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Apathy and Foreign Policy: What We Can Learn from the Vietnam War

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Apathy and Foreign Policy
What We Can Learn from the Vietnam War

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Chapter 1: Public Opinion

Americans as Indifferent to Foreign Affairs

“To speak with precision of public opinion is a task not unlike coming to grips with the Holy Ghost,” said V. O. Key, Junior.¹ Nebulous and variable, public opinion invites description by cliché. Social scientists can’t help but dwell on it, discussing its characteristics and effects. To politicians, especially, public opinion is of particular interest, given the high profile of its relationship to government. Although the nature and sense of this relationship have been questioned, it has always remained a subject of discussion, particularly with the spread of democracy.

A particular section of the influence of public opinion is even more intriguing; that is, the connection of public attitudes with foreign policy. While the electorate is perfectly willing to involve itself in domestic politics, such has not always been the case with regard to international relations. There is a whole list of factors resulting in what amounts to an apathetic, uninformed American public opinion on global issues.

Thus, despite its assumed necessity as a building block for any democratic system, public opinion is typically non-extant in regard to issues of foreign affairs, at least in the United States. The Vietnam War, the example usually given to prove that public opinion is in fact relevant to foreign policy, is in fact the exception that proves the rule, and even corresponds largely with theories predicting the actions of elites in a public opinion vacuum. A case rife with failures, both those caused by public sentiment

¹ V.O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 8.

and those not, it raises many questions on how we should respond to an apathetic public.

Eventually, there are two main options: improve public attentiveness related to foreign policy, or find a way to improve the standard of elite decision-making. An amalgamation of the two, relying the government to require the most from its public servants, but even more importantly, counting on the everyday citizen to engage with their nation's civics and international politics, turns out to be the conclusion. But this will be an incredibly difficult task, as the United States has long suffered from an inbred isolationism and public apathy, particularly concerning foreign affairs.

Perspectives on Public Opinion

As public opinion has shifted in the past, so has the consensus on what it is and how it affects foreign policy. In the era of progressivism and Wilsonian idealism, it was seen as an essential functioning part of democracy, and of a nation's actions.²

But after the First World War, as idealism waned, this was questioned. Lippmann was one writer who questioned the idea that the general public was at all well-enough informed for its ideas to mean anything substantial.³ And furthermore, public opinion could not pass beyond apathy – the public was unable to take the initiative and promote any idea in pursuance of policy change.

Another belief that began to arise was an increased faith in propagandists –

² Ibid., p. 4.

³ Ibid., p. 5.

which led to a corresponding decrease of confidence in public opinion as a guide for policy. After World War I, it was seen that propaganda and media could influence the public to a large degree. Therefore, public opinion was undermined as a justification for policy, since the media and propaganda opinion elite could just create public attitudes in the first place.

This theory was soon modified. V. O. Key, Jr.'s understanding of the change was that it was just too inconvenient and uncomfortable to believe that "ulcer-ridden hucksters" held veiled control of the entire system. Thus something more "elegant" had to be found, which turned out to be the idea of the policy elite.⁴ It was unacceptable to believe that a media mogul directed the ideas of the masses, but to replace that person with a group of highly-educated, trained decision makers, using their influence for the national interest as well as their own, was much more palatable.

The Almond-Lippmann Consensus

Almond is another political theorist who thought that the average person was probably unfit to govern and that their opinion granted no real direction to politics. Writing after the Second World War, he worried that public opinion actually had too great an effect on foreign policy. Looking at Americans' historical isolationist bent, he feared that public opinion would prove to have a harmful influence on the United States' international relations.

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

Almond points out that although normally, the public is uninterested in foreign affairs, foreign affairs may, in a particular moment, assume a much more important place in the public's attention.⁵ Essentially, when foreign affairs begin to present a threat that is seen as much more urgent, people sit up and take notice. Thus "foreign policy moods" are constantly shifting and unstable. Almond blames this on both a public lack of information, and a tradition of isolationism. He concludes that the best plan of action is "creating general public confidence that the future contingencies are being planned for by the responsible agencies."⁶

Thus the period after World War II led to a general consensus that public opinion was untrustworthy – the Almond-Lippmann consensus or post-World War II consensus. The Almond-Lippmann consensus had three tenets.⁷ First, the consensus held that public opinion is erratic. It responds unpredictably to stimuli and varies widely, taking first one position and then the contrary. This makes public opinion an unstable basis for any justification of policy. Secondly, public opinion is incoherent. The average person cannot commit the time to learn about policy issues, especially those of foreign policy, and their opinion is not based on any real factors. Due to this, any individual may hold a different opinion on a matter despite the same circumstances being present, and the combination of these individual views into a holistic 'public

⁵ G. A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 71.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁷ O. R. Holsti, 1992, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus," *International Studies Quarterly* 36 (4): p. 442.

opinion' results in an incoherent mess. Third and finally, the consensus held that public opinion was irrelevant to policy. Not only was it useless to policy, being variable and inconsistent when left on its own, but due to these factors it could not exert its own influence over policy makers either.

Consequently, public opinion could be disregarded. This held especially true for issues of foreign affairs. This paper will assume that the Almond-Lippmann consensus is correct, but only for issues of foreign policy. Even if the majority of people can provide a useful opinion on domestic issues, international relations are more inaccessible to the public, which leads to public sentiment dissolving into apathy and isolationism.

A History of Isolationism

Isolationism has been a trend throughout American history. Broadly speaking, there are four reasons for this: a geographical separation from the rest of the world, making it physically difficult to engage other countries; a value on isolationism, whether that is practical or idealistic; ignorance of the rest of the world; and a basic indifference to events that do not affect Americans. Here we will focus on the fourth reason: an apathetic public concerning foreign affairs.

If we look at the early United States, this international apathy began early. Hardly had the colonies shrugged off that label and cut their ties to the Old World, when their first president under the new constitution established an isolationist bent. George Washington's famous farewell address advised "as little political connection as

possible” with foreign nations,⁸ and Lin-Manuel Miranda’s famous musical *Hamilton* commemorates Washington’s decision to remain neutral during and after the French revolution in a rap battle.⁹

There is, of course, a very important distinction between isolationism and apathy. Washington, of course, was well-informed to the situation in Europe, and weighed it carefully before making a decision. But by creating a policy of isolationism, he initiated a cycle where a government with a detached foreign policy encouraged citizens to detach from foreign policy, which then led back to more isolationism.

Jefferson continued this isolationist idea at least to some extent, speaking against “entangling alliances” in his inaugural address.¹⁰ Of the early presidents, perhaps it is James Monroe who is most famous for his isolationism. The Monroe Doctrine, wellknown even around the world, can be seen as a warning to other countries to back off— America wanted its space (although one also sees in the doctrine justification for the United States’ own involvement in the Americas).

Non-interventionism reigned for most of the United States’ history, and almost all of the nineteenth century, with the main exception being the Roosevelt administration. By the time the First World War broke out, the administration was

⁸ George Washington, “Farewell Address,” *The Avalon Project*. Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp.

⁹ Lin-Manuel Miranda, “Hamilton: An American Musical,” In *Hamilton: The Revolution*, Edited by Jeremy McCarter. (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016).

¹⁰ David Fromkin, “Entangling Alliances,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1970. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1970-07-01/entangling-alliances>

again trying to avoid being caught up in the conflict, and Wilson tried to avoid joining the war for as long as possible. The war changed his mind, and afterwards he became a supporter of the League of Nations, but the Senate and the public were not with him and the United States once more descended past non-interventionism into a real, deep isolationism, from which only Pearl Harbor was able to yank it out.

This period, amounting to around a century and a half of more or less continual isolationism, left clear marks on the American public. Already geographically separated by an expansive ocean on either side, political introversion only served to compound these factors, encouraging Americans for focusing on themselves.

Since the end of the Second World War, public opinion on foreign affairs has grown and shrunk with the cold war, as well as direct American intervention such as the Vietnam War or the Gulf War. Yet compared to any international standard, American common knowledge of global issues is typically not great enough to allow any sort of mass opinion to be well-informed. It is for this reason as well that the American public is customarily apathetic concerning international relations.

This is the result we get if combine this history of American foreign policy moods with the history of the perception of public opinion; a general sentiment of isolationism stemming from an apathetic public that largely doesn't care about the rest of the world and as a result puts no pressure on policy makers to engage with international affairs. In other words, this is where we can see the Almond-Lippmann consensus playing out in the policy world.

Formation of Public Opinion

Of course, there are academics who disagree with the Almond-Lippmann consensus. Holsti is one, who points to the Vietnam War as a place where public opinion became important again, or at least recognized as such.¹¹ He appeals to another political scientist, Robert Shapiro to back him up using polling evidence to show that public opinion is more stable than had been assumed, and argues that in many instances, foreign policy has been directed by public attitudes.

But to counter these arguments, one need merely turn to the vast breadth of academic literature about the formation of public opinion, especially its connection with the media.

The Media as Uninformative

Bernard Cohen is one writer who was concerned with the lack of public interest in foreign policy. While the media was, he believed, essential in informing the public and in shaping its views on politics and the world, the common person simply wasn't willing to spend their time learning about foreign affairs, and there was little that the media could do about it.¹² Cohen assumed the importance of the media in creating public opinion, but doubted its effect, and thus the validity of that opinion.

Graber, also writing concerning the media and how it affects the public, points out that the media chooses stories not to educate the public, but in order to keep public

¹¹ Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," p. 445.

¹² Bernard C. Cohen, "The Press, the Public, and Foreign Policy," *Press and Foreign Policy*, Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 253-254. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183q0fp.10.

interest and keep the news cycle in motion.¹³ Thus characteristics that lead to high coverage are primarily a sense of a story being “close to home.” This is true in a geographic sense, and also in a metaphorical sense where the media chooses issues that its audience is likely to care about or be affected by. Beyond this, journalists look for violence, disaster, scandal, and timeliness as secondary characteristics. Thus the vast majority of news coverage doesn’t touch on foreign affairs, and when it does, it is usually in a more sensationalist way.

Powlick and Katz add that this has resulted in a “vicious cycle”; the media finds demand for things that the public knows about, but if only those things are covered, then those will continue to be the things which are familiar to the public. Conversely, foreign affairs issues, while important, are not covered because they are confusing and unfamiliar to most people. This means that the people don’t hear about them and therefore have no demand for international relations coverage in the future. Public ignorance and apathy towards global affairs is perpetuated. Powlick and Katz believe that “if journalists consistently reported international events based upon their intrinsic importance, public interest and knowledge about international events would eventually increase,”¹⁴ but see this as unlikely.

¹³ Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., (1997), p. 118.

¹⁴ Philip J. Powlick and Andrew Z. Katz, “Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus,” *Mershon International Studies Review*, vol. 42, no. 1, 1998, pp. 41. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/254443.

Baum agrees with this pessimistic view of the relationship between the media and the public. One could put the blame on either the media or the public, but essentially the public will leave its apathy only when events are framed as “soft news.” “Soft news” is what Baum terms the kind of news one is likely to find on daytime and late-night talk shows, cable entertainment networks, and in tabloids. These media are not focused directly on “hard news,” but are more likely to cover a crime drama story or celebrity news.¹⁵ Baum points to a consensus in the literature that the politically active get their news typically from different sources from the average person. He sees the rise of politically uninformative news sources as a recent thing, with “a dramatic expansion in the number and diversity of entertainment-oriented, quasi-news media outlets.”

These soft news sources do not avoid covering topics such as international relations entirely, but they only do so in an amount and in a way that is calculated to remain engaging to their audience. As a result, while the public may begin to lose a little of its apathy, it is only in a measure that corresponds to its interest as a source of entertainment, and any resulting public opinion is still too uninformed to make a good basis for policy.

Framing

The way in which soft news makes international relations accessible to the average American is what Baum, and also Powlick and Katz, call “framing.” Powlick

¹⁵ Matthew A. Baum, *Soft News Goes to War*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 6.

and Katz discuss debate over policy among elites, but clarify that this is not the same thing as public involvement. They believe that for that to happen, issues need to be framed and be made more accessible. People are more likely to have an opinion on domestic issues than they are on issues of international relations because domestic issues are easier to understand and closer to home. But when someone – the media – can provide a frame, it gives people a “central organizing idea or story line.”¹⁶ People can then use that as a conceptual tool to interpret and evaluate information.

A frame is also usually a common conception across a group that allows members of that group to communicate with each other with greater ease. But this also doubles as a method of controlling the narrative. Powlick and Katz recognize this, which they say is why political elites are always trying to frame narratives in terms that are helpful to them. A positive or negative frame can affect the way an entire discourse is held, and sway public opinion. Therefore, the power of frames is easily used by power elites to create opinion where they want it, or support for their policies.

In the end, then, Powlick and Katz don’t wind up rejecting Seymour’s statement that “the President makes opinion, he does not follow it. The polls tell him how good a politician he is.”¹⁷ In their search to find the nexus between public opinion and foreign policy, they decide that elite debate often controls the media and through it public

¹⁶ Powlick and Katz, “Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus,” p. 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

attitudes. Policy and opinion affect each other, but policy decisions always have the initiative.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, we can see that public opinion is easily swayed by the media and elites. The effect of the media on public attitudes is strong, but not one that can be positively used to create informed moods on international relations. The public is easily distracted by soft news and doesn't have time to pay attention to foreign affairs if they are not a source of entertainment. This lack of information leads to ignorance, which further builds public ignorance of global affairs. A tradition of isolationism and noninterventionism in the United States leads to citizens feeling detached from goings on in the rest of the world. All this combines to a general public apathy towards foreign relations.

There are a few exceptions. If one thinks of issues in international relations that do maintain public interest – terrorism, ISIS, North Korea – they are all issues that have essentially been domesticated. American domestic political parties – the Democrats and Republicans – have built policies on these issues into their platforms, framing the discussions and making it easier for people to build opinions on them, influenced by the party and by elites. Typically they are issues which involve some type of conflict, and often some threat to the United States itself.

One might also note that these are the issues which are the most polarized. As the issues become more tied to domestic political positions and alignments, the debate becomes fiercer and more partisan. This means that policy-makers are now being

influenced by party politics, rather than the national interest. Decisions come to be made in order to appease the electorate back home, and not due to any diplomatic concerns or influence. Thus it might almost seem that it would be better for diplomacy to keep the public uninterested so that thoughtful choices can be made on foreign affairs without partisan rivalries getting in the way.

This distinction between domestic and foreign policy issues is an important one for this very reason. It needs to be clear that the circumstances addressed in this paper refer specifically to foreign policy issues. Furthermore, given the cultural and historic background discussed earlier, any findings cannot necessarily be extrapolated to any other nation, but are instead specific to the American sphere.

In order, therefore, to discuss the benefits and drawbacks that result from public apathy, and the resulting effect on policy makers, we will assume, as many still do, that the points outlined in the Almond-Lippmann consensus do hold true, at least as regards foreign relations.

Chapter 2: Policy Influences

An Analysis in View of the Almond-Lippmann Consensus

Once one assumes that Almond and Lippmann are correct, then the question becomes: if public opinion is unguided, fickle, unimportant, or absent, having little effect on policy makers, how do those policy makers respond and act? In what amounts to an opinion vacuum, how do choices get made? In an ideal democracy, the assumption would be that the feelings and desires of the public itself are what steer,

however indirectly, the choices made by the government that represents it. So what happens when no one is at the wheel?

The image of an electorate sitting at the wheel of diplomacy, too preoccupied to steer the car, is a metaphor that quickly breaks down. Diplomacy is carried out by diplomats – people and decision-makers – who have their own agency, unlike a vehicle, which has no mind of its own. Only if one believes that international relations are path dependent to the extent that they continue along, following structural patterns, regardless of the leaders in charge, might one compare diplomacy to a car, drifting down the road guided by nothing but its steering alignment. Yet even in this scenario, policy-makers, by not acting, are making the choice not to guide international relations – they would still be choosing to not put themselves in the driver's seat.

Presuming, therefore, that policy-makers do take charge in situations lacking public guidance – that is, the majority of global affairs – is this seizing of the initiative well-meaning, helpful assistance by experts who can do what the average citizen cannot or chooses not to? Or is it a manipulative, opportunistic ploy to push foreign policy in the direction that elites see fit? And what choices do in fact get made?

The Hands-Off Approach

There is evidence to back up the first assumption – that foreign policy does get neglected by leaders, not just the public. Lindsay describes a process by which foreign affairs have lost political credit.¹⁸ Translated, this means that politicians stand to gain

¹⁸ James M. Lindsay, "The New Apathy: How an Uninterested Public Is Reshaping Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 79, no. 5, 2000, pp. 4, JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20049883.

less electoral capital by pinning themselves to non-domestic issues. Of course politicians emphasize things that are close to home, he says, because they will always talk about things that will get them votes. A congressperson has no reason to bring up a political issue from the other side of the world when they're campaigning, unless it is somehow relevant to their own district. Any focus that representatives put on foreign policy typically seems forced or to be some sort of duty or obligation. The Senate Foreign Relations committee or Senate might show up in the news every now and again, but it is hardly glamorous. When we give our politicians the authority to make our decisions for us, we also give them the authority to decide which decisions to make; that is, to frame the agenda. This happens in a very practical way in our legislative bodies, when literal agendas are written, but also in a larger sense across our national dialogue. And although politicians do carry out their jobs when it comes to foreign policy, it is not something that is often broadcast or treated as an area of equal importance.

For Lindsay, this is an unarguably negative result. This apathy amounts to what he calls "malign neglect." The drawbacks of this don't come from any moral standpoint but instead a quite practical one: as long as we neglect our foreign policy we hurt our own global standing. The broader public, although it may support international organizations and hold the opinion that international involvement is important, is still uninformed concerning the rest of the world, doesn't follow foreign affairs, and has trouble directing its representatives concerning these matters. This then, Lindsay says, leads to politicians neglecting international relations, as already mentioned. But furthermore, interest groups and lobbyists are empowered and given greater influence

because the arena is so empty. When most ignore international relations, the “squeaky wheels” can promote their opinion to an undue point.

Finally, Lindsay adds, less attention given to foreign affairs weakens the president by emboldening congress to withstand him even without public support.¹⁹ During the cold war, when national standing was very important, even political opponents of the president in congress hesitated to make him look bad. But with national prestige less of an issue and a public that now exerts little pressure one way or the other on global issues, congress is more comfortable putting itself at odds with the president. This trend waned after 9/11, but only briefly – by the end of Bush’s term, the opposition was back.

This is unfortunate because to Lindsay, the president is the only one who can really initiate any real internationalism again. The public is certainly incapable, and congress cannot control the political discourse the same way the president can. Ultimately then, politicians have followed the public and become too apathetic with concern to foreign issues, and the president must lead the return to internationalism, in order to protect American interests and standing abroad.

The weakness of Lindsay’s solution is that he doesn’t address the real problem, which is the apathy of the public and its representatives. By trying to find a more manageable solution, Lindsay has constrained himself. Asking the president to be responsible for leading every aspect of foreign affairs puts a lot of pressure on them

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

takes out a large safety net. Obviously Lindsay isn't telling the president to get rid of foreign affairs advisers, but deemphasizing other staff to emphasize the power that the president has to frame issues isn't a helpful trade-off.

The Elite as Controlling the Agenda

Shapiro agrees with Lindsay that public opinion should rightfully control democracy, including foreign affairs.²⁰ For him this comes more out of a place of justice than the practical way in which Lindsay addresses it. In talking about democracy, the assumption is that representatives and policy makers mirror and execute the desire of the people as a foundational aspect of the system. This connection is what gives legitimacy to the entire arrangement. But unlike Lindsay, Shapiro believes that this is in fact happening. This difference of opinion, however, perhaps stems from a difference in topic – while Lindsay is discussing only foreign policy, Shapiro speaks to American democracy on the whole. But although he maintains that public opinion plays a vital role in domestic politics, Shapiro does admit that when it comes to international relations, that connection is a much weaker one.

For one thing, although the public's point of view may influence politicians on any given issue, the public is not typically in a position to determine which issues are at the forefront of national debate. Instead, policy elites, in conjunction with the media, set the agenda for public discourse. If politicians find themselves led by public opinion that

²⁰ Robert Y. Shapiro, "Public Opinion and American Democracy," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 5, 2011, pp. 982, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41345919.

they have helped to create and direct through their rhetoric, we can hardly say that they are being influenced by the masses. Rather, it is the other way around.

Even when politicians do respond to popular influences, Shapiro admits, they are victim to “the thermostat effect,”²¹ a term he borrows from Wlezien, who first used it in relation to public spending.²² Essentially, public opinion, although a powerful instrument, is a clumsy one. It is able only to push policy-makers in a certain direction with a vague mandate. This pressure is hard to quantify, and results in the resultative policies being enacted late and overreacting. Then the public changes its mind to pull policy back in the other direction again, after it has already overshot the mark.

Translated into foreign policy, this appears unstable and dangerous on the global stage.

Another reason for this seesawing of policy is that as Lindsay said, policymakers are unduly influenced by small interest groups. These groups, typically more extreme than the median citizen, pull policy further in a given direction than mass opinion would have it go, meaning corrections will only have to be made again later.

Three Models of Opinion Influence on Representatives

Shapiro in the end thinks that public opinion does affect policy, but excepts foreign policy, citing Miller and Stokes.²³ Miller and Stokes were some of the first to combine actual opinion polling from constituencies with voting records of

²¹ Ibid., p. 1001.

²² Cristopher Wlezien, "The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending," *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 4 (1995): pp. 981-1000, doi:10.2307/2111666.

²³ Shapiro, "Public Opinion and American Democracy," p. 1003.

representatives in the U.S. house in order to compare public opinion (rather than basic demographic information) with policy.²⁴ They establish three different ways in which representatives can act on behalf of their constituencies: the instructed-delegate model, where voting is directly affected by public opinion; the responsible-party model, where the party line is used as a tool by both representatives and constituents to communicate and determine what position is desired on the issues; and what Miller and Stokes call the Burkean model, based on Edmund Burke's argument that the representative should legislate based not on the popular will, but the popular interest.

In the end, Miller and Stokes think that different areas of policy follow different models. For them, writing in the early 1960s, civil rights were an extremely salient issue which followed the instructed-delegate model. This corresponds with other authors who point out that domestic issues which constituents see as important are the ones where public opinion has the largest effect.²⁵ These issues had the largest correlation between the constituency's attitude and that of the representative. Other domestic issues used the responsible-party model, such as problems of social welfare, which had been part of Democratic and Republican debate for decades. But foreign policy issues were essentially unaffected by public opinion, with statistically insignificant, even negative correlation.²⁶ Yet Miller and Stokes hesitate to say that the Burkean model applies here. Instead, they see the influence of the executive branch as the guiding star

²⁴ Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," *The American Political*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

for representatives unsure of how to vote. They clearly believe that public opinion and policy ought to be connected, but seem less concerned that they might not be, although their data confirms the connection only in certain cases. Even when constituencies do not exert their influence, they seem to think that there are other helpful influences for policy makers.

An Independently Acting Foreign Policy Elite

Alterman would find this opinion troublesome. Another author who comes down to say that public opinion ought to have an opinion on foreign policy, Alterman is pessimistic. Alterman distinguishes between those who make policy decisions – “the foreign policy elite” – and the greater public, the American people.²⁷ The two problems, as he sees it, are the elite’s comfortability with making decisions on behalf of the public without any input from that public, and the inability of the public to make its voice heard. Alterman points out that the public doesn’t lack an opinion; the average person is merely incapable of standing up for that opinion and directing policy.

Alterman is, as a consequence, hesitant to rely on public opinion polls, since he thinks that the foreign policy elite not only establishes policy on its own, but also is capable of manipulating public opinion and its expression in such polls. Foreign policy ought to represent the national interest, a term that is only another way of saying the domestic interest. So foreign affairs ought to be directed by domestic opinion. The problem is that there are multiple, conflicting domestic interests, as seen in the conflict

²⁷ Eric Alterman, “A Democratic Foreign Policy,” *World Policy Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1996, p. 23, JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40209473.

and polarization of domestic politics. Sadly, the elite that makes international relations decisions has its own interests as a group and is therefore disinclined to hear out the opinions of the greater public. Especially when it comes to war, Americans are very willing to support their president and their country out of patriotism rather than interest.

Therefore, to Alterman, having the executive branch or the president set the foreign policy agenda would only be a compounding of the current problems. Unlike Lindsay, who sees the president as the only one with the public influence to establish international policy, or Miller and Stokes, who view the executive branch as a form of guidance for politicians who have trouble interpreting their constituents' desires, Alterman sees presidential influence as just another form of elite power control. The whole idea is to take power back from the elites in government so that the public can again direct them based on its own opinion.

Alterman's solution is a value-based one. The public, while apathetic, does hold its own opinions, which need to be translated into broad values on which policy can be built. This way public opinion on foreign affairs becomes something actionable for the policy elite, who can then be held accountable. Although Alterman recognizes the difficulty of this, given that even an individual American is likely to hold contradictory opinions and values, he attempts to outline a few basic guidelines, based largely on mutual respect, rights and freedoms, and transparency.

The ideas Alterman puts forward already seem difficult enough, but even trickier is that for them to be validated he needs the everyday American to begin to consider

him or herself an expert on foreign policy issues. Alterman cites a Noam Chomsky anecdote about callers to radio shows who expound at length, and in detail, about sports, while disagreeing with experts on the topic.²⁸ But if we want the public to approach international relations with the same fervor with which it might discuss a sports game, while avoiding extreme polarization, it will be a nigh-impossible task. So although he may appeal to something higher than presidential influence as a basis for foreign policy, he sets himself that much more intractable a charge to remedy the situation.

There are two reasons, then, that Alterman's answer is inadequate. Setting broad values is not the hard part – the hard part is finding values that are general enough for the public to understand and support that still offer any meaningful substance to those trying to create foreign policy from them. Secondly, it is not as if this has not been tried before. This approach is basically a propagandistic one, and propaganda has been used to justify policy to the public for centuries. Even if the values are in fact being set by the public rather than the power elite, Americans have discussed national values since the inception of the United States, and a broad commitment to something like “promoting democracy” means little to the layperson, and more importantly, does nothing to involve the public in the actual decision-making process.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

The Elite as a Subsection of the Public

Perhaps, however, there are answers to the problem which do not require an overhaul of the entire foreign policy system. Gabriel Almond would agree with Alterman that as a whole, the American public is ill-suited to direct foreign policy. But Almond points out that when one imagines the general public, although one may picture “a sense of identification” and a group that “responds to general stimuli”, one must remember that the public comprises many distinct interest groups influenced by their own specific factors.²⁹ And when we speak of “elites,” that is just one particular group that consists of members of the public who happen to be attentive and hold wellformed opinions on policy. Thus Almond says, “Who mobilizes elites, mobilizes the public.”

Is it then, a misunderstanding to say that the public is inattentive or apathetic, if it already does exert its influence through its members who are part of the elite? To return to the example of the sports fan who considers himself an expert, it is not accurate to say that this person represents all Americans, and probably not enough of them to grant democratic legitimacy to a foreign policy, did they partake in global affairs with the same enthusiasm with which they pursued sports. Instead, sports, like international relations, has its elite – high level players, trainers, coaches, and analysts – who dominate the discourse and influence public opinion. In other words, there already are members of the public who care deeply about foreign policy, and they are those

²⁹ Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, p. 138.

who become analysts, commentators, policy-makers, and influencers. Therefore it is nonsensical to say that we should take back foreign policy and give it back into the hands of the attentive public; that elite is the attentive public itself.

Democracy vs. Diplomacy

Finally, there are those on the other side of the normative fence: those who hold the controversial opinion that reduced public involvement actually translates to a better foreign policy. Holsti, for one, points out that even those who believe that public opinion is helpful when it comes to domestic issues are forced to admit that it is not as useful when it comes to international relations.³⁰ Holsti describes the AlmondLippmann consensus and the events leading up to its inception. The idea was that public opinion was unstable, badly-informed, and had no link to policy.

Holsti admits that Shapiro shows that public opinion of foreign policy is relatively stable, but finds no evidence that the public is at all well informed when it comes to international affairs, even with the advent of live television coverage, such as in the gulf war. And the weakest of all is what Holsti calls the “opinion – policy link.” Although there is some correlational data, there is nothing that Holsti sees as causal. In the end, Holsti saw a shift away from military issues in foreign affairs at the time of his writing. Such a shift could lead to a greater importance for public opinion, but Holsti was still hesitant to assume its role in the global sphere.

³⁰ Holsti, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, p. 447.

Most fascinatingly, Holsti points out the contradictions between diplomacy and democracy. While one requires discretions, secrecy, decision, and speed, the other requires transparency, time for democratic consensus, and compromise. Thus one could argue that democracies are at a disadvantage in the diplomatic world. Or, to put it differently, the foreign policy elite ought to make decisions on behalf of the public in its interest, as involving the common people would only hurt their own interests after all.

Since we ought to value our democracy more highly than our diplomacy, this means that something needs to change. The idea that the elite should take control because they are better able to execute diplomatic missions shouldn't have precedence over a nation that wants to be represented in a certain way. Rather, foreign policy makers should be the tool of the public to carry out its wishes. Having a diplomatic corps able to make decisions for itself is not a useful answer, since the only reason for its existence in the first place is to speak for work on behalf of the people it represents.

Summary

In the end, how can we compare the different views on public opinion and foreign policy? If we return once more to our metaphor of a car whose driver – the public – is taking a nap, how do different political scientists respond? Lindsay is a proponent of the self-driving car: the president ought to exert his influence to encourage internationalism. Shapiro isn't sure that the public has in fact fallen asleep at the wheel, admitting only that under its sleepy responses to global stimuli, the reactions of the vehicle are typically too much but too late. Miller and Stokes think the public is perfectly awake, but has simply forgotten about foreign affairs, leaving this area to the

elite decision makers. Alterman wants to put the public back in the driver's seat; otherwise he sees no justification for the journey on which the car has set out. Almond thinks we may have confused the driver for the steering mechanism, and Holsti argues that the driver we have may not be fit to drive in the first place.

Chapter 3: Vietnam

Breaking Down the Vietnam War Counterexample

If we've gotten so far, after all, with the Almond-Lippmann consensus, why has it been rejected by such a broad group of political scientists?³¹ The turning point for most was really the Vietnam War. The massive anti-war protests, and indeed an entire counter-culture that grew up against the war, demonstrated that the public could in fact care about politics. Interestingly, this was even a foreign affairs issue, making it particularly surprising that Americans would suddenly care about the politics of a nation all the way on the other side of the world from them. The reversal in American policy in Vietnam, seemingly caused by a rising tide of public outcry, is given as evidence that the public can formulate meaningful opinion and take the reins of policy.

However, it can still be argued that public opinion was not strong until the war was already far progressed, that its formation was not based on any active, critical approach to the issues, that even when formed, it had only clumsy, imperfect effect, and that the different points of the Almond-Lippmann consensus still hold true.

The Vietnam War is also a wonderful example of a situation that arose without

³¹ Ibid., p. 445.

much attention being focused on it, at least from a public perspective. Arguably the administration didn't consider the war a priority for a long time either. But then, as the war drew on, it garnered public attention. This transition from apathy to alert offers a wonderful opportunity to examine the situation and see how decision makers' processes changed as they began to be put more and more in the spotlight. Looking at decisions made before the war was in full swing, in relative inconspicuity, as well as those made as the conflict de-escalated, allows us to isolate the facets of those policy decisions that are characteristic of an uninvolved public. In this way we can see the influence both of public apathy and attention, determine if it is a positive or negative influence, and advise policy makers on how to react to its absence or presence.

Finally, the Vietnam War was the first war that was really brought into the homes of Americans via their televisions. For the first time, people watched live footage of the war. Many believe that this played a large role in the perceptions of the war and in popular sentiment, which then in turn affected the leaders making decisions on America's Vietnam policy. Therefore the Vietnam War is also a special case to look at public opinion and its relationship with the media, or any other groups who try to frame public discourse.

For all these reasons, the war in Vietnam warrants a close inspection. A look at the Vietnam War must try to take account of all the details, a task which can be especially difficult. The division of American society into two camps on the war, for and against, telling different narratives about what happened, combined with gaggles of historians all finding different explanations for the failures that occurred, mean that it is

important not only to look at one portion or section of the war, and not to take all of one's information from the same source.

Incremental Involvement

Therefore, to attempt to take a more comprehensive view of the war, even if it is only a brief one, one should not start in the middle of the war but rather start at the beginning of American involvement. Picturing the Vietnam War often conjures up images of the nineteen-sixties, when American involvement was highest, to the dismay of protesters and objectors. But in fact American involvement had begun as many as four administrations earlier, in 1950, when President Truman first sent American military advisers to Vietnam.

At this point, Vietnam was still a French colony as part of Indochina, but it was fighting for its independence in the First Indochina war (the Vietnam War would be the second). In 1945, with the end of the Second World War, the French tried to reinstate control of their colony that the Japanese had controlled, but communist rebels, known as the Viet Minh, fought back against the European imperialism. Although the idea of communists putting up resistance and wanting to take power definitely put up red flags for American policy makers, they didn't always know what to think of the situation.

William Gibbons, a historian, put it this way:

"For most Members of Congress, 'Indochina,' as the area comprising Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia was called in 1945, was a small, distant, insignificant place of little interest to the United States. It is even doubtful whether any Member of the 79th Congress sitting in 1945 had ever been to Indochina or had any direct knowledge of its peoples and cultures. But this was not unusual. The State Department itself, in part because the area

had been a French colony, had only a handful of staff who were knowledgeable on the subject.”³²

Five years later, Americans were more positive that their own interests were being affected by the outcome in Indochina, and became involved, desirous of preventing a Communist takeover. There is a debate over which American president is responsible for the mistake of getting us involved so heavily in Vietnam. But Gibbons says that there was not really any one president who should take the blame for that. Instead, a long, slow, incremental process of piecemeal involvement gradually led to the United States becoming engulfed in Vietnam.

Gibbons quotes Senator John Cooper, who opposed the Vietnam War, as saying that he “did not believe that any of the Presidents who [had] been involved with Vietnam... desired that the United States would become involved in a large scale war in Asia. But the fact remains that a steady progression of small decisions and actions over a period of 20 years had forestalled a clear-cut decision by the President or by the President and Congress.”³³ Because of this situation, one can see that public opinion had very little effect towards the beginning of the Vietnam War. It was 15 years from the first American involvement to when Lyndon Johnson put the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to use in stepping up American troop commitments, which by that time was just a

³² William Conrad Gibbons, Prepared for the United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part I*, 98th Cong., 2d sess. Washington, DC: GPO, 1984, p. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

continuation of the trend of escalation which had already been happening for over a decade.

In reality, the public could not much help being uninformed. Gibbons discussed President Truman's decision to send Americans to Vietnam, pointing out that the desired effect and the action proposed were so far divorced that the connection remained largely unseen. "The limited intent of the announced action so carefully masked the ultimate intention of the assumed policy that the real point of origin of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War has remained unclear... The fact is that it began in 1950, when the U.S. Government decided that the loss of Indochina would be unacceptable, and that only with U.S. assistance could that loss be prevented."³⁴ Over the course of American involvement, different administrations kept taking small steps forward. Eisenhower offered support, Kennedy sent military advisers, Johnson sent soldiers. Yet each decision hinged on those before it, following a preexisting philosophy and doubling down as if former choices were being treated like sunk costs. In other words, American involvement in Vietnam was path dependent and didn't reach a critical juncture until much later, at the onset of vietnamization.

This matches with the Almond-Lippmann consensus that would hold mass opinion as virtually meaningless throughout this entire time period. Congress was not

³⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

much consulted by the executive branch,³⁵ which meant that those outside of the unilateral decision-making circles were typically unaware of what was going on.

Avoidance and Uninvolvement

This period during which even lawmakers were unaware of what was brewing in Southeast Asia also demonstrates Lindsay's hypothesis. Congress people and other politicians avoided this sort of foreign policy – trying to work with international relations was unhelpful for their careers. With no large group working such a specific area of international affairs, it was of course the executive that was forced, once again, to lead. Presidents, along with their diplomatic and military advisers, did what they thought was best in Vietnam without worrying too much whether they had a mandate to do so.

At this early stage in the conflict, therefore, we see the public uninvolved, as its attention had not been drawn to this issue. In the absence of any direction on this specific issue, policy makers followed the sort of track in which they had been set, taking clues from past decisions and from American policy elsewhere in the world, based on the values of that time.

Symbolic Commitments

For perhaps, if we were to assume that those Americans setting international relations policy followed what came before them blindly, not making any autonomous decisions, we would be selling them short. We would also be ignoring the fact that

³⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

American foreign policy was not without some guiding principles, and never is. In fact, American choices in Vietnam were based on values that Americans had assumed to be universally applicable.

The biggest example of this, of course, was a fear of communism, spurred on by the belief that as compared to communism, capitalism had the advantage both morally and practically. The Soviet Union and China began to be seen as genuinely evil, and to be thwarted at all opportunities and at all costs. It was logical, then, to fear that one or the other of these rising superpowers would take the side of the communists in Vietnam and use them in order to advance its own agenda and that of global communism.

Another fear was that if communism was adopted by one nation in a given region, it would soon begin to influence others and its neighbors would also begin to become communist states. This was known as the domino theory. These two factors—a dread of communism and a fear of its spreading—led to American leadership adopting the containment policy. This policy was one of the reasons given for the involvement of the United States in Vietnam.

Other symbolic reasons were tendered as well. A common one was the United States' credibility. Once having offered support to the Vietnamese who wished to resist communism, the United States could not pull back its involvement without losing face in a big way. And once American troops were also involved, that became only more true.

These symbolic reasons are part of what led to the United States becoming so largely involved in Vietnam without stopping to question the practicality of its

engagement and the conditions under which it would be able to consider its a mission a success and how to achieve them. Rather than having practical goals in the conflict, America had set for itself idealized objectives that it was unable to reach, which led to mass frustration among civilians but also in the military.

Michael Sullivan, another historian, confirms this.³⁶ He suggests the analogy of a newlywed couple, fighting because one of them forgot to buy a loaf of bread for dinner. Such a conflict is easily resolved – a return to the store or a promise to go shopping tomorrow patches it up. But if the offending party does not resolve the issue, waving it off, then the hurt party may launch a symbolic accusation, saying something like “You don’t love me enough!” At that point, only by resolving the issue of the loaf of bread can the forgetful newlywed reconcile the argument. If they, too, begin to argue on the symbolic level, talking about love, the problem is no longer a winnable situation. Instead, all kinds of drastic actions may take place, as the fight has become about something much bigger.

Something similar happened to the United States in Vietnam. A practical plan with quantifiable, concrete objectives to be worked toward might have gone a long way. But instead, the American goals in the war were to “promote liberty,” and “maintain credibility.” A desire for America’s allies to trust it and for its enemies to believe that it was ready to use force to back up its words was very logical. But meant that America fought to prove that it would fight, when it needed much better reasons and goals.

³⁶ Michael P. Sullivan, *The Vietnam War: A Study in the Making of American Policy*, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1985, p. 29.

Containing communism had worked with a coalition on the Korean peninsula, but that strategy could not simply be picked up and transplanted into Vietnam.

The Public Opinion Thermostat

Shapiro would see his arguments borne out in Sullivan's views. Shapiro, who thought that elites framed the discourse, setting the path for public opinion to then act in a clumsy, thermostat manner, might see this in the way that policy elites used the context of the red scare to frighten the American people into supporting a distant war. By politicians talking about the dangers of communism all the time, it became easy for the common person to see why the United States should be involved in a small country halfway around the world.

This could also be seen as an example of what Eric Alterman would say he thinks is the best solution for the connection between public opinion and foreign policy. Remember, Alterman says that in order for the public to be able to get any response from policy makers, it needs to set its values in explicit terms that governing bodies are then able to take and base their policies off the values of Americans. If politicians were already able to frame the Vietnam War as an issue of communism (and thus national interest and security), it was most likely thanks to the fact that the American public had already expressed its values of freedom, individualism, and an opposition to communism.

In this way, one might say that there was in fact American public opinion on international relations, it just was very broad, indistinct opinion which gave only general advice for how to deal with the world. This, of course, was not particularly

useful for dealing with specific situations for Vietnam. There was not coherent, public opinion that offered any intelligent advice on the details or particulars for the Vietnam War, only an inexact desire for policy makers to do something.

Foreign Policy Moods

This corresponds with another of Sullivan's arguments.³⁷ Despite the United States' long history of isolationism, he sees that there are some periods where America did look to the world more or less than usual. These periods he calls "extroverted" or "introverted moods." Sullivan divided up all American history up to the time of his writing into alternating moods of extroversion and introversion, with the biggest mood of extroversion beginning with World War II. The end of that war was what led directly to the French problems in Indochina, and the United States beginning to pay any attention to that part of the world at all. It is possible, consequently, to see American involvement in Vietnam as a decision that had already been made by a larger trend and foreign policy mood--individual decision makers were merely fitting into their context and wound up slowly dragging the United States into a war.

If it is the case that American involvement was catalyzed only by a broad foreign policy mood rather than a specific desire to accomplish anything particular in Vietnam, then once again we see public opinion as uninfluential and policy decisions as the apathetic rule following of decision makers mindlessly following structural constraints.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

The Thermostat Effect

Finally, another area where Shapiro could argue that his opinion is born out in Sullivan's history of the Vietnam War is where he says that public opinion works sort of as a thermostat. The "thermostat effect" is what Sullivan calls his idea that policy overreacts to public opinion, and that it typically moves too late. Just as turning the thermostat up in a cold room takes a while before anything happens, so public opinion doesn't shift actual policy instantly. And just as a room with the thermostat left up might quickly become too hot, so policy responses to public opinion typically tend to overshoot what is typically desired. Thus a cycle is started where opinion has to be changed to pull policy back down, as it constantly tries to catch up with popular sentiment. Public sentiment, then, we can conclude, is a very clumsy tool indeed.

If we see how this fits the Vietnam War, we can start to see some of the problem. Public opinion against communism had the unintentional effect of getting the United States involved in Vietnam, and by the time the public became aware of what was going on on a large scale and then begin to express its opinion that the war was wrong, America had become deeply involved and extrication from the situation was essentially impossible. Following that, as it became clear that Americans wouldn't stand for continued involvement in a war they didn't understand, the administration had to backtrack and try to get out of Vietnam without giving up on American interests or standing.

Public opinion really began to take a solid shape concerning the Vietnam War around the time Lyndon Johnson started to send more troops to the country. In 1964,

American ships were attacked off the coast of Vietnam, and seeing Americans were starting to become the victims of North Vietnamese attacks, rather than the South Vietnamese, Johnson asked for congressional permission to increase the American military presence in the country.

The Influence of Public Opinion during the Vietnam War Hammond, a media historian, notes that even at this point public opinion, although not necessarily approving of the American role in the conflict, was not consolidated enough that the administration was worried about crossing it.³⁸ And after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, there was a large jump in support for America fighting in Vietnam. In other words, the public still didn't care particularly strongly about the United States' involvement in Vietnam, 14 years after it had begun, and even when it did, it was on an issue which Johnson's administration had pushed as an excuse to raise support for greater involvement.

However, attempts by the Johnson administration to frame the discourse around the conflict did not wind up being successful in the long run. Magnifying enemy casualties and trying to paint American efforts as being on the cusp of victory were seen as dishonest once the public found out that the president wasn't often trying to tell the whole truth of the story. Accordingly, a solution to unformulated public opinion is not relying on the executive to frame issues for the average person to understand. For as the

³⁸ William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968*, Washington, D.C., United States Army in Vietnam, 1988, p. 69.

public began to feel more and more manipulated, they trusted Johnson less and less, gradually turning against him and the war.

Media efforts to control the discourse around the war were not always the ultimate factor in shaping popular sentiment either. Instead, Hammond says that a public opinion had a much stronger correlation with the recent level of casualties.³⁹ This goes with Matthew Baum's theory about soft news – news intake for entertainment doesn't provide the same quality of information and is less instrumental in shaping opinion than would be hard news bringing real events in people's lives, such as front line deaths. As Graber would say, good news is local, and the death of a friend or relative in a faraway country really brings home the effects of a far-off foreign policy.⁴⁰

Presidential Portrayal

Kathleen Turner agrees with Hammond. She sees Johnson as a tragic figure, whose inability to communicate on the right level with the American people cost him his perception and ultimately his position.⁴¹ When Johnson couldn't justify himself to the press, he lost the power that the executive needed to set the agenda and frame the conversations about the Vietnam War in order to maintain a basic modicum of public approval and continue his policies. Because Johnson failed to connect with people and

³⁹ Hammond, *Public*, p. 387.

⁴⁰ Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 353.

⁴¹ Kathleen J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 353.

convince them of his policies, as any president who wants a continuing mandate needs to be able to do, the Vietnam War became an exception where public opinion erupted into a massive movement against the war and the president.

Johnson wound up stuck. Public opinion had flared up, and now that it was no longer latent, he was no longer able to shape it as he might have been. Yet this sudden swell of opinion did not refute the Almond-Lippmann consensus. Public opinion was still unstable, varying as different news stories came in, and wasn't consistent throughout the nation: different groups held different sides. However, now that the war had become a domestic issue, the public began to influence the administration, especially Johnson, who was very sensitive about how he was viewed. The president found it very difficult that he could no longer get majority opinion behind him, but was instead only a portion of the nation, now split culturally in two.

Breakdown of Consensus

This division of American society was something Holsti saw and blamed on the Vietnam War.⁴² To Holsti, the war was a watershed issue in the arena of international relations, just as a particularly important election might be referred to as a watershed election. The results of the Vietnam War on the American psyche and political landscape were irreversible and long-lasting. For the first time, there was a breakdown of consensus on foreign affairs. Until this point, there had typically been a general agreement on what was the best way to go about any particular international relations

⁴² Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, "American Leadership in World Affairs: Vietnam and the breakdown of consensus," London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1984, p. 249.

issue. This beginning of disagreement divided the American government and undermined it by having its public actively oppose it, weakening the United States' global position. In the end then, our democratic system was unable to provide any good solutions for the Vietnam War, and in return the war caused the system to begin to fall apart.

What Effect did Public Opinion have on Vietnam Policy?

Even as public opinion finally began to influence presidential decisions, the war grew into more and more of a failure. As Johnson agonized over his role in Vietnam, a presidential election came and went, and Nixon began to withdraw American soldiers, the effects of public opinion appeared to become more and more visible. Yet it still failed to provide a solid basis for policy decisions.

The public was getting what it wanted – it wanted to get out of Vietnam. But it wasn't clear that the change in policy was going to help American standing. For one thing, a change in objective totally destroyed the morale of the army, who were no longer fighting to win. Once vietnamization was begun, there was no more hope of accomplishing anything, only being forced to remain pointlessly behind until the final withdrawal. Since South Vietnam did fall to the communists, and in fact the neighboring countries then did as well, the reversal in policy destroyed American military credibility, and proved that the containment principle, based on the domino theory, had been correct all along.

Public opinion then, in exerting its clumsy force, caused instability in policy, reduced American standing, caused complications for leadership both at home and in

the military, and gave up on previous national interests. Thus in proving its effect on foreign relations, it at the same time showed that it ought never to have one.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no way to deny that there was certainly a large consolidation of public opinion on the Vietnam War, nor that it did affect American policy. However, looking at the bigger picture, one sees that public opinion took decades to formulate and even then was only helped by president Johnson's botched attempts to draw attention and support to his cause. Most foreign policy issues are much more comparable to the first half of the conflict, when American involvement was much more minimal, under the radar, and outside of public notice.

All three aspects of the Almond-Lippmann consensus can still be argued for in the case of the Vietnam War as well. Erratic, in that public opinion varied unpredictably, wound up favoring the war, and then suddenly took a massive turn against it. Incoherent, in that until the war was literally broadcast into the lives of every American, most people had no information on which to base their opinion. And finally, irrelevant to policy in as much as it took 19 years of American involvement before policy was finally reversed, and even then, it seemed to be the natural course of action for policy makers as much as it was something forced upon them by a resentful public. Rather than seeing the Vietnam War as the occasion for the disproof of the Almond-Lippmann consensus, it makes more sense to see it as the example that proves the rule. Even the amount to which the war was domesticized and politicized points to public

opinion needing something closer to home and easier to grapple with than erudite issues of international relations before it can have a tangible effect on policy. But this answer does not give a good solution to avoiding the repetition of the mistakes made in the Vietnam War – it merely shifts the blame. It is only the first step to positing what the right response to this information is.

Chapter 4: Response

How Should Policymakers React to Public Opinion

After seeing the catastrophic results of the Vietnam War, the natural response is to ask whom to blame. The debate has raged fiercely since the War and there is still no broad consensus. It is particularly difficult to decide who to blame since there is not even agreement on what exactly the problem was. Among those who assume that the problem was in the execution, and that the United States was at least well-intentioned, there is still the question of whether it was the military's fault or if the war was unwinnable in the first place. Others believe that the mistake was the very fact of American involvement. In either case, there were so many decisions made that it is difficult to point to a specific instance to assign blame.

The beginning of American involvement was way back in the 1950's with Truman and Eisenhower, so perhaps it was their fault for sending advisers and trying to oppose the communists in the Indochina wars. But most people do not go so far back as to put the blame on them, instead focusing on the later choices that seemed so much bigger – the bombing campaigns or the troop deployments.

The truth is, many things went wrong, and no single person, decision, or situation can be faulted for the overall failure. However, there are many lessons that we can take from the experience as a whole, and if we are looking at the interactions of public opinion with foreign policy, then there are in particular several items in government policy and the way it handled the war that we can look at for improvement.

Failed Responses to Apathy

Malign Neglect

If we look at the beginning of American involvement in Vietnam, we see that it matches up with the sort of scenario that Lindsay describes. We've discussed how Gibbons' findings back up the idea that lawmakers distanced themselves from the international relations issues. And, just as predicted, it fell to the president to lead.

Yet if we assume that involvement in Vietnam was the main error which ought to have been avoided, then this was a terrible result. For it was the president who decided to support France against the communists in Indochina. That decision can be pointed to as the catalyst for the Vietnam War, although it was not made in a vacuum, but rather a high-pressure environment of global affairs in which many circumstances, including but not limited to an unshakable fear of Soviet expansion, seemed to point to the decision to help fight communism in Southeast Asia being the right one.

In this scenario, it seems obvious that uninvolvement created drastic negative consequences. Without knowing where they were headed, the United States embarked into a decades-long conflict while its leaders focused on other issues, essentially burying

their heads in the sand. A lack of debate or discussion in congress meant that no opposing viewpoints were ever expressed. The president would make decisions based on the advice of his advisers and executive staff, but this group was relatively homogenous and often came to consensus on the broader issues.

This lack of elite involvement with foreign policy issues was a distinct issue from public apathy towards global affairs. In theory, the United States' foreign policy elite should have been able to make good decisions on behalf of the American people, even if the nation as a whole did not focus on its foreign relations with any degree of concentration or expertise. On the other hand, one might argue that a lack of popular opinion regarding specific foreign policy issues was the problem in the first place, and had any solid public opinion existed it might have provided a framework on which decision makers could rely.

It follows that it is difficult to say which of the following three conclusions we should come to. The first would be that the problem was and is a lack of public involvement. Without the guiding star of mass opinion, decision makers had no way to find the right course anyhow. The second conclusion would be that the problem is not public apathy but a governmental apathy; the Vietnam War was typical of a system where policy givers are unable to act both independently and well on international relations issues. Here the solution is not increasing general interest in foreign policy, but finding a way to create a foreign policy elite that can reliably make the right choices. Finally, a third conclusion might be that the Vietnam War was just a fluke and that

typically policy makers do just fine; this time they just got unlucky and turned out to be wrong about what would be best for America.

Executive Influence

A similar model for guiding decision making of foreign policy is that proposed by Miller and Stokes, who think that it makes sense for representatives to defer to the guidance of the administration on foreign affairs.⁴³ After all, they point out, “the background information and predictive skills [needed to carry out foreign affairs]... are held primarily by the modern Executive. As a result, the present role of the legislature in foreign affairs bears some resemblance to the role that Burke had in mind for the elitist, highly restricted electorate of his own day.” The legislature, in other words, is at least a part of the international relations system, but isn’t the body that informs the final decision-making process.

Looking at the Vietnam War as our example, one sees places where this strategy was attempted. However, it did not work out any better. Whether we’re talking about Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy taking the lead by acting unilaterally, or President Johnson trying to control his media perception, we ultimately end with the same situation. By the time the war was over, it was clear that it had been a colossal mistake. The fact that earlier administrations left power unaware of how things would ultimately turn out doesn’t mean that they had not already started the United States on the path to failure.

⁴³ Miller and Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," p. 56.

Some say that Kennedy, had he not been assassinated, would have handled the situation much better than Johnson did when he took his place. But this seems mostly to be wishful thinking. Kennedy had already sent troop deployments to Vietnam. Kennedy, who had been in office with Johnson, had learned from the same experiences and most likely would have reacted to events such as the gulf of Tonkin incident in a manner similar to that in which Johnson reacted.

It is an extremely difficult task to judge any president on how they responded to foreign policy situations. With hindsight, it is easy to say that Truman made the wrong choice to commit to supporting the French in Indochina. But this wasn't totally evident until much later, in light of all the following decisions. Any issue in international relations could be like that—a seemingly minor choice concerning a few military advisers and a small country blew up years later into the biggest military calamity the United States had ever suffered. Similar, low-profile issues abound, both as historical examples, and today, with real, very practical ramifications. The president has no way of knowing ahead of time which locations or issues will stay relevant, become problematic thorns in their side, or be forgotten. This makes it hard to know how to frame an issue and what sort of long-term advice to give lawmakers.

Another important distinction is that between the president's role as a leader of the people and their role as a leader for congress and the American government. Guiding a political elite is very different from guiding mass opinion. There are very different consequences for losing political backing while in office—becoming a lame

duck president – than there are for having low approval ratings. But on the other hand, the two are of course connected to some degree.

President Johnson in particular mishandled his public relations. While trying to raise public awareness and support for his policy in Vietnam, he at the same time was covering up different activities and various areas of American involvement in the war. Therefore, he wasn't able either to ignore the public and make the decisions he came to on his own, or to give the public what it wanted. Essentially, by trying to keep the public happy but continue his foreign policy he sealed his own fate. Johnson's Secretary of Defense told him that "the United States public will support the course of action because it is a sensible and courageous military-political program designed and likely to bring about a success in Vietnam."⁴⁴ Again, it is worth noting here that this situation is different than if the president had been lobbying for domestic reform, (which, as a matter of fact, he was) since the public responds so much differently to foreign issues. It is particularly fascinating that despite this, Johnson's efforts were seen in such a poor light that it unified his opposition and eclipsed any domestic issue of his career.

Issue Framing

Part of the reason that President Johnson missed his chance to influence the public in such a big way was because he was so poor at framing issues. The values he put forward to the American public – American military credibility, victory, communist

⁴⁴ The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, Boston: Beacon Press, vol. 4 c. 2, "Senator Gravel Edition."

containment—were rejected for a different set of values—peace, compromise, and decolonization. The ideals that the administrations before him had managed to convince Americans to hang on to were changing when faced with the setbacks and difficulties that came with a high level of involvement and commitment in Vietnam: casualties, the draft—the ethical shortcomings of the American army and moral dilemmas posed by the situation.

Nixon's vietnamization, on the other hand, was a framing success, allowing him to keep his approval and political clout, while slowly transitioning from the original policy to that which the public now demanded. But even Nixon, the master manipulator, couldn't save both his political career and the American reputation in Vietnam. Instead, with his new framing, the war was lost. We can see that political opinion is used by Nixon, but even he is unable to shape it into any useful tool. Instead, he surfs down the wave of the anti-war movement, after it had already crashed during the Johnson administration.

Rather, public opinion is a clumsy force, shifting from a strong anti-communist sentiment in the 50's through a gradual mutation into an even stronger anti-war sentiment in the 60's and 70's. The policymakers caught in its way who try to frame it to help themselves out with it are mostly pushed around by it when they try to engage with it. As the Vietnam War became a domesticized issue, the strength and extremism with which citizens supported different positions on it grew immensely. Framing the issue as something close to the average voter made feelings much stronger about foreign policy, but also polarized opinion.

Not every foreign policy issue is going to have a takeaway or an aspect that makes it particularly relevant for every American back home. For that reason, either Americans need to give themselves a reason to care about parts of the world that don't affect them, or politicians or they need to allow their leaders to deal with the issues or make them more understandable for them. While it makes sense to say "let the trained elite who have worked their whole careers in foreign affairs handle this issue, the common person doesn't really understand it," it seems axiomatically unfair to take away some people's voice and elevate that of others. One would also need to have totally given up hope on humanity in order to see citizens as mindless rule followers, unable to offer any useful input, even in the form of a philosophical or moral system designed to guide decision making choices.

Policy-Guiding Values

If policy makers are unable to frame the discourse in such a way as to be helpful to the public, then we must try to let the public establish its values to influence decision makers, as Alterman suggests. But again, in the case of the Vietnam War, this did not work out well.

The public certainly did express broad values that enabled lawmakers to base their decisions on them. However, this too failed to produce desirable results. In the first place, given that public opinion on foreign policy is volatile, as the Almond-Lippmann consensus would say, when values shifted in the middle of the war, the administration was left stranded, working on a policy it assumed would garner support but which instead was contrary to the wishes of most Americans.

Neither set of values that the public expressed aided policy makers very much in making their foreign affairs decisions. The first set of values – anti-communism, freedom, promotion of democracy, national security, and eventually a desire to maintain American credibility – led the United States into a draining, unproductive war on the far side of the world. The second set of values – peace, humanitarianism, anti-imperialism, isolationism – not only ordered American policy into a self-destructive turnaround, but also expressed itself in an “unpatriotic” way, making it difficult for decision makers to interact with it. Had the anti-war movement presented itself as an alternate strategy for furthering American interests within the already established framework, rather than protesting against all levels of government, it would have lost a lot of its force, but might have better fit into the policy paradigm.

The problem was not that either set of values was problematic: to wildly simplify the values, victory and peace are both positive values with much to say on their behalf. The problem was that any interpretation of “value” into policy will be just that – an interpretation. Merely having “peace” as an overarching foreign policy goal will not tell the people making those policies how to go about achieving that. One can still argue both that it made sense to try to contain communism and to try to withdraw from Vietnam. But within that framework, the decisions that were made did not achieve those goals and were the main causes of American involvement becoming such a fiasco.

Thus relying on the public to set actionable foreign policy values also fails as a method of creating international policy. The kind of broad values on which the public

will agree are still not useful enough to contribute anything meaningful towards the actual decision-making process.

Other Failures

When we try to look at other solutions to this problem, we find that they also fall short. Congress, for example, began to take a more interested, active role in the war as the crisis progressed. Yet it accomplished little, and in the end it was still the executive that really changed American policy. This demonstrates that smaller, more efficient bodies are required in the area of foreign policy. As Holsti said, diplomacy and democracy are incongruent.⁴⁵ Putting international policy in the hands of Congress to increase public involvement would only hamper our international positioning, due to qualities inherent in the very nature of that body.

However, letting an elite group of executive officials, or even career diplomats make those decisions, comes with its own set of drawbacks. If we allow the elite to take charge, it will pursue a national interest that it defines based on its own experience, which essentially means that it will relate national interest to its own interest.⁴⁶ This is the worst-case scenario possible in a situation where the public has relinquished its control over foreign affairs. Letting elites do what they think is best means letting them do what is also probably best for themselves, even to the detriment of a greater public interest.

⁴⁵ Holsti, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, p. 461.

⁴⁶ Alterman, *A Democratic Foreign policy*, p. 23.

Looking at the Vietnam War, each response to the minimization of public opinion's role in foreign policy resulted in negative consequences for the United States. And it seems obvious that the American decision to gradually withdraw from Vietnam, made while anti-War sentiment was at its zenith, was influenced by public opinion. All this evidence can be thrown against the Almond-Lippmann consensus, not only to point to its weaknesses when compared against the facts of the war, but more importantly, in a normative sense: If the public isn't involved in foreign policy and it results in bumbles such as Vietnam, then shouldn't we change the way the system works?

Should Public Opinion Play a Role in Foreign Policy?

V. O. Key, Jr., the eminent American political scientist, points out that if we don't take public opinion into account, then all this talk about democracy is nonsense.⁴⁷ The idea of democracy or any representative form of government is that in the end the institution serves as a mechanism for giving the public what it wanted, whatever that is. On the other hand, we have assumed that public opinion has little influence on foreign policy, and even in the example of the Vietnam War, the greatest counterexample, this holds more or less true. Therefore, foreign relations are not democratic.

This is a difficult pill to swallow, and hard to believe, particularly because it goes so strongly against what we feel ought to be the right way for foreign affairs to work. Living in a system that was founded on social contract theory, we no longer see the

⁴⁷ Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, p. 7.

justification for government if it is not responsible to public opinion. This strong normative belief, paired with an awareness of the many failures of foreign policy when not directed by public opinion, as seen in the Vietnam War, pushes us towards the conclusion that a change must be made. In other words, the Almond-Lippmann consensus is true, but we need to fight it.

Public Opinion as Failed

Although this may appear to be a logical conclusion, there is still much to be said against public opinion as the ultimate decider of foreign policy. Remember for example the failings of the Vietnam War, even once the public had begun to direct policy. Involving public opinion in the situation only made the American position more convoluted.

Other considerations before accepting public opinion as the ultimate decider of foreign policy include its tendency to trample roughshod over any minority opinion. This is especially dangerous when it comes for international relations, for often minorities do in fact have valid perspectives that bear emphasis. For example, the Palestinian and Jewish communities in the United States often have voices disproportionate to the size of those communities when it comes to the issue of Israeli statehood and what form that should take. But this is only fair, as those same communities have a much higher vested interest in the outcome to that problem.

Typically, domestic policy issues will have interest groups that lobby for or against a given side of the issue, and those lobbyist groups usually represent a certain body that is touched by that particular matter. We allow these lobbyists to have larger

influence because we believe that they know what they are talking about, and because they will be most affected by the result. Issues of global affairs are no different. If an immigrant community feels strongly on a given issue of international relations, then they should at least be given a voice in the matter. Rather than allowing public opinion to ignore a small part of the population, it makes more sense to set up a system where at some point minority groups are protected and heard out, even if not given the final say. These could be ethnic, religious, or national minorities, or they could also be minorities of opinion. Think of the Vietnam anti-war movement, which, when denied a voice in the mainstream discourse, was forced to create upheaval and counter-culture to bring its points across.

As a direct counterpoint, these groups can also have too much influence, swaying public opinion although they are only minorities. Almond gives the example of “hyphenated-Americans” who try to influence American foreign policy.⁴⁸ Polish, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian Americans resented the Soviet influence in the post-World War II world and pushed for America to refuse to recognize Soviet republics and instead recognize governments in exile for those countries. But Almond points out that these specialized interests interfere with a balanced conception of American interests.⁴⁹

Relatedly, whenever apathy towards foreign relations falls, consensus breaks down. It is a noticeable trend that issues of foreign policy which take a large place in

⁴⁸ Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, p. 187.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

domestic political debate become partisan and polarized. The Vietnam War is again a prime example, as are others like immigration or the Israeli/Palestinian dilemma, or even more modern ones such as the Iran nuclear deal or the Paris climate accords. Basically, for a foreign policy issue to become relevant to the broader public, it needs to be framed, which most often happens through political parties, as has been discussed by Miller and Stokes.⁵⁰ The result is a partisan divide that only increases as the issue garners attention. The intensity of this disagreement can come to such a point that it would almost seem better for the public not to care at all. (Think of how the 2012 Benghazi attacks were drawn out into multiple, repeated investigations of a clearly political nature.)

Hence public opinion has its shortcomings as well as its strengths. It is important not to idealize it as some unanimous, all-knowing entity. As can be seen in the Vietnam War, we cannot assume that there is a consensus on Foreign Policy or that even when there is it will always arrive at the best answer. Furthermore, there are not only practical considerations, but also arguments against the involvement of public opinion in foreign affairs based on a normative judgment.

Philosophical Arguments Against Public Opinion

Many famous philosophers have supported the idea that the voice of the masses is not the ideal way to govern a nation. Populism has always been seen as a danger—a mass of the uneducated taking control casts fear into the elite. Terms like “mob rule”

⁵⁰ Miller and Stokes, “Constituency Influence in Congress,” p. 54.

invoke imaginations of the worst-case scenario – democracy become unhinged. Even considering a more reasoned approach, it's a common idea that the educated should be the ones to govern. If you wouldn't trust one non-expert on foreign policy to make your decisions, why should you trust a whole bunch at once?

One of the most famous thinkers to argue against democracy was Plato, despite the fact that he himself lived in a democracy. Of course, the democracy of Plato's time was not the same as ours. Only a small minority was enfranchised. Women, slaves, and the poor had no say in government. Although obviously this was problematic, the justification given was that none of these groups had had the time to pursue education and improve themselves. None of them were seen as able to speak to political matters since their situation rendered them incapable of an informed opinion.

Plato took this a step farther. Rather than have just give governing power to the educated citizenry – the attentive public – in Plato's ideal society, the elites were chosen at an early age and trained specifically towards leadership. Essentially, the idea of education being the qualification for government was extrapolated as far as possible. In the end, it was the intellectuals who were to have power; philosopher kings, raised from birth to be better than all their subjects so that they could make decisions on their behalf and in their best interest. Plato's republic sounds dystopian to us, but it does present an alternative to the rule of the masses.

Edmund Burke was another philosopher who might say something similar, if less extreme. Speaking to his own electors, he argued that "our Representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if

he sacrifices it to your opinion.”⁵¹ Burke also lived under a system where being a member of the electorate required certain qualifications; not every member of the public was able to vote in parliamentary elections. Yet Burke does not appeal to a better level of education or a higher status as a person to justify his right – or, as he would say, duty – to put his own judgment over the opinion of his constituents. Instead, he feels that there is a humanistic justification: his judgment has been endowed by Providence and he must remain loyal to it rather than to someone else’s opinion.

It’s difficult to argue against what Burke says here. He does not make the claim that policy makers should weigh their own opinion more heavily than the public’s; instead it is only when they feel that on an objective level public opinion is not on the side of rationality that they must counteract it. And any argument that decision makers should go against what they see as the right choice for the sake of their constituents’ will is flawed. The conflict is not a conflict of opinion. A representative (whether legislative or executive) has every responsibility to listen to different authorities and judgments on what is the best course of action to take. Their decisions must be carefully weighed and inspected from all sides. Burke does not say that a policy maker does not need to be attentive to the public. It is only that they are responsible to their conscience for their final say in the matter.

⁵¹ Edmund Burke, “Speech to the Electors of Bristol,” In *Miscellaneous Writings (Select Works Vol. 4)*, edited by Francis Canavan, p. 13. Fordham University, 2005.
<http://fs2.american.edu/dfagel/www/Philosophers/Burke/SpeechToTheElectorsOfBristol.pdf>

Finally, one might note the similarities to Aristotle's teleological argument. If the best way to pursue justice is for each person to do what they are best at, or to pursue their telos, then it will follow that there will be some who happen to be more gifted with policy matters. As a result, these people should make up the elite and control political decisions. Rather than Plato's idea of creating people to fit the role of leader, Aristotle believes that the just thing to do is to find the person who is already fit to lead and put them in charge so that they may fulfill their telos.

This philosophy also results in a political elite. It seems even more applicable to foreign policy; after all, Aristotle believes that all humans are inherently political and achieve their telos through society, but one cannot make that same claim in regard to international relations. That branch of politics is almost defined by its relevance to a very different stratum of the public. Therefore those who do find that they have a talent for foreign policy, Aristotle would say, should be the ones responsible to make foreign policy choices for the rest of society.

Balancing the Arguments

With arguments both for and against public control over foreign affairs from a philosophical standpoint, and foreign policy failures with both an apathetic public and an attentive one, what is the right response? It is difficult to find any success stories when looking at the history of the Vietnam War, and no answers jump out. But in the end two resolutions suggest themselves – one idealistic and one realist.

The idealistic solution is that we can turn around the Almond-Lippmann consensus by educating the public and conditioning it to finally take an interest in

foreign affairs. It will not be easy work to shake off two centuries of isolationism, and to temper our exceptionalism to enable us to work with our allies as equals, rather than imperialists. But by educating the public and creating a civic citizenry the strength of our democracy and our global standing will be vastly bettered.

This is why public education, particularly civic education, must be the top priority for any democracy. For a nation so physically isolated as the United States, it is important to study both civics, that future citizens may better engage with their own society, and also world affairs, that they may be cognizant of the situation of the rest of the globe and our relationship with it.

Our global standing depends greatly on our support for education and for patriotic praxis; by this is meant a return to the idea that American exceptionalism comes from the involvement and character of its citizens. Americans must be proud of their country for the civic foundation it offers and constantly live out their engagement and dedication to constantly improving that society.

Of course, a massive cultural shift such as this is impossible to ask. Therefore the realist solution is a different one. Rather than try to elevate the public to a level where it can productively engage with foreign affairs, we must focus on the quality of our leaders to ensure that they have the skills and talents to avoid mistakes such as those that occurred during the Vietnam War.

Professionalism in our foreign service; a high standard of knowledge; grooming of highly trained policy makers to create our international policy: these are all immensely important if the elite is to best serve the public that it works for. But even

more important is the honing of critical thinking skills among decision makers rather than basic informational knowledge – those are the skills required to make heavy decisions and are more important than familiarity with the facts of the situation. It is for that reason that a realist might argue that simply educating the public will not provide the same results – it is skill, not knowledge that must be promoted.

The weakness of the realist's solution is that in theory, all this is already being done. There has always been incentive for the United States to employ the best and brightest in its government if it wants to promote its own interests, and to reaffirm this is not a smart new idea. But looking at the Vietnam War and finding that even the elite can make massive mistakes causes a fear that maybe there will continue to be times when America is just unlucky and despite its best efforts makes the wrong decision with catastrophic effect.

Conclusion

If a broad campaign of public education and value realignment is infeasible and a search for skilled policy makers is obvious, then what is left? Between the two positions lies a sort of compromise – an effort to in a way try both at once for the greatest profit.

The compromise between the idealistic solution and the realistic one builds off the Almond-Lippmann consensus in the same way that Gabriel Almond originally did. Almond points out that the idea that the elites control foreign policy in the absence of an attentive public “has been accepted with great reluctance and in the form of an ‘under-the-counter’ transaction. The myth of democratic spontaneity and mass control still holds sway ‘above the counter,’ only to trouble the literal minds of young people,

and older people who have resisted the impact of experience.”⁵² Because the average person cannot or will not spend the time or effort to acquaint themselves with the problems of global affairs, and media campaigns to increase foreign knowledge have “no perceptible effects,”⁵³ the solution is a gradual, selective and qualitative approach to public information.⁵⁴ This corresponds with an idealistic response that tries to increase public awareness and emphasize civic and international involvement.

Yet Almond points out that because the elite is really just made up of members of the public who have rejected apathy for attention, an invitation must be extended to bring more people to an attentive state to join the elite. This will work both towards creating a public that is more informed and able to come up with solid, actionable opinions, and growing an elite that is representative of the public from which it is drawn. Almond wants elite selection and training to be bettered as well, in order that they may “compete for influence before an attentive public.”⁵⁵ The elite, even if not directly elected, must be representative of the public which it serves.

In the end, therefore, whether one accepts the Almond-Lippmann consensus or not, the only response is to try to educate oneself and engage in the politics happening around oneself. From there one can try to increase the engagement of those around and eventually begin to interact with foreign policy. Education and civic-mindedness are

⁵² Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, p. 231.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

both lofty ideals that no government can just decide to “do”. Rather, it is each of our responsibility to improve ourselves and strive towards our telos of a fulfilling involvement with our society and our world.

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