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European Journal of International Relations 2012 18: 509 originally published online 11 May 2011

DOI: 10.1177/1354066110396763

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European Journal of
International Relations
18(3) 509–538

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DOI: 10.1177/1354066110396763

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Abstract

By synthesizing material forces with ideational forces more organically via a social evolutionary approach, we advance a deeper understanding about post-World War II American military interventionism. We argue that post-World War II American military interventionism — that is, the American elites' and public's support for America's military intervention abroad — cannot be understood with ideational or psychological forces alone. Rather, two crucial material variables, namely, geography and aggregate power amplified by superior technological prowess, are indispensable for understanding the propensity for the United States to intervene militarily abroad. These two factors have powerfully shielded the American elites and public from the horrendous devastation of war. As a result, compared to their counterparts in other major states, American citizens and elites have tended to be less repelled by the prospect of war. The outcome is that since World War II the United States has been far more active in military intervention overseas than other major states.

Keywords

empire, foreign policy, International Relations, militarization, policy relevance, security

Introduction

As the most powerful state in the international system, what the United States does in the international arena profoundly shapes international politics for better or worse. Thus, it

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is not surprising that the aggressive manner in which the United States has responded to the security challenges confronting it after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 has once again put the sources of US military intervention abroad under careful scrutiny.

So far, most of the explanations of American international behavior have been largely ideational. In its simplest form, most analysts, from realists to constructivists, argue that America's aggressive intervention overseas reflected the influence of ideas and the people holding those ideas. For those who focus on the invasion of Iraq specifically, the verdict has been almost unanimous: something had gone terribly wrong in the American 'marketplace of ideas'. Writers charge George W. Bush and his officials with inflating the threat posed by terrorism, skillfully manipulating public opinion, 'fixing the meaning of 9/11' to their liking, and neutralizing opposition in the 'marketplace of ideas' (Flibbert, 2006; Kaufmann, 2004; Krebs and Lobasz, 2007).

For pundits who have sought to uncover the deeper roots of the Bush Doctrine and American interventionism in general, the decisive roles that ideas and the individuals who hold those ideas had played were all too apparent. For Mann (2004) and Flibbert (2006), the 'Vulcans' in the Bush administration managed to turn their ideas into policies once they entered the White House. Disheartened by the Vietnam debacle and determined to restore the United States' primacy, the Vulcans made a virtue of American military power and the assertive advancement of ('noble') American ideals abroad. The attacks of 11 September 2001 provided them with the perfect opportunity to transform the political landscape in the Middle East to their liking. For Lieven (2004) and Monten (2005), American nationalism, when reinforced by Puritanism, played an important role in generating and sustaining aggressive US behavior abroad. For Cramer (2007), 'militarized patriotism' and two Cold War norms — support for strong national security policies and deference to the executive on military matters — were most responsible for rendering public opposition to the Iraq War feeble in the marketplace of ideas.

Even realists who have traditionally underemphasized the role of ideas in shaping state behavior have now banked on ideational factors to explain the Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War. Jervis (2006: 7–8) accounts for Bush's conduct in psychological and ideational terms: fear, overreaction, and the President's personal conviction that his country and administration were entrusted with a mission to resist evil and bring good to others informed his administration's foreign policy. Most tellingly, Desch (2008), who has previously argued strongly against putting too much weight on ideas for explaining state behavior (Desch 1998), now squarely blames a 'liberal illiberalism' for dragging the United States into unwarranted military adventures abroad (see also Miller, 2010).

These mostly ideational explanations have undoubtedly advanced our understanding of the motivations behind the US intervention in Iraq, the roots of the Bush Doctrine, and US military interventionism in general. Nonetheless, this overwhelming emphasis on ideational factors is incomplete, unsatisfactory, and potentially misleading. While leaders' personalities and ideational factors are undoubtedly important for comprehending US behavior, attributing the Bush government's interventions to an 'ism' or two is, although quite justifiable, inadequate: it does not get to the heart of the problem.

Although we cannot directly link material forces with behaviors, we cannot merely state that ideas inform behaviors either. For the question here, we cannot confine ourselves to merely asking what ideas Bush and his administration have deployed and

championed that allowed them to prevail in the marketplace of ideas. We must also ask what material factors have made those ideas and Bush's victory in the marketplace of ideas possible. The challenge is how to synthesize material forces and ideational forces organically into a coherent framework.

Elsewhere, Tang (2008, 2010a, n.d.) has advanced a social evolutionary approach for understanding state behavior and international systemic change, informed by what he called a 'social evolution paradigm' (hereafter, SEP).¹ SEP explicitly seeks to integrate material forces and ideational forces into a coherent framework, via the social evolutionary mechanism of *artificial* variation–selection–inheritance. Here, we employ SEP to better understand US military interventionism, thus further buttressing our claim that SEP is a powerful paradigm for social scientists.

Specifically, we argue that US military interventionism — that is, the American elites' and public's support for America's military intervention abroad — cannot be understood as the product of ideational forces alone. Rather, two crucial material variables, namely, geography and aggregate power amplified by superior technological prowess, are indispensable for understanding the propensity for America to intervene militarily abroad. Due to America's unique geographical location and enormous power advantage over other states, the majority of the elites and general public have essentially been shielded from the horrendous devastation of war. Compared to the citizens of other major states, American citizens in general have consequently tended to be less repelled by the prospect of force being used as an instrument of statecraft. Likewise, the political (i.e. executive, congressional, and those within the foreign policy establishment), business, and cultural elites (i.e. churches, local socialites, and universities) within the US have tended to support the use of armed force to resolve conflicts abroad more enthusiastically than the elites of other major countries.² The result is that ideas that support military intervention overseas are more likely to win in the marketplace of ideas, and the US since World War II has been far more active in military intervention overseas than other major states.

Three caveats are in order before we proceed further. First, unlike most studies that focus on American elite and, public support for ongoing and, usually, prolonged conflicts (e.g. Vietnam and Iraq), we are only interested in the levels of elite and, public support for the state *initiating* military action against another state. This choice of data point is crucial in determining real elite and public backing for a war before it turns or appears to be turning into a bitter defeat or sweet victory.

Second, we do not deny that in some cases there has been significant opposition to the use of force within America. Also, our exercise is not a normative condemnation of *all* US military interventions, but rather an attempt to illuminate the more fundamental roots of US interventionism.

Finally, although we focus on post-World War II America's (and, to a lesser extent, on Britain's and France's) military interventions, we do not imply that other great or major powers (e.g. China, India, the former Soviet Union/post-Soviet Union Russia) have not engaged in military conflicts. We focus on the three countries here because they are liberal democracies in which elite and public opinion data are more readily available, although not all military interventions by the three were subject to strict congressional or parliamentary oversight or approval and polling had not been conducted for all military interventions mounted by these states. The three states are also the three

major democratic powers that have not relinquished their sovereign right to use force. Moreover, the three countries constitute a natural experiment as regards the two variables that are of interest to us (see the discussion in the second section below). Furthermore, whereas post-World War II America (and, to a lesser extent, Britain and France) has intervened extensively in far away places from its soil, China, India, and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union/Russia, have intervened mostly in areas that are close to their borders.

We divide the rest of our discussion into five sections. The first section introduces a social evolutionary approach for understanding state behavior. The second section presents our arguments and justifies our choice of cases. The third section presents qualitative evidence indicating that geography and power do impact on the American decision-makers' and public's perceptions of war and that memories of war do influence the elites' and public's decision to support a war effort. The fourth section provides quantitative evidences. The fifth section draws theoretical implications for understanding state behavior. A conclusion follows.

A social evolutionary approach toward state behavior

Regarding the specific challenge of synthesizing material forces and ideational forces into a coherent framework, SEP is underpinned by the following key premises. First, the human society is constituted by material and ideational forces, and they interact with each other to shape our world, although material forces hold ontological priority over ideational forces (Searle, 1995: 55–56). Thus, any social theory must integrate both materialism and ideationalism into the explanatory structure, though we must give material forces ontological priority. Pure materialism is obviously untenable because human beings invent ideas and ideas have profoundly (re)shaped human society and the physical environment. Pure ideationalism will not do either: even if one insists that an idea matters — and ideas do matter — one still needs to explain how that idea comes to exist and matters. And unless one is prepared to accept infinite regression, there is no alternative but to look at the material world for explaining how and why an idea comes to exist and matters. Thus, social theories, including IR theories, must attempt to bring material and ideational forces into an *organic* synthesis. Such a synthesis must be more than just listing material factors and ideational factors and employing one or the other to explain social facts, an approach that has been euphemistically labeled 'analytical eclecticism'. It must be more than merely putting power alongside identity and culture, and showing how they collectively cause social phenomena. And it must be more than redefining structure as both material and ideational (e.g. Sørensen, 2008).

Second, ideas are not created in a vacuum, but rather upon a material foundation and within material constraints. Ideas are then selected by 'artificial selection', in which both the physical environment and human intelligence are involved. In other words, ideas emerge and then win or lose in the marketplace of ideas due to a combination of both material and ideational forces. Third, ideas can return to change both the physical and ideational environments via human behavior. Although human-induced changes cannot completely re-make the physical world, man-made changes to the physical environment do come back to impact the biological evolution of human beings, but often only in the very long run (Tang, 2010c, n.d.).

For explaining states' behavior, SEP holds that although ideational factors are immediate explanations of states' behavior, only a synthesis of material forces and ideational forces can provide an adequate explanation. This is so simply because although material forces have to be relayed to states' behavior via ideational forces, ultimately no ideational factors can operate without underpinning material factors. The key to an adequate explanation for states' behavior is to explain why certain ideas prevail or lose in the marketplace of ideas by bringing material forces into the picture.

For understanding state behavior, a social evolutionary approach relies on the central mechanism of social evolution: *artificial* variation–selection–inheritance. In the phase of variation, human beings generate ideas based on their reading of the material world and the ideational world, and upon the foundation and under the constraints provided by the interaction between material forces and ideational forces. In the phase of selection, various ideas are selected for (i.e. positive selection) or against (i.e. negative selection) by 'artificial selection', a process involving both the physical environment and human intelligence. In this phase, human beings select ideas in the marketplace of ideas and the selection environment is constituted by the combination of material and ideational forces. In the phase of inheritance, ideas that prevail in the marketplace of ideas will then be passed on to the next generation (vertical inheritance), and even spread to other human beings or groups (horizontal inheritance). In ancient times, the spreading of winning ideas was mostly accomplished via symbols, rituals, and story telling. In modern times, while retaining (and reinforcing) those ancient channels, the diffusion of winning ideas has been predominantly advanced via the media, education, and pop culture (literature, movies, and TV). To a great extent, these ideas form part of human societies' collective memories, and some of them approach the status of myths, conventions, norms, or, simply, 'culture'. Finally, SEP holds that only ideas that have been selected for will be translated into policies and actual behaviors. For understanding state behavior, a social evolutionary approach thus seeks to explicate what ideas have been formed, what ideas have been selected for or against, and how those ideas that have been selected for are then translated into policies and actual behaviors (see Tang, 2008).

The social evolutionary approach thus also synthesizes two processes — highlighted by neorealism and constructivism, respectively — that shape state behavior: negative learning via selection and socialization via positive learning. Neorealists such as Waltz (1979: 118; 1986: 330–331) allow a prominent place for negative learning via selection in their theoretical frameworks, maintaining that the material environment will compel states to learn to adapt or face high costs for not doing so.³ Constructivism, on the other hand, emphasizes positive learning or the diffusion of ideas (i.e. horizontal inheritance) as a socializing force that shapes state behavior (Adler, 2005 [1991]). The social evolutionary approach maintains that negative learning and positive learning work together to shape state behavior. Within this approach, negative learning corresponds to selection and socialization (via positive learning) to inheritance (i.e. diffusion of ideas) in the core evolutionary mechanism of variation–selection–inheritance. This whole process of *artificial* variation–selection–inheritance operates within the constraints dictated by the material and ideational environments. For the discussion here, we are mostly interested in the more lasting aspect of selection ('negative learning') and then inheritance (i.e. spreading, diffusion) of ideas, although we do touch upon short-term negative learning after a major negative experience (e.g. Vietnam) when necessary (see below).

Argument and cases

Our overall hypothesis is straightforward: because of its geographical location and aggregate power amplified by its technological superiority, the American foreign policy elites and public have been largely shielded from the devastation and horror of war. As a result, Americans have tended to vastly underestimate the true cost of war and lack 'adverse historical memories of war'. Without the stopping power of 'adverse historical memories of war', Americans have consequently tended to be more supportive of their government's military interventions abroad than their counterparts in other countries. The overall causal link is thus that geography and power/technology shape war experiences, and memories of war experiences in turn shape attitudes toward military intervention.⁴

Specifically, the Atlantic, Arctic, and Pacific moats have provided a buffer, sheltering Americans from directly experiencing the death and destruction of interstate violence. Meanwhile, because its aggregate power often dwarfed the adversaries that it has fought, the United States has been able to prevail in most conflicts that it has engaged in throughout its history. Technology has been a force multiplier, and maintaining technological and military superiority over its real and potential adversaries has enabled America to keep its war casualties relatively low.

Geography

Among the great powers (and among the three states we examine here), America is geographically the most fortuitous. Unlike the other major great powers, America has not had to deal with a credible threat posed by an adversarial and comparatively powerful state close to it. As Gholz et al. (1997: 8) wittily note, 'To the north and south are weak, friendly neighbors; to the east and west are fish' (see also Craig, 2004: 156–158; Wohlforth, 1999: 28).

Britain also has natural geographical barriers that protect it from the ravages of war, and make its period of 'splendid isolation' possible. Although Britain's potential adversaries were geographically located in a more proximate position than the United States', the North Sea and the English Channel have played their part in shielding Britain from the threat of a heavy land assault mounted from the European continent in the past. The water barriers have also enabled Britain to remain aloof from squabbles on the European continent when its attention was on the Empire.

Unlike the United States and Britain, France is in an unenviable geographical location. France is not geographically situated behind any formidable natural barrier. In more belligerent times, therefore, war has been a frequent visitor to French territory as geography made it a relatively open target. Leaving German territory, Charles de Gaulle aptly accentuated France's geographical vulnerability, lamenting, '[there are] no more mountains, no more ravines, no more escarpments. It is France!... a prey so close, so fine and so easy' (quoted in Falls, 1948).

In sum, in terms of geographical location, the United States has the best location among the three states we examine, Britain second, and France third and last. We hypothesize that the spatial setting of these three states and the manner in which imposing spaces of land and water protect them from the ravages of war inevitably shape the perceptions of their citizens toward military interventions pursued by their governments

overseas. Given that geography has shielded Americans from the gory face of conflict, we hypothesize that they are more likely to support their government's military interventions abroad than their counterparts in Britain and France.

Power, amplified by technology

If the contiguity to conflict exerts a significant impact on how citizens perceive armed violence, power and its effect on the battlefield are equally influential. The United States has enjoyed an overwhelming advantage in aggregate power over almost all the other great powers since 1900.⁵ By 1914, when World War I broke out, the total gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States was two times more than that of Germany. Moreover, since 1900, the United States has enjoyed a technological advantage over almost all the major powers, when measured in terms of GDP per capita (data not shown due to space limitations).⁶ This overwhelming advantage in power, when measured as the multiple of total GDP and GDP per capita, has enabled the United States to smash its adversaries on the battlefield without it suffering similar numbers of casualties to that endured by its antagonists. Fighting overseas, the Americans have further managed to distance their homeland from the ravages and direct horrors of war. As a result, the American experience with war has been more about triumphs and heroism achieved on another state's shores rather than an encounter with a devastated homeland and depopulated American cities. As such, we expect that Americans will be less appalled by the prospect of war than their counterparts in Britain and France.

In sum, by any measure, the United States was the lone 'providentially blessed power' long before others came to acknowledge its superpower status after 1945. The United States enjoys advantages in both geography and aggregate power over both Britain and France. Meanwhile, Britain enjoys an advantage in geography over France, but no significant advantage in aggregate power (see the third section below). We thus expect the American foreign policy elites and public to be more willing to support military interventions than their British counterparts, and the British elites and public to be more willing than their French equivalents to support armed expeditions overseas. By logical extension, we also expect US elite and public opinion to be more willing to support military interventions advanced by their government than their French counterparts.

Qualitative evidence: Impact of war memories

In this section, we present qualitative evidence for our thesis. Specifically, we show two things. First, a country's perceptions of war tend to be directly correlated to how much devastation it has experienced in past conflicts, and the devastation is largely determined by the country's geographical location. Second, memories of past wars do influence leaders' and the public's attitudes toward potential armed conflicts.

Geography, devastation of conflict, and national attitude toward war

America's geographical location has spared Americans the scourge of military conflict. Apart from the War of 1812, the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor, and the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, no foreign troops have managed to cause mayhem on American

soil. Apart from Pearl Harbor, the United States and its citizens have not directly experienced the terror of aerial bombardment (the attack on Pearl Harbor incidentally took place in Hawaii, an island located almost half a world away from the continental United States). Throughout the country's history, the oceans surrounding the United States have managed to provide Americans with a sense of security that has been denied the citizens of the other great powers.

The geographical position of the British Isles has also afforded Britons a relative sense of confidence about their physical security. Although Britain was raided by German aircraft and bombers during World War II, the British Isles has remained essentially unmolested by foreign troops in modern times. Patrolled by the Royal Navy who were joined later by the Air Force, the waters surrounding the British Isles have served as a barrier to discourage and impede foreign invaders throughout the island's history. Spared from a direct invasion, Britons have consequently been less haunted by the carnage and devastation of war suffered by people in countries such as France.

Britons, however, have expressed less confidence than Americans in the ability of the geographical barriers surrounding their respective countries to guarantee their physical safety. Britons, for example, recognized that the Germans could have mounted an invasion across the English Channel during World War II, and this prospect generated a real sense of apprehension. Yet, a variety of developments including the formidable deterrent posed by the Royal Navy in the English Channel, the inability of the Luftwaffe to gain air superiority over the Royal Air Force, and the German decision to embark on Operation Barbarossa eventually killed the German cross-Channel assault. The British Isles were thus ultimately spared severe devastation (Mackay, 2003; Scott and Zac, 1993).

In contrast to Britain and the United States, France has suffered enormously from wars on the European continent. It does not have strong natural barriers to shield it from conflict, and it has been unable to escape from the carnage of foreign invasions and ruinous violence throughout its history. Most evidently, German forces were able to lay waste to French territory, their population, and property when Germany and France were at war with each other.

More than anything, the Maginot Line exemplified the extent to which the French had been psychologically scarred by the trauma of war. In building the Maginot fortifications, those in the French Chamber of Deputies who had experienced the ordeals of the Franco-Prussian war and World War I were most strident in appealing 'for defenses that would shield their families, vineyards, and homes from the ravages of the barbarian hordes' (Kraehe, 1944: 111). But even this attempt to fortify the country's frontiers was in vain as Germany outflanked and overran France in 1940.

France suffered much destruction and loss of human lives in both world wars. In World War I, approximately 9 percent of all buildings in France were razed and 7.5 million acres of fertile plots were rendered wastelands by incessant bombing — devastation that the population of Britain and the United States did not experience. In World War II, 25 percent of France's buildings were leveled and more than half of its transportation infrastructure was crippled. By comparison, in World War II, out of a total of 13 million houses in Britain, only 0.15 percent were destroyed while 29 percent were damaged (Christofferson and Christofferson, 2006: 199; Corvisier, 1994: 191; Ley, 2000: 128).

The brutalities of war were to take their psychological toll on the French, stimulating pacifist and anti-interventionist ideas among its populace after World War I and

especially World War II: for most French citizens, war, any war, is bad (Shapiro, 1997). In contrast, among Americans and Britons, wars such as World War II generated relatively more ambivalent sentiments. The United States and Britain notably experienced less psychological trauma than the French. And between the American and British populace, the former experienced less directly the ordeal of war than the latter. Not surprisingly, in two surveys conducted in 1985 and 1990 on the impact that world events such as World War II had on the collective memories of 1410 Americans and 600 Britons, respectively, of the 362 Americans and 251 Britons who mentioned the conflict as an important global event, World War II 'evokes far more negative memories [in Britain] than in the United States'. Among Britons, the war was connected to notions of deprivation and trauma. One man, aged 40, spoke of the 'horror of it'. Another woman, aged 56, remembered the 'bombs dropping close to home, the air-raid shelter and the damage'. Still another man, aged 62, stated that the war 'left a big impression as to what war is really like and what can happen. It's an unfavorable impression' (Scott and Zac, 1993: 329).

Conversely, most Americans, as the popularity of Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* suggests, tend to view their participation in World War II as a noble effort and one that advanced the righteous cause of democracy, freedom, and liberty (Brokaw, 1998). They were inclined to associate war less with tragedy than with patriotism. They were also inclined to associate war with economic prosperity rather than deprivation. The reason for the divergent Anglo-American viewpoints, according to Scott and Zac (1993: 329), is simple: 'the tragedy of war was closer to home for the British' than the Americans. Because the majority of Americans were essentially sanitized from the true horrors of battle, never having been subjected to incessant pounding by artillery shells, terrorized by bombs dropped from bombers daily and nightly, or exposed to the haunting wails of those whose limbs have been dismembered in conflict, they were bound to hold a more roseate opinion of armed conflict.

Aggregate power, technology as amplifier of power, and images of war

Apart from geography, another factor has shaped America's perception of war. America's overwhelming aggregate power and technological superiority make the belief in 'antiseptic war' — the belief that the United States could engage in military interventions overseas without suffering heavy casualties and still prevail — possible and sustainable. By bringing its overwhelming military power to bear on its adversaries and by constantly sustaining a favorable kill ratio vis-a-vis enemy combatants, the United States has generated and furthered the idea that wars can be relatively antiseptic.

US military power, in terms of its aggregate power and technological superiority, has constantly dwarfed that of its adversaries. America's overwhelming advantage in aggregate power and technological superiority has then enabled it to smash its opponents without its armed forces suffering comparatively high human casualties. The infamous remark by General Curtis LeMay that the United States should 'bomb them [i.e. North Vietnam] back into the Stone Age' all too clearly reflects this logic: heavy US firepower could advance American interests at little cost to American lives because (only) bombs, rather than men, would be expended.

The notion that an antiseptic war could be fought was most apparent in Operation Desert Storm. For an American pilot who fought in Gulf War I, the bombing of Iraq was 'the biggest Fourth of July show you ever saw' rather than a bloody enterprise (Moriarty and Shaw, 1995: 4). With a US media reluctant to show many scenes of carnage to the general public, 'the war took on the appearance of a somewhat surrealistic video game and led to a spurt in the sales of video games that simulated war in the Middle East'. War seemed bloodless and clinical. Non-combatant deaths suffered by the other side were and are referred to as 'collateral damage'. Such wartime narratives or 'speech acts' conceal the bloody and true face of war: war has no victims, only humane heroes and patriots, and brutal tyrants who deserved their comeuppance. With such wartime narratives, small wonder that war's carnage is not deeply etched in America's psyche.

In contrast, at the other end of our spectrum of countries, there is comparatively less confidence among the French that war can be antiseptic. Fighting opponents possessing comparable military and technological capabilities and on French soil in the past, the French have a long history of experience with the brutalities of war. They have no illusions about the devastating ravages of conflict. France's aggregate power could not prevent two world wars from slaughtering a generation of its people. If France's material resources afforded it little opportunity to fight antiseptic wars with its European rivals in the past, its aggregate power and military capabilities in the present also offer little comfort to its citizens that contemporary armed conflicts can be relatively bloodless affairs. Such understanding further works against French military adventurism overseas. Even when logistically challenged French troops were lifted in 1990–1 by America to the Middle East for their first major military operation overseas since the early 1960s, the French government was hesitant about its involvement in the Persian Gulf conflict and faced significant domestic obstacles to the move. Not many expected the war against the reported one million Iraqi troops that Baghdad could field to be a relatively bloodless affair. Such concerns contributed to the negativity about the French intervention in Kuwait (Vaïsse, 2004). The ideational marketplace in post-World War II France remains predominantly hostile to those ideas advancing military adventurism overseas, its aggregate power doing little to allay concerns that war can be antiseptic.

As for Britain, when military technology in general was unsophisticated and British power was relatively dominant, a concentration of its resources in building up the Royal Navy could afford the country a formidable defense against external aggressors as well as diplomatic room to maneuver against its peer competitors in Europe. The English Channel, patrolled by well-armed naval craft, was a difficult moat to overcome. But, like France, when it did get involved in the world wars of the 20th century against its peer competitors, Britain's aggregate power was unable to shelter its peoples from the horrors of the trenches or the pummeling by bombers. The carnage of World War I was brought home to Britain by the sheer number of British men who did not return to their families, and the crippled and impaired who struggled on the streets after the war. The terror of World War II was brought home by German pilots and V-2 rockets. Thus, Britain's power ultimately did not shield Britons from the bloodiness of war. It did, nevertheless, work with Britain's natural geographical barriers (coupled with fortuitous circumstances) to do one thing: stave off a foreign invasion of the country. As we will argue below, Britain's war experiences would impact on its citizens unevenly.

The short and long shadow of war memories

The differences in Britain's, France's, and the United States' experiences with and perceptions of the horrors of war condition the three countries' understanding of war, and, consequently, their attitudes toward future wars. In this sub section, we show not only that selective aspects of past wars have sunk into the societies' collective memories of war, but also that these memories do consciously or subconsciously affect both the elites' and publics' attitudes toward armed conflict and military interventions. Straightforwardly, we argue that what the citizens of a state remember about the state's past wars (including the last one) will inform whether their support for future government-led military interventions overseas is likely to be forthcoming.

We differentiate 'adverse historical memories of war' from 'lessons learnt from a recent military defeat', although both operate upon 'negative learning'. The former is a general lesson (i.e. 'war is devastating' or 'war is easy and glorious'). The latter, conversely, refers to lessons learnt about a specific war (e.g. 'we could have won the war if we had done that' or 'we should have avoided the war'), which result according to social psychology from a typical 'counterfactual exercise' undertaken after a negative experience or outcome (Epstude and Roese, 2008). Put differently, 'adverse historical memories of war' are something that tend to be deep and lasting whereas 'lessons learnt from a recent military defeat' tend to be shallow and ephemeral.

Thus, we certainly admit that the United States would be less likely to intervene again immediately after a (major) military debacle overseas due to negative learning (as expected according to common sense and as emphasized in our theory). Yet, military defeat *still* does not really bring the true devastation of war to America's home, again due to the protection provided by the two material factors. Put bluntly, whereas other major powers have experienced the devastation of war *even though* they had won war(s), the United States has not really tasted the true devastation of war *even if* it had lost war(s).

The American foreign policy elites' predisposition toward a new conflict is clearly conditioned by their experiences of past wars. With the two material factors, geography and aggregate power, shielding them from the ravages of war, the majority of American elites tend to adopt optimistic views of foreign military intervention. Past military successes, which have been many, further create an ideational marketplace favoring military interventionism. As the opinion polls show, elite support for US interventions overseas has been consistently high. At the same time, rather than inducing a debilitating crisis of morale or generating among the elites a deep revulsion toward war in general, past military defeats, which are notably few, are scrutinized for lessons on how the next armed struggle could be better fought. Adversities stemming from past failed interventions such as the Vietnam War are unable to function as powerful psychological constraints on elites who live and operate in a milieu that has not suffered intense embattlement and the vast destruction wrought by modern weaponry.

Instructively, the core of US elite discourse on American military intervention in the post-Vietnam period was less about how swords should be beaten into ploughshares and more about how American swords could be better wielded in the future. The 'Vietnam Syndrome' was less a psychological aversion to war in general and more a fear of failure in the next war. 'Never again' was uttered not in the context of seeking to avoid war

altogether, but about how the armed forces should never again be deployed piecemeal in the theater of operations. Thus, the lessons learnt from the Vietnam experience were that overwhelming force should be unleashed from the start and exit strategies should be in place when the military instrument was applied to advance identifiable US objectives overseas. If these principles were applied in future conflicts, it was believed that victory would obtain (Hagopian, 2009; Summers, 1982).

Such attitudes worked against any 'adverse historical memories of war', with repeated American triumphs in subsequent wars progressively dispatching the fear that the United States would encounter another grave setback in conflicts overseas. Indeed, once the fear of defeat proved unfounded and initial concerns were overcome by success in the next war, the rush of relief and renewed confidence were perceptible in elite discourse as well as US public opinion on the deployment of American forces overseas. Remarking on the impact of one of the major US foreign interventions after the end of the Vietnam War, James A. Baker III had this to say: 'In breaking the mindset of the American people about the use of force in the post-Vietnam era, [the 1989] Panama [operation] established an emotional predicate that permitted us to build the public support so essential for the success of Operation Desert Storm some thirteen months later' (Mann, 2004: 180). Similarly, after Gulf War I, a war which President George H.W. Bush asserted had 'kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all', the sense of confidence in the utility of coercive force returning to the US policy community in greater magnitude was conspicuous.⁷ For the American public, though they had some hesitation in supporting the subsequent two military interventions after Vietnam, what followed thereafter was renewed backing for the use of US forces overseas (see Table A4 in the Appendix). In fact, a *USA Today* poll taken immediately after Gulf War I found that 78 percent of Americans expressed 'a great deal of confidence' in the military (Budiansky and Auster, 1991). Unsurprisingly, Falk (1992) predicted that US elites would be more willing to consider the option of force immediately after the Gulf War, and his prediction has largely been borne out. In 1993, 49 percent of Americans thought that US intervention in Bosnia would reap a similar victory as that attained in the First Gulf War in contrast to the 43 percent who thought it would end up like Vietnam (Gallup, 5 June 1993, cited in Sobel, 1998: 251). Notably, a significant number of Americans (50 percent to be exact) also expressed support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Larson and Savych, 2005: 152).

American military interventionism, in short, was not cowed in the wake of Vietnam. It remained resilient in the American marketplace of ideas. Revulsion toward war, as a competing idea, cannot grow strong roots in a society that has largely been shielded by geography and overwhelming power from the ravages of modern conflict. The result is that continued success in US military interventions overseas sustains American confidence in the utility of force as an instrument of statecraft. The rare defeat, conversely, becomes a case study for lessons on how the next war can be better prosecuted and more easily won. With such conceptions about the utility of force in foreign affairs, it is conceivable that elite and public support for future US government-led military interventions overseas is likely to continue to be forthcoming.

For countries that have suffered the ravages of war, on the other hand, the citizens' dissent against foreign military interventions is relatively more intense. The slaughter

of the two 20th-century global conflicts made cynics of many idealists and skeptics of believers in the romance and merits of war. Within France, peoples across class lines articulated their despair and bitterness toward the futility of World War I and war in general (Ingram, 1991). Following the destruction and hardships of World War II, Jean Monnet (1978) would be moved to pursue policies that sought to avoid another catastrophic war among the European powers. Unlike the Americans, the equivalent of the French 'never again' debate has been averting armed conflict altogether rather than forestalling another misplaced deployment of military forces on the battlefield. From the close of the Algerian crisis in the early 1960s to the contemporary period, therefore, 'France was pacified and was to become a pacifier' (Väisse, 2004: 335).

Like France, Britain was not immune to the European wars. Yet, because Britain's military defenses, its geographical barrier, and fortuitous circumstances enabled the British to stave off a foreign invasion of the homeland in more modern times, its people's memories about the conflicts have been unevenly formed. For Margaret Thatcher (1995: 31–38), living unscathed and relatively unmolested in Grantham and Oxford during World War II, the poverty of Chamberlain's appeasement policy and the vigor of Churchill's resistance dominated her recollection of the period. For a less privileged Bob Holman (2002), who 'endured the London Blitz' as a child and 'witnessed death and the destruction of our home', war 'meant daily fear and terror'. In the wake of the allied invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the lesson Holman took away from his World War II experiences and which he thought should have been applied to the allied response to the 11 September 2001 attacks was this: avoid war and find more peaceful means to confront the adversary. As he asserted: 'No children should be subjected to bombing — and this applies to [children in] Afghanistan as well as to [those in] the USA and Britain'.

In sum, what the citizens of a state remember about the state's previous wars informs whether their support for future government-led military interventions overseas is likely to be forthcoming. America's, France's, and Britain's historical experiences with war are evidently different, due to their different geographical circumstances and aggregate power capacities. With its geography and aggregate power effectively shielding America from the horrors of war, the American elites and public have tended to be more supportive of their government's military interventions overseas than their French and British counterparts for their respective countries' foreign adventures (see Appendix).

Quantitative tests and findings

In this section, we provide quantitative evidence for our hypothesis. Specifically, we show that the fortuitous geographical location of the United States and its overwhelming advantage in aggregate power and technological superiority (measured in terms of total GDP and GDP per capita) have been most responsible for shielding the country from the destruction of war. This quantitative evidence complements and reinforces the qualitative evidences. Together, they make a compelling, if not unassailable, case that the two material variables are indispensable for American military interventionism to sustain. Thus, American military interventionism cannot be understood through ideational forces alone.

Hypotheses and variables

To reiterate, our core hypothesis is that because the American elites and populace have fewer adverse memories of war, they are more likely to support military interventions than their counterparts in Britain and France. Our intermediate hypothesis is that the two most important factors that have shielded the United States from large-scale war-induced destruction and thus limited their adverse memories of war have been its fortuitous geographical location and its overwhelming advantage in aggregate power and technological superiority. America's unique geographical location has shielded it from foreign invasions, and its aggregate power and technological prowess have enabled it to expend bombs and machines rather than bodies, thus reducing its military and civilian casualties.

To link individuals' probability of personal loss in war with their attitude toward war more unequivocally, we also test an intra-case hypothesis. The control hypothesis is that elites tend to support war more enthusiastically than the general populace because elites are less likely to shoulder the cost of fighting in the conflict. Straightforwardly, elites and their children are less likely to volunteer for service in a volunteer military system. Thus, elites are less likely to suffer personal loss in war and their attitudes toward war tend to be more positive. This intra-case control hypothesis should be confirmed by data from all three countries that we examine. Of course, elites have been consistently more influential in the making of US foreign policy than the public (Jacobs and Page, 2005), and the public generally gives elites greater latitude to wage war when elites come to a consensus (Berinsky, 2007).

For our explanatory variables, we measure a country's geographical advantage or disadvantage by measuring its nearest distance to a great power opponent in miles from Google Earth. If a state is neighbored by a great power opponent, the geo-distance is normalized to 1 (e.g. France and Germany) for mathematical convenience (i.e. obtaining log numbers). Straightforwardly, the greater a state's distance from a potentially adversarial great power, the more advantageous the state's geographical location.

We measure two sub-dimensions of power. The first is measured in terms of a state's total GDP at the outbreak of conflict. The second is technological prowess as measured by GDP per capita at the onset of conflict. The independent variable in regressions is the additive of the two dimensions in log terms, which captures a country's capability to expend money and military armaments rather than bodies and blood in war.

We resort to an indirect approach to link the content of a society's collective memories of war with the people's attitudes toward military interventions. First, we obtain elite and public opinion in the United States as well as Britain and France on possible military interventions mounted by the respective governments. We measure the elites' support for war by computing their voting record in the congress or parliament before military forces were deployed on the ground and before an authorization for war was officially sanctioned. We measure the publics' support for war with public opinion polls taken *before* the actual commitment of military action by a country.

Geographical location and power/technological superiority as two shields

There is no doubt the United States has consistently suffered relatively fewer casualties, measured as a percentage of the total population, than other states in major wars. In

World War I, America suffered the lowest percentage of military casualties among the warring parties (barring Japan, an extreme outlier), and it suffered no civilian casualties. In World War II, the United States undertook more of the fighting than it had in World War I, but still suffered fewer casualties than most countries in the conflict, again measured in the number of casualties as a percentage of their total populations (barring Poland and the Netherlands, two extreme outliers due to the Nazis’ ethnic cleansing of the Jewish population after occupying these two countries). The United States also suffered few civilian deaths in World War II.

There are no reliable data on the total civilian casualties (including death and wounded) in the wars that we examine, although there are data on total civilian deaths. We again resort to an indirect approach: we measure the impact of war on the civilian population with log of civilian death, with zero death normalized to 1 for log. We also create an artificial variable to capture the impact of war upon the civilian population, and this variable also serves as an approximate indicator of the total devastation suffered by a state during war (used in model 3 in both Table 1 and Table 2). This variable is the ratio of total civilian death versus total military casualties (dead and wounded). Our intuition is that the higher this variable, the higher a war’s impact on the overall civilian population. This variable correlates with the variable of total civilian deaths in conflict as a percentage of the total population of a state at a coefficient of $r = 0.498$ at $p = .065$ significance level for World War I and $r = 0.520$ at $p = .016$ significance level for World War II, respectively. This indicates the sound reason behind our intuition.

We add four control independent variables that may be of interest: the log of a state’s territory size in 10,000 km² (Goertz and Diehl, 1992), Polity IV scores (from Polity IV

Table 1. Regression results from World War I dataset

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
IV/DV	Log of total military casualties, dead and wounded (in hundreds)	Log of total civilian death (in thousands)	Ratio of civilian death vs total military casualties
Constant	.212 (2.168)	5.340 (4.509)	2.786 (3.152)
Log of geo-distance (miles)	-.350 (.115)	-.800** (.240)	-.749* (.168)
Log of territory size (10,000 km ²)	.231 (.181)	.194 (.376)	-.057 (.263)
Power indicator (Log of total GDP + log of GDP per capita)	.653*** (.063)	-.029 (.396)	-.377 (.277)
Winners (Allies) or Losers (Central Powers)	-.061 (.788)	-.232 (1.638)	.018 (1.145)
POLITY Score (plus 20)	-.293 (.072)	.041 (.130)	0.715* (.091)
Months in conflict	.238 (.023)	.002 (.047)	-.114 (.033)
Adjusted R ²	0.729	0.478	.367
N	15	15	15

Note: All coefficients are standardized. Standard errors are in parentheses. * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Regression results from World War II dataset

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
IVDV	Log of total military casualties, dead and wounded (in hundreds)	Log of total civilian death (in thousands)	Ratio of civilian death vs total military casualties
Constant	-3.357 (2.471)	-4.147 (3.569)	1.563 (1.099)
Log of geo-distance (miles)	-.290** (.118)	-.939*** (.170)	-.542* (.052)
Log of territory size (10,000 km ²)	.389** (.194)	.174 (.280)	-.261 (.086)
Power indicator (Log of total GDP + log of GDP per capita)	.426*** (.186)	.251 (.269)	-.224 (.083)
Winners (Allies) or Losers (Axis Powers)	-.097 (.796)	.336 (.090)	.609** (.354)
POLITY Score (plus 20)	-.176 (.062)	-.052 (1.149)	0.108 (.028)
Months in conflict	.451*** (.012)	.491*** (.018)	-.035 (.005)
Adjusted R ²	0.749	0.641	.437
N	21	21	21

Note: All coefficients are standardized. Standard errors are in parentheses. * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

project), a dummy variable indicating whether a country is eventually a winner or loser in the war (winner = 1; loser = 0), and months in conflict (calculated from online World War I and World War II websites). In order to evaluate which variable is most important in producing change in a particular dependent variable, we report standardized coefficients throughout.

Results from the World War I data (Table 1) show that geo-distance is the *most important factor* in reducing casualties in all the models, although it does not reach the cut-off significance level of $p < .1$ when regressed against total military casualties. When we regress it against the two indicators that capture war's impact on the civilian population, however, geo-distance becomes the only factor that shields the population from conflict, at a significance level of $p < .05$ and $p < .1$, respectively. The power indicator shows a positive association with military casualties ($p < .01$), which is somewhat unexpected (we address this result below). When regressed against the indicators measuring war's impact on the civilian population, the power indicator shows a negative sign, although without reaching the cut-off significance level of $p < .1$.

Most critically, model 2 and model 3 in Table 1 unambiguously show that geo-distance is the *only* decisive factor limiting the devastation of war upon a state. Geo-distance is negatively associated with the two dependent variables that capture the devastation of war with coefficients at -0.880 and -0.749 and reaching the significance level of $p < .05$ and $p < .1$, respectively.

The World War II dataset yields results that are generally similar to the World War I dataset (Table 2). For World War II, geo-distance remains the most important factor in

shielding a state from the devastation of war, even for military casualties, reaching the significance level of $p < .05$. When regressed against the log of civilian casualties, the protecting power of geo-distance becomes more overwhelming, reaching the significance level of $p < .001$.

For the World War II dataset, the power indicator again shows a positive sign when regressed against the indicator for military casualties, reaching the level of significance of $p < .001$. Together with the results from World War I, it seems that power was not able to reduce military casualties in both world wars. We reason that this result can be readily explained: (1) a state with more power would usually be asked by its allies to shoulder more war-fighting responsibilities and thus tend to send more troops into the battlefield and suffer more casualties; and (2) military casualties were subject to other human factors, such as strategic planning and tactical maneuvering on the battlefield.

Although the hypothesis that power advantage should have reduced America's military casualties was not supported by the data, we reason that this may also be due to the fact that the power gap between America and its major opponents (e.g. Germany, Japan, and Italy) in the two world wars not had been that overwhelming. In the post-World War II era, however, the United States has consistently held overwhelming advantage in terms of total aggregate power and technological prowess. We thus reason that although the power factor might not have been a robust protector for American servicemen in both World War I and World War II, this factor might have become a robust protector in the post-World War II era.⁸

That is, holding a wide advantage in power (amplified by technology) should a state to suffer fewer casualties while inflicting heavier casualties on its opponents. As it turns out, there is indeed a good positive fit between the two indicators (see Figure 1A in the Appendix for a scatter plot). The correlation coefficient between the two indicators is 0.553 ($R^2 = 0.306$), $p = .062$ ($< .1$), despite the small sample size ($N = 12$).

In sum, the statistical results generally support our hypothesis. Geo-distance has been the most important factor that has shielded a state from the devastation of war in both world wars. America has been the most advantaged among the great powers in this aspect. Power has been an important factor that reduces military casualties, especially in the post-World War II era. On this front, America has also fared extremely well. Altogether, there is no doubt that America has been in the most enviable position among the great powers when it comes to the two key factors that could shield a state from the horrors of war.

Elite versus public opinion

The intra-case control hypothesis that elites are more likely to support foreign military interventions than the general public is also strongly supported. In all three countries and at almost every juncture when military intervention was contemplated, the elites were more likely to support and far less likely to oppose the use of force against foreign adversaries than the respective masses (Table 3, see also Appendix). On average, American elites were 15 percent more likely to support and almost 10 percent less likely to oppose military interventions abroad than the public. In Britain, the numbers were 20 percent and 18 percent, respectively, and in France, 40 percent and 38 percent, respectively (for cases in which both numbers are available). Although we should not exaggerate the

Table 3. Support and opposition for military intervention in US, Britain, and France

Items	Average elite support	Average elite opposition	Average public support	Average public opposition
US	77.4% (18.2) N = 8	22.5% (18.2) N = 8	59.8% (22.4) N = 12	33.4% (20.6) N = 12
Britain	66.3% (18.6) N = 3	22.3% (16.9) N = 3	56.4% (14.4) N = 9	33.3% (11.4) N = 9
France	72.1% (19.6) N = 4	21.1% (13.5) N = 4	42.1% (22.2) N = 6	46.1% (19.5) N = 7

significance of the differences between US, British, and French elites and their publics in their support for various wars, due to the limited sample size available and the incompleteness of the data (especially those from Britain and France), it is clear that our intra-case control hypothesis is supported by the available evidence.

More importantly, the American elites and public tend to be more supportive of war than their British and French counterparts almost all the time. This is consistent with our expectation that the United States, protected by geography and preponderant power, would be more willing to use force to advance its goals abroad than either Britain or France. The stopping power of adverse memories of conflict evidently operated with more vigor in London and Paris than in Washington.

Summary

Overall, the quantitative exercise robustly supports our hypotheses. Together with qualitative evidence indicating that a society's collective memories of war are always in the background when decision-makers and the public ponder possible military interventions, we have built a strong case that memories of past wars, which are shaped by the devastation that a country has experienced in the past, do influence both the elites' and public's attitude toward possible military interventions today.

Other studies lend further support to our hypotheses. In an experimental setting, Rousseau (2006: 54–58) found that when a country has a 2:1 favorable distribution of military power, 59 percent of the individuals who identify with that country are more likely to favor military rather than more peaceable options to resolve territorial disputes. In contrast, when one's country has a 1:2 unfavorable distribution of military power, the level of support for the military option drops to 24 percent (the difference between the two experiments is statistically significant at the 0.001 level). Because the United States usually enjoys far greater advantages in military power over its adversaries, the chances are that individuals in America are more willing to support war than other countries even over disputes that do not involve sovereignty over land.

Our finding that elites have consistently been more supportive of military intervention than the masses is also consistent with the results obtained using a scenario-based

experimental approach, in which elites and the public were asked their opinion about possible military actions in hypothetical scenarios (Holsti, 2006 [2001]). Without a single exception, the elite are always more willing to support military actions than the general public. A *t*-test with the data marshaled by Holsti shows that the differences between the two groups in their attitudes toward war are statistically significant ($t_{(df=32)} = 7.914$) at the 99.9 percent confidence level ($p < .001$).

Finally, our finding that elites have consistently been more supportive of military intervention than the masses, mostly because elites are less likely to send their children to the battlefield, is also consistent with the results obtained by Urbatsch (2009) through an ingenious exercise. He found that families (with girls) that do not face the prospect of sending their children into harm's way have been more likely to support military intervention than those families (with boys) who do.

Material forces, ideas, selection, and state behavior

Our inquiry strongly suggests that the lack of deep adverse memories of war — underpinned by the two material factors — has made the American elite and public more willing to support US military intervention abroad than their counterparts in Britain and France. These findings have important implications for two critical issues in IR theory and social theory in general.

Traditionally, realism emphasizes the impact of material forces — especially geography and material power — and neglects the impact of ideational factors upon state behavior. To the extent that realists deploy ideas to explain state behavior, they have done so in a mostly ad hoc fashion: ideas are smuggled into the explanatory framework when states do not behave 'realistically' as realism would have it. Constructivism, conversely, has accentuated the prominent role that ideas, norms, and culture play in international politics, at the expense of material factors. The realist–constructivist debate makes it apparent that the interaction between the material and ideational worlds and its impact on state behavior, which has 'stubbornly been under-theorized', represents a major challenge for IR theory (Herman, 1996: 276).

The preceding discussion shows that it is possible to synthesize material and ideational forces into a coherent framework via a social evolutionary approach. For the specific task of explaining post-World War II US military interventionism, we argue that ideas that support military intervention abroad are more likely to triumph in the American marketplace of ideas than in other great power ideational marketplaces, due to America's blessed geographical location and advantages in aggregate power amplified by technological prowess. In other words, America is more likely to produce and select ideas that favor military intervention abroad (i.e. military adventurism) than those ideas that advocate caution and military restraint.

Our social evolutionary approach has also been able to synthesize negative selection and positive learning organically. According to our framework, how a state behaves in the international system depends on the ideas that it has selected, socialized, and internalized among its constituents, but this whole process of selection and socialization occurs within both the human brain and a particular material setting. Thus, ideas that cannot operate well in a particular ideational and material context will diminish or be eliminated

in the long run whereas ideas that survive and thrive within the context tend to dominate the collective consciousness of the people living in that society. Because America's blessed geographical location and advantages in aggregate power amplified by technological prowess tend to make ideas that favor military adventurism more viable than those that advocate caution, ideas that favor military adventurism have entrenched themselves (or have been diffused) among American elites and the public more stubbornly than among their British and French counterparts.

Hence, although most states in the international system have been selected and socialized to adopt a more moderate stance in global politics, the United States remains an exception. The geographical location and power of the United States have impeded the ability of the (negative) selection and learning process to transform America into a more war-averse state among the great powers. Put simply, because the United States has not suffered as severely as other countries in war due to specific material circumstances, it has not been motivated to select war-averse defensive postures in international politics. Specific material circumstances have enabled America to escape the harsh devastation of war. Consequently, the American elite and populace have less adverse memories of war than their counterparts in other major states. Those clamoring for military action overseas in public debates have usually trumped those advocating military restraint. In the marketplace of ideas on 'national security', which inevitably engages American nationalism/patriotism (Cramer, 2007), military interventionism has usually triumphed and America has been the most war-prone among the contemporary great powers.

In contrast, military adventurism generally receded in other major states after World War II. Other powers such as Britain, China, France, and Russia, not to mention Germany and Japan, do not possess the strategic depth, power resources, and social backing to endure a military defeat or quagmire, and hence will be more hesitant to engage in military adventurism. As a result, the elites, but especially the citizenry, of other major powers have consistently expressed less willingness to entertain military intervention in faraway places than those of the United States since 1945.

The blessing of geography and the preponderant power that America has developed over the course of its history may have been of benefit to American security, but they have also enabled America to act in a belligerent manner. As a result, Americans' blessing also becomes a curse to those on the receiving end of US military interventions as well as to those American military servicemen who risk their lives on battlefields to advance the policy of their interventionist state.

We believe that our interpretation has synthesized material forces and ideational forces into a more coherent framework for understanding America's military interventionism better than existing studies, either by realists or constructivists. Although both groups recognize that ideas are what immediately underpin specific policies and behaviors, neither has attempted to link material factors with ideational factors more tightly. In contrast, we show that the material pillars — the United States' geographical location and aggregate power — form the bedrock upon which the ideational edifice that influences US behavior in international affairs sits. We do not deny that ideational factors have played important roles in propelling the United States to intervene militarily abroad. But we do argue that without some material foundation, especially the two crucial mate-

rial factors we accentuate here, an exclusively ideational explanation of US military intervention abroad cannot be complete and satisfactory.

Perhaps a simple counterfactual will drive our point home. Suppose the United States were located at the heart of the European continent and were not endowed with immense power. Successive generations of American citizens would have endured the recurring devastating experiences of military conflict. Under these circumstances, would we expect American elites and the public to have been so supportive of their country's military adventures abroad? The answer, most likely, will be a strong 'No'.

Conclusion

Geography gives the United States a security environment that other major powers envy. Unlike other major powers, the United States does not have to worry about the potential threat posed by an adversarial and comparatively powerful state situated contiguously to it. America's geographical location is indisputably a blessing to its people.

In a perfect world, the benign security environment in which the United States finds itself may also have likely benefited other states. Because America is located some distance away from another major continent, the stopping power of water makes it less able to pursue outright occupation of other states located in other regions. As a result, other states have less to fear even if the United States is inherently territory-hungry. With its enormous power, America then could act as the ultimate 'offshore balancer'. America's geographical situation and its enormous power could in turn become a blessing to international security.

In the real and imperfect world, however, the protection conferred on the United States by geography has often turned out to be a curse for other countries — and ultimately for America too. The oceans and America's enormous power and technological might have shielded American elites and the public from the true face of war. Absent the stopping power of adverse memories of war, American elite and public opinion has remained far more supportive of military intervention conducted by their government abroad than the citizens of other major powers since World War II.

Indeed, the United States has been able to behave in an abrasive and proselytizing manner internationally because geography and preponderant power affords it a comforting sense of security. While a state's foreign policy is necessarily informed by a set of beliefs, active exportation of one's beliefs through hard power inevitably makes the state very threatening to others that do not share those beliefs. Because no country can be insulated from America's exercise of its vast power, other states invariably fear it and question its motives, even if American intentions are not malevolent. America's blessing again becomes a curse to other states and ultimately to the United States as well. Meanwhile, America's elites and public, informed by an ethnocentric sense of providence and self-righteousness, often cannot appreciate why other countries fear America's enormous power and its promotion of its supposedly universal beliefs. This apathy toward other countries' fears inevitably exacerbates the security dilemma and/or spiral between America and other countries.

What, then, is to be done? In addressing US military interventionism, there are essentially three options: maintain an international balance of power against the United States, tighten international legal constraints against military interventionism in general, and enhance America's self-restraint. The first option, however, may not be viable. Under the condition of unipolarity, it is self-destructively costly for any one state to balance against America's vast power. Any anti-American alliance or coalition, established to balance US power, will also be unstable and ineffectual. Members of such an anti-American circle are likely to defect or assume neutrality as they worry about being singled out by Washington for retribution. The second option too has severe limitations. An international legal arrangement, which all the major powers endorse and stipulate that they can use force only when a UN mandate is issued, is not likely to be forthcoming.

The third option also has limitations, but it holds the most promise of tempering US interventionist tendencies. To enhance US self-restraint, the American people need to develop a more sober marketplace of ideas where ideas opposing military adventurism can have a better chance of winning the debate. Because of space limitations that prevent us from elaborating on the details and nuances, we briefly highlight some recommendations on how to do this here. First, as the United States is unlikely ever to be invaded (nor do we wish for Americans to endure a horrible war on the homeland), Americans need to better appreciate the ghastly ravages of war through a closer study of combat and its outcome, and the impact of war on society. Second, the American people should tame their ethnocentrism, which leads to the belief that they have been chosen to advance what they contend are universals (their political institutions and ideals), by developing more cosmopolitan outlooks through education reforms that advance a deeper appreciation of the values of other cultures and societies. Third, sectors within US society such as the military-industrial complex which are likely to drum up strong support for government military intervention overseas should have their operations intensely and publicly scrutinized and their influence checked. Finally, the United States should pay greater heed to global opinion, especially when it is contrary to US thinking, and respond accordingly.

It should also be noted that it will take time for any change in US behavior to be effected. The competing ideas that spring forth from our recommendations to build up American self-restraint will also not lodge themselves easily in a milieu — protected by geography and preponderant power — that selects for rather than against military interventionism. We consequently have little reason to expect that America will beat its swords into ploughshares any time soon. America can afford to behave aggressively because of its geography and preponderant power. Absent the stopping power of adverse memories of war, elite and public opinion is likely to back American military intervention overseas at the outset. This is something that the world will have to live with until Americans truly come to terms with the true face of war. We can only hope.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Robert Jervis, Stephen Walt, Chenqiu Wu, and Qin Zhu for insightful discussion and feedback. Trevor Williams, Nadege Orban, Tow Sow Keat, C.A. Jorge Humberto, Keith Eric Flick, and Rongfang Pan provided outstanding research assistance. We also thank two anonymous reviewers at *EJIR* for their extremely useful comments. The usual disclaimer applies.

Notes

- 1 A discussion on the various foundational paradigms in social sciences can be found in Tang (2010c).
- 2 Our definition of elite follows the definition employed by the Chicago Council for Foreign Relations (CCFR). On CCFR surveys and their limitations, see Jacobs and Page (2005) and Holsti (2006 [2001]).
- 3 Selection is essentially a negative process, that is, a process of eliminating some mutations. Waltz's socialization is the same as selection. Waltz did emphasize that states emulate others' success behaviors. Emulating or imitating is positive learning or diffusion of ideas.
- 4 We thank an anonymous reviewer for this succinct formulation of our overall causal logic.
- 5 Due to space limitations, we put most supporting data into the Appendix. Other data are available upon request.
- 6 Traditionally, IR scholars' understanding of military technology and conflict has been dominated by the offense–defense theory (ODT). Yet, ODT is deeply flawed. For a detailed critique, see Tang (2010b).
- 7 George H.W. Bush was quoted in Maureen Dowd, 'War introduced nation to a tougher Bush', *New York Times*, 2 March 1991. Madeleine Albright, for example, was recorded as having retorted to Colin Powell during the Bosnian crisis in 1993: 'What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?' For Albright, see Powell (1995: 576).
- 8 We thus plot the ratio of casualty in war (measured as $\frac{\text{US opponents casualties}}{\text{US casualties}}$) against the ratio of power gap (measured as $\log\left(\frac{\text{US total GDP}}{\text{US opponents total GDP}}\right) + \log\left(\frac{\text{US GDP per capita}}{\text{US opponents GDP per capita}}\right)$). Our prediction is that these two indicators should be positively correlated.

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Appendix

Table AI. Power disparity: US versus its opponents (1914–2003)^a

Wars	GDP	Per capita GDP	Casualties (dead & wounded)
World War I (1914–18)			
The United States	478	4799	320,710
Austria-Hungary	20	2876	4,842,500
Germany	202	3059	6,815,689
World War II (1941–5)			
The United States	1099	8206	1,085,119
Germany	401	5711	11,280,000
Italy	154	3432	757,941
Japan	213	2873	3,563,878

(Continued)

Table A1. (Continued)

Wars	GDP	Per capita GDP	Casualties (dead & wounded)
Korea (1950–3)			
The United States	1456	9561	147,131
China	240	439	888,396
North Korea	7.3	767.7	518,584
Dominican Republic (1965)			
The United States	2607	13,419	67
Dominican Republic	5	1259	1000
Vietnam (1965–73)			
The United States	2607	13,419	212,926
North Vietnam@	33	617	1,500,500
China	505	706	~1146
USSR	1068	4634	~16
Grenada (1983)			
The United States	4433	18,920	135
Grenada	0.18–0.31	1895–3263	404
Cuba	29	2944	84
Libya (1986)			
The United States	5110	21,236	3
Libya	13	3586	93
Operation Desert Storm (1991)			
The United States	5776	22,785	31
Iraq	17	947	~70,000
Somalia (1992–4)			
The United States	5952	23,169	92
Somalia	6	908	3500–4500
Bosnia (1994)			
The United States	6357	24,130	18
Bosnia	7	2021	97,207
Operation Uphold Democracy (1994–6)			
The United States	6357	24,130	7
Haiti	5	753	3000
Operation Enduring Freedom (2001–)			
The United States	7966	27,948	333
Afghanistan	12.2	453	5000–10,000
Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003–)			
The United States (2001)	7966	27,948	2923
Iraq (2002)	32.3	5138	>25,000

@ Economic indicators are from Maddison (2003). Figures are computed before the advent of the US intervention in the war. Total GDP is in billions of 1990 Geary Khamis US\$. GDP per capita is in 1990 Geary-Khamis US\$. North Vietnam's casualties are the average of estimation by Rummel (1997). Casualties for Afghanistan and Iraq were from the end of large-scale military campaigns (2001 and 2003, respectively).

Table A2 and Table A3 show some of the raw data that are used in the two regressions.

Table A2. Casualties of World War I at a glance

Country	Total population at the beginning of the conflict (in millions)	Total military casualties (death and wounded, in thousands)	Total civilian death (in thousands)	Total military casualties as a percentage of population	Total civilian death as a percentage of population
France	41.48	5632	40	13.58	0.10
Britain	46.05	2998	32	6.51	0.07
US	103.82	321	0	0.31	0.00
Germany	66.1	6056	760	9.15	1.15
Russia	156.2	6650	2000	4.26	1.28
Italy	37.53	1416	0	3.77	0.00
Austria-Hungary	29.34	4543	300	15.48	1.02
Turkey	15	725	1150	4.83	7.67
Greece	5.46	26	132	0.47	2.42
Romania	12.5	456	275	3.65	2.20
Bulgaria	4.7	228	275	4.85	5.85
Australia	5	210	0	4.20	0.00
Canada	8	203	0	5.05	0.00
Belgium	7.7	58.4	30	0.84	0.43
Portugal	6	21	0	0.35	0.00

Table A3. Casualties of World War II at a glance

Country	Total population at the beginning of the conflict (in millions)	Total military casualties (death and wounded, in thousands)	Total civilian death (in thousands)	Total military casualties as a percentage of population	Total civilian death as a percentage of population
France	41	635	350	1.55	0.85
Britain	48.22	772.5	92.7	1.60	0.19
US	132.6	1079.2	5.9	0.81	0.00
Germany	69.8	11350	780	16.26	1.12
Soviet Union	196	24512	7000	12.51	3.57
Italy	37.53	577.5	153	1.54	0.41
Japan	71.3	4571.9	672	6.41	0.94
China	510.6	3961	2000	0.78	0.39
Austria	6.7	630.2	0	9.41	0.00
Hungary	9.3	289.3	290	3.11	3.12
Bulgaria	6.7	40.4	10	0.60	0.15
Australia	7.04	77.4	0	1.10	0.00
Canada	11.7	95.8	0	0.82	0.00
India	386.8	113	0	0.03	0.00
New Zealand	1.63	31.6	0	1.94	0.00
Greece	7.3	135.6	325	1.86	4.46
Belgium	8.4	78.2	76	0.94	0.91
Denmark	3.8	3.8	4.6	0.1	0.12
Norway	2.9	3.3	7	0.11	0.24
Finland	3.7	132	2	2.57	0.05
Romania	15.9	400	200	2.52	1.26

Table A4. Post-World War II American elite and public support for military intervention^a

Cases	Elite support	Elite opposition	Public support	Public opposition
Korea (1950)	78.7	21.3	78	15
Vietnam (1965)	99.6	0.4	58	35
Grenada (1983)			53	33
Panama (1989)			28	59
Iraq (1991)	61.8	38.2	71.5	25
Somalia (1992)			74	21
Bosnia (1993, air campaign)			60	34
Haiti (1994)	89.9	10.1	54	41
Bosnia (Dec. 1995)	67.6	32.4	40	55
Kosovo (1999, air strike)	51.6	48.4	46	44
Afghanistan (2001)	99.8	0.2	85	12
Iraq (2003)	70.5	29.5	70	27
Mean (all cases)	77.4	22.6	59.8	33.4
Mean (only cases in which both elite and public opinion were available)	77.4	22.6	62.8	31.8

^a All numbers are in percentages. We have left out the US invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 and the deployment of marines to Lebanon as peace keepers in 1982 due to a lack of either elite or public opinion data before the operation. With the US data, we performed a *t*-test between elite support and public support. The analysis showed that the differences between the two groups in their attitudes toward war are not statistically significant ($t_{(df=7)} = 2.227$) at the 95% confidence level ($p = .061$), but this is mostly due to the limited sample size. This suggests that the difference between the elites' attitude toward war and the public's attitude toward war is unlikely to be a random outcome.

Independent variables in regressions

1. We follow a standard practice in economics: other than some oil-producing states, the higher a country's GDP per capita, the more advanced a country's technological prowess.
2. The number of total troops mobilized obviously is another possible independent variable. Yet, our initial test showed that the number of total troops mobilized is largely determined by total population at the onset of conflict (for World War I) or by total population at the onset of conflict and GDP per capita (for World War II). Thus, we have dropped this variable.
3. The Correlates of War project has produced a Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score. We carried out a correlation test between our power indicator and the CINC score, and found these two indicators are highly correlated ($r = 0.840$, significant at the 0.001 level). We believe that our measurement of a state's material power is simpler and more sensible than the more complicated CINC score. Moreover, the CINC score does not cover all the

countries during the historical period we examine (for instance, for Australia and Canada, data started from 1920). In contrast, our indicator, drawn from historical economic data (Maddison, 2003), covers a much longer period for most countries. Regressions with the CINC score as an independent variable produce similar results. Results are available upon request from the authors.

Table A5. Post-World War II British elite and public support for military intervention

Cases	Elite support	Elite opposition	Public support	Public opposition
Korean War (1950)			50	41
Suez Crisis (1956)	50	39	33	47
Falklands/Malvinas War (1982)			65	25
First Gulf War (1991)	86.6	5.2	68.5	22.5
Bosnia (1993)			64	27
Bosnia (1995)			62	39
Kosovo (1999)			55	27
Afghanistan (2001)			74	20
The Iraq War (2003)	62.5	22.6	35	51
Mean (all cases)	66.3	22.3	56.4	33.3
Mean (only cases in which both elite and public opinion were available)	66.3	22.3	45.5	40.2

Table A6. Post-World War II French elite and public support for military intervention

Cases	Elite support	Elite opposition	Public support	Public opposition
Vietnam (1947)			37	37
Algeria (1955)	52	36		
Algeria (1956)	87	12		48
Suez Crisis (1956)	58.6	29	20	67
First Gulf War (1991)	90.6	7.6	46	45
Kosovo (1999)			68	22
Afghanistan (2001)			66	28
The Iraq War (2003)			15.6	75.5
Mean (all cases)	72	21.1	42.1	46.1
Mean (only cases in which both elite and public opinion were available)	74.6	18.3	33	56

Scatter plot

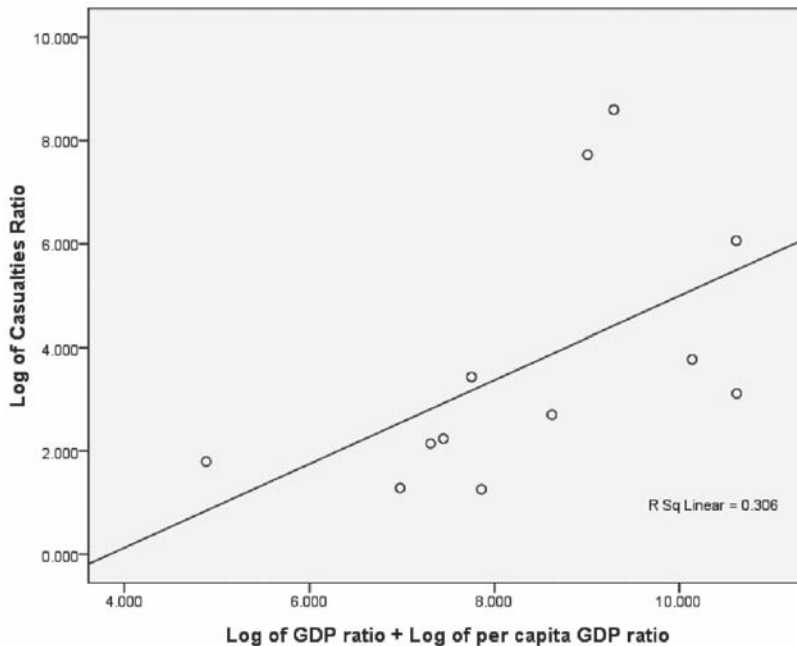


Figure A1. Power advantage resulting in favorable casualty ratio

Note: Correlation co-efficient is 0.553 ($R^2 = 0.306$), $p = .062$ ($< .1$), $N = 12$.

T-test

Data in the *t*-test are from polls conducted on scenarios rather than real crises or interventions. Polls were usually conducted by the Chicago Council for Foreign Relations (CCFR), Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (Pew Center), and Foreign Policy Leadership Project Surveys (FPLPS) (see Holsti, 2006 [2001]).

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