on democracy deem Poland to be democratic at this time.[36] Closer inspection reveals that Poland was a democracy, and that Pilsudski was a constrained leader and not an autocrat.

Poland emerged as an independent state in late 1918. Pilsudski was given authority over the armed forces by the Regency Council when he arrived in Warsaw that November. The Council gave him only temporary power, to be handed back to the national government when the latter was formed.[37] Critically, "Jozef Pilsudski supported elections from his first moments in Warsaw. He believed elections to be the only way of creating a centre of state authority which would be generally recognized in Poland and abroad—a factor of the society's consolidation and integration."[38] As early as November 1918 Pilsudski's power was constrained, when he was informally the provisional head of state. His first nominee for prime minister, Ignacy Daszynski, had to be withdrawn because of opposition from the Right.[39] Pilsudski instead (on November 18) appointed Jedrzej Moraczewski as prime minister, commanding him that his appointment demanded that "in the course of one week you will produce an electoral law, just as if you had a trench to dig."[40]

Moraczewski followed Pilsudski's encouragement, and the first elections to the Sejm legislature were held in January 1919. The election was competitive, providing legislative seats to several different parties.[41] In February, Pilsudski honored his commitment made to the Regency Council and handed power to the elected Sejm. The Sejm voluntarily handed power back to Pilsudski, a temporary measure until a permanent constitution could be formed. Importantly, Pilsudski did not enjoy dictatorial powers. At the time of Pilsudski's reappointment, the Sejm made a short declaration on its own legislative powers which came to be known as the "Little Constitution." This declaration constrained Pilsudski's power. It stated that the Sejm itself "embodies the sovereign and legislative authority of the State of Poland." The declaration gave Pilsudski the power to appoint the prime and cabinet ministers, but such appointments required the consent of the

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[35] Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, 387.

[36] POLITY (see http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm <downloaded June 9, 2010>; Michael W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review* 80 (December 1986): 1151-1169.

[37] Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate 1918 to 1939* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 87.

[38] Andrzej Ajnenkiel, "The Establishment of a National Government in Poland, 1918," in Paul Latawski, ed., *The Reconstruction of Poland, 1914-1923* (London: MacMillanm 1992), 141.

[39] Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 82.

[40] Quoted in Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 83.

[41] Roszkowski, 164.

Sejm, and the Sejm could dismiss at any time the prime and cabinet ministers. Pilsudski accepted the Sejm's appointment subject to the Little Constitution.[42]

In sum, Poland at this stage can be described as being institutionally democratic. Poland held elections. There was a constitution which empowered an elected legislature and constrained the executive. A separate democracy-related question is, was the war against Soviet Russia popular? The critical theoretical assumption underlying the selection effects argument is that democratic leaders follow public opinion because they desire to sustain their domestic political careers. This means, critically, avoiding unpopular wars.

Pilsudski's foreign policy choices which led to war commanded the assent of the Sejm. Following Soviet peace overtures in early 1920, the Foreign Affairs committee of the Sejm approved the text of a peace feeler on March 27, which proposed a time and place for the commencement of peace negotiations.[43] As the negotiations with the Soviets bogged down, the Polish government proceeded to make a military alliance with Ukraine, laying out plans for coordination of their two armies. This alliance was approved by the Foreign Affairs committee.[44] Even Sejm members opposed to the war recognized that the majority favored war over the renewal of peace negotiations.[45] The Warsaw correspondent for the *Times* of London noted at the time:

> "It is suggested that the Government in demanding the disannexation of the whole of the ancient Kingdom of Poland from Russia and helping the establishment of an independent Ukrainian State...was pursuing a policy unacceptable to the country as a whole. These assumptions were entirely refuted at yesterday's session, and the Government's policy was approved by practically every member of the Committee except the National Democrats."[46]

Poland's successes during the war were recognized by the Polish public, and Pilsudski's popularity surged with these victories. Even the National Democrats quieted their opposition.[47] When Pilsudski returned to Warsaw on May 18 following initial battlefield successes, he was given a hero's welcome and thanked formally by the Sejm. The political opposition halted their attacks.[48] The May Soviet counteroffensive led to a string

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[42] Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 87-8; Jedrzejewicz, *Pilsudski*, 81; Garlicki, *Pilsudski*, 91.

[43] Piotr S. Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations, 1917-1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 172.

[44] Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, 193.

[45] Stanislaw Grabski, *The Polish-Soviet Frontier* (New York: Polish Information Center, 1944), 21.

[46] Quoted in Titus Komarnicki, *Rebirth of the Polish Republic: A Study in the Diplomatic History of Europe, 1914-1920* (Melbourne: William Heinemann Ltd, 1957), 573-574. Desch provides (73) a skeptical quote from a Polish Foreign Ministry Official about the goals of the war, though the quote is from 1919, long before specific consideration of the April 1920 operation.

[47] Jedrezejewicz, 103.

[48] Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 120; Davies, *White Eagle*, 113; Robert Szymczak, "Bolshevik Wave Breaks at Warsaw," *Military History* 11 (February 1995): 58.

of Polish defeats, as the Red Army approached Warsaw. Importantly, as Polish military fortunes worsened, Pilsudski did not cast aside the cloak of democracy and become a dictator. Twice before the Council of National Defense, on July 13 and on July 19, Pilsudski submitted his resignation. Both times the offer to resign was rejected.[49] Desch reports (85) that in August 1920 Pilsudski was concerned about declining public support for continuing the war, a pattern predicted by the selection effects theory, that support for continuing the war might ebb in the face of military setbacks. The reversal of Poland's military fortunes did lead to a reduction in Pilsudski's power. During this period, the Sejm convened a Council of National Defence, which included Pilsudski, several Sejm representatives, and several cabinet members. The Council had the power to make all decisions on war-related matters, and its creation marked a "considerable slimming down of Pilsudski's authority."[50] In short, as selection effects theory forecasts, there were negative domestic political repercussions for the elected leader in the wake of disappointments on the battlefield. Eventual Polish victory helped Pilsudski stay in power.

Was Poland Confident In Victory Before the War?

Desch (73) states that "Pilsudski reportedly launched the attack on the Ukraine in the spring of 1920 despite serious doubts that it would succeed." The evidence does not clearly support this conclusion. The article Desch cites indicates that though some British emissaries had doubts about the operation, many also noted Pilsduski's confidence. It quotes one February 1920 report: "General Pilsudski is confident that he can carry on the war [with Soviet Russia] for several months…"[51] Pilsudski attacked in April because delays in Russian military mobilization created a Polish advantage in the balance of forces.[52]

Desch (73) also states Pilsudski should have forecast that the invasion of the Ukraine would inflame nationalism in the Red Army, boosting its military effectiveness. It is perhaps unreasonable to assume that the Pilsudski should have seen that the invasion would spark Soviet nationalism. The pro-Soviet nationalism which emerged following the Polish invasion was bizarre and unique. It was bizarre because it was a call to Russian nationalism to defend Ukraine, and this nationalism was then wedded to a Bolshevik call for class consciousness and unity. It was unique because this was the first appearance ever of this odd mix of "Russian nationalism and Soviet internationalism."[53] Indeed, even the Bolsheviks themselves were "stunned by the success" of using Russian nationalism to mobilize the population to fight the Poles. That is, it is unreasonable to criticize Pilsudski for failing to foresee a development as shocking as the emergence of pro-Soviet Russian nationalism. [54]

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[49] Jedrzejewicz, *Pilsudski*, 112-113.

[50] Garlicki, *Pilsudski*, 101.

[51] Zygmunt J. Gasiorowski, "Joseph Pilsudski in the Light of British Reports," *Slavonic and East European Review* 50 (October 1972): 558. Brackets in Gasiorowski.

[52] Davies, *White Eagle*, 99-100.

[53] Davies, *White Eagle*, 101-115.

[54] Figues, *People's Tragedy*, 699.

A related question is the quality of prewar strategic evaluation in Poland. Desch (84) echoed the argument by Vladimir Lenin that the Poles might have been better off not going to war. The Treaty of Riga, which ended the Russo-Polish War, provided Poland with less territory than it would have received if it had accepted the terms offered by the Soviets in January 1920. This notion of the war as ultimately one of Polish loss was a common propagandistic theme made by Soviet leaders and later by members of the antiwar minority.[55]

It would be inaccurate to portray the episode as one in which Poland foolishly refused a generous settlement, only to receive its comeuppance when the war it chose did not work out as well as hoped. The true promise of the January 29 offer is dubious, as its terms were for an armistice and demarcation line, not for a border and peace treaty.[56] Further, it is doubtful that the Soviets truly desired peace. The Bolsheviks were more interested in subverting Poland from within, hopefully inciting a Communist revolt, rather than peacefully settling a border dispute. Indeed, soon after the January offer the Soviets declared, "Polish soldiers, turn the bayonets which you hold in your hands against your masters and government...[and] then *peace will be concluded.*"[57] Pilsudski had good reason to doubt the veracity of Soviet declarations of peaceful intentions. He had received intelligence reports that since the end of 1919 the Soviets were concentrating their forces in Belarus and Ukraine, quintupling their forces in the west from January to April 1920.[58]

Regardless, the Poles did not initially reject the Soviet offer, as on March 27 they suggested negotiations commence on April 10 in Borisov. Wrangling over the specifics of the negotiations ensued, preventing actual talks from taking place. Importantly, in the post-March 27 bargaining over negotiating terms, the Soviets indicated that the January 29 offer was no longer on the table.[59]

The Poles were reluctant to strike a deal with the Soviets. Their concern was that accepting a peace treaty would leave the Soviet army intact, and since the critical phase of the Russian Civil War was passing, Soviet strength would grow in the future, eventually leading the Soviets to attack.[60] Specifically, a peace treaty at that juncture would have permitted the Bolsheviks to crush the last of the opposition in the Ukraine as well as

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[55] Eg, Grabski, *Polish-Soviet Frontier.*

[56] Piotr Wandycz, *Polish Diplomacy 1914-1945: Aims and Achievements* (London: Orbis Books, 1988), 15.

[57] Italics in original. Quoted in Serge Michiel Shewchuk, "The Russo-Polish War of 1920," Ph.D. thesis, University of Maryland, 1966, 127; see also 133.

[58] Michael Palij, *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance, 1919-1921* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1995), 90.

[59] Davies, *White Eagle*, 99; S. Kutrzeba, "The Struggle for the Frontiers, 1919-1923," in W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, and R. Dyboski, eds., *The Cambridge History of Poland From Augustus II to Pilsudski (1697-1935)* (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1941), 525.

[60] Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 107-108; Davies, *White Eagle*, 96-99; Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, 156-7.

the forces under General Petr Wrangel.[61] This is consistent with the more general proposition that war is one solution to a credible commitment problem created by a changing balance of power.[62]

IV. Israel's Initiated Wars.

Desch presents a cluster of case studies of Israel's post-independence wars.[63] Desch claims that three wars Israel initiated, the 1956 Sinai War, the 1967 Six Day War, and the 1982 Lebanon War, do not support selection effects theory. The remainder of this section examines these claims. It then discusses the effects of war outcomes on leader tenure in the Middle East during this period.

1956 Sinai War

In 1955 and early 1956, Britain and France became increasingly worried about Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalism, especially following Nasser's seizure of the Suez Canal. During this time, Israel was suffering from Egyptian and *fedayeen* attacks launched on southern Israel from bases in Gaza and northeastern Sinai. Israel worried that a 1955 arms deal with Czechoslovakia would significantly expand Egyptian military power. In 1956, Britain, France, and Israel agreed on a plan. Israel would invade Sinai and Gaza, and the invasion would then provide a diplomatic pretext for Anglo-French forces to land in Egypt and seize control of the Suez Canal. The three countries executed the plan later that year. Israel captured Gaza and Sinai.

Was Israel Democratic?

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[61] Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations*, 15.

[62] Dan Reiter, *How Wars End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[63] Desch coded the Egypt-initiated 1969-1970 War of Attrition a draw, though others, including Stam and I, code it as an Israeli victory because Israel better accomplished its operational goals than did Egypt. Desch's only discussion of this coding comes in his 2002 (14) *International Security* article, in which he relates the following Ezer Weizman quote from Martin L. van Creveld's book, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Force* (New York: Public Affairs, 1998), 215: "It is no more than foolishness to claim that we won the War of Attrition. On the contrary, for all their casualties it was the Egyptians who got the best of it." However, the context is that Weizman, an Israeli military commander during the War of Attrition, was not making judgment on the lack of Israeli operational success. Rather, he was sorely disappointed that Israel did not press its operational advantage and seize the west bank of the Suez Canal with ground forces. Ezer Weizman, *On Eagles' Wings: The Personal Story of the Leading Commander of the Israeli Air Force* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), esp. 280-281. Egypt failed to compel Israel to abandon the Sinai or its forward military positions. Also, Egypt suffered far, far greater losses than did Israel. Israel lost 260 soldiers killed in action, and suffered an additional 687 wounded. Egyptian losses are not precisely known, but reached into the thousands, as the death rate probably ranged from 100 per week to 300 per day, across the 18 or so months of war. Casualties aside, "Egyptian towns along the canal were almost totally destroyed and some 750,000 residents were evacuated. Important industrial plants were wrecked and with them the refineries and oil port of Suez." Ze'ev Schiff, *A History of the Israeli Army: 1874 to the Present* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1985), 183. In short, the War of Attrition is consistent with the selection effect theory: an autocracy initiated a war and lost.

Desch views Israeli wartime decision-making throughout its post-independence period as insulated and autocratic, though systematic data sets view Israel as democratic since independence.[64] Israeli institutions provided for fair, regular, and competitive elections in a multiparty, parliamentary framework, safeguarded by the rule of law. Across the 35 year period from 1948 to 1983, Israel experienced nine different leadership transitions, all peaceful and legal. No single party dominated the array of ruling coalitions.

Desch's depiction of Israeli decision-making before the Sinai War as autocratic is exaggerated. Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was more constrained than Desch allows. This is demonstrated in part by Israel's earlier decisions *not* to attack Egypt. As Defense Minister, Ben-Gurion had suggested to Prime Minister Moshe Sharett in March 1955 that Israel should seize the entire Gaza Strip; Sharett refused. When Nasser announced in September 1955 a massive Czech-Egyptian arms deal which promised to augment substantially Egyptian military power, Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan wanted to launch a preventive invasion immediately. Now Prime Minister, Ben-Gurion demurred on Dayan's decision, but did support the use of force to open the Straits of Tiran. However, no action was taken because the Israeli cabinet rejected the plan. Ben-Gurion suggested to his cabinet in January 1956 the possibility of an Israeli preventive attack on Sinai in advance of the arrival of Czech arms, but again opposition within his cabinet killed the idea.[65] This string of decisions not to invade also speaks to Desch's (124-5) undocumented assertion that "many Israelis believed that Ben-Gurion's Suez gambit was not carefully thought out," as clearly the Israeli leadership had been considering multiple scenarios for offensive action against Egypt for more than a year.

Political opportunity presented itself later that year for an Israeli solution to the growth in Egyptian military power. The French and British suggestion for a joint attack on Egypt came with the arrival of a large, secret shipment of French arms to Israel in July 1956. On October 24, Dayan briefed Peres and Ben-Gurion on a plan for invasion of the Sinai.[66] The cabinet, which included members of the political opposition, approved the plan soon after. After the vote had been taken, more members of the political opposition were informed. All opposition parties supported the operation, other than the Communists.[67] Israel attacked on October 29.

Consistent with selection effects theory, the decision to attack was popular. The rising Egyptian threat had been turning Israeli public opinion more belligerent since 1955, as indicated by the July 1955 elections which replaced the moderate Sharrett with the more hawkish Ben-Gurion, and increased the number of Knesset seats held by the nationalist Herut party.[68] The September Czech arms deal further increased public support for war. When the Knesset met in mid-October 1955 and discussed the Czech arms deal, almost all saw the pending growth in Egyptian power as a grave threat to Israeli security. Many called for action, though at that

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[64] POLITY and Doyle, "Liberalism."

[65] Dan Kurzman, *Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 382-4.

[66] Kurzman, *Ben-Gurion*, 386-9.

[67] Kurzman, *Ben-Gurion*, 390-1, Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion: A Biography*, Peretz Kidron, trans. (New York: Adams Books, 1978), 244; Schiff, *History of the Israeli Army*, 93.

[68] Jack Levy and Joseph R. Gochal, "Democracy and Preventive War: Israel and the 1956 Sinai Campaign" *Security Studies* 11 (Winter 2001/2002), 22.

point, before French arms had been secured, the calls for action frequently centered on the acquisition of more and better arms rather than for immediate preventive war.[69] The ongoing *fedayeen* attacks on Israeli territory from Sinai and Gaza were escalating public insecurity, incubating public criticism against the Israeli government for its inaction.[70] Public support for action was evident in Israeli newspapers and public statements by political leaders. Editorials in *Ma'ariv*, the leading Israeli daily, warned of Egyptian aggression. The head of the Centrist Liberal Party Peretz Bernstein argued for preventive war, as did *Davar*, the moderate voice of the Labor movement. [71] Once the war began, there was "insignificant" dissent, coming only from the tiny Arab-Jewish communist party, Maki.[72] Consistent with selection effects theory, Ben-Gurion favored preventive war as a means of reducing Israeli casualties, as a preventive war would allow Israel to destroy enemy bombers on the ground before they could be used to attack Israeli civilians.[73]

Secrecy and the Decision for War

Desch (101) proposes that the secrecy surrounding the preparation for war provides two critiques of selection effect theory. First, it exemplifies a non-democratic decision-making process. Second, it is "evidence" that Ben-Gurion knew such a war would be unpopular.

Ben-Gurion kept war planning as secret as possible, because secrecy maximized the chances for victory. As discussed above, selection effects theory does not necessarily predict that elected leaders will make decisions for war publicly, and that certain conditions may push elected leaders to decide in secret in order to maximize the chances for victory. In 1956, the plan to attack Egypt hinged on maintaining secrecy. The whole operation was predicated on the diplomatic ruse that Israel would attack Egypt, and then France and Britain by previous agreement with Egypt would deploy their forces to "protect" the canal. Exposure of the prewar secret arrangement between Israel, Britain, and France would have jeopardized the entire operation. Further, secrecy was critical for battlefield success, especially the commando operations undertaken at the beginning of the war. General Moshe Dayan bluntly stated that, "Secrecy was imperative."[74] However, domestic politics did frame the decision-making. As noted, Israeli society and politics had shifted in a more belligerent direction since 1955, and Ben-Gurion vetted the decision for war both with his cabinet and with members of the political opposition. Notably, secrecy does not imply that Ben-Gurion thought the war would be unpopular. The sources that Desch employs do not make this point.[75]

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[69] Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 6-9.

[70] Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 261.

[71] Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 6-9.

[72] Gad Barzilai, "War, Democracy, and Internal Conflict: Israel in a Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 31 (April 1999), 323.

[73] Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955-1957* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 39-40.

[74] Quoted in Bar-On 1994, *Gates of Gaza*, 250.

[75] See Desch (2008, n33 on p.209). Avner Yaniv and Robert J. Lieber "Personal Whim or Strategic Imperative? The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon," *International Security* 8 (Fall 1983), 140 say merely and without citations, "In 1956, a

Did Israel Win the Sinai War?

A last critique Desch makes is that Israel did not win the war. He declares (96) that Israel scored a tactical success, "but was denied a strategic victory when the United States forced it and its allies to withdraw from captured Egyptian territory." This point invokes methodological issues, discussed above, regarding whether a war outcome should be coded on the basis of operational or grand strategic success.

However, even using a longer term, grand strategy yardstick for determining who wins wars, the war yielded important gains for Israel, its withdrawal from the Sinai notwithstanding. The war substantially improved Israeli relations with Britain and France, which had the specific benefit of providing Israel with a steady flow of French munitions. U.S.-Israel relations improved in the wake of the war. UN peacekeepers stayed in the Sinai after the Israeli withdrawal, providing improved security for southern Israel from Egyptian and *fedayeen* attacks. Israeli military successes improved Israel's military reputation, boosting its deterrent. Israeli military successes dissuaded Nasser from getting involved in conflicts between Israel and Syria. Israel was able to use Eilat as a port and acquired critical maritime access to the Gulf of Aqaba and thereby the Indian Ocean.[76]

The Six Day War

Israel launched the Six Day War on June 5, 1967 in reaction to Egypt's decision to close the Straits of Tiran, and because of rising fear that an Arab attack loomed. Israel defeated the militaries of Arab states including Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It captured Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

Desch's central critique is that Israeli decision-making was not democratic.[77] He claims that as with the Sinai War Israeli decision-making was highly autocratic even within the inner circle. He (100) specifically posits that Prime Minister Levi Eshkol was forced to take Dayan and Peres into his government, and that, "This

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similar deception did not generate much criticism because the operation was quick and decisive." Thomas (1966, 16) doesn't make this argument either; on the cited page, he discusses deliberations in 1955, when, as noted, the Israeli cabinet rejected Ben-Gurion's suggestion that Israel capture the Straits of Tiran. Brecher, *Decisions*, 65 discusses Ben-Gurion's ideas about Germany and the Holocaust on the cited page.

[76] Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 317-323.

[77] Desch (101) also summarizes Michael Brecher's 1975 study of Israeli decision-making by claiming that Brecher found that "domestic political considerations played only a 'marginal' role in 75 percent of its major foreign policy decisions." Desch appears to be referring to Brecher's hypothesis 19, "Decision-makers of middle power will be marginally influenced in their decisional choice by their own political structures." However, Brecher notes that domestic political considerations were critical in the approach to the Six Day War: "The political structure, in the form of a split coalition Cabinet, was important in the decision to delay and to form a National Unity Government. It became a decisive input into the strategic decision. The growing demand for a wall-to-wall Coalition, including *Rafi* and *Gahal*, from 24 May onward was a focus for the nation at large—over the correct form of response to Nasser's threat. The victory of the 'pro-changers' and the consequent formation of a National Unity Government on 1 June was a manifestation of the influence of the political structure in the 1967 decision-making process as a whole." Brecher, *Decisions*, 544-546.

government reshuffling was hardly the result of normal democratic procedure." He quotes Levi Eshkol's wife Miriam Eshkol as declaring, "It was a real putsch. Everyone was worried and nobody cared about democratic processes."

There are some difficulties with this claim. Miriam Eshkol's comment was a reaction to the vehement criticism that Levi Eshkol received after he made a rambling and discouraging public speech on May 28, 1967, as the crisis reached a fever pitch. Right after the speech, he met with military leaders in private. The military leadership lambasted him, urging him in the strongest terms to take the country to war. The Miriam Eshkol quote comes from Michael Oren's book, from an interview she gave decades after the war. It is not surprising that she would defend her embattled husband, and notably Oren does not agree with her assessment. After presenting her quote, Oren notes that the military officers were expressing their opinion to the prime minister in private, and not attempting to seize power. Importantly, the military was not alone in its opposition to Eshkol's attempt at moderation. Israeli newspapers attacked Eshkol for his weakness, some demanding that he step down.[78]

Desch's proposition that Peres was forced into government as part of the rush to war is not accurate. Peres was a member of the Rafi party, which belonged to the ruling coalition before the crisis emerged. Representing Rafi, Peres sat on the Ministerial Defence Committee.[79] Peres did not get promoted during the crisis. Further, he made largely unheard suggestions for resolving the crisis without war which diverged from the opinions of those who demanded an immediate preemptive attack. For example, he suggested on June 2 that Israel conduct a nuclear test as a means of restoring Israeli deterrence and averting war.[80]

Like Peres, Dayan represented the Rafi party on the Ministerial Defence Committee. Dayan was promoted to Defense Minister through democratic means. Golda Meir, a civilian and general secretary of the Mapai party (the largest member of the coalition), asked Dayan to serve as deputy prime minister on defense matters, though Dayan instead ended up with the defense portfolio.[81] The appointment of Dayan, the war hero of 1956, to Defense Minister was widely and wildly popular. The appointment was a great relief to many, and the announcement led to a cancellation of a planned massive protest in Jerusalem.[82] Eshkol was forced to accept Dayan into his government not because of a feared coup, but because Dayan was so popular. As Colonel Israel Lior noted, "Too many ministers, too many members of Knesset, too many generals, and the street, always the street, supported Dayan."[83]

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[78] Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 134.

[79] Oren, *Six Days*, 87-8.

[80] Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East*, Jessica Cohen, trans. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 327.

[81] Oren, *Six Days*, 135.

[82] Segev, *1967*, 328.

[83] Oren, *Six Days*, 138.

Desch claims (101-2) that Israel attacked not out of optimism for victory, but rather out of fear that the alternative was the annihilation of the state. It is true that Israel's decision to attack was greatly encouraged by a sense of overwhelming threat to its national security. However, Israel did not view the attack on Egypt as a long shot launched in desperation, as Japan viewed the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.[84] The Israeli military establishment was very confident in victory, and conveyed this confidence to the political leadership. Desch himself concedes that "Rabin, Yariv, and their colleagues in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) were 'spoiling for a fight'." An article cited by Desch agrees: "Israel's military leaders, while certainly concerned by the situation in general, were also unequivocally convinced that they would be victorious in the forthcoming war, even if the Arabs did attack first."[85] More importantly, the political leadership became convinced that an attack could succeed, especially after Dayan became Defence Minister and approved a more aggressive plan of attack, and after the United States began to signal that its opposition to attack was waning. When the final decision for war was made, the cabinet voted 12-2 in favor of attacking.[86]

Desch also claims (100) that Dayan as defense minister "ordered the assault on the Golan Heights without securing the prime minister's approval." Desch uses this as evidence that Dayan eschewed democratic processes, perhaps evincing an image of a reckless defense minister unconstrained by an elected leader. The reality is much more complex. After the war started, Eshkol was *more* in favor of attacking Golan than was Dayan. As late as June 8, Dayan vehemently opposed attacking Golan, even as Syrian forces were bombarding settlements in northern Israel. It was at a meeting that day that Dayan convinced Eshkol and the cabinet *not* to attack the Golan. Others besides Eshkol supported the attack on Golan, including Minister of Labor Yigal Allon and Minister of Education Zalman Aran. The following day, Dayan changed his mind and ordered the invasion of Golan that Eshkol favored, albeit without consulting with Eshkol that day. Eshkol was furious not because he opposed the operation, but rather because he feared that now Dayan would reap political credit for ordering the operation.[87]

Lebanon War

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, in reaction to attacks of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) forces based in Lebanon. Stam and I coded this as an Israeli victory. Desch (97) codes it as a draw, specifically that the invasion "again met with some tactical success but hardly constituted a clear strategic victory." While there has been debate in Israeli society since 1982 about the long-term advisability of the invasion, there is not debate that Israel achieved its operational goals, the successful seizure of swaths of Lebanese territory and the ejection of the PLO from Beirut. By the operational success standard, Israel won the Lebanon War.

Desch's central critique (100) is that the decision for war was not taken democratically. According to Desch, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon "used the pretext of an assassination attempt against Israel's ambassador to

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[84] Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 35-37.

[85] Roland Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly Into the Six Day War," *Middle East Journal* 60 (Spring 2006), 297.

[86] John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 150-153; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 156-7.

[87] Segev, *1967*, 386-391.

London, Shlomo Agrov, by the anti-PLO Abu Nidal faction to justify an invasion of Lebanon. Publicly adhering to a 'Little Plan' designed only to drive the PLO forty kilometers away from Israel's northern border, Sharon secretly implemented his 'Big Plan' in Lebanon to destroy the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), weaken Syria, and fundamentally remake the Middle East, all without a formal cabinet vote." (Note that the correct names of the operations were "Little Pines" and "Big Pines" rather than "Little Plan" and "Big Plan.")

Desch's characterization of Sharon as successfully subverting democratic processes is overblown. Menachem Begin of the hawkish Likud Party was elected to the office of Prime Minister in 1981. Begin reshuffled the Israeli cabinet, replacing centrists with hawks, including Sharon as Defense Minister. Desch (100n) cites Avi Shlaim's book *The Iron Wall*, but Shlaim recounts a number of instances in which Sharon (and sometimes Begin) attempted to maneuver Israel into war, but was rebuffed by the cabinet. In December 1981, cabinet opposition to Big Pines precluded a vote from being taken on it. Sharon then proposed a more limited operation, bombing PLO targets in Lebanon, which he hoped might then draw Israel into a larger war, but the cabinet opposed this suggestion, as well. In March 1982, Sharon suggested an invasion of Lebanon as a means of testing Egyptian intentions in the wake of Israeli withdrawal from eastern Sinai. Begin rejected the idea.[88]

Begin remained open to the idea of war in Lebanon, but consistent with selection effects theory he would only act with broad support inside his government, as a means of providing him with domestic political protection once war started. On May 10, Sharon and Begin secured an 11-7 cabinet vote in favor of a reduced form of Big Pines, but this slim majority was insufficient for Begin, and he declined to order the invasion.[89] The debate on whether and how to attack was fundamentally changed on June 3 when Palestinian terrorists shot and severely wounded Agrov. Desch implies that Sharon used this event to get his invasion approved, but the attack enraged Begin himself, who recommended launching an invasion to strike back at the Palestinians. The cabinet voted 14-2 in favor of war, approving an operation intended to penetrate forty kilometers into Lebanon and avoid conflict with Syria. The attack was launched on June 6, and enjoyed broad national support. One June poll found that 77% of Israelis believed that the war was definitely justified, and a further 16% thought it was justified with reservations, though support declined as a quagmire developed following the end of the conventional phase of the war.[90]

A critic might reply that once the war started, Sharon expanded the operation without sufficient respect for democratic processes.   It would be inaccurate, however, to characterize Sharon as acting secretly or against the wishes of the cabinet majority and Begin. Sharon sought cabinet support for a number of steps to escalate the war once it started. On the second day of the war, Sharon asked the cabinet to authorize Israeli forces to outflank the Syrians and go as far as the Beirut-Damascus road, which lay beyond the 40 kilometer zone. The

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[88] Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: Norton, 2000, 397-9).

[89] Avner Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security: Politics, Strategy, and the Israeli Experience in Lebanon* (New York: Oxford, 1987, 109).

[90] Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 403-7; Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security*, 128.

cabinet approved, but took military and diplomatic measures to prevent a larger confrontation with Syria.[91] On June 8, the cabinet approved Sharon's suggestion for an Israeli flanking move around Syrian forces, and the following day Sharon approved cabinet permission to attack Syrian surface to air missile batteries.[92]

The Lebanon War demonstrates selection effects theory. Democratic Israel won a war that it initiated. Begin declined to attack until there was sufficient political support for the invasion. The decision to attack was popular. The democratic political process constrained and shaped Begin's decisions for war. Once war began, individual decisions for escalation were approved by the civilian cabinet.

The Postwar Political Fates of Middle Eastern Leaders

Desch (103) argued that Israeli leaders were not punished for poor military performance, or rewarded for strong military performance. He remarked that "the arguably mixed results of the Suez War…did not adversely affect Ben-Gurion's political career," though as noted that war provided important geopolitical benefits to Israel, and was certainly viewed by Israeli society as a great success. Further, Desch concedes that Dayan and Meir resigned in disgrace for the series of errors committed in the prosecution of the 1973 War, that Sharon was forced out after the Lebanon War, and that Begin stepped down from power after the Lebanon War, albeit for personal reasons. And of course, the War of Independence improved Ben-Gurion's political standing. More generally, as noted previously, the most sophisticated quantitative work on the relationship between war outcomes and leadership tenure supports selection effects theory.

Desch attributes a number of leadership transitions in the Arab world to outcomes of the wars with Israel. However, in all of these cases it is not clear that it was defeat to Israel which caused the leader to lose power. Husni Za'im of Syria was deposed and executed in 1949, though the coup against Za'im may have been more directly caused by Za'im's political repression and policies of ethnic favoritism within the Syrian military.[93] Desch mentions the assassination of King Abdullah in 1951, but that assassin was motivated by fear that Abdullah would make peace with the Israelis, not retribution for Jordan's defeat in the War of Independence (the assassinations of King Faisel and Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id of Iraq in 1958 were also largely caused by fear that those leaders would make peace with Israel). Desch mentions the 1952 overthrow of King Farouk of Egypt, but this was driven principally by anti-British sentiment and an upsurge in Egyptian nationalism.[94] The other purges that Desch makes note of, such as those within the Egyptian military following the Six Day War, are not inconsistent with the selection effects theory, as a defeated authoritarian leader found scapegoats for a loss to deflect criticism from himself. Desch notes that King Hussein of Jordan worried about public backlash following the defeat in 1967, but of course Hussein stayed in power, as did Nasser of Egypt and Assad of Syria. Nasser also held power following the defeat in 1956, Sadat stayed in power following the failed 1969-1970 War of Attrition, Sadat and Assad stayed in power following the defeat in 1973, and Assad stayed in power following the 1982 defeat.

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[91] Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security*, 113.

[92] Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 409.

[93] Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 98.

[94] See Derek Hopwood, *Egypt: Politics and Society 1945-1984* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 29-33.

V. The Vietnam War.

Downes argued that the 1965 American decisions to escalate its involvement in Vietnam provide evidence against selection effects theory. He focuses on processes rather than coding of independent and dependent variables. Importantly, the identity of the initiator is debatable (specifically, whether the February 1965 attacks on Pleiku or the American retaliatory airstrikes constituted the commencement of the North Vietnam-US war), and American participation is often coded as ending in a draw in 1973. So, this is not a clear case of a democracy initiating a war it goes on to lose.[95]

The American decision to escalate occurred in the context of a wave of Vietcong bombings against American troops in South Vietnam in February 1965 at Pleiku. The US launched a minor round of airstrikes against North Vietnam in retaliation for the bombings, which eventually grew into a major bombing campaign. The US also substantially escalated its ground commitment in Vietnam, to more than 500,000 American troops. Downes proposed that the Johnson administration clearly understood in 1965 that the likelihood of winning in Vietnam was not high, and yet it initiated/escalated the war anyway. Downes claimed that this is a counterexample to the selection effects proposition that democracies only initiate war when they are confident in victory.

As Downes argued, there were two reasons why Johnson initiated/escalated the Vietnam War, despite knowing that the chances for eventual American success were not high. First, Johnson and others in the foreign policy elite believed that abandoning South Vietnam, an American ally, would have grave consequences for American reputation, and likely encourage aggression elsewhere. Second, President Johnson feared that withdrawing from South Vietnam would expose him to vicious political attacks including from within his own party, which among other things would jeopardize his Great Society program.

The Vietnam War demonstrates many of the patterns predicted by selection effects theory. If Downes' critique is correct, then in one sense the marketplace of ideas seems to have worked reasonably well, as many components of government (including the White House) correctly understood that the Vietnam War was a risky bet in which victory was not guaranteed. This is not to say that the Vietnam War is an unqualified success of the marketplace of ideas, as critics have long lambasted the Johnson administration for presenting inaccurate or incomplete information about Vietnam, most notably regarding the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. But at least on one important issue, estimation of the likelihood of winning the war, the president was basically correct.

Consistent with selection effects theory, the decision to escalate was popular at the time. Before the Pleiku attacks, there was broad support for either standing by South Vietnam or escalating. A September 1964 poll

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[95] The quantitative data sets are mixed as to whether or not the US initiated the war. Downes argues that the US should be coded as the initiator, because the latest evidence indicates that the first interstate violence, airstrikes following the February 1965 Pleiku bombings, was initiated by the US (the Pleiku bombings themselves were a Vietcong operation, and Downes argues that the bombings were approved by a local VC commander, and not the North Vietnamese commander). At the time, however, the US clearly perceived itself as a target, and the attack as being ordered by North Vietnam. Hence, from the US perspective the decision to escalate was seen more as a reaction to attack rather than a war of choice. Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 124.

found that 45% supported maintaining support for South Vietnam, 36% supported escalating to initiate attacks on North Vietnam, and only 19% favored withdrawal.[96] A December 1964 poll found that 58% supported either standing by the Saigon government or bombing North Vietnam, as opposed to only 20% who supported leaving Vietnam and negotiating.[97] This support held up after the Pleiku attacks. A March 1965 poll found that 85% of the American public favored either holding the line to protect South Vietnam or invading North Vietnam proper, whereas only 15% supported withdrawal.[98] In a June 1965 poll, 79% agreed with the Johnson administration's argument that if the US did not stand fast in Vietnam, then the Communists would take over the rest of Southeast Asia.[99] More generally, opinion polls taken in the months after the escalation decisions were made indicated that about two thirds of the public rated Johnson's Vietnam policy as excellent or very good, and only about one third rating it as only fair or poor.[100]

Other aspects of the Vietnam War are consistent with selection effects theory. The escalation of casualties and increasingly grim prospects for victory steadily eroded American public support for the war.[101] The poor course of the war had negative consequences for the elected leader who initiated/escalated it, as the setbacks forced Johnson to forgo running for reelection in 1968. Last, even by Downes' own argument Johnson elected to initiate/escalate the war because of fear of being attacked politically. This domestic political motivation is fundamentally consistent with the assumption of selection effects theory that the foreign policy decisions of elected leaders are shaped by concerns about their domestic political fortunes.

Importantly, the American public shared the Johnson administration's sober estimates of the likelihood of rapid victory. That is, this is not an instance in which an elected leader duped the electorate into being falsely confident in the prospects for victory. In a May 1965 poll, 44% thought that in five years' time a neutralist or pro-Communist government would be in power in Vietnam and only 22% thought a pro-US government would be in power.[102] In an August 1965 poll, only 14% thought the war would end in US victory, and 35% thought it would either end in a Korea-like stalemate or drag on interminably.[103] In an October 1965 poll, only 29% indicated they thought the war would end in American victory, whereas 40% indicated it would

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[96] Gallup Survey, [USGALLUP.633POS.Q24].

[97] Harris Survey, [USHARRIS.122164.R2].

[98] Harris Survey, [USHARRIS.65MAR1.R1]. All polling data are from iPoll, available from the Roper Center (http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/). The abbreviated references used here are the same as those used by iPoll.

[99] [USHARRIS.062865.R9], from iPoll.

[100] Eg Harris Survey, [USHARRIS.071965.R2], Harris Survey [USHARRIS.100465.R2I], and Harris Survey [USHARRIS.120665.R4].

[101] Mueller, *War*; Gartner and Segura, "War."

[102] The question refers to "Vietnam," not "South Vietnam" or "North Vietnam." [USGALLUP.711.Q004D], from iPoll.

[103] [USGALLUP.715.Q005], from iPoll.

either end in stalemate or drag on.[104] A different poll found that 54% thought that Vietnam would be a long war, and only 24% though it would "settle soon."[105] In one December 1965 poll, 69% indicated that they thought the war would end in a compromise, whereas only 7% indicated that they thought the war would end in a clear-cut American victory.[106] That is, the public agreed with the basic assessments of the Johnson administration: though the chances of victory were only moderate, the high stakes merited escalation regardless.

Is a case of a democracy initiating war when both public and leadership recognize the chances for victory to be moderate a challenge to selection effects theory? Stam and I argued that publics are more likely to consent to war as the stakes involved get higher.[107] Sometimes, as in 1965, the perceived stakes become high enough that the public is willing to support war initiation even when the chances of victory are only moderate. The existence of such cases is in a narrow sense a challenge to the simple proposition that democracies only initiate wars when they are highly confident they will win. However, the general pattern is consistent with the theory. The theory forecasts that publics weigh costs and benefits, and their sensitivity to war costs means they will only support war when the expected utility of war are quite high. When the stakes are high, it means that the expected utility of war is high even if the chances of victory are moderate, and the costs of inaction are high.

In sum, though the war was initiated despite the recognition by the leadership and the public that the chances of victory were only moderate, many of the internal dynamics within the Vietnam War are predicted by selection effects theory. A meritocratic military provided the president with an accurate assessment of the likelihood of victory. The public and president shared a reasonably accurate view of the likelihood of success. The initial initiation/escalation of the war was popular. The government's decision for initiation/escalation was affected strongly by domestic political concerns. Escalating casualties and declining military fortunes pushed down public support for the war. The lack of success affected an elected leader's political tenure.

VI. Conclusions.

Close examination of the Russo-Polish War, the Sinai War, the Six Day War, the Lebanon War, and the Vietnam War all reveal more support for selection effects theory than critics have allowed. These wars generally describe the patterns predicted by selection effects theory. Democracies tend to win the wars they initiate. Domestic politics shape the war initiation decisions of elected leaders. Democratic militaries usually provide accurate assessments of the likelihood of victory. Elected leaders generally attack when they are confident they can win. Elected leaders only initiate wars when they are confident that war initiation decisions will be popular. Elected leaders vet war initiation decisions among the political opposition, and they do not attack if there is not adequate support. If the war does not go well, it has negative domestic political

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[104] [USGALLUP.719.Q005], from iPoll.

[105] [USHARRIS.65OCT.R1], from iPoll.

[106] [USGALLUP.65-722.R004], from iPoll.

[107] Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 148-149.

consequences for the leadership. These dynamics are all squarely at the heart of selection effects theory, and the broader proposition that domestic political institutions shape foreign policy decisions.

That being said, elements of the cases demonstrate two important aspects of selection effects theory that would benefit from future research. The first concerns civil-military relations, especially civilian control of the military. Though not extensively developed, an internal assumption of the selection effects theory is that democracies are often characterized by looser civilian control of the military. Elected leaders are less fearful of *coups d'état*, and hence can afford to promote military officers on the basis of merit rather than political reliability. The lower fear of *coups d'état* also means they can grant their military leaders more decision-making autonomy both before and during war.

Though looser control can provide benefits, it can also introduce risks. Even the highest quality military officers sometimes give poor advice to civilian leaders or make bad decisions. When civilians defer too much to military officers or to high level officials with military backgrounds, this can sometimes increase the chances that bad military advice gets translated into policy without being checked by civilian oversight. This has been an issue of long standing concern in American history. For example, the Union fought the Civil War badly for years because President Lincoln too easily deferred to the flawed judgments of military leaders like Generals John Pope and George McClellan.

The military advice in the cases examined here was generally good, notably military strategizing in the Sinai and Six Day Wars, and 1965 American military assessments of the likelihood of victory in the Vietnam War. The dangers of excessive deferral to leaders with military backgrounds was evident in the 1982 Lebanon War. Though Sharon achieved cabinet approval for each escalatory step taken by Israel, he was probably able to have a large influence in shaping the debate in the direction he wanted, broader action in Lebanon, because Begin and other members of the cabinet lacked military expertise.[108] However, even in the Lebanon case the push to a broader war came from Sharon himself rather than from the military more broadly. Sharon's deputy, the former brigadier general Mordechai Zippori, told Begin and the cabinet that the June 1982 invasion plan would lead to a war with Syria, but he was ignored.[109] Future research might explore whether decisions for war are of higher quality when many or most members of an elected leader's inner circle enjoy military expertise, meaning that more high level decision-makers can evaluate military arguments more thoroughly and with greater confidence.

A second issues concerns secrecy and the marketplace of ideas. The issue of secrecy introduces some puzzles for selection effects theory. Though the theory does not forecast that elected leaders have a normative aversion to secrecy, it does allow that an elected leader might make decisions in secret in order to maximize the chances of victory, and hence minimize the chances that the war will go poorly and threaten her hold on office. There are limits to how secret an elected leader will keep the decision-making process, as she is motivated to include at least the leadership of the political opposition in order to provide political cover. Regardless, though keeping a decision secret may improve the chances of victory by concealing diplomacy or military strategy, it may increase the chances of policy failure by cutting out much of the marketplace of ideas.

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[108] Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security*, 113.

[109] Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 405; Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security*, 111.

Secrecy needs to be explored further as both a dependent variable and an independent variable. As a dependent variable, we need to know what structural military conditions (such as new military strategies) might make secret war decision-making more likely. We also need to know whether democracies are significantly less likely to engage in secret war planning and decision –making. Though there are some instances of democracies deciding secretly, they are not the norm. For example, the US debated war decisions openly in 1898 (Spain), 1917 (Germany), 1941 (Japan), 1950 (North Korea), 1964/1965 (North Vietnam), 1990 (Iraq), 2001 (Afghanistan), and 2003 (Iraq). One quantitative study found that excluding Israel, democracies are significantly less likely than other kinds of states to engage in secret mobilization moves during international crises, though Israel itself is more likely to engage in secret mobilization than other kinds of states.[110]

As an independent variable, we need to know whether secrecy makes military success more or less likely, perhaps exploring whether secrecy might make victory more likely but only under certain conditions. Certainly, some of the bigger foreign policy decisions in American history had their roots in decisions or assumptions made in secret. The Bay of Pigs invasion was not openly debated. Johnson's selective framing of the facts surrounding the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Incident may have led the American public to exaggerate the extent of the North Vietnamese threat, in turn leading the public to accept war in 1965 knowing that the chances of victory were only moderate. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was based on flawed and inadequate evidence about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and terrorist links that were not sufficiently exposed to open debate. Future research on both the causes and effects of secrecy will help improve our understanding of the marketplace of ideas, and whether it plays a significant role in explaining why democracies win their wars.

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[110] Brian Lai, "Military Mobilization and the Outcome of International Crises," Ph.D. diss. (Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, 2001), 95.