Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick? Veterans in the Political Elite and the American Use of Force

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Other research has shown (1) that civilians and the military differ in their views about when and how to use military force; (2) that the opinions of veterans track more closely with military officers than with civilians who never served in the military; and (3) that U.S. civil–military relations shaped Cold War policy debates. We assess whether this opinion gap "matters" for the actual conduct of American foreign policy. We examine the impact of the presence of veterans in the U.S. political elite on the propensity to initiate and escalate militarized interstate disputes between 1816 and 1992. As the percentage of veterans serving in the executive branch and the legislature increases, the probability that the United States will initiate militarized disputes declines. Once a dispute has been initiated, however, the higher the proportion of veterans, the greater the level of force the United States will use in the dispute.

> *. . . My feeling is that [National Security Advisor Anthony Lake] must always be conscious when it comes to making military decisions on the use of military power that the president has not served and that he has not served.*
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> *General John Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (as quoted in DeParle 1995)*

In his autobiography, General Colin Powell relates his difficulty in dealing with the academic and "nonmilitary" style of the Clinton foreign policy team. He describes his patient efforts early in President Clinton's first term to instruct civilian leaders on when and how to use force. During one such session, Madeleine Albright, then ambassador to the UN and later Secretary of State, asked General Powell in frustration, "What is the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?" Powell reports that he thought he "would have an aneurysm. American GIs were not toy soldiers to be moved around on some sort of global game board" (Powell and Persico 1995, 576–77).

It is tempting to dismiss the Powell–Albright exchange as merely a *contretemps* between two powerful and idiosyncratic personalities. But nearly every post-Cold War use of U.S. military force was conducted against the backdrop of some sort of civil–military dispute, and these disputes in broad brush seemed to conform to the Powell–Albright pattern: Civilian leaders seemed more willing than military leaders to deploy the military in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Kosovo, and so on (Desch 1999; Feaver n.d.). Of course, exceptions abound, with some prominent civilian politicians showing reluctance and some prominent military officers showing a greater willingness in a given case (Avant 1996/97). At the most senior policymaking levels, the civil-military distinction is blurry and only awkwardly fits the neat categories of classical civil–military relations theory (Roman and Tarr 2001). Nevertheless, reports persist that post-Cold War civil–military relations in the United States are characterized by repeated clashes between promiscuous civilians and reluctant warriors (Mandelbaum 1996; Weigley 2001).

We examine the extent to which these disputes are a function of an enduring civil–military gap. Other research has shown that military experience "matters" in the sense that civilians and military personnel tend to give different responses on surveys asking about the appropriate criteria for when and how to use force. Moreover, this research has indicated that civilians who are military veterans give responses that track more closely with those of military officers than with those of civilians who never served (Feaver and Gelpi 1999, n.d.). Likewise previous research has shown that differing civilian and military opinions shaped policy debates at the highest decision-making levels within the United States during the Cold War (e.g., Betts 1991, Gacek 1994, and Petraeus 1989). We assess whether this opinion gap "matters" in terms of the actual conduct of American foreign policy.

Specifically, we examine whether the prevalence of military experience among the policymaking elite affects the propensity of the United States to use military force. Because veteran opinion corresponds with military opinion, we use veteran presence in the political elite as a proxy for measuring the civil–military gap over time. Relying on a composite measure of military experience across the executive and legislative branches of government, we examine the impact of elite military experience on the U.S. propensity to initiate and to escalate militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) between 1816 and 1992.

FROM BELIEFS TO BEHAVIOR: THE CIVIL-MILITARY GAP AND INTER-STATE CONFLICT

Analyses of U.S. decision making during Cold War crises point to a general civil–military pattern of

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disagreement across two dimensions: (1) the decision regarding *whether/when* to use force and (2) the decision regarding *how* to use force. Civilian leaders tended to be more willing to use the military to address a diplomatic problem but favored using the military in a constrained way to minimize the chance that the crisis would escalate out of control. Military leaders tended toward greater reluctance in adopting a military solution to a diplomatic problem but, if the military was to be used, favored fewer restrictions so the military could use force in a quick and decisive manner (e.g., Betts 1991, Gacek 1994, and Feaver 1995).

A similar pattern emerges in recent surveys of civilian and military elites. Compared to midcareer active-duty military officers, civilian elites are somewhat more interventionist with regard to the range of issues over which they will support the use of force by the United States. Military officers report what may be called a "realpolitik" view that reserves the use of force for interstate issues that represent a substantial threat to national security, such as control of territory, the maintenance of geostrategic access and position, and the defense of allies. Civilian elites, on the other hand, are somewhat more likely than military officers to report an "interventionist" view that extends the use military force to address additional issues that do not fit within this interstate security paradigm. Such goals include human rights abuses, the internal collapse of governance, and the desire to alter a state's domestic regime.[1] Thus, interventionists will generally have a wider set of issues across which they will support the use of force, while realpolitik thinkers will support force only over a narrower range of issues.[2] In other words, civilian and military views converge somewhat when considering potential realpolitik uses of force but diverge more sharply when considering potential "interventionist" uses of force. Significantly, respondents in the civilian elite who had previously served in the military report views that track more closely with active-duty military officers than with nonveterans in the civilian elite (Feaver and Gelpi 1999, n.d.).

Regarding the issue of *how* to use military force, civilians tended to endorse a greater willingness to place constraints on the manner in which force is used, whereas military respondents tended to endorse a position that has come to be known as the Powell Doctrine of overwhelming force (Dauber 1998; Stevenson 1996). The doctrine calls for using force only when the political will to do so essentially without restrictions—or only with very broad restrictions such as the prohibition of nuclear weapons—is clearly present. The Powell Doctrine is based on the putative lessons of Vietnam but can be traced back to the "never again" or "all or nothing" school of senior military disenchanted with the restrictions imposed by political leaders during the Korean War (Gacek 1994). This view could not contrast more starkly with those of civilian elites such as Albright, who vigorously contended that "[the use of force] doesn't have to be all or nothing. We should be able to use limited force in limited areas."[3] Once again, existing research suggests that military veterans within the civilian elite give responses that track more closely with active duty military officers than with nonveterans such as Albright (Feaver and Gelpi 1999, n.d.).

How, in theory, might these opinion differences affect the actual conduct of American foreign policy? The American military has never openly challenged the fundamental principle of civilian control. Nonetheless, even within the basic framework of civilian control, one can imagine varying levels of military influence. Military preferences shape U.S. foreign policy to a greater or lesser extent through at least three significant mechanisms. First, given their obvious expertise regarding the use of force, military advisors have the opportunity to persuade civilian policymakers to adopt views that reflect the beliefs and preferences of the military. Second, military officers have the opportunity to influence policy by shaping the kinds of options that are presented to civilian leaders. Third, even if military advisors are unable to alter the views of policymakers, their preferences may constrain policymakers because of the leverage that the military can give to competing civilian elites (e.g., elite members of a competing political party or faction). The norms of civilian control may inhibit military leaders from openly and publicly challenging civilian decisions regarding the use of force, but competing civilian elites are under no such constraint. Research indicates that one of the keys to maintaining public support for the use of force is the existence of a supportive elite consensus (Larson 1996).

We hypothesize that military preferences will have greater influence on civilian policy choices when the civil–military gap is narrow (i.e., when civilian leaders preferences are similar to those of the military). Because civilians who have served in military have preferences that are closer to the those of the military, *ceteris paribus*, the presence of veterans in the civilian leadership can serve as a proxy measure for the width of this civil–military gap: the more veterans there are in the civilian leadership, the greater the influence of military preferences on civilian policy choices.

Of course, the decision to use force is influenced by many factors, of which civil–military relations may not be the most important. The presence of these other factors presents a challenge for testing the influence of the civil–military opinion gap over time. Even so, it should be possible to isolate the impact of civil–military relations relative to other contributing factors that shape the use of force. The hypotheses that follow, then, are all subject to the *ceteris paribus* condition; controlling

[1] During earlier periods in U.S. history, other matters such as the defense of American commercial interests were more prominent "interventionist" issues. Recent survey results also indicate that military officers are less likely to view U.S. economic relationships as "a matter of national security" (Feaver and Gelpi n.d.).

[2] Jentleson (1992, 1998) makes a further empirical distinction between interventions designed to alter the regimes of other states and those designed to prevent human rights abuses. Our survey analyses (Feaver and Gelpi n.d.) did not reveal such a distinction in opinion at the elite level. Moreover, our measures of conflict behavior cannot capture the distinction between a humanitarian and a state-building intervention.

[3] Comments made on *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, January 9, 2001.

for all the other factors that affect the decision to use force, we expect the following.

HYPOTHESIS 1. *As the proportion of civilian policymakers with military experience increases, the probability that the United States will initiate militarized disputes will decrease.*

HYPOTHESIS 2. *The impact of policymakers' military experience on American decisions to initiate militarized disputes will be more pronounced with regard to interventionist threats rather than* realpolitik *threats.*

Once the decision to use military force has been made, the nature of the military's advice to civilian elites will reverse. Regardless of whether the mission is "realpolitik" or "interventionist," the military always prefers the large-scale use of force to the limited use of force. Thus, once civilian policy makers have decided to use force, military advisors will always counsel strongly for using force on a large scale. Once again, we expect this advice to be more influential when the civil–military gap is small.

HYPOTHESIS 3. *As the proportion of civilian policymakers with military experience increases, the level of force the United States uses in disputes it initiates will increase.*

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF THE CIVIL–MILITARY GAP ON AMERICAN CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

To test these hypotheses, we relate the civil–military gap to U.S. conflict behavior over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while controlling, as far as possible, for other factors that are known to shape the use of force.

Scope

We test for the impact of the elite civil–military gap on American decisions to use force with a cross-sectional time-series dataset composed of interstate dyads of which the United States was a member between 1816 and 1992.[4] State membership is determined by the Correlates of War (COW) definition of membership in the international system. One difficulty in using such dyadic-pooled time-series data is determining which states were capable of interacting. During the latter part of the twentieth century, this issue seems less salient because of the frequent opportunities for interaction among states. As we move back in time through the nineteenth century, however, it becomes less plausible to assume that all states were capable of fighting with one another. Following a number of prominent analyses of the use of force, we address this problem by analyzing only "politically relevant" dyads (Maoz and Russett 1993; O'Neal and Russett 1997), which are defined as (1) any pair of states in which at least one of the states is a major power or (2) any pair of states that share a border or are divided by less than 150 miles of water.[5]

Since the United States became a major power (according to the COW Capabilities dataset) in 1898, this rule implies that we analyze all interstate dyads including the United States from 1898 onward. Prior to 1898, the rule implies that we analyze American relations with all of the major powers during that period as well as American interactions with Mexico.[6]

Dependent Variable 1: Initiation of Force by the United States

Our first dependent variable is the *propensity* of the United States to initiate the use of force.[7] We code American initiations of force based on the COW MIDs dataset, which defines the initiation of militarized disputes as explicit threats to use force, displays of force, mobilizations of force, or actual uses of force (Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996). This variable is coded on an annual basis for each dyad, set at 1 for each year that the United States initiated a militarized dispute against the other state in the dyad and at 0 otherwise.[8]

[4] This dataset was defined through the use of EUGene, a data generation program produced by D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam (1998). The analysis of binary-pooled time-series data has recently come under considerable methodological criticism. We approach the problem of temporal dependence in the manner advocated by Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998). In addition, we rely on Huber–White robust standard errors that allow for clustering on each dyad to deal with spatial autocorrelation and heteroskedasticity. Because of the skewed distribution of the dependent variable, we also tested King and Zeng's (2001) rare event logit estimator. It produced identical results, so we retained the traditional logit specification.

[5] The analysis of "politically relevant" dyad-years versus all dyad years has been a source of some debate. In general, the effect of analyzing politically relevant dyads should be to increase the size of estimated coefficients by reducing the problems associated with analyzing rare events (King and Zeng 2001). Because the United States became a major power in 1898, our analysis does look at all dyads in the twentieth century. The impact of veterans remained consistent across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, suggesting that the selection of politically relevant versus all dyads is not an issue for this analysis.

[6] This excludes U.S. conflicts with Native American tribes because the COW datasets do not identify these groups as nation-states.

[7] We also investigated the possibility that the presence of veterans might be associated with the probability that the United States would become a target in a militarized dispute. No such hypothesis emerges from our data on civilian and military preferences, but we investigated the possibility that other states might anticipate levels of U.S. "interventionism" and alter their behavior based on the perceived preferences of U.S. leaders. We found no support for this hypothesis. Thus—as expected by our argument—the initiation of U.S. MIDs is related to the presence of veterans but the targeting of MIDs against the United States is not. This pattern increases our confidence that we are identifying a causal relationship rather than a spurious correlation between veterans and the overall frequency of disputes.

[8] As is the case with all analyses of dispute initiation, the distribution on this dependent variable is quite skewed. The United States was a member of 8,790 politically relevant dyad years from 1816 to 1992 and it initiated disputes in 111 of those cases. U.S. dispute initiations were relatively rare (1.26% of the cases) but did differ substantially from the frequency of dispute initiations in a random sample of politically relevant dyad years. As noted below, King and Zeng's (2001) rare-events logit estimator yielded results identical to those presented here.

Dependent Variable 2: Level of Force Used by the United States

Our second dependent variable is the *level* of force used by the United States in the disputes that it initiated. In the MIDs dataset the highest level of force used by each side in a dispute is coded on a five-point scale, as follows: 1 = no militarized response to a MID initiation by the other state, 2 = threat of force, 3 = show of force, 4 = use of force, and 5 = war. For our purposes, of course, the first category of this variable is irrelevant, for we analyze the level of force only if the United States initiated a dispute. Threats of force involve verbal actions that are not supported by militarized behavior. A show of force involves the actual movement and use of troops but stops short of extended or direct combat. The use of force involves direct military hostilities but short of full-scale war. Wars are defined as military engagements in which the combatants suffer at least 1,000 battle deaths.

Key Explanatory Variable: The Elite Civil–Military Gap

We have no way of directly measuring the preferences of policymakers regarding the use of force across the span of American history. However, we can measure the military *experience* of American policymakers. As we discussed above, this measure acts as a surrogate indicator for the presence of "military views" within the civilian policymaking elite.

Focusing on military experience as a measure of the gap fits nicely within the causal chain with which we link the civil–military gap to the use of force. We view the impact of the gap as a two-stage process. First, military experience shapes individuals' attitudes and preferences regarding the use of force. Second, these differing preferences, in turn, alter American conflict behavior. That is, although our aggregate analysis of American conflict behavior draws a direct linkage between military experience and dispute behavior, we view attitudes as an intervening variable between military experience and American foreign policy.

Our approach requires us to assume that the link between opinions about the use of force and military/veteran status has been more or less constant over the time. Specifically, we assume that the general structure of civil–military differences has remained fixed over time. Considerable evidence suggests that this assumption is reasonable. Although changes have occurred at the margins, the broad contours of recent survey results (Feaver and Gelpi 1999, n.d.) are consistent with the findings of several studies of U.S. civil–military relations during the Cold War (Betts 1991, Petraeus 1987, 1989), with Huntington's (1957) canonical consideration of the sweep of U.S. civil–military relations since the founding of the Republic, and with Upton's (1917) classic critique of nineteenth-century American civil–military relations. Compared to military officers, American civilian leaders have tended to be more willing to use force as a foreign policy tool and more willing to constrain how that force is used. As Albright said, "Limited force in limited areas." Importantly, if our assumption is invalid and veteran status is not associated with foreign policy preferences in a consistent manner, then our estimates will generally tend to be dampened toward zero and we will thus be less likely to uncover any statistically significant relationships.

The next issue is the determination of *whose* military experience might be relevant for predicting the use of force. The President's military experience should be an important aspect of this process, but the President's own military experience should by no means be the only factor. The President inevitably relies on advice from members of his Cabinet and his national security team, so surely their military experience will shape the views and the information they convey to the President. In addition, the President must also be concerned about how other policymakers will respond to his decisions regarding whether and how to use force. Congress has often publicly debated American decisions to use force, and as we noted earlier, public support for a military operation may depend critically on the existence of an elite consensus in support of the operation (Larson 1996). Thus, the President must be concerned with whether legislators will hold hearings or make public statements that question the administration's policy. Congress also retains an important budgetary and constitutional link to American uses of force, and the President may consult directly with prominent members of Congress who have expertise in foreign affairs.

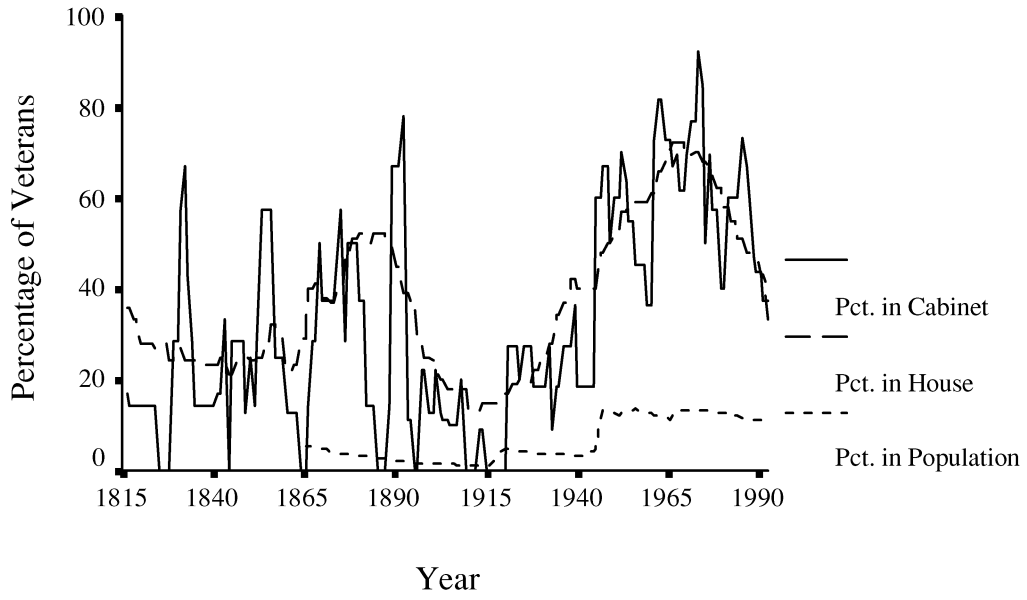
Consequently, our measure of the military experience of policymakers encompasses the executive and legislative branches. We do not include the military experience of the Supreme Court or other aspects of the judiciary because judges have not historically played a role in American decisions to use force, nor have they debated such decisions publicly. For the executive branch, we recorded the percentage of veterans serving in the Cabinet for each year. Thus we include the military experience of the President, the Vice President, and any other Cabinet officers serving during that year. Data for this variable are from the Biographical Directory of the Executive Branch, 1774–1989 (Sobel, 1990)[9]. For Congress, we use the percentage of veterans serving in the House of Representatives for each year.[10]

To convey a sense of what these data look like, we display both of our measures of military experience in Figure 1. The proportion of veterans in the House ranged between 13% and 72%, while the percentage of veterans in the Cabinet ranged from 0% all the way to 92%. Both measures were low in the early nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and both rose after the conclusion of the Civil War, World War I, and World War II.

[9] Data for 1990–92 were taken from the biographies of Cabinet secretaries available at the web sites of each Cabinet department.

[10] We thank William T. Bianco (2001) for generously sharing these data with us.

FIGURE 1. Percentage of Veterans in the Cabinet, House of Representatives and U.S. Population



The two variables are closely related to one another, correlating at .85 ($p < .01$). Thus, we combine these two indicators into a single composite measure of elite military experience by simply taking their average.[11]

Secondary Explanatory Variable: Interventionist vs. Realpolitik Uses of Force

One important aspect of our argument is that civilians differ from those with military experience in terms of their willingness to use military force to address issues that are outside the realpolitik scope of American security policy—especially those that involve intervention *inside* other states. To test this hypothesis, we divided dyads into two categories: states whose actions could represent a threat to the core bases of American security and states whose actions could not represent such a threat. The former category we labeled "realpolitik" targets, and the latter we labeled "interventionist." We defined interventionist targets as any state that (1) faced worse than a 99:1 disadvantage against the United States in terms of relative military capabilities *and* (2) was not allied with a competing major power. Such small, nonaligned states clearly do not have the capability to threaten American security in a realpolitik manner. Instead, disputes with such states were likely to involve U.S. intervention inside the minor state because of domestic turmoil or because the United States was dissatisfied with the policies or behaviors of the ruling government of such states. States that enjoyed less than a 99:1 disadvantage against the United States *or* were allied with a rival major power were coded as "realpolitik" targets. This coding rule results in approximately 51% of the dyad-years in our dataset being coded as "interventionist."

This division is crude, but it captures the essence of what we mean by U.S. "interventionism." Our measure of interventionism is intended to identify states against which the United States was likely to be using force for reasons other than the defense of traditional national security goals. To the extent that the United States initiated militarized disputes against "interventionist" states, it was targeting extremely weak states that were not allied with rival external powers. In such cases the United States was likely to be intervening in the domestic politics of such states to alter their governments or their governments' internal policies. Our hypothesis is that policymakers with military experience would be more reluctant to engage in such interventions.

Control Variables

A large literature on international conflict has already identified numerous factors that affect the use of force, including distance, military capabilities, and democracy, for example. To the extent that the elite military experience is correlated with any of these factors, the failure to include that factor in our analysis might bias our estimate of impact of elite veterans. As far as possible, we have controlled for every plausible alternative argument in our empirical analysis. Including additional control variables *cannot* artificially inflate the estimated impact of our variable of interest. It can, however, introduce problems such as

[11] Because the two variables correlate so highly, however, differing functional forms had little impact on the results. For example, weighting the military experience of Cabinet members twice as heavily as that of House members had no impact on our results. Below we demonstrate that our findings are robust across several other variations in these coding rules.

multicollinearity.[12] Such problems would inflate the standard errors of the coefficients and could reduce the statistical significance of our results. Thus, the inclusion of control variables can only provide a more stringent test of our hypotheses.[13] Including these variables also allows us to compare the impact of elite military experience to the influence of other prominent causes of conflict.

The variables that we utilize are clustered into three categories: variables that that address likely counterarguments or potential sources of spuriousness for our results; variables that are not likely sources of spuriousness but are known to be important determinants on the use of force and thus are useful for illustrating the comparative importance of our main explanatory variable; and variables that are needed to address other methodological concerns.

Potentially Confounding Variable 1: Log of Casualties in a Previous U.S. War

Controlling for the human costs of U.S. participation in a war helps address one of the most obvious counterarguments to our finding of a relationship between elite veterans and the use of force: American war experience. The presence of veterans in the political elite is obviously a function of U.S. participation in a war and it is reasonable to expect American conflict behavior to change after a major war. Perhaps this war memory or "war weariness" is the true causal factor, and the presence of veterans in the political elite merely an artifact of the costs of that war. Our measure of war weariness is the natural log of the number of U.S. fatalities suffered by the United States in its most recent war.[14] Data on U.S. war fatalities were drawn from the Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (Statistical Information Analysis Division), U.S. Department of Defense (http://www.web1.osd.mil/mmid/casualty).

Potentially Confounding Variable 2: Percentage of Veterans in the American Public

Controlling for the percentage of veterans in the American public provides a further test of the war-weariness hypothesis. The percentages of veterans in the elite and the mass are likely to be correlated because they are both affected by the extent of U.S. participation in major wars. Perhaps any correlation between political elite veterans and the use of force is an artifact of a deeper relationship between the general public and conflict proneness. That is, perhaps the political elite is merely responding to the broader currents of war weariness in the general public. Data for the number of veterans in the U.S. public were received from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and data for the total U.S. population figures were drawn from the COW dataset on national capabilities.[15] The percentage of veterans in the American public is displayed in Figure 1.

Potentially Confounding Variable 3: Cold War Years

As noted above, the percentage of veterans reached its height in the years following World War II. This time period, of course, was also the period of the Cold War—the most intense security competition in U.S. history. Thus, we would expect the United States to have exhibited a greater propensity to initiate the use of force quite independent of any civil–military effect. The Cold War broke out for reasons that were exogenous to (but correlated with) the increase in veterans among U.S. policy makers. Thus the failure to control for the Cold War period would lead us to attribute changes in American behavior to other factors when they were most likely due to the new global role that the United States assumed in the wake of World War II.[16] This indicator is a dummy variable that equals 1 during the years 1946 to 1989.

Potentially Confounding Variable 4: U.S. Involvement in Other Disputes

Both presidents and the mass public may be more likely to select policymakers with military experience when

[12] Multicollinearity levels do become high (auxiliary $R^2 = .8$) for the elite veterans variable because of our specification of an interaction with interventionist targets. Auxiliary regressions for the balance of military capabilities also revealed relatively high collinearity levels (auxiliary $R^2 = .71$). Nonetheless, elite veterans, its interaction term, and military capabilities all retain their statistical significance, making the issue of multicollinearity irrelevant. The dummy variables for the major power status of the United States and its partner in the dyad also suffer from some moderate collinearity problems (auxiliary R^2 values are .5 and .71 respectively), which could account for their statistical insignificance; however, the relatively small size of their coefficients appears to be a more likely cause. Comparing their coefficients to our estimate for the impact of the Cold War (also a dummy variable making such comparisons possible), we can see that the standard error for the U.S. major power status variable is smaller than the standard error for the Cold War variable. Its coefficient, however, is less than one-fourth the size of the impact of the Cold War. Auxiliary regressions on all other variables revealed auxiliary R^2 values of less than .2.

[13] One circumstance in which it could be inappropriate to include a variable as a "control" would be if that factor actually served as an intervening variable between our antecedent variable (elite military experience) and our dependent variable (the use of force). Controlling for an intervening variable may cause the antecedent variable to "disappear" from the equation because its influence is exerted only through the intervening factor. The insertion and removal of the intervening factor could be used to demonstrate the nature of the causal linkage, but one should not infer from such an analysis that the antecedent variable has no effect.

[14] We estimated a variety of decay functions for the decline of the war-weariness effect over time. However, the simple log of U.S. casualties fit the data best.

[15] Data on the number of U.S. veterans were available only from 1865. Thus, we estimate our equations both with and without this control variable. Missing data points after 1865 were interpolated from the time series using STATA version 6.0. Because the time series is generally smooth, the interpolated values appear to provide a good fit. We tested the interpolation process by interpolating the entire time series based only on one observation per five-year period. Regressing these interpolations on the true values yielded an R^2 of greater than .96.

[16] After presenting our results, we discuss a number of sensitivity analyses that address the robustness of our findings across various historical periods—including the Cold War.

they perceive the United States as facing substantial security threats. Thus, if elite military experience is positively related to American involvement in disputes, this result may be an effect rather than a cause of that involvement. Our first step toward solving this problem was to define our dependent variable as American *initiations* of disputes. In addition, however, we also control for the number of disputes the United States was involved in each year (as either initiator or target) outside the dyad under consideration.

Potentially Confounding Variable 5: Political Party in Power

Recent evidence suggests that military officers increasingly identify with the Republican Party (Holsti 2001). In addition, recent Republican administrations have been perceived both as having greater military representation among their ranks and as being more sympathetic to the views of the military than have Democratic administrations. At the same time, Republican administrations have frequently been depicted as relatively hawkish on foreign policy issues. Thus we control for the political party in power to distinguish the impact of military views from the impact of the Republican Party.

Potential Confounding Variable 6: Balance of Military Capabilities

One robust finding in the literature on conflict propensity is that states of vastly unequal military capabilities are unlikely to engage in conflict with one another (Blainey 1973; Organski and Kugler 1980). America experienced dramatic increases in power around the turn of the twentieth century and after World War II. Shortly after each of these changes, the percentage of veterans in the policymaking elite increased as well. Thus we must control for American capabilities to distinguish their influence from the impact of elite military experience. We measure the balance of military capabilities within a dyad with COW data on national material capabilities. For each year we calculate the proportion of the capabilities within each dyad that is controlled by the United States (i.e., U.S. capabilities/(U.S. + adversary capabilities), subtract 0.50, and take the absolute value. The resulting variable ranges from 0 (perfectly equal capabilities) to 0.50 (capabilities entirely controlled by one state in the dyad). We then rescale this variable from 0 to 1 to make it consistent with standard measures of relative capabilities.

Comparative Variable 1: Shared Alliance Ties

States that share security interests should be less likely to engage in militarized disputes with one another (Bueno de Mesquita 1981; Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992). Accordingly, we include a τ-b measure of alliance portfolio similarity between the United States and the other dyad member in each dyad-year. In principle, the τ-b similarity score ranges from -1 to 1, with higher values representing more similar alliance patterns; in our data, similarity scores range from -0.46 to 1.[17]

Comparative Variable 2: Major Power Status

Another well-established finding is that major powers are substantially more likely to become involved in disputes (Bremer 1992). Because the United States became a major power roughly halfway through the time period, and because this status altered the set of "politically relevant" dyads, we control for whether both the United States and its potential adversary were major powers. Again, major power status is coded on the basis of the COW dataset on national material capabilities.

Comparative Variable 3: Adversary's Level of Democracy

The extensive literature on the democratic peace has established democracy as one of the most robust and important determinants of international conflict (Bremer 1992; Maoz and Russett 1993; Ray 1995). Thus, we include the level of democracy in the opposing state. Consistent with most of the literature on the democratic peace, we measure democracy on the basis of the Polity III dataset (Gurr and Jaggers 1996). We create a net democracy score for each state, defined as its democracy score minus its autocracy score. This variable ranges from -10 (autocracy) to 10 (democracy).

Comparative Variable 4: Distance between States

One of the strongest findings in the study of international conflict is that states that are near one another are more likely to engage in military conflict (Bremer 1992). Thus, we control for the distance between the United States and its potential adversary in the dyad. We measure this as the log of the number of miles between capital cities, unless the two states are contiguous, in which case the distance is defined as 0. States are coded as "contiguous" if they share a land border or if they are separated by less than 250 miles of water.

Comparative Variable 5: Adversary's Level of Force

We control for the level of force used by the opposing state, which is measured according to the five-point scale described above.[18]

[17] A dummy variable identifying states with which the United States shared a direct alliance tie yielded similar results.

[18] Our use of the level of force used by the opposing state as a control variable in explaining the level of force used by the United States is a rather crude specification of crisis escalation. In fact, the United States and its adversary were likely to be interacting strategically as

Methodological Control 1: Peace Years in the Dyad

We correct for temporal dependence in our binary time-series cross-sectional data by accounting for the number of years that have elapsed since the previous conflict within the dyad (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998). We model the impact of time by including dummy variables for each elapsed year of peace because this method is both simple and flexible in dealing with any possible pattern of temporal correlation.[19] As it happens, the dummy variables are statistically significant for peace years 0 through 4; thus, we retain only these five dummy variables.

Methodological Control 2: Selection Effects Parameter

As in any analysis of crisis escalation, we must cope with the issue of selection effects. Since the United States had to initiate a dispute before it could engage in escalation, the cases in which we can observe American decisions regarding escalation are self-selected. This nonrandom selection process can bias the coefficients in the analysis of the level of force used by the United States. We account for the nonrandom selection of crises by modeling the initiation and escalation decisions as a set of simultaneous equations.[20] In the selection equation we estimate a predicted probability of dispute initiation. We then insert this predicted value as a control variable in our analysis of escalation. By accounting for the expected probability of a dispute, we correct for the self-selection process.[21]

DOES THE CIVIL–MILITARY GAP INFLUENCE AMERICAN CONFLICT BEHAVIOR?

We conducted a logit analysis of every politically relevant interstate dyadic relationship in which the United States was a partner from 1816 to 1992. Table 1 presents our analysis of the propensity of the United States to initiate militarized disputes. Our results provide strong and striking support for hypotheses 1 and 2. As predicted, the negative coefficient for elite veterans is statistically significant, indicating that the more veterans there were in the political elite, the less likely the United States was to initiate the use of force. Also as predicted, the effect of veterans on the propensity to use force was even greater in "interventionist" cases. As indicated in column 3 in Table 1, the coefficient for this variable for realpolitik dyads is only $-.19$ ($p < .10$). With regard to interventionist dyads, on the other hand, the coefficient is calculated by adding that value to the coefficient on the interaction between the percentage of veterans in the policy elite and an interventionist threat ($-.47$, $p < .01$). Thus the overall effect of elite veterans for interventionist dyads is $-.66$—more than three times the impact for realpolitik dyads.

Figure 2 displays the predicted probability that the United States would initiate a militarized dispute as the percentage of veterans in the Cabinet and Congress ranged from its historical near-minimum of 10% to its historical near-maximum of 80%.[22] When only one policymaker in 10 had military experience, the probability that the United States would initiate a dispute within a given dyad was approximately 3.6%. At first glance, this might look like a relatively low risk. But because militarized disputes are rare events, a 3% probability of a dispute between a given pair of states actually indicates a relatively high risk. Moreover, the large number of dyads in which the United States was involved each year magnifies the effect of a 3% probability. For large portions of our dataset the United States was engaged in more than 100 such dyads per year. Thus, a 3% per dyad probability of a dispute yields a prediction that, holding all other factors that influence the decision to use force hypothetically constant, the United States might initiate several additional militarized disputes per year because so few policymakers had military experience.[23]

Conversely, of course, as the percentage of policymakers with military experience increases, the probability of dispute initiation drops substantially. The impact of these changes is slightly nonlinear, with the greatest decreases in the probability of a dispute occurring as the percentage of veterans ranges between 10% and 67%. By the time the rate of military experience among policymakers reaches 67%—the probability that the United States would initiate a dispute

they escalated a militarized dispute. This strategic interaction creates a problem of censored data (Signorino 2000; Smith 1999). Fortunately, our results remained robust when we specified the escalation of the United States and its adversary as endogenous variables in a bivariate probit. We retained the current specification so that we could use the full range of the COW escalation variable rather than dichotomizing it for the bivariate probit.

[19] Controlling for peace years with a spline function yielded identical results.

[20] A necessary condition for the identification of a system of equations is that at least one exogenous variable be excluded from each equation. In our analysis, the hostility level of the adversary is excluded from the selection equation because the dispute initiation by the United States is temporally (and causally) prior to the opponent's escalation decision. The impact of peace years in the dyad and the number of years since U.S. participation in a war are excluded from the escalation equation because these temporal effects are no longer relevant once a dispute has been initiated.

[21] In addition to this two-stage selection model, we also estimated a Heckman selection model that estimates the initiation and escalation equations simultaneously. Once again, our results regarding the impact of veterans remained robust across both estimations. Again, we retained the current specification so as to utilize the full COW escalation scale.

[22] We select this range of variation because approximately 95% of the cases we observe are within this range. The historical minimum percentage of veterans is 6.5% and the maximum percentage we observe is 81.2%. The mean value for this variable is 46.7% and the standard deviation is 20.3%. The median percentage of veterans in office is 50%, while the first and third quartiles are 28% and 61%. Thus our variation from 10% to 80% represents a plausible set of hypothetical values for judging the marginal impact of this variable.

[23] An event count model that estimated the overall number of disputes initiated by the United States each year estimated the marginal impact of moving from 10% veterans to 80% veterans as an average of 1.3 initiations per year.

TABLE 1. Impact of Elite Military Experience on the Probability that the United States Will Initiate a Militarized Dispute[a]

Explanatory Variables	Elite Veterans Model	Elite & Mass Veterans Model	Realpolitik vs. Interventionist Threats
Percent veteran in Cabinet & House	−.032***	−.031**	−.019*
	(.011)	(.014)	(.011)
Elite vets × interventionist threat	—	—	−.047***
			(.012)
Interventionist threat	—	—	1.02**
			(.46)
ln of previous war's battle deaths	−.16***	−.22**	−.17***
	(.056)	(.092)	(.056)
Percent veteran in U.S. public	—	−.042	—
		(.059)	
Cold War era	1.70***	2.17***	1.83***
	(.50)	(.76)	(.52)
Republican administration	.44	.41	.45
	(.28)	(.31)	(.28)
U.S. involvement in other disputes	−.070	−.065	−.061
	(.060)	(.063)	(.06)
Balance of military capabilities	−1.75***	−1.84***	−1.15
	(.61)	(.72)	(.74)
Alliance similarity	−1.41**	−1.36**	−1.77**
	(.65)	(.70)	(.79)
U.S. is a major power	−.39	−.76	−.61
	(.38)	(.69)	(.40)
Adversary is a major power	−.39	−.43	−.29
	(.69)	(.86)	(.70)
Adversary level of democracy	−.045**	−.061**	−.037*
	(.023)	(.026)	(.023)
ln distance between states	−.30***	−.30***	−.28**
	(.029)	(.031)	(.027)
Years since U.S. initiation in dyad			
Constant	−1.29	−2.38	.61
	(.90)	(1.80)	(1.04)
Number of observations	8739	8464	8739
Initial log-likelihood	−594.92	−534.37	−594.92
Log-likelihood at convergence	−469.72	−419.82	−456.54
χ^2	601.74 (17d.f.)***	727.95 (18d.f.)***	560.77 (19d.f.)***

Note. Huber–White robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors allow for clustering by adversary. * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

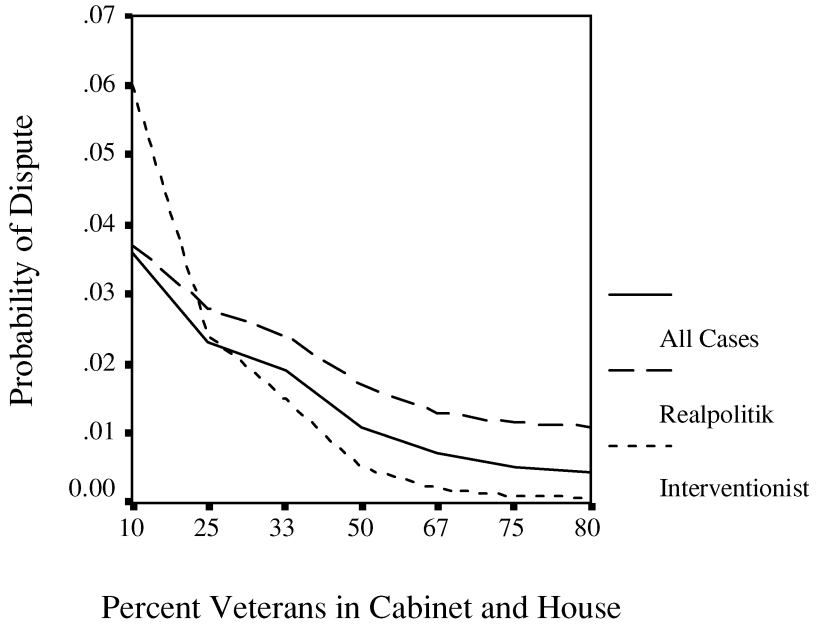
[a]For reason of space the temporal dependence coefficients are not reported here. As expected, years since the previous U.S. initiation did have a significant and nonlinear effect on U.S. dispute initiation as expected by Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998).

within a given dyad drops from 3.6% to 0.7%—more than an 80% decrease from its previous value. Further increases in elite military experience up to 80% reduce the probability of a dispute within a dyad to nearly 0.4%.

Also in Figure 2, we compare the impact of elite veterans on the probability that the United States would initiate a crisis against realpolitik and interventionist threats. As one would expect from the results in Table 1, the impact of elite veterans is much greater for interventionist cases. When few veterans are in office the United States is much less likely to initiate a dispute against realpolitik and interventionist targets. Specifically, when only 10% of policymakers are veterans, the probability of a U.S. initiation in a realpolitik dyad is about 4%, and in an interventionist dyad it is approximately 6%. As the percentage of elite veterans increases the probability of a dispute drops within both sets of dyads, but the decline is much steeper in the interventionist group. In fact, by the time the percentage of veterans reaches 50%, the United States is actually more than three times as likely to initiate force against a realpolitik threat. When the percentage of veterans nears its historical maximum, the probability of initiation against a realpolitik threat is 1%, while the probability of initiation against an interventionist threat is only 0.08%. These results are made all the more striking by the crude nature of our distinction between realpolitik and interventionist threats. More careful theorizing and empirical work on these categories would surely increase the decisiveness of this distinction.

Many of our control variables also have a significant impact on U.S. dispute initiation, but none of these effects can account for the impact of elite veterans. For

FIGURE 2. Impact of Elite Military Experience on U.S. Dispute Initiations: Realpolitik, Interventionist, and All Dyads



example, our analysis supports the war-weariness hypothesis. The coefficient for the log of U.S. casualties in the previous war is negative and statistically significant, but it does not account for the impact of elite veterans. The percentage of veterans among the U.S. public, on the other hand, has no significant effect. The fact that elite military experience matters while military experience among the public does not fits precisely with the elite-level causal mechanism that we hypothesized. The coefficient for Republican administrations was consistently positive but did not quite achieve statistical significance ($p < .11$ for the model in column 1, Table 1). Thus any possible association between the U.S. Military and the Republican Party cannot account for the relationship between elite military experience and American conflict behavior.[24]

Most of the other control variables perform as expected, consistent with the established literature. Not surprisingly, for example, the positive coefficient for the Cold War years indicates that this period witnessed a significantly larger number of American dispute initiations than other periods of U.S. history. The negative coefficient on the opponent's democracy score indicates that the United States is significantly less likely to initiate disputes against other democratic states. The balance of military capabilities also has a significant impact on American initiation of disputes. This negative coefficient indicates that the United States is less likely to initiate disputes in dyads where military capabilities are highly unequal. Common security interests (as measured by alliance similarity) also had a significant dampening effect on American initiations of disputes. And not surprisingly, distance also had a dampening effect on America's propensity to initiate disputes. American involvement in other disputes, on the other hand, had no impact on decisions to initiate additional disputes. America's status as a major power also had no impact on its initiation of disputes, nor did the major power status of the adversary.

How does the substantive impact of the civil–military gap compare to the impacts of the control variables? In Table 2, we list the statistically significant variables and the range across which we varied them to generate the predicted effects. In the third and fourth columns, we display the changes in the probability and in the relative risk of a dispute initiation.

Clearly, the impact of elite military experience continues to be substantial, even when we compare it to other prominent and well-established sources of international conflict. Specifically, our model predicts that a change in the percentage of elite veterans from 10% to 80%—a shift from slightly less than two standard deviations below the mean to slightly less than two standard deviations above—will generate a 3.7% reduction in the probability of U.S. dispute initiation across all dyads. This change corresponds to an 88% reduction in the relative risk of a dispute.

Even the Cold War, which obviously had a substantial impact on American involvement in militarized disputes, did not have as large an impact as elite military

[24] It is also worth noting that we find little evidence of a general relationship between Republicanism and elite military experience. Since the onset of two-party competition between the Democratic and the Republican parties in the midnineteenth century, Republican Cabinets have averaged approximately 5% more veterans, but this gap is not statistically significant. In the House of Representatives, on the other hand, the percentage of veterans was more than 18% higher under Democratic control ($p < .01$). However, this gap seems more likely to be a chance result of the timing of Democratic control than a direct link between military experience and Democratic partisanship.

TABLE 2. Marginal Impact of Significant Variables on the Risk of U.S. Initiation of a Militarized Dispute

Explanatory Variable	Change in Explanatory Variables	Change in Probability of a Dispute %	Change in Relative Risk of a Dispute %
Percent veteran in Cabinet & House	10% to 80%	−3.1	−88
Cold War years	Yes to no	−1.0	−80
Adversary's level of democracy	−10 to 10	−1.1	−59
Balance of military capabilities	70% to 100%	−1.0	−49
Alliance similarity score	−.3 to .7	−1.4	−72
Previous war's battle deaths	383 to 400,000	−1.6	−67
Distance between states	10,00 to 9,000 mi	−.7	−44

Note: Relative risk is calculated based on predicted probabilities generated from the first model in Table 1. Predicted probabilities were generated by varying each independent variable while holding others at their means or modes.

experience. The United States was at an 80% lower risk of initiating militarized disputes prior to the outbreak of the Cold War, but as large as this effect is, it remains smaller than the 88% reduction in risk associated with increased veteran representation in the political elite. Other traditional "realist" variables such as relative military power and alliance ties also had a substantial impact on American dispute behavior, but neither of them outstripped the impact of elite military experience. These results are particularly important in light of the amount of attention that the Cold War, military capabilities, alliances, and the structure of the international system have received as explanations of international conflict and American foreign policy. Our results suggest that American military behavior had been as powerfully influenced by the military experience of its leaders as it has by America's position in the international system.

Similarly, the much-touted impact of democracy is smaller than the impact of elite military experience. A shift in the democracy score of the opposing state from its minimum value of −10 (pure authoritarian state) to its maximum of 10 (pure democracy) reduced the probability that the United States will initiate a dispute by 1.1%—a reduction in relative risk of 59%.[25] This impact is undoubtedly substantial, but it remains considerably less than the 88% reduction in risk associated with closing the civil–military experience gap among the political elite.

Put another way, our results raise questions about the primacy that post-Cold War administrations have given to spreading democracy around the world as a way of reaping the so-called democratic peace. To be sure, the spread of democracy is a substantial and important factor and, once the democratization process has taken root, can be expected to dampen the likelihood that the United States will use force. This strategy may ultimately yield a peace dividend, but our results suggest that an even more effective way to reduce the likelihood that the United States will use force, other things being equal, is to increase the percentage of veterans serving in policymaking positions.

DOES THE CIVIL–MILITARY GAP INFLUENCE HOW AMERICA USES FORCE?

Does elite military experience also have an impact on the American escalation disputes? The answer to this question—displayed in Table 3—appears to be an unqualified "yes." Our results indicate that higher percentages of veterans in the political elite were associated with greater levels of force by the United States—*if* the United States did initiate the use of force. The coefficient for the percentage of veterans in the Cabinet and in Congress is positive and statistically significant, and the impact of this variable is substantial.

Figure 3 indicates that as the percentage of veterans in the Cabinet and Congress increases from 10% to 80%, the probability that the United States would engage in direct combat (use of force coding) increases from 2% to 73%. This same increase in the percentage of elite veterans increases the probability that the United States will escalate the dispute to the level of becoming a war from 0.06% to 9%. The latter increase is particularly substantial given the rarity of wars (0.2% of the dyad-years) and the gravity of escalating to such a level. Most of this impact is felt after the percentage of policymakers with military experience exceeds 33%. Thus policymakers with military experience may well have favored something like an informal Powell Doctrine long before any such doctrine was articulated, far back in American history.

Table 4 compares the marginal impact of changes in policymakers' military experience with the impact of other statistically significant variables in the model. We see that the impact of elite military experience is large in comparison to these other variables. Only the Cold War, which we take to be a surrogate for nuclear deterrence, arguably has a greater impact on the level of force employed by the United States. The Cold War reduced the probability that the United States would engage its forces directly by 56% and reduced the probability that it would escalate to war by 18%. The impact of major power status is dwarfed by the impact of

[25] We use minimum and maximum values because of the bimodal distribution of this variable. Opposing states with democracy scores below −6 or above 6 comprised well over half of our dataset. In fact, opposing states with democracy scores of −10 comprised more than 5% of our dataset and opposing states with a democracy score of 10 comprised more than 15% of the cases.

TABLE 3. Impact of Elite Military Experience on the Level of Military Force Used by the United States in a Dispute

Explanatory Variable	Coefficient & SE
Percent veteran in the Cabinet & Congress	.089*** (.024)
Republican administration	−.42 (.47)
Cold War years	−4.31*** (1.24)
Balance of military capabilities	−1.93 (1.45)
Alliance similarity score	.89 (1.11)
U.S. is a major power	1.91** (.79)
Adversary is a major power	−2.73*** (1.01)
Adversary level of democracy	.066 (.049)
U.S. involvement in other disputes	−.10 (.13)
Contiguous state	−.68 (1.016)
Distance between states	−.0002 (.0002)
Adversary's level of force	.61*** (.16)
Selection effects parameter	5.17* (3.15)
Threshold 1	−.61 (1.87)
Threshold 2	2.86* (1.90)
Threshold 3	7.08*** (2.04)
Number of observations	111
Initial log-likelihood	−112.54
log-likelihood at convergence	−92.47
χ^2 (10 d.f.)	40.13 (12 df)***

Note: Huber–White robust standard errors for coefficients in parentheses.

military experience among American policymakers. America's status as a major power, for example, increases the probability that it would engage its forces directly by 12%. Conversely, the United States was 14% less likely to intervene directly against another major power. Neither of these variables, however, had any substantial impact on the probability that the dispute would escalate to war. Even the impact of the adversary's level of force is not as large as the impact of elite veterans. A change in the adversary's actions from "no response" to "full-scale combat" increased the probability of an American "use of force" by only 39%.

ADDITIONAL TESTS FOR ROBUSTNESS

We performed a variety of checks of the robustness of our results. Because elite military experience and "interventionist" targets are complex concepts with no "standard" indicators, we reestimated our analyses of both dispute initiation and escalation with alternative measures of both concepts. For elite military experience we tested a measure that excluded the military experience of Cabinet members whose positions were not relevant to national security, as well as a measure that excluded the military experience of House members and focused *only* on the military experience of Cabinet members on the national security team (President, Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense/War). The impact of elite military experience remained consistent for both the initiation and the escalation of disputes and remained statistically significant across all these estimations. In fact, a dummy variable identifying when the Secretary of State was a veteran was consistently significant at the .10 level. It is worth noting, however, that a simple dummy variable coding whether or not the President was a veteran was *not* statistically significant for either the initiation or the escalation equation. This result is consistent with the idea that the preferences of presidential advisors (and potential critics) are relevant to U.S. foreign policy behavior. With regard to "interventionist" targets, we conducted analyses that identified any state facing greater than a 99:1 military disadvantage as an interventionist target regardless of its alliance ties to other major powers. We also conducted analyses that identified any minor power state that was not allied to a rival major power as an interventionist target. Our results remained robust.

Our pooled time-series analysis of dispute initiation heavily weights the post-World War II period because of the very large number of dyads during that period. To ensure that our results are stable across the span of American history, we also analyzed a single 177-year event count time series in which the dependent variable was the number of disputes initiated by the United States in each year. The coefficient for elite military experience remained negative and statistically significant ($-.036$; $p < .002$) and the impact of elite veterans remained substantively large. For example, the average number of dispute initiations per year over the 177-year period is 0.56, or about one dispute every other year. The model predicts that a shift in the percentage of veterans in the policymaking elite from 10% to 80% would reduce the average number of dispute initiations by 1.3 per year.

We also distinguished various historical eras and then removed each era from the analysis to ensure that our findings are not limited to a specific period. Specifically, we used major military conflicts (the Spanish–American War, World War I, World War II, and the Cold War) to divide U.S. history into the following periods: pre-1898, 1898–1914, 1915–45, 1945–89, and post-1989. Our results remained consistent even when each of these historical eras was removed from the analysis. Although its substantive size varied somewhat, we found a consistent impact of elite veterans across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and across the pre- and post-World War II periods.

Finally, we investigated whether the type of military service experienced by policymakers mattered and

FIGURE 3. Impact of Elite Military Experience on the Level of Force Used in a Dispute

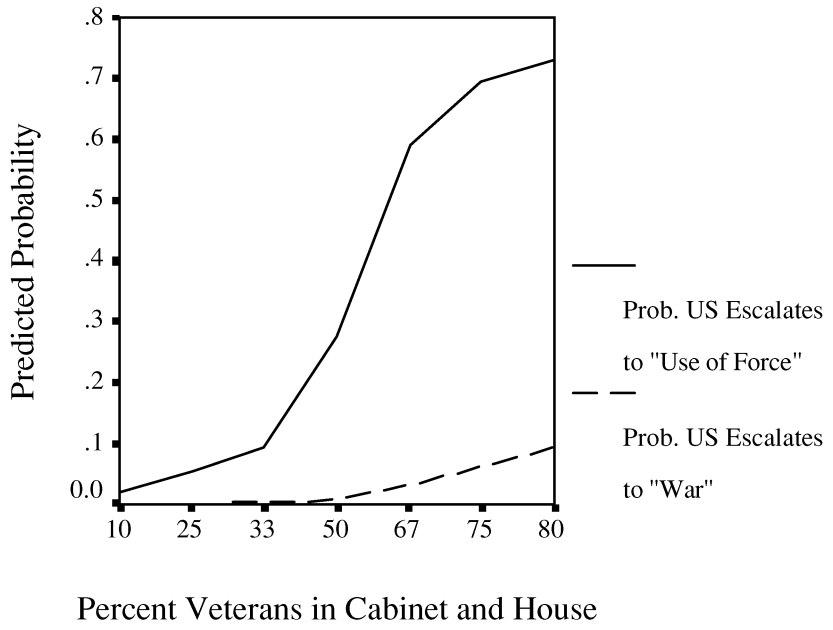


TABLE 4. Marginal Impact of Significant Variables on the Level of Force Used by the United States

Explanatory Variables	Change in Explanatory Variable	Change in Probability of the Use of Force %	Change in Probability of War (%)
Percent veteran in Cabinet & House	10% to 80%	71	9
Cold War years	No to yes	−56	−18
U.S. is a major power	No to yes	12	.3
Adversary is a major power	No to yes	−14	−.4
Adversary level of force	0 to 5	39	2

Note. Relative risk is calculated based on predicted probabilities generated from the model in Table 3. Predicted probabilities were generated by varying each independent variable while holding others at their means or modes.

found that it did not. Specifically, we found no distinction between the impact of elite veterans who served as officers and the impact of those who served as enlisted personnel. These results suggest the existence of a rather broad set of "military foreign policy preferences." Moreover, since those who served as officers generally did so by choice while those who served as enlisted personnel may have been drafted, these results suggest that "military preferences" may remain fairly consistent regardless of whether one's service was voluntary. Unfortunately, two potentially important distinctions we were not able to capture were combat experience and the timing of military experience (i.e., serving in wartime or peacetime). Consistent and reliable data on combat experience and the precise timing of military experience among the policymaking elite were not available.

CONCLUSIONS

Civil–military relations at the policymaking level often seem to be dominated by personalities. Contrast the problems of President Clinton with his war-hero predecessor, President Bush; compare the rumpled tenure of Secretary Aspin or the academic acerbity of Secretary Albright to the no-nonsense corporate mentality of Secretary Rumsfeld; or consider the unusual charisma and political clout of General Powell. Personalities matter and may be decisive in certain cases. Nonetheless, the findings presented here suggest that, at least when it comes to the use of force, we can identify consistent civilian and military tendencies in policymaking.

Other research has shown that elite civilians with military experience behave like "Colin Powells" and elite civilian nonveterans are like "Madeleine Albrights"—at least when it comes to opinions on the use of force (Feaver and Gelpi n.d.). What creates these different types? Why do civilians without military experience tend to have foreign policy views that systematically differ from the views of those who have served? We cannot definitively answer that question. We would contend, however, that service in the U.S. military is an important socialization experience that shapes individuals' attitudes. The military teaches lessons about

the role of military force in American foreign policy and lessons about how military force ought to be used. These lessons do not appear to be forgotten when individuals leave the military and enter civilian life. Of course, we cannot yet specify the precise mechanisms at work in this socialization process, and our data may be consistent with other explanations as well.[26] Nonetheless, our results suggest that the relationship among military experience, foreign policy attitudes, and conflict behavior merits further attention.

Whatever the causes of this civil–military opinion gap, we have shown that the gap had a profound effect on American military behavior from 1816 to 1992. As expected, we found that the higher the proportion of American policymakers with military experience, the lower the probability that the United States would initiate a militarized dispute. Also as expected, we found that the impact of military experience on dispute initiation became even larger when we focused on states that represented "interventionist" rather than "realpolitik" threats to the United States. Finally, also as expected, we found that the higher the proportion of American policymakers with military experience, the higher the level of force used by the United States if it had initiated a dispute. Throughout these analyses, the impact of elite military experience was substantively large and often outweighed the impact of variables that have received considerably more attention in the study of international conflict.

It may be "normal" for military personnel and civilians to develop distinctive views regarding the use of force, but when this divergence of views begins to have an impact on American conflict behavior, one cannot simply shrug off the difference and say, "Who cares?" The difference in views between those with and those without experience in the American military is a profoundly important issue that is in need of public attention and discussion.

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[26] An important competing hypothesis, of course, is that the civil–military gap is created by self-selection rather than socialization. That is, the civil–military differences we observe may be due to the fact that the military tends to attract individuals who already share its foreign policy views. In the absence of panel survey data looking at individuals' attitudes before, during, and after military service, we cannot definitively resolve this debate. However, several available pieces of evidence suggest that socialization is a more plausible explanation. First, our survey data (Feaver and Gelpi 1999) indicate that the reason that military respondents gave for why they joined the military did not have a significant effect on their foreign policy views. Similarly, as we discussed above, the presence of veteran policymakers who served as officers (self-selected) had the same impact on U.S. behavior as the presence of veteran policymakers who served as enlisted personnel (less likely to be self-selected).

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