CHAPTER 3

Challenges to the Postwar Consensus

Just as World War II and fears of postwar isolationism among the mass public gave rise to concerns about public opinion and its impact on foreign policy, the war in Vietnam was the primary impetus for a renewed interest in the domestic sources of foreign policy. As the editor of a major 1965 symposium on public opinion and foreign policy put it, “The intense controversy in the United States over the struggle in Vietnam has dramatized anew the fact that the foreign policy of governments is more than simply a series of responses to international stimuli, that forces at work within a society can also contribute to the quality and content of its external behavior” (Rosenau 1967, 2). That conflict was also a major catalyst in stimulating a reexamination of the consensus, described in chapter 2, that had emerged during the two decades after World War II. Most broadly, many of those who had believed that a stronger executive hand on the tiller of foreign policy, relatively free from the whims and vagaries of public moods, best served both national interests and global stability came to reexamine their views in the light of the conflict in Southeast Asia. Indeed, influential columnist Walter Lippmann, who only a little more than a decade earlier had despaired of the tyranny of a feckless public opinion and had called for a stronger executive to counteract the general public, became a leading critic of the Johnson administration’s Vietnam policy. Lippmann eventually even came to regard war protesters and draft card burners as more enlightened than the administration (Steel 1980, 571).

At a narrower level, some critics of U.S. policy became increasingly persuaded that the Gallup, Harris, and other commercial polls inadequately represented public attitudes toward the war by posing excessively restrictive and simplistic questions. For example, among the most widely asked questions was whether respondents supported or opposed current American policy in
Vietnam. The critics complained that these polling organizations far less commonly employed more probing questions that offered respondents an opportunity to express their views about policy options other than those favored by the Johnson administration. Thus, in addition to generating secondary analyses of survey data relating to the war (Mueller 1973), the conflict in Southeast Asia stimulated independent surveys designed specifically to assess foreign policy opinions in greater depth than the typical survey conducted by Gallup or other major polling firms.

The first of these studies, the Verba-Stanford surveys, focused on specific aspects of American policy in Vietnam, including some options other than support for or opposition to the Johnson administration’s actions. Sidney Verba and his colleagues in fact found support for the administration’s Vietnam policy, but they also unearthed approval for such alternative policies as negotiating an end to the conflict (Verba et al. 1967; Verba and Brody 1970). The period since the Verba-Stanford polls has witnessed a proliferation of public opinion surveys with a foreign affairs focus, including surveys both of the general public and of opinion leaders.¹ As a consequence, we no longer depend completely on evidence generated by the major commercial polling organizations. Moreover, the independent surveys were often designed to deal with policy or theoretical concerns that can only imperfectly be probed by secondary analyses of the Gallup and other more general public opinion polls.

Thus, public opinion analysts, armed with growing central archives of data generated by major polling organizations as well as evidence produced by independent surveys, have begun to challenge important aspects of the consensus described in chapter 2.²

Is Public Opinion Really So Volatile?

William Caspary (1970) offered the first systematic challenge to Gabriel Almond’s thesis that public opinion about international affairs is best characterized by volatile moods. Caspary took issue with Almond’s (1950) heavy reliance on a single question in which respondents were asked to identify “the most important problem before the American people today.” Analyzing a broader set of foreign policy questions led Caspary to conclude that “American public opinion is characterized by a strong and stable permissive mood” rather than by mindless volatility toward international in-
volvement (1970, 546). While differing from Almond on the nature of public opinion, Caspary hardly characterized his findings as cause for celebration. Citing four years of combat in Vietnam as an example, Caspary concluded that the permissive public mood provided a blank check for foreign policy adventures rather than responsible support for international organizations, genuine foreign assistance, and basic defense measures.

A limitation of Caspary’s analysis is that he included data for a period of only a little more than a decade ending in 1953. A longer perspective would nevertheless appear to support important aspects of his thesis while assuaging the fears of those who forecast public disenchantment with and a retreat from an active U.S. role in world affairs. Since 1942, Gallup, the Office of Public Opinion Research, the National Opinion Research Council, and several other organizations have asked the public whether it is better to take an active role in or to stay out of international affairs. The first survey found that 71 percent favored the internationalist option, whereas only 24 percent preferred withdrawal from world affairs. Responses to more than fifty surveys, summarized in figure 3.1, spanned six decades encompassing World War II; the onset of the nuclear age; the Cold War; two long costly wars in Asia and a short victorious one in the Persian Gulf region; crises in the Caribbean, the Taiwan Straits, Berlin, and the Middle East; several periods of warming relations between Moscow and Washington; the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union; controversial interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and elsewhere; and the months following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in 2001.

Despite the almost unprecedented turbulence of this period and some variation in the precise wording used in the surveys, responses to these questions about the appropriate international stance of the United States have not been characterized by wild volatility. A modest decline in support for internationalism in 1947 coincided with worsening East-West relations, but at this low point approximately two-thirds of the public still favored an active American role, outnumbering the supporters of withdrawal by a margin of about five to two. The question was not posed between June 1965 and March 1973, apparently because survey organizations felt that the issue of the appropriate American stance toward international affairs had been settled in favor of an active role and therefore was no longer worth asking. Although the Vietnam War did in fact evoke calls for revisiting the
Fig. 3.1. Should the United States play an active role in world affairs, or should it stay out? (1942–2002)
issue—in his acceptance speech at the 1972 Democratic National Convention, George McGovern urged, “Come home, America”—even in the aftermath of that controversial conflict, those favoring the “stay out of world affairs” option never reached 40 percent, much less a majority. A number of critics have charged that excessive U.S. involvement abroad lay at the root of the 2001 terrorist attacks, but the public appears to reject that thesis. Seventy-one percent of respondents to the 2002 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) survey expressed a preference for an “active part” in world affairs, far outnumbering the 25 percent who would have the country “stay out.” Throughout the period, no survey recorded more than 40 percent of the respondents stating that “it is better if we stay out of world affairs,” and only two surveys found that fewer than 60 percent felt that “it is better if we take an active part in world affairs.” Because an “active role in world affairs” can encompass a wide array of international undertakings, ranging from military interventions abroad and foreign aid programs to liberalizing the terms of international trade and coping with such worldwide public health issues as AIDS, it is important not to read too much into these data. They certainly should not be counted as evidence of a broad consensus or sustained support for specific foreign policies. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that at least the deepest concerns of some critics who feared an American return to isolationism after World War II or after the disintegration of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, including those cited in chapters 1 and 2, may have been somewhat overdrawn.

The indictment of public caprice was also dismissed in an analysis that absolved it from blame for foreign policy shortcomings during the Korean War. While agreeing that erratic governmental actions may indeed threaten international stability and peace, Kenneth N. Waltz attributed the “mixture of firmness and vacillation” in U.S. policy to leaders rather than to public pressures or fears of electoral retribution. Indeed, he concluded that whatever shortcomings it may have exhibited in the past, “the mass of the American people have learned to live with danger, to tolerate ambiguity, to accept setbacks, and to understand that victory is sometimes impossible or that it can only be gained at a price the wise would refrain from paying” (1967, 277, 279, 293; for an opposing view on the quality and impact of public opinion, see Rosenberg 1967, 151).

A fuller and more systematic analysis of public opinion toward
the wars in Korea and Vietnam posed another challenge to the thesis of irrational mood swings in public attitudes. To be sure, public support for the American war effort in both conflicts eventually declined, but it did so in ways that seemed explicable and rational rather than random and mindless. More specifically, John E. Mueller (1973) found that increasing public opposition to both conflicts followed a pattern that matched a curve of rising battle deaths, suggesting that the public used an understandable, if simple, heuristic to assess American policy.

The most comprehensive challenge to the thesis that public opinion is volatile has emerged from a series of studies conducted by Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro. Their evidence includes all questions that have been posed by major polling organizations, beginning with the inception of systematic surveys in the mid-1930s and extending through the 1980s. Of the more than six thousand questions included in these surveys, almost 20 percent have been asked at least twice, providing a substantial data set with which to assess the degree of stability or change in public attitudes. Employing a criterion of a difference of 6 percent from one survey to another to distinguish between continuity and change, Page and Shapiro found that public opinion in the aggregate is in fact characterized by a good deal of stability; moreover, this conclusion was equally valid for domestic and foreign policy issues (Shapiro and Page 1988; Page and Shapiro 1992). Most importantly, when attitude shifts took place, they seemed to be neither random nor completely removed from international realities. Rather, changes appeared to be “reasonable, events-driven” reactions to the real world, even if the factual information on which these changes were based was marginally adequate at best. Page and Shapiro concluded that

virtually all the rapid shifts [in public opinion] we found were related to political and economic circumstances or to significant events which sensible citizens would take into account. In particular, most abrupt foreign policy changes took place in connection with wars, confrontations, or crises in which major changes in the actions of the United States or other nations quite naturally affect preferences about what policies to pursue. (1982, 34)³

A very similar conclusion about the importance of external events emerged from an analysis of opinion changes on both domestic
and foreign policy during the period from the Kennedy administration through the Reagan administration (Mayer 1992, 274).

The sudden shifts in public attitudes highlighted by Almond and summarized in chapter 2 were also responses to wars, crises, and other dramatic international events, including Hitler’s conquests during the spring of 1940, increasing Japanese-American tensions in the fall of 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the end of World War II, the Czech coup in 1948, the Berlin Crisis of 1948–49, and the like. Almond, however, chose to interpret the fluctuations as evidence of massive mood swings rooted in shallow opinions about the world rather than as reasonable responses to rapidly changing international conditions (1950, 70–80).

Because their analyses are based on aggregate responses rather than on panel studies in which the respondents in the sample are interviewed repeatedly, Page and Shapiro cannot address definitively one fundamental aspect of the debate about the volatility of public opinion: precisely what proportion of individuals in fact changed their minds on each question? For an issue on which the public divided evenly—50 percent in support of a particular policy and a like percentage in opposition—in each of two time periods, it is theoretically possible that all respondents switched positions. However, volatility approaching this magnitude seems highly unlikely because, as Page and Shapiro have shown, opinion changes tended to be in directions that make sense in terms of events.

The volatility thesis can be tested most directly and satisfactorily by individual-level rather than aggregate analyses of opinion data. Using alternative methods for correcting for measurement error, several studies have shown convincingly that at the individual level, mass foreign policy attitudes are every bit as stable as those on domestic issues (Achen 1975). These studies revealed an impressive level of stability during times of constancy in the international environment. A panel study also found very substantial stability in policy attitudes and international images even during the late 1980s, a period that witnessed rapid and dramatic changes in Soviet-American relations and other important aspects of international affairs (Peffley and Hurwitz 1992).

Similar conclusions supporting Page and Shapiro and casting doubt on the thesis of unstable and irrational public moods also have emerged from other studies. During the post-Vietnam era, variations in public support for the use of force are best explained by differences between two quite distinct situations: the use of
force to coerce foreign policy restraint by others versus the use of force to influence or impose political changes within another state. The former goal consistently has received much stronger support than the latter (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Eichenberg 2003).

An interesting variant of the "rational public" thesis stipulated that the public attempted to moderate American behavior toward the USSR by expressing preferences for a conciliatory stance from a hawkish administration (Reagan) while supporting more assertive policies when a dovish leader (Carter) controlled the White House (Nincic 1988, 1992). The Nincic thesis gained additional support from Mayer's assessment of opinion changes. During the Ford and Carter years (1974–81), the preponderance of opinion changes, including foreign policy issues, occurred in a conservative direction. In contrast, during the eight Reagan years that followed, the public moved in a liberal direction on thirteen of nineteen issues, including all of those involving international affairs (Mayer 1992, 120–21). To the extent that one can generalize from these studies to other periods or other aspects of foreign policy, they further challenge the Almond-Lippmann thesis of volatility in public attitudes; indeed, these findings turn that proposition on its head, identifying the public as a source of moderation and continuity rather than instability and unpredictability.4

It is important to emphasize that none of these challenges to the Almond-Lippmann thesis is based on some newly found evidence that the public is in fact well informed about international affairs. Surveys not only repeatedly reveal that the public has a very thin veneer of factual knowledge about politics, economics, and geography but also indicate that most Americans are poorly informed about the specifics of conflicts, treaties, negotiations with other nations, characteristics of weapons systems, foreign leaders, and the like. Indeed, a seven-nation study in 1994 revealed that the American public substantially trails those in Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, and Canada in levels of political information; only Spain ranked behind the United States in this respect. The results were traced at least in part to Americans' heavy dependence on television rather than newspapers as sources of information (Dimock and Popkin 1996).5

Because the modest factual basis on which the mass public reacts to international affairs remains an unchallenged—and unchallengeable—fact, we are faced with a puzzle. If an often poorly informed general public does indeed react to interna-
tional affairs in a stable and reasonable manner, and if opinion changes are driven by events rather than whimsy or emotion, what means permit the public to do so? Have publics undergone a "skills revolution" that permits them to exercise sound political judgment despite low levels of factual knowledge (Rosenau 1990; Yankelovich 1991; Kay 1992a)? Do they make effective use of certain heuristics or rules of thumb to organize even the modest levels of information that they possess? As discussed in chapter 2, a significant body of research evidence indicates that mass public attitudes lack the kind of ideological underpinnings that would provide some structure and coherence across specific issues and stability through time.

Do Public Attitudes Lack Structure and Coherence?

Philip Converse's (1964) chapter on mass belief systems is one of the most widely cited studies in the literature of American political science. In recent years, his research has also stimulated a plethora of studies that have, on the one hand, vigorously challenged his findings and, on the other, supported the main thrust of his conclusion that mass public attitudes lack ideological structure, whereas those of leaders are characterized by far greater coherence. Part of the debate is methodological, centering on the manner in which questions are framed, the clarity of questions, the degree to which the "unsure" respondents are prodded to state a position on issues, and similar aspects of research procedures. Did the evidentiary base include enough questions to support the conclusions? Did the analytical methods deal adequately with problems of measurement error? Did an analysis that examined correlations across specific public policy issues exhaust the possible structures that might be used to lend coherence to political thinking? These and other significant methodological questions about the Converse findings emerged from several studies (Achen 1975; Sullivan, Pireson, and Marcus 1978).

Another part of the controversy focuses on trends—specifically, on the durability of findings that, to a large degree, drew from evidence generated during the 1950s. This was a period of American economic, political, and military dominance in foreign affairs—the shock of the pioneering Soviet space capsule Sputnik notwithstanding—and the 1956 and 1960 elections took place while the United States was at peace during the interim between the Korean War armistice and escalation of the Vietnam conflict.
Domestically, the late 1950s and early 1960s were marked by relatively low inflation and unemployment, and despite the Montgomery bus boycott and Greensboro sit-ins, the full impact of the civil rights movement had yet to be felt. According to the critics, this period, both celebrated and condemned for marking the "end of ideology," is insufficiently representative for assessing the degree of ideological consistency among the general public. In support of that view, a number of analysts found that beginning with the Johnson-Goldwater election campaign of 1964, ideological consistency among the public did in fact increase (Nie and Anderson 1974; Nie, Verba, and Petrock 1976). Some corroborating evidence also appeared to emerge from an assessment of public opinion polls on domestic and foreign policy issues from the late 1930s to 1967. Although there was generally a weak relationship between attitudes on domestic and international issues, the evidence also revealed a stronger correlation between them during the post-Eisenhower years (Hero 1969).

Those who claim to have found greater ideological consistency among the general public during the turbulent era of the late 1960s and 1970s have also encountered criticism. Are the claims of greater issue consistency really rooted in increasing ideological consciousness? Alternatively, do such claims merely result from the parroting of ideological rhetoric or from some methodological artifact? This is not the place to provide a blow-by-blow account of the many and varied answers to these and other questions on the issue, especially as excellent and detailed summaries of the vast literature are available elsewhere (P. Converse 1975; Kinder 1983; Kinder and Sears 1985; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Zaller 1992; Sniderman 1993). It will suffice to say that a consensus appears to be emerging that public responses to political issues are not adequately captured by the most familiar bipolar dimensions—liberal to conservative and internationalist to isolationist. If these dimensions constitute the standard by which to determine the existence of attitude structures, then mass public attitudes do indeed appear to lack coherence, although this may not be an insuperable barrier to making adequate sense of politics (Luttbeg and Gant 1985). Given that tentative conclusion, does the literature on international issues reveal anything else about organizing concepts that might tend some coherence to public attitudes on foreign affairs?

Although more recent research has yet to create a consensus on all aspects of the question, there does appear to be a consider-
able convergence of findings on two general points relating to belief structures. First, even though the general public may be rather poorly informed about the factual aspects of international affairs, attitudes about foreign affairs are in fact structured in moderately coherent ways. Indeed, low information and an ambiguous international environment may motivate rather than preclude the existence of some type of attitude structure. For example, the conception of humans as “cognitive misers” suggests that they may use a limited number of beliefs to make sense of a wide range of facts and events. Second, there is growing evidence that a single internationalist-to-isolationist dimension inadequately describes the structure of public opinion on international affairs.

In a study of the domestic sources of American foreign policy, Barry Hughes (1978, 30) was one of the first to note that internationalism encompasses two quite different perspectives, which he called military internationalism and nonmilitary internationalism. Soon thereafter, a study based on the first of the quadrennial CCFR surveys of both the general public and elites employed factor analyses and other methods to uncover three foreign policy outlooks described as liberal internationalism, conservative internationalism, and noninternationalism (Mandelbaum and Schneider 1979). A comparable trichotomy labeled the “three-headed eagle” emerged from early analyses of the data on opinion leaders generated by the Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP) (Holsti 1979; Holsti and Rosenau 1979, 1984). These findings did not go unchallenged, however. Other observers have questioned the division of foreign policy attitudes into three types rather than three dimensions and have offered useful evidence in support of their critiques. William Chittick and Keith Billingsley (1989) undertook both original and secondary analyses that supported the case for dimensions rather than types for the adequate description of the foreign policy beliefs of both leaders and the mass public, and their findings have received other support (Bardes and Oldendick 1978; Oldendick and Bardes 1982; Chittick, Billingsley, and Travis 1990, 1995).

A major contribution to the debate about how best to describe foreign policy attitudes has come from Eugene Wittkopf’s (1986, 1990) secondary analyses of the CCFR surveys of both leaders and the general public. His results, which parallel Barry Hughes’s (1978) distinction between two kinds of internationalism, were developed inductively from the CCFR surveys conducted in 1974, 1978, 1982, and 1986. Wittkopf’s work revealed that with a
single exception, two dimensions are necessary to describe foreign policy attitudes: “support-oppose militant internationalism” (MI) and “support-oppose cooperative internationalism” (CI). Dichotomizing and crossing these dimensions yields four types of foreign policy belief systems, with the quadrants labeled hard-liners (support MI, oppose CI), internationalists (support both MI and CI), accommodationists (oppose MI, support CI), and isolationists (oppose both MI and CI). The MI/CI scheme also proved useful for characterizing respondents to the first post–Cold War CCFR survey, which occurred in 1994 (Wittkopf 1995; see also Chanley 1999).

More generally, methods of classification such as the MI/CI scheme that operate in terms of dimensions rather than types provide a good deal of conceptual freedom. For example, a critic might suggest that the fourfold MI/CI classification scheme is too simple or that it overemphasizes between-type differences while obscuring those among persons who are classified within any of the four cells; the latter point is a common criticism of typologies based on fourfold tables. Focusing on the two dimensions rather than on the four types permits us to escape from the limits of a two-by-two matrix. Thus, the MI/CI scheme could be expanded into a three-by-three matrix by making somewhat finer distinctions along both dimensions (for example, “strongly support,” “neutral,” “strongly oppose”). The types discussed here would then appear in the four corner cells, and additional descriptive labels would be developed for the other five types—for example, indifferenters for those who are neutral on both dimensions. Moreover, when we think in terms of dimension rather than type, we are more likely to search for other dimensions that may enhance the analytical power of the scheme. The latter point is illustrated by Ronald Hinckley’s (1992) classification scheme, which resembles Wittkopf’s MI/CI but adds an important third dimension, unilateralism-multilateralism. Hinckley demonstrates the scheme’s utility not only for classifying respondents to Cold War surveys but also for distinguishing adherents of competing schools of thought on the proper U.S. role and strategies during the interwar period. The importance of the unilateralism-multilateralism dimension also emerges from other studies, including Chittick, Billingsley, and Travis 1995. Chapter 6 includes a further discussion of this dimension.

Strong support for Wittkopf’s MI/CI scheme also has emerged from analyses of the FPLP data on American opinion leaders (Holsti and Rosenau 1990, 1993). Those studies put the MI/CI
scheme to a demanding test because of three major differences between the CCFR and FPLP data sets. First, the CCFR surveys were undertaken at four-year intervals starting in 1974, whereas the six FPLP studies followed two years later in each case. Moreover, the two sets of surveys have only a few questions in common. Finally, the MI/CI scheme was developed largely from data on the mass public, whereas the FPLP surveys focused solely on opinion leaders.

Although the origins of the MI/CI scheme are strictly inductive, the militant and cooperative internationalism dimensions correspond closely to the most venerable theoretical approaches to international relations, realism, and liberalism. Realism views conflict between nations as a natural state of affairs, either because of human nature or because of the anarchic structure of the system, rather than as an aberration that is subject to permanent amelioration. Such realist concepts as security dilemma, relative capabilities, relative gains, and a zero-sum view of conflict are also basic to the militant internationalism dimension.

Similar links exist between liberalism and the cooperative internationalism dimension. Although acknowledging the primacy of the state as a self-interested actor, liberalism denies that conflict is an immutable element of relations between nations. Liberalism defines security in terms that are broader than the geopolitical-military spheres and emphasizes the potential for cooperative relations among nations: institution-building to reduce uncertainty and fears of perfidy as well as information costs; improved international education and communication to ameliorate fears and antagonisms based on misinformation and misperception; and the positive-sum possibilities of such activities as trade are but a few of the ways liberals believe nations may jointly gain and thus mitigate, if not eliminate, the harshest features of international relations emphasized by the realists. In short, the CI dimension shares important elements with the liberal school of international relations theory. These MI and CI dimensions also seem clearly related to other conceptualizations of American thought on foreign affairs. For example, Thomas Hughes’s (1980) distinction between the “security culture” and the “equity culture” in American foreign policy and James Billington’s (1987) categories of “realist-conservatives” and “idealist-liberals” appear to parallel, if not match exactly, the MI and CI dimensions. The MI/CI scheme has been linked to broader American ideologies—cosmopolitan liberalism, nativism, and multiculturalism—in a study encompassing a
period of six decades beginning in 1930 (Citrin et al. 1994). The four types that emerge from the MI/CI scheme also bear more than a passing resemblance to the distinction between the Hamiltonian (internationalists), Wilsonian (accommodationists), Jeffersonian (isolationists), and Jacksonian (hard-liners) approaches to American foreign policy (Mead 2001).

Although the empirical and theoretical cases for measuring attitudes about both militant and cooperative internationalism rather than on a single isolationist-to-internationalist dimension seem quite strong, there is also some evidence that these two dimensions may not be sufficient to describe all contours of contemporary international opinions. As noted earlier, a number of studies have suggested a further distinction between unilateralism and multilateralism (Wittkopf 1986; Hinckley 1988; Chittick and Billingsley 1989; Russett 1990; Chittick, Billingsley, and Travis 1995; for a somewhat different formulation, see Russett and Shye 1993). It is not reasonable, moreover, to expect that any belief structure could encompass all possible aspects of foreign affairs, and there is indeed rather persuasive evidence that attitudes toward some rather important issues cut across the main dimensions identified previously. One such example is trade and protectionism, issues that are likely to become more rather than less important—and more contentious, to judge by the protests accompanying almost every major international meeting on global trade issues—during the post–Cold War era. Questions involving Israel and American policy toward that nation appear to form another cluster of attitudes that does not fit neatly into the MI/CI scheme. That is, the four types that emerge from that scheme—hard-liners, internationalists, isolationists, and accommodationists—do not differ significantly on either trade issues or U.S. policy toward Israel.

A somewhat different approach to the question of attitude structures emerges from several studies of the general public conducted by Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley (1987). In contrast to Philip Converse's search for a "horizontal" coherence that relies on correlations among attitudes toward various issues, Hurwitz and Peffley proposed and tested a hierarchically organized foreign policy belief structure in which specific policy preferences are derived from postures—militarism, anticommunism, and isolationism—that in turn are assumed to be constrained by a set of core values (morality of warfare, ethnocentrism) relating to the international community. These authors found that their
survey respondents possessed such structures. Thus, a few rather
general beliefs—attitudes toward militarism and a general pref-
erence for a “tough-minded” approach to international affairs—
appear to have served as organizing devices that enabled sub-
jects to respond in a reasonably coherent manner to a broad
range of issues, including defense spending, nuclear arms policy,
military involvement, policies toward the USSR, and interna-
tional trade.

Once again, however, none of these studies challenges the
overwhelming evidence on one important point: the American
public is generally poorly informed about international affairs. In-
deed, even the Persian Gulf War, the first international conflict to
be telecast in real time, increased the normally low level of infor-
mation among the general public by only a very modest amount
(S. Bennett 1992). Rather, the evidence appears to suggest that
even in the absence of much factual knowledge, members of the
general public use some simple—perhaps even simplistic—cog-
nitive shortcuts to make some sense of an increasingly complex
world; a few salient criteria rather than complete information may
serve as the bases of judgment. Even experts may well use such
shortcuts to organize their attitudes. “Domino theory,” “lessons of
Munich,” “lessons of Vietnam,” and “my enemy’s enemy is my
friend” are among the shortcuts that have served—for better or
worse—to guide the thinking of more than a few policymakers
and their expert advisers. Stated differently, although lacking a
deep reservoir of factual information, members of the mass pub-
lic may act as “cognitive misers,” employing a few superordinate
beliefs to guide their thinking on a broad spectrum of interna-
tional issues. Thus, people may organize their political worlds in
richer and more diverse ways than Converse and his colleagues
indicated (Conover and Feldman 1984).

Recent research clearly has yet to produce complete agree-
ment on many important issues relating to the structure of the
mass public’s foreign policy beliefs. Nevertheless, the earlier con-
sensus depicting public attitudes as lacking any real coherence
has been challenged from many quarters and for many reasons.
As a result of substantial empirical research, there is now a good
deal of credible evidence suggesting that members of the mass
public use various heuristics—although not necessarily the tradi-
tional liberal-to-conservative or internationalist-to-isolationist
blueprints—for organizing their political thinking.
Is the Public Really Impotent?

Among the most important questions about public opinion are these: To what extent, on what kinds of issues, under what circumstances, and in what types of political systems, if any, does public opinion affect public policy? If public opinion is indeed impotent, that would reduce the reasons for studying it; the topic might be of interest to cognitive psychologists, but it would be largely irrelevant to students of foreign policy. If it has an influence, what are the means by which public attitudes become known so that they can have an impact on decision makers? These are also the most difficult questions to answer, for our ability to do so is not materially enhanced by the many technical improvements that have characterized public opinion research during the past half century: better sampling designs, greater attention to construction of questions, more sophisticated statistical models to analyze the data, and, of course, the widespread availability of computers that make possible complex analyses rarely attempted even a few decades ago. Not surprisingly, then, we have a good deal more systematic evidence describing the state of or trends in public opinion than detailing how it has affected the conduct of foreign affairs.

As noted in chapter 2, much of the evidence through the 1960s pointed toward the conclusion of public impotence in the process by which foreign policy is made. Even when there appeared to be some correspondence between public sentiments and foreign policy, not all analysts were prepared to accept the inference that the former had any independent impact on the latter. According to some of these observers, for example, any evidence of a correlation between public opinion and foreign policy merely serves to underscore the effectiveness of efforts by policymakers, aided and abetted by pliant print and electronic media, to manipulate the mass public into accepting the ruling elites' political or class-based interests.

There is certainly no shortage of evidence that most post–World War II presidents have followed Theodore Roosevelt in thinking that the White House is a “bully pulpit,” whether it was used by Harry Truman to “scare the hell out of them” to gain support for aid to Greece and Turkey in 1947; by Dwight Eisenhower to warn against the dangers of “unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex” in 1961; by Jimmy Carter to generate approbation for the Panama Canal
Treaties during the early months of his administration; by Ronald Reagan to drum up support for assistance to the contras in Nicaragua during the 1980s; by George Bush to rally support for a military intervention, followed by an air campaign and a ground war to force Iraq out of Kuwait in 1990–91; by Bill Clinton to gain passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organization treaties; and by George W. Bush to gain public support for strong but unspecified measures against nations he called an "axis of evil" (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea) in his 2002 State of the Union address, followed by a vigorous campaign to rally support for military action against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. It is also evident that all such presidential efforts to shape public opinion have not had equal success. At least one noted public opinion analyst has asserted that the relationship between leaders and the public has changed in the post-Vietnam era—"farewell to 'the President knows best'" (Yankelovich 1978). Although it remains to be demonstrated that the equation has been permanently altered, some recent evidence indicates that the public is both able and willing to express views that do not necessarily follow those of policymakers or opinion leaders (Clough 1994; Isaacs 1994, 1998).

The more difficult question concerns influence in the other direction. How much did public impatience lead the Carter administration to embark on an ill-fated effort to free American hostages held in Tehran in 1980; how much did public impatience lead the Reagan administration to withdraw U.S. Marines from Lebanon after a terrorist bombing had killed more than 240 of them in 1983? Was George Kennan (1993) correct in blaming media-generated public pressures for the first Bush administration's humanitarian intervention in Somalia shortly after the 1992 presidential election? (For a detailed rebuttal, see Strobel 1997.) Did President Kennedy genuinely believe that he would be impeached should he fail to force removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, as he told his brother, or was he merely seeking to bolster decisions arrived at for reasons that had nothing to do with public opinion? Perhaps a more telling example from the Cuban missile crisis emerges from transcripts of a crucial White House meeting on October 27, 1962, the day before the crisis was resolved peacefully. It appears that Kennedy was prepared to accept a compromise solution that many of his top advisers strongly opposed—removal of American missiles in Turkey in exchange for withdrawal of the Soviet missiles in Cuba that had precipitated
the Caribbean confrontation—rather than initiate a further escalation of the crisis, and that he would have done so in large part because it would have been hard to explain to the public why such a seemingly symmetrical arrangement had been rejected (Bundy and Blight 1987–88).

Some anecdotal evidence may also be suggestive, but it hardly offers irrefutable answers to these questions. Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first president to make extensive use of public opinion data, and he even specified to polling organizations exactly what questions he wanted to have posed to the public on a regular basis. Virtually all recent presidents have extensively used pollsters. John Kennedy’s 1960 presidential campaign relied heavily on private polls conducted by Louis Harris, and after the election Kennedy made public opinion analysis a regular part of White House activities (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994a, 1995). Lyndon Johnson, who often carried survey results to show critics that he had strong public support for his policies, expanded the use of public and private polls, but he proved to be rather ineffective as an opinion leader (Altschuler 1986; Jacobs and Shapiro 1999). The process of institutionalizing and politicizing public opinion polling, not only for election purposes but also for making policy decisions, was even more fully advanced by the Nixon White House (Jacobs and Shapiro 1995). Moreover, whereas Nixon and his predecessors took considerable efforts to keep such polling activities secret, they have now become a well-known activity of every administration (Heith 1998; Murray and Howard 2002).

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 stimulated an immense amount of public and private polling by a wide variety of sources, including almost nightly surveys commissioned by the government of Kuwait to determine, among other things, how the public reacted to various reasons for opposing Saddam Hussein’s aggression: oil, restoration of Kuwait’s preinvasion government, U.S. jobs, international norms, and Iraq’s nuclear weapons aspirations. Although George H. W. Bush’s administration made less extensive use of polling than did the Reagan White House, there is evidence that the government was not immune to the impact of public preferences. In recalling events of the period, General Norman Schwarzkopf wrote, “Washington was ready to overreact, as usual, to the slightest ripple in public opinion” (1992, 468). In their joint memoir, the George H. W. Bush and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft (1998) make no mention of public opinion but, as noted earlier, policymakers may be reluctant to
acknowledge that they were influenced by polls. (For results of public polls before and during the Gulf War, see Mueller 1994.)

Bush and Scowcroft’s silence in their memoir notwithstanding, a careful analysis of policy-making before and during the Gulf War, drawing not only on surveys but also on interviews with such key officials as the president and Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, revealed that public opinion played an important role in American policy. Its influence was not so much in formulating the plans to go to war—Cheney asserted that “even if public opinion was against us, we were still going to go [to war]” (168)—but in the manner in which the policy was implemented. Two examples illustrate the many ways in which concerns with the public were reflected in policy: the last-minute talks with Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz of Iraq were intended to convey to the public that the administration was seriously pursuing negotiations with Baghdad; and the decision to call up National Guard and Reserve units was, according to Cheney, intended to “play a role in terms of helping us mobilize public opinion when it is time to go to war” (Sobel 2001, 159, 167, 173). Chapter 6 will discuss polls concerning the use of force in Afghanistan and Iraq during the months following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

We have relatively few detailed accounts from public opinion analysts within the government about how their expertise and survey results were used in the policy process, but those that exist suggest that the mass public is not viewed merely as an essentially shapeless lump that can readily be molded through public relations activities and compliant media to meet the immediate policy needs of the administration (H. Cantril 1967; Beal and Hinckley 1984; Hinckley 1992). Hadley Cantril, who undertook public opinion analyses for Presidents Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Kennedy, summarized his experience: “I want to emphasize that no claim is made here that the [public opinion] data and suggestions that Lambert [a drug company heir who financed Cantril’s polls] and I provided the President [Roosevelt] were crucial to his decisions. But actions taken were certainly very often completely consistent with our recommendations” (1967, 42).

Although the evidence describing public attitudes still far outstrips—both in quality and quantity—that on the causal links between mass opinions and foreign policy, research in recent years has begun to cast some doubt on the earlier thesis of public impotence. In addition to anecdotal evidence, two classes of studies have challenged the proposition that the processes by which
foreign policy is made are essentially impervious to public influence: quantitative-correlational analyses and intensive case studies.

Several quantitative studies have challenged some important foundations of the theory that, at least on foreign and defense policy, the public is impotent. One element of that proposition is that policymakers are relatively free agents on foreign policy questions because these issues pose few dangers of electoral retribution by voters. Elections are said to be decided by domestic questions, especially those sometimes described as “pocketbook” or “bread-and-butter” issues, because international affairs are so far removed from the average voter’s concerns and information. For example, Dwight Eisenhower’s landslide victory at the height of the Korean War in 1952, giving Republicans control of the White House for the first time in two decades, was described by Warren E. Miller in a way that discounted the effects of foreign policy: “Coming up to 1956 and 1960, we can be sure of no more than that public opinion on foreign policy matters constituted a thin veneer on the basic structure of the vote decision” (1967, 229).

That conclusion about the distinction between domestic and foreign policy in voting behavior has been challenged by John H. Aldrich, John L. Sullivan, and Eugene Borgida on the grounds that “there has been no theoretically plausible account of attitude formation and salience that would explain why attitudes on domestic issues—as opposed to foreign policy issues—should be so accessible and so likely to affect voting behavior” (1989, 125). These authors’ systematic study of presidential campaigns between 1952 and 1984 revealed that in five of the nine elections during that period (1952, 1964, 1972, 1980, and 1984), foreign policy issues had “large effects.” Or, as the authors put it, when presidential candidates devote campaign time and other scarce resources to articulating their positions and debating questions of external policy, they are “acting reasonably, because voters do in fact respond to their appeals. The candidates are waltzing before a reasonably alert audience that appreciates their grace. Also, given a choice, the public votes for the candidate who waltzes best” (Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989, 136; Zaller 2004).

Research on voting behavior also has emphasized the importance of retrospective evaluations of performance on voter choices among candidates, especially when one of them is an incumbent (Fiorina 1981; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1990). Because voters are perceived as punishing incumbent candidates
or parties for foreign policy failures (for example, the Iran hostage episode and the failed rescue mission damaged President Carter’s reelection campaign) or rewarding incumbents for successes (for example, victory over Iraq in the Persian Gulf War brought President Bush’s approval ratings to the highest level—89 percent—ever recorded up to that point), decisions by foreign policy leaders may be made in anticipation of public reactions and the probabilities of success or failure (Zaller 1992; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1994, 1995; Foyle 1999).

The electoral retribution hypothesis received a different kind of test in a study of American policy toward China during the three decades following establishment of Mao Tse-tung’s government in 1949. Leonard A. Kusnitz (1984) found that, with few exceptions, the correspondence between public preferences and U.S. policy toward China was remarkably high. Policy sometimes led opinion, and opinion at other times led policy, but on the whole the two remained in harmony. These findings are explained by issue visibility, partisan differences, and the nonrandom changes of opinion, which combined to create the belief among policymakers that the possibility of electoral retribution required them to pay close attention to public opinion on the China issue.

Two other studies also seem to cast some doubt on the universal validity of Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes’s (1963) classic finding that public attitudes on foreign policy questions have far less impact on members of Congress than domestic issues do (Bartels 1991; Hartley and Russett 1992). A careful analysis of voting on Pentagon appropriations at the beginning of the Reagan administration’s defense buildup revealed that “public opinion was a powerful force for policy change in the realm of defense spending in the first year of the Reagan administration. Moreover, the impact of constituency opinion appears to have been remarkably broad-based, influencing all sorts of representatives across a wide spectrum of specific defense spending issues” (Bartels 1991, 467; see also Russett, Hartley, and Murray 1994). Another study of defense spending revealed a strong reciprocal connection between public inputs—preferences for “more” or “less” spending for the Pentagon—and policy outputs (Wlezien 1996).

Finally, two major studies have measured the congruence between changes in public preferences and a broad range of policies over extended periods. The first, an analysis of public opinion and policy outcomes spanning 1960–74 revealed that in almost two-thirds of 222 cases, policy outcomes corresponded to public
preferences. The consistency was especially high (92 percent) on foreign policy issues. The author offered three possible explanations for his findings: foreign policy issues permit more decision making by the executive, are likely to be the object of less attention and influence by organized interest groups, and are especially susceptible to manipulation by elites (Monroe 1979). A follow-up study revealed that policy outcomes were consistent with public preferences in 55 percent of the cases during 1980–93, a decline from 63 percent in 1960–79. But once again the level of consistency was higher (67 percent) for foreign policy decisions than for those in other issue areas (Monroe 1998). A second study of the opinion-policy relationship covered an even longer time span—1935 to 1979—that included 357 significant changes of public preferences. These data also revealed a high degree of congruence between opinions and policy, with little difference in this respect between domestic (70 percent) and foreign policy (62 percent) issues (Page and Shapiro 1983).

Although anecdotal and correlational analyses can make useful contributions toward understanding the public opinion–foreign policy relationship, they are not an entirely satisfactory substitute for intensive case studies that could shed more direct light on how, if at all, public opinion enters into and influences the policy-making process. It is not wholly sufficient to describe the state of or trends in public opinion on an issue immediately before or during foreign policy decisions because a finding that major decisions seemed to be correlated with public preferences does not establish, by itself, a causal link: “not even time-series analysis can provide a magic bullet that will kill all the demons of causal ambiguity” (Page 1994, 27). For example, policymakers might be responding solely to pressures and constraints from the international system, precisely as realist theorists insist that they should, without any significant attention to public sentiments on the issue, even if those attitudes are highly congruent with those of policy-making officials. If international events are sufficiently dramatic and unambiguous in their implications—for example, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor or the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon—leaders and the general public may react similarly, but this would not demonstrate that the latter affected the former. Alternatively, the direction of causality might run from policymakers to the public rather than vice versa, as depicted by critics who describe the public as the targets of public relations efforts by American elites (Ginsberg

When opinion change precedes shifts in policy, the latter interpretation loses potency. However, we could not rule out still another possibility: the administration manipulates events; the events, now a part of the information available to the public, result in changes of opinion about the issue in question followed by policy changes that are congruent with public opinion. A somewhat related variant of this sequence is the “rally round the president” hypothesis, according to which the executive may manipulate the public indirectly by first undertaking external initiatives and then responding to the resulting events abroad in a manner calculated to increase his popularity with domestic constituents (Brody and Shapiro 1989; Marra, Ostrom, and Simon 1990; Hugick and Gallup 1991; Lian and Oneal 1993). But the “rally” effect is generally of moderate magnitude and depends on whether elites are united on the issue. It is a dicey reelection strategy, as Jimmy Carter (who launched the effort to rescue American hostages in Tehran in 1980) and George H. W. Bush (who received only 37 percent of the popular vote a little more than a year after the Gulf War) might attest. Moreover, a careful analysis of post–World War II presidents found no evidence to support the diversionary thesis that an administration might use force abroad to enhance public support at home (Foyle 1999, 283), but others have come to somewhat different conclusions (Lowi 1985). Finally, one of the understudied questions is whether adversaries abroad have initiated crises during election years on the belief that Washington’s reactions might be constrained by the distractions of domestic politics. If and when Russian archives on the issues are opened, it would be interesting to determine the extent to which the Berlin blockade (1948) and the invasions of Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Afghanistan (1979–80), for example, might have been affected by the Kremlin’s calculations that presidential elections in the United States made the timing of aggressive action especially propitious.

Among the more difficult cases in which to assess causality are those dealing with public opinion as a possible constraint on action. During the 1980s, the Reagan administration undertook a massive public relations campaign to generate public support for assistance to contra rebels in Nicaragua, but careful analyses of surveys on the issue indicated that a majority of the public consistently opposed American military involvement in Central
America (Parry and Kornbluh 1988; Sobel 1989, 1993, 2001; Hinckley 1992). Would the Reagan Administration have intervened more directly or massively in Nicaragua and El Salvador in the absence of such public attitudes? Unambiguous evidence about the causes of contemporary nonevents is, to understate the case, rather hard to come by. Intensive case studies involving archival research, elite interviews, or both appear to be the only way to address such questions, although even this approach is not wholly free from potential problems of inference. Does an absence of documentary references to public opinion indicate a lack of interest by policymakers in public sentiments? Alternatively, was attention to public attitudes so deeply ingrained into their working habits that it was unnecessary to refer explicitly to it? A participant in the deliberations that led to the 1986 bombing of Libya recalled that public opinion was never discussed or brought up, but “it was clearly in the air,” and “everyone knew what polls [their private ones] showed” about bombing a nation supporting terrorism. (Hinckley 1995). Even if frequent discussions and analyses of public views on the issue occurred, the inference to be drawn from that fact may not always be wholly self-evident. Are we to conclude from these deliberations that public attitudes played a significant role in policy decisions, or does the evidence merely reveal a desire on the part of officials to be on record as seriously having taken public sentiments into account?

These examples do not imply that we are limited to simple, one-directional models of the links between the public and policymakers; a number of more complex alternatives have been put forward (Rosenau 1961; Graber 1968; B. Hughes 1978; Russett 1990; Hinckley 1992; Zaller 1992; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; Powlick and Katz 1998; Entman and Herbst 2000). Moreover, a full analysis of the opinion-policy links would often require explorations into many aspects of the domestic political process, including the role of parties and candidates in raising issues, the impact of interest groups, the role of the media, the manner in which opinions form and circulate in the body politic, and the level of elite competition, just to mention a few salient aspects of the process. The literature on each of these topics is enormous.7

V.O. Key’s definition of public opinion as “those opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed” (1961, 14) provides an especially appropriate introduction to any causal analysis of the opinion-policy link. He also pointed to the
central research task: "If one is to know what opinions governments heed, one must know the inner thoughts of presidents, congressmen, and other officials" (14). Consequently, to develop and test competing hypotheses about opinion-policy linkages, there are no satisfactory alternatives to carefully crafted case studies employing interviews and, if possible, archival research designed to uncover how, if at all, decision makers perceive public opinion; feel themselves motivated or constrained by it; factor it into their identification and assessment of policy options; and otherwise take it into account when selecting a course of action, including a decision not to act.8

Although the literature systematically addressing these questions is dwarfed by the number of studies that describe the state of public opinion, several examples illustrate this type of research. The availability of substantial collections of documents relating to the 1914 European crisis enabled Richard Fagen to study top German leaders' uses and assessments of public opinion during the weeks leading up to World War I. The kaiser and other leaders in Berlin regarded public opinion as "hard goods" capable of being assessed in the same manner as military or economic capabilities. Although public opinion meant different things to different leaders, it was perceived as "an active, initiating, coercive, reified, and even personified force" (Fagen 1960, 457). For German decision makers, public opinion played four important roles during the six weeks prior to the outbreak of a general war: (1) adding a national dimension to governmental positions, (2) defining national limits of tolerance, (3) excusing actions of others, and (4) excusing one's own actions.

Doris Graber undertook an intensive study of four decisions during the early years of American history: John Adams's decision to renew negotiations with France in 1800, the Louisiana Purchase during the first Jefferson administration, James Madison's policies leading up to the War of 1812, and the enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823. Despite differences in personality, ideology, and other attributes among the four presidents, Graber found that in each case public opinion was "an important factor in decision making, but by no means the most important single factor" (1968, 318).

A study on the making of foreign policy about a century later came to a rather different conclusion. Robert Hilderbrand (1981) was unable to discover that public opinion had any significant impact on foreign policy during the quarter century
(1897–1921) encompassing the McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations. To the extent that public opinion entered into executive discussions, it did so only after policy decisions had already been made. Other students of the Wilson presidency have come to somewhat different conclusions about his interest in and sensitivity to public opinion (Turner 1957; Cornwell 1959). Still different findings emerged from an analysis of public opinion and foreign policy from the period leading up to World War II through President Truman’s March 1947 speech to Congress requesting aid to Greece and Turkey. Michael Leigh (1976) tested two approaches to the foreign policy process: the traditional democratic model that public opinion constrains American policymakers versus the radical model that manipulation of the public in favor of predetermined policy choices not only takes place but invariably succeeds. His findings validated neither the traditional nor the radical model.

Striking evidence that public opinion significantly affects policy emerged from a study of four cases of U.S. arms control policy—international control of atomic energy, the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the SALT I/Antiballistic Missile Treaties, and the SALT II Treaty—spanning every administration between Presidents Truman and Reagan. Thomas Graham (1989) used a research design that included an analysis of more than five hundred public opinion surveys and an examination of primary source materials to determine whether correlations between public opinion and policy decisions were causal or spurious. The evidence indicated that public opinion had at least some impact on decisions at all stages of the policy process, including agenda setting, arms control negotiations, the treaty ratification process, and implementation of the agreement. Moreover, the impact varied directly with the level of public support for a policy—that is, whether it reached the level of majority (50 to 59 percent), consensus (60 to 69 percent), preponderant (70 to 79 percent), or virtually unanimous (80 percent or more).

A detailed analysis of four episodes during the Eisenhower administration—the “New Look” defense policy, the decision not to intervene in Indochina following the military disaster suffered by France at Dien Bien Phu, the Quemoy-Matsu confrontation with China, and the reaction to the pioneering Soviet space capsule Sputnik—drew heavily on archival research. These cases, supplemented by briefer analyses of all post–World War II presidents, were used to test realist, Wilsonian liberal, and “beliefs”
models of the role of public opinion in the policy process. The beliefs model, based on an individual's normative beliefs about the proper role of public opinion and practical beliefs about the importance of public support in the success of foreign policy undertakings, proved best able to explain the role of public opinion in the policy process (Foyle 1999).

Studies of the opinion-policy links are not limited to cases in which sufficient time has passed to permit full examination of the relevant archives. Philip Powlick's analysis of the role of public opinion in U.S. decisions on the Lebanon intervention during the first Reagan administration relied almost entirely on interviews with policy officials. Whereas public opinion influenced many mid-level officials and a few higher ones—for example, Caspar Weinberger—it had little impact on others, including President Reagan, Robert McFarlane, and George Shultz.9 Powlick concluded that public opinion formed the basis of several recommendations to pull the marines out of Lebanon several months after a terrorist attack killed more than 240 American servicemen; public opinion also helped to ensure that most officials and members of Congress would warmly receive the decision to withdraw. However, President Reagan's decision to withdraw apparently was less influenced by public opinion than by the kinds of external considerations to which realists would assign top priority in decision making. Public opinion was thus only one of several factors that came together to bring about the evacuation from Beirut in February 1984. Another study of policy-making in the Reagan administration came to a somewhat different conclusion. In searching for the sources of Reagan's transformation from a Cold War hawk who had blamed the USSR—an "evil empire"—for all international problems to a president who came to describe his Soviet counterpart as "my friend," Fischer (1997) concluded that public opinion played little if any role.

Powlick's conclusions regarding the Lebanon intervention may, however, have understated the impact of public opinion on those at the top levels of the government. According to another official in the administration, Ronald Hinckley, the president and McFarlane constantly had public opinion information fed to them. Reagan received his from pollster Richard Wirthlin, whereas McFarlane was briefed on public opinion by his crisis management center team. Hinckley concludes that the Lebanon episode (as well as the later decision to bomb Libya in response to suspected terrorist activities in 1986) illustrates officials' tendency to discount public
opinion when explaining their decisions "because it is not con-
sciously on the table when the decision is made, but it has been in
the mind of the decision maker for some time" (Hinckley 1995).

Because most of the relevant archives have yet to be opened,
Richard Sobel's (2001) study of public opinion in four U.S. inter-
ventions abroad—the Vietnam War, aid to the contras in Nica-
ragua, the Gulf War, and the civil war in Bosnia—relied heavily
on interviews. The key policy officials whom Sobel interviewed
included former President George H.W. Bush, four secretaries of
defense, and three secretaries of state. Sobel concluded that
"public opinion has constrained the U.S. foreign policy decision-
making process over the last generation," but its impact varied in
the four cases (240). For example, the controversial issue of aid to
Nicaraguan contras yielded somewhat mixed results. Although
the public consistently opposed aid, Congress was willing to pro-
vide assistance to the rebels but did so in far more limited
amounts and restricted form than the Reagan administration had
requested. Several key members of Congress denied that their
votes had been cast in direct response to public preferences
within their districts, but under questioning they admitted sound-
ing out their constituents' opinions and voting their own minds
when they found evidence of public indifference. Administration
officials also attempted to ignore public opposition. Nevertheless,
public opinion did constrain more aggressive intervention in Nica-
ragua. Despite his deserved reputation as the "great communi-
cator," Reagan's inability to win over the public to his view was one
of his major political defeats, and it probably forced him to rely
on the proceeds of illegal arms sales to Iran to fund the contras
(Sobel 1993, 2001).

Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro have been engaged in the
most ambitious analyses of the public opinion-policy link. Their
many studies have ranged across several administrations between
those of John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton. Through archival re-
search the authors identified the polling data—generated both in-
ternally and by such organizations as Gallup and Harris—avail-
able to the president and his advisers (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994a,
1995, 1995–96, 1999, 2000). In addition to consulting archival data,
Jacobs and Shapiro interviewed top White House personnel as
well as those engaged in conducting the surveys.

Taken as a whole, these studies clearly point to mixed conclu-
sions about the impact of public opinion on foreign policy and
seem to suggest that public opinion's effects may have intensified
during recent decades. This tentative conclusion also receives some support from interview studies of foreign policy officials. Although the bureaucrats interviewed by Powlick (1991, 1995) were not notably more sanguine about the public and its ability to contribute constructively to foreign policy than were those interviewed in similar research by Bernard Cohen (1973) more than two decades earlier, these leaders were more inclined to accept the legitimacy of a public contribution to the policy process and consequently tended to avoid policy options perceived as likely to engender public opposition. In contrast, Graham's (1989) study of U.S. arms control policies found little change over time because his research revealed that public opinion has played an important role in such decisions in all administrations since President Truman's. This, then, is one of the many areas in which contradictory findings exist. This mixed assessment and call for additional research is consistent with that of an extensive recent review of the opinion-policy link across a wide range of issues: "although policy will tend to follow public opinion more often than not, there is sufficiently wide variation in the extent of responsiveness across different issues and at different points in time to warrant increased scholarly attention to examining the institutional and political sources of variation" (Manza and Cook 2002, 657–58).

Some salient features of American public opinion can be illustrated in more detail by examining responses to some of the most important foreign policy issues that have confronted the United States since World War II. First, I will focus on questions rooted in the Cold War, notably assessments of the Soviet Union (Russia since 1991) and, much more briefly, of China. I will then examine responses to a broader set of questions that have lost none of their importance since the end of the Cold War—namely, the appropriate goals for American foreign policy.

Public Opinion on the Soviet Union and Russia

On February 27, 1946, Arthur Vandenberg asked his colleagues in the Senate, "What is Russia up to now?" Few questions have so persistently engendered debate within the United States after the end of World War II as those concerning the Soviet Union, its foreign policies, and the appropriate American approaches for dealing with the USSR. In his famous 1946 "long telegram" and in an essay on "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" a year later, George F. Kennan wrote that Soviet foreign policy was driven
largely by internal forces, including the need for real or imagined external enemies; at least in the short run, therefore, American offers of friendship and cooperation were likely to prove fruitless. Kennan’s diagnosis of Soviet international behavior and his prescription of a “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies” (1947, 575) were enormously influential in providing an intellectual framework for American policy toward Stalin’s Russia but did not end the debate about Soviet foreign policy or the best means for dealing with the USSR.

The debate has often been stimulated by external events. The Berlin blockade; the invasion of South Korea; the death of Stalin; the invasions of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan; Sputnik; the Cuban missile crisis; and the activities that constituted the high point of détente in 1972–73 are some of the more dramatic episodes that have intensified interest in the question. Almost as often, the debate has been aroused by American domestic politics, especially presidential election campaigns. In 1952, the concept of containment came under attack from some Republicans, notably John Foster Dulles, as too “static.” Later events demonstrated clearly that its putative replacement—“roll back” of the Iron Curtain—was campaign rhetoric rather than policy. To disarm critics in the right wing of his own party in 1976, President Ford let it be known that détente was no longer a part of the White House working vocabulary. Four years later, the soon-to-be-nominated Ronald Reagan blamed the USSR for all international problems, and during the subsequent campaign he attacked arms control and détente as the causes of the “worst decade in American history” (House 1980, 1).

American interest in these questions has recently been enhanced by external and internal developments. After 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev provided the Soviet Union with a style of leadership that seemed light-years removed from that of most previous Soviet leaders. He was certainly a far cry from the dour, reclusive Stalin, the mercurial Nikita Khrushchev, or the aged, doddering trio of Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko, who preceded Gorbachev in the Kremlin; even those most skeptical about the significance or permanence of glasnost or perestroika agreed that Gorbachev possessed political and public relations skills unmatched in Soviet history. At the same time, the American president who excoriated the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” in 1983 was within five years meeting regularly with
Gorbachev and describing him as a friend. Relations between the superpowers continued to improve during the early 1990s, reaching a level of cooperation not witnessed since World War II; in 1990 and 1991, the two countries joined forces at the United Nations Security Council to pass a series of resolutions aimed at compelling Iraq to reverse its invasion of Kuwait.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 coincided with the effective end of Gorbachev’s political career and the emergence of Boris Yeltsin as the Kremlin leader. Expectations that Yeltsin would preside over a continuing process of democratization and liberalization proved overly optimistic. Although reelected president in 1996, Yeltsin was plagued by a plethora of domestic problems, including a rebellion in Chechnya, ill health, and suspicions of alcoholism. Yeltsin stepped aside in 2000 in favor of his handpicked successor, Vladimir Putin. Bloody repression in Chechnya by Russian armed forces; the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s war against Serbia, a traditional Russian ally, and eastward expansion; and differences over the American plan to deploy a national missile defense system roiled relations between Washington and Moscow. These differences appeared to have been pushed aside, at least temporarily, by the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, which dramatically resurrected cooperation between the two countries, but the differences reemerged on the question of how best to deal with charges that Iraq had failed to divest itself of weapons of mass destruction, as required by several United Nations resolutions.

During the more than half century between the onset of World War II and the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, the Gallup and other polling organizations provided an immense amount of survey data on questions relating to superpower relations. Aside from the Soviet Union’s obvious importance for American foreign relations, there is also evidence that attitudes toward the USSR have played a central role in organizing public attitudes toward a wide array of international issues (Herrmann 1986; Holsti 1988; Hurwitz and Peffley 1990; Murray 1996). The disintegration of the USSR has not wholly extinguished debates about how best to manage relations between Washington and Moscow. Thus, the combination of ample data and the salience of these issues provides a good opportunity to assess several competing theories of public opinion.10

Two of the theories have been described earlier. The Almond-Lippsmann thesis stipulates that public reactions to world affairs
are characterized by volatility and little if any relationship to international realities. An alternative interpretation describes mass public reactions as rational and events-driven. A third theory, developed largely to deal with the Cold War period, depicts the American public quite differently, although not necessarily in a more flattering light than the Almond-Lippmann thesis. Rather than focusing on volatility and mood cycles that have a random or negative correlation with the real world, this theory emphasizes certain continuities in public opinion, with special attention to a putative American propensity toward a Manichaean worldview. The public is depicted as imbued with a frontier mentality for which the appropriate metaphor is the cowboy movie, with its “white hats” and “black hats” and a concomitant absence of multidimensional characters, simplistic plots, violent shoot-outs as the characteristic mode of conflict resolution, and the inevitable triumph of the good guys over the villains. According to this thesis, Americans have regarded communism as the great evil and the Soviets as its black-hatted agents. To the extent that public opinion has been a factor in American foreign policy, it has buttressed and perhaps even cast into concrete the great constant in Washington’s post–World War II diplomacy: a reflexive anti-Soviet policy that was allegedly so often out of touch with reality that it served neither the national interest nor the prospects for peace, stability, and justice.

There are at least two broad variants of this third theory. According to one, public opinion is the victim in that it was manipulated into a hard-line anti-Soviet position by the ruling class and its faithful handmaidens in the media and other key institutions. Because public opinion has little autonomous life of its own, it is also of limited relevance in any effort to understand American foreign and defense policies. This viewpoint may be found in several revisionist histories of the Cold War (for example, Kolko and Kolko 1972). A second version locates irrational anti-Soviet sentiments in certain widely shared values, beliefs, and attitudes about the world that are central features of American culture. For example, in analyzing the cultural bases of American foreign policy, Robert Dallek has written of an “unthinking anticommunism” that serves several nonrational needs, providing, among other things, “a convenient excuse for not facing up to troubling domestic concerns” (1983, xvii, xviii). The ample data on the Soviet Union and the successor Russian regime provide an opportunity to assess, if not put to a definitive test, these quite distinc-
tive depictions of American public opinion. Responses to ques-
tions about the Soviet Union/Russia and appropriate American
policies for dealing with Moscow provide the evidence for this
purpose.

Soviet-American Cooperation

Almost from the moment that the United States entered World
War II, various polling organizations started asking the public to
appraise the prospects for relations between Washington and
Moscow after the fighting ended. While the wording of the ques-
tions varied, all of them focused on the probability that the So-
viets could be trusted to continue cooperation with the United
States into the postwar period as envisaged, for example, by
President Roosevelt’s plan for collaboration among the “Four
Policemen”—Britain, China, the USSR, and the United States—
to maintain peace.

During World War II, the American public was offered a good
deal of information that sustained hopes of good Soviet-American
relations. Most public pronouncements by policymakers were op-
timistic on this score. One example will illustrate the extent to
which the Roosevelt administration attempted to portray the
USSR in favorable terms. During the summer and fall of 1941,
survey evidence revealed a lack of public enthusiasm for aid to
Russia, which had recently been invaded by its erstwhile German
ally. Opposition was especially strong among American religious
groups. Roosevelt mounted a strong campaign to disarm the critics
by asserting that the Soviet constitution guaranteed freedom of
conscience and worship (Dallek 1979). Such books as Mission to
Moscow by former Ambassador Joseph Davies (1941) and One
World by Wendell Willkie (1943), the 1940 Republican presiden-
tial nominee, also depicted the Soviet Union in highly favorable
terms. Many wartime movies, including the film version of Mission to
Moscow, were similarly upbeat. To be sure, some skeptics
remained, but the information available to the public stressed the
Soviets’ important military role in defeating the Nazi regime and
the wartime cooperation among the Allies while deemphasizing
the nature of Stalin’s regime and the possibilities that there might
be strong divergences of interests or competing and perhaps in-
compatible preferences about the nature of the postwar interna-
tional order.

Of the many wartime surveys that touched on the prospects
for postwar collaboration between Washington and Moscow, not a single one yielded a plurality that answered the question in the negative (table 3.1). A peak in trust was reached in the wake of the 1945 Yalta Conference, which Roosevelt reported had re-

TABLE 3.1. "Can Russia Be Trusted to Cooperate with the United States?" 1942–49

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Number of Surveys</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Key Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Aug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Dec.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Soviet victory at battle of Stalingrad (Jan.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soviets dissolve Comintern (May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Dec.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Allied invasion of France (June)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soviets allow Germany to crush Warsaw uprising (Aug.–Oct.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Yalta Conference: U.S., USSR, U.K. (Feb.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Dec.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>UN Conference at San Francisco (April)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>German surrender (May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Dec.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>USSR declaration of war against Japan (Aug.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese surrender (Aug.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Dispute over laggard Soviet withdrawal from Iran (Jan.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Dec.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Stalin speech on &quot;inevitability of war&quot; (Feb.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Molotov attack on U.S. at UN (Nov.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Truman Doctrine: Aid to Greece and Turkey (Mar.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Dec.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Marshall Plan speech on aid to Europe (June)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communist coup in Czechoslovakia (Feb.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Berlin blockade initiated (June)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–Dec.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Soviet Union vetoes Berlin compromise proposal in UN (Oct.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Berlin blockade lifted (May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.–June</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>First Soviet atomic bomb test announced (Sept.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey data from National Opinion Research Center (NORC), Gallup Organization, and Office of Public Opinion Research. Reported percentages are averages of the "yes" and "no" responses for each six-month period.

Note: Several NORC questions in 1947–49 asked, "Can the Russians be trusted to meet us halfway?"
solved a number of outstanding issues among the United States, Britain, and USSR; at that time, the affirmative responses outnumbered the negative ones by a margin of almost two to one: 55 percent to 31 percent. Another Gallup poll revealed almost identical results immediately after the Soviet Union joined the war against Japan, as Stalin had promised at Yalta.

From these high points, a steady if irregular erosion of public trust in Soviet cooperation occurred, coinciding with a potential crisis revolving around the laggard withdrawal of Soviet wartime occupation troops from northern Iran in 1946 as well as the failure of various foreign ministers’ conferences to resolve such issues as peace treaties for Germany and Austria. Yet as late as December 1946, nineteen months after the German surrender, a Gallup survey revealed that a 43 percent plurality of the public remained optimistic on the question of Soviet cooperation with the United States. Within less than three years—a period that witnessed consolidation of the Soviets’ hegemonic position in Eastern Europe, the coup that brought a communist government to power in Czechoslovakia, and the Berlin blockade—those who responded that the Soviets could be trusted to be cooperative had shrunk to a small minority.

The “cooperation” question was rarely used after 1950, but two decades later, Harris surveys began regularly posing a somewhat similar question that asked Americans to assess the prospects for Soviet-American agreements “to help keep the peace.” The results appear quite consistent with actual international developments. In July 1968, those who felt that agreements were possible outnumbered the naysayers by 12 percent, but following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, the number of optimists fell from 49 to 34 percent. Public opinion also reflected the developing détente between the superpowers. Strong majorities, reaching a peak of 60 percent in 1973, answered that it was possible for the superpowers to reach such agreements. By the time Harris stopped asking the question in 1975, détente had been subjected to a number of strains, including a major confrontation between Washington and Moscow during the Yom Kippur War of October 1973; concomitantly, positive responses concerning the prospects for U.S.-USSR agreements dropped to 45 percent.

Although strictly comparable data are more limited for the Gorbachev period, there were many indications of increasing optimism about cooperation between the superpowers. A 1988 survey found that only 19 percent of the respondents felt that
improving relations between the two nations “will not lead to any lasting, fundamental changes.” In contrast, 57 percent stated that the changes will be fundamental and lasting, “though the two countries will never be allies,” and a surprisingly high 23 percent predicted that “one day” they would indeed be allies (Americans Talk Security 1988, 64). By the end of 1989, when asked to look ahead to the end of the millennium, two-thirds of the respondents agreed with the statement that “The Soviet Union and West will be living peacefully together” (De Stefano 1990). Finally, when the “cooperation” question was posed again in 1990, after the pathbreaking Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and other agreements between the superpowers as well as well-publicized summit conferences between Soviet and American leaders, those events were reflected in the overwhelmingly optimistic responses to a Gallup survey on the question.

Several post–Cold War Gallup surveys have asked whether Russia is an ally, friendly but not an ally, unfriendly but not an enemy, or an enemy. The results reveal a good deal of ambivalence about the most appropriate term for describing the U.S.-Russian relationship, but a survey just prior to the Russian presidential election won by Vladimir Putin in 2000 indicated some optimism on this score. Although few respondents were willing to depict Russia as an ally (12 percent) or enemy (11 percent), most of the others selected the friendly (49 percent) rather than unfriendly (22 percent) option (G. Gallup Jr. 2000, 175). Similar results have emerged from three NBC/Wall Street Journal surveys since the mid-1990s. Americans are somewhat more inclined to think of their erstwhile Cold War rival as an ally rather than as an adversary, although not by overwhelming margins. The responses were 56 to 35 percent in favor of the “ally” designation in 1995, 48 to 28 percent a year later, and little changed in a 2002 survey undertaken seven months after the terrorist attacks (52 to 26 percent).

Soviet/Russian Foreign Policy Objectives

Since World War II, polling organizations have frequently asked the public whether Soviet foreign policy goals are expansionist or defensive. The immediate postwar era, 1946–53, witnessed a steady erosion of the cooperation that had marked wartime relations between Moscow and Washington, the start of the Cold War, the Korean War, and the death of Joseph Stalin. After 1976, the U.S.-Soviet relationship was marked by the collapse of dé-
tente, an accelerated arms race, rapid turnover among Kremlin leaders, the beginnings of dramatically better relations between the superpowers, and, at the end of 1991, the disintegration of the USSR.

Survey data from the first period reveal a rather steady decline—from 29 to 12 percent between 1946 and 1949—in the proportion of Americans who believed that the Soviet Union was merely acting defensively by “building up protection against being attacked in another war.” The invasion of South Korea in 1950, widely assumed to have had at least tacit Soviet support, further reduced to a minority of less than one in ten those who believed that the Kremlin was acting out of defensive motives.\(^{11}\)

After a lapse of more than a quarter century, a similar question was again posed regularly but with a more diverse set of response options. As was the case during the earlier period, the results appear to have been at least moderately sensitive to the course of international events. Whereas in October 1979 only 18 percent of the respondents believed that the Soviet Union was willing to risk war in a quest for global domination, that figure more than doubled to 39 percent within four months, an interval highlighted by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Conversely, the later 1980s saw a steady decline in the proportion of the public that believed that the USSR would use any means, not excluding war, to achieve essentially unlimited international goals. By January 1988 an Americans Talk Security survey revealed that a majority (54 percent) of Americans attributed defensive motives to the Kremlin, whereas a Roper poll at the same time indicated that fewer than half of respondents (44 percent) believed that global domination was “Russia’s primary objective in world affairs.” By the end of the year, almost two-thirds of the registered voters polled by the Americans Talk Security project attributed defensive motives to Soviet foreign policy. The trend toward a more benign view of Soviet/Russian foreign policy motives continued into the early 1990s, with a steady increase in those who believed that self-defense was the driving motive behind Moscow’s external policy. By the end of the decade, the public was quite evenly divided about whether “Russia poses a significant military threat to the United States today.” Indeed, an April 1999 Gallup poll found that whereas 48 percent perceived a significant military threat, exactly the same number disagreed. The issue was not a partisan one, as Republican, Democratic, and independent responses were virtually identical (G. Gallup Jr. 1999, 183). Despite Russia’s
assistance during the months following the 9/11 attacks, concern for its internal stability does not rank high among perceived threats. More than four-fifths of Americans asserted, in responses to the 2002 CCFR survey, that the United States has “a vital interest” in Russia. However, only about a quarter of respondents also rated the possibility of political turmoil in that country as a “critical” threat to American interests.

General Assessments of the Soviet Union and Russia

When asked for general assessments of the Soviet Union, aggregate responses from the American public reveal considerable shifts in response to international developments rather than a consistently negative image (fig. 3.2). During the 1950s, at the height of the Cold War, the ratings were overwhelmingly negative, but they tended to moderate somewhat thereafter. Not surprisingly, a survey undertaken in December 1956, immediately after the Soviet invasion crushed the Hungarian rebellion, found that only 2 percent of Americans had a favorable view of the USSR. Within the next ten years, relations between the superpowers had witnessed both crises, such as those involving American U-2 spy flights over Soviet territory and the introduction of Soviet offensive missiles into Cuba, and cooperation on arms control, including such agreements as the Limited Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Concomitantly, American appraisals of the USSR, while still negative on balance, improved considerably. By the early 1970s, the peak of the Nixon-Kissinger period of détente that was characterized by agreements on arms (SALT I) and in other areas as well as pronouncements from the White House that the Cold War was over, well under half of the public expressed unfavorable judgments of the Soviet Union; only 30 percent did so in response to a March 1973 Gallup poll. Public assessments of the USSR similarly reflected the erosion of détente during the remainder of the decade.

After the invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 and the destruction in 1983 of Korean Airlines flight 007 as it strayed over Soviet territory, unfavorable ratings of the USSR increased sharply, reaching levels not seen since the 1950s. Another shift in sentiment began during the second Reagan administration, after Mikhail Gorbachev assumed leadership in Moscow. By 1987 two surveys reported that fewer than half of the respondents had an unfavorable opinion of the USSR. For the next four years, public assessments continued to improve, although with some irregularity.
President Gorbachev's crackdown on Lithuania and Latvia in 1991 resulted in some decline. More dramatically, a Gallup survey taken the day after hard-line communist coup plotters had deposed Gorbachev in August 1991 found that favorable appraisals had dropped by 30 percent from levels found in a poll taken a few days earlier, but support rebounded after the coup's failure.

Despite the turbulent course of Russian politics and governance during the post-Soviet period, evaluations of that country remained favorable by a margin of three to two in early 1994. Gallup surveys in 1996 and 1997 revealed majorities with a positive assessment of Russia, but the next three years witnessed growing disenchantment in public appraisals of that country. Two surveys in 2000 found that only 40 percent of respondents had a favorable view of Russia, whereas small majorities held the opposite view. A year earlier, Republicans, Democrats, and independents had identical favorable ratings of Russia (46 percent), but minor partisan differences emerged by 2000, with Republicans very slightly more inclined toward a negative view.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon elicited prompt Russian expressions of sympathy and offers of assistance in support of the military campaign against al Qaeda and Afghanistan's Taliban regime. The public responded to these developments with significantly more favorable assessments of Russia. Whereas only a bare majority (52 percent) rated Russia favorably in early 2001 (nine months prior to the attacks on New York and Washington), that figure rose to 66 percent a year later. The solid majority (63 percent to 26 percent) of those holding a favorable view of Russia in February 2003 fell sharply within a month—a period of well-publicized differences between Washington and Moscow on how best to deal with charges that Iraq was developing and maintaining weapons of mass destruction, in violation of the terms that ended the first Gulf War in 1991.

Assessments of Soviet and Russian Leaders

Until the 1980s, polling organizations rarely asked the American public to evaluate individual Soviet leaders. Even Stalin's death in 1953 did not elicit probes about its implications for Soviet-American relations or for assessments of his successors. This apparent lack of interest on the part of polling organizations in specific Soviet leaders changed dramatically with Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to leadership in 1985. Indeed, the frequency with which pollsters asked the public to assess Gorbachev—the question was
posed at least thirty-four times between 1985 and 1991—may have been a good indicator of his manifest public relations skills. Although the results reveal a considerable range of responses, in part from inconsistency in the wording or context of questions, one rather remarkable constant runs through the results for the entire six-year period: not a single survey found that as much as 40 percent of the public expressed a negative opinion of the Soviet leader. During his last three years in office, Gorbachev had an average favorable rating of more than 70 percent. By 1988, those with a favorable view of Gorbachev typically outnumbered his detractors by margins of two, three, or even four to one. A 1988 Harris survey found that the Soviet leader had a 76 percent positive rating, twenty points higher than that accorded to President Reagan during his final months in office. Just prior to Gorbachev’s retirement when the Soviet Union disintegrated at the end of 1991, 80 percent of the public appraised the Soviet leader in favorable terms. These results confirmed that the Soviet leader enjoyed a higher degree of popularity in most Western nations, including the United States, than in his own country.

His manifest domestic political difficulties notwithstanding, the American public continued to express support for Russian President Boris Yeltsin. A remarkably small proportion of the public had not heard of him—in three Gallup surveys, those who failed to do so numbered fewer than 5 percent—and American support for Yeltsin had widespread public approval, reaching 62 percent in 1993 (G. Gallup Jr. 1993, 54; 1994, 15). Perhaps these figures also reflected a feeling that, whatever his shortcomings, Yeltsin was preferable to those who might replace him as Russian leader. As Yeltsin’s domestic problems multiplied and his health seemed to decline, his support in this country also eroded. By April 1999, those favoring support for the beleaguered Russian leader outnumbered those opposing support by the slim margin of 48 percent to 42 percent.

Yeltsin’s successor, Vladimir Putin, was largely unknown to most Americans. Following his election in 2000, fewer than one in five respondents could identify Putin as president of Russia, but that was still almost ten times the number who could identify the longtime prime minister of Canada, Jean Chretien (G. Gallup Jr. 2000, 175).

Arms Control

In addition to survey data regarding public attitudes about the Soviet Union, there is ample information about several aspects of
U.S. policy toward the USSR. Support for arms control, both for general proposals and specific agreements, has been one of the constants in American public opinion since the 1950s. The SALT II agreement is the only exception to this generalization. A massive public relations campaign against the treaty, led by the conservative Committee on the Present Danger, sustained by the manufactured “Cuban brigade crisis,” and brought to a climax by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, combined to erode early public support for the treaty. Even in the face of these events, a Gallup survey conducted early in 1980, immediately after the invasion of Afghanistan, found that supporters of the agreement outnumbered its critics by a slim margin of 30 to 27 percent, but several Roper polls found declining support for the treaty during the remainder of that election year.

Except for SALT II, the public has strongly endorsed proposals for several kinds of agreements on nuclear weapons: to stop testing them, to place limits on their numbers, and to freeze nuclear arsenals. Even before President Reagan’s proposal at the 1986 Reykjavik summit meeting with Gorbachev that all offensive strategic weapons be destroyed within a decade, a plan along these lines gained support from a plurality of respondents in a 1981 Gallup poll. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty received overwhelming support, as did various START agreements to reduce offensive nuclear weapons. No doubt the latter measures gained some support because they were endorsed by a popular president—Ronald Reagan—whose harsh anti-arms-control rhetoric during the 1980 election campaign endowed him with the public image of a leader who would not rush into unfavorable agreements or otherwise be hoodwinked in superpower negotiations. But support of a popular president does not appear to explain fully the consistent public support for arms control; indeed, it does not even appear to be a necessary condition. Repeated polls and state-level referenda, only one of which failed, revealed widespread support for a nuclear freeze during the early 1980s even though President Reagan repeatedly denounced the proposals.

Confrontation or Accommodation?

During a five-year period (1948–53) encompassing the Truman administration and the first year of the Eisenhower administration, the National Opinion Research Center asked the public,
"Do you think the United States should be more willing to compromise with Russia, or is our present policy about right, or should we be even firmer than we are today?" According to their responses, the proportion of Americans who felt that Washington should adopt a more accommodating stance toward the Soviet Union never exceeded one in ten. In contrast, a policy of greater firmness consistently garnered support from majorities ranging between 53 and 66 percent of the respondents. The inauguration of the Eisenhower administration in 1953, the death of Stalin six weeks later, and the Korean armistice that summer did not significantly affect responses to this question.

After a hiatus of more than a decade, a somewhat comparable question was included in a 1964 Free-Cantril survey. Although this poll took place in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis—a period that included the Limited Test Ban Treaty, the "Hot Line" agreement, and generally less confrontational relations between Moscow and Washington than had been the case during the turbulent years between the 1958 Berlin "deadline crisis" and the Caribbean confrontation in 1962—a substantial 61 percent of the respondents agreed that the United States should "take a firmer stand" in its dealings with the Kremlin. However, there were definite limits on what a "firmer stand" should entail; for example, the same survey found that only 20 percent favored "rolling back the Iron Curtain."

Sixteen years later, in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, two-thirds of those taking part in a CBS/New York Times poll also felt that the United States should "get tougher." During the Reagan years, however, every survey, save one taken immediately after the Soviet destruction of Korean Airlines Flight 007, revealed that Americans preferred trying "harder to reduce tensions with the Russians" to a more confrontational policy. By 1987 the tension-reduction option had become the preferred choice by a margin of well over two to one. Even though some support continued for a policy of "getting tougher," within a year the ratio in favor of reducing tensions increased to almost three to one. A year later, respondents who felt that President George H. W. Bush should do more to help the Soviet Union "deal with social and political changes taking place there" outnumbered by more than four to one those who stated that he was already doing too much (Americans Talk Security 1988, 141).
Just before gaining the Republican presidential nomination in 1980, Ronald Reagan asserted in a long interview with the *Wall Street Journal* that the Soviets were the sole source of all international problems (House 1980, 1). Although he was elected in a landslide later that fall, some survey evidence from the Reagan era suggests that most Americans rejected such a Manichaean diagnosis of world problems. When asked three times during the 1980s to respond to the proposition that “the U.S. has to accept some of the blame for the tension that has plagued U.S.-Soviet relations in recent years,” three-fourths or more of the public agreed each time. That three surveys undertaken by different organizations—*Time* magazine, the Public Affairs Foundation, and Americans Talk Security—over more than five years yielded almost identical results lends greater credence to the data. Respondents to a 1988 survey also agreed by a margin of two to one that “the U.S. often blames the Soviet Union for troubles in other countries that are really caused by poverty, hunger, political corruption and repression” (*Americans Talk Security* 1988, 57). These figures would also seem to cast some doubt on the thesis that a moralistic and hypocritical American public is incapable of transcending a simplistic black/white assessment of world affairs.

Questions about presidential performance have long been a staple item in opinion surveys, but, before the Reagan era, only the Harris poll regularly asked the public to assess the president’s handling of relations with the USSR. Evidence from the Nixon years reveals that respondents were generally divided on the question until the blossoming of détente. In mid-1972, the public gave Nixon a positive rating by a margin of 68 to 25 percent, and six months later the margin of approval had swelled to an even more favorable 70 to 22 percent. The Yom Kippur War, which raised such questions as “What did the Soviets know about the impending Egyptian attack on Israel, and when did they know it?” saw a sharp decline in the approval ratings to 55 percent, but they remained favorable, on balance, until 1975. The first survey of the Carter years, during his honeymoon period and at a time of highly visible White House support for human rights in the USSR, revealed that a plurality approved of his Soviet policies, but his rating fell steadily, if irregularly, from that point on. A low point was reached late in 1979, when only 22 percent supported his handling of relations
with the Kremlin, and that figure had scarcely improved on the eve of the presidential election thirteen months later.

Although many Americans apparently disagreed with Reagan’s 1980 diagnosis that the Russians were behind all international problems, they nevertheless gave the president relatively good marks for his policies toward the USSR. The data also offer a valuable lesson in caution about using survey data. In this case the lesson centers on systematic differences between results produced by various polling organizations. In some cases, differences between surveys are quite dramatic. For example, whereas in 1984 (a presidential election year) nine Harris polls found an average net rating for Reagan’s Soviet policies of −18 percent, the comparable figure from five Gallup surveys was 6 percent. Three other polls by ABC, the Washington Post, and CBS/New York Times yielded results almost identical to those from the Gallup organization. These differences notwithstanding, it appears clear that Reagan generally received public approbation for his policies toward the USSR. Indeed, aside from the consistently negative ratings that emerged from Harris surveys, only four others out of more than one hundred found a plurality or majority that disapproved of Reagan’s Soviet policies.

The data also indicate that after the honeymoon period in 1981, Reagan’s strongest approval ratings on Soviet policy tended to come during his second term, years that were marked by regular meetings with Mikhail Gorbachev, progress on arms control, and a general easing of tensions between the superpowers. Because this was also a period when Reagan’s overall performance rating scores tended to suffer—for example, he experienced the sharpest drop on record when it was revealed that his administration had been selling arms to the fundamentalist Islamic regime in Iran and using the receipts to fund the Nicaraguan contras despite (or perhaps because) the Bolin Amendments prohibited doing so—the evidence is especially revealing. By mid-1988, a Harris survey found that the president’s high approval ratings on Soviet policy (67 percent) and his performance at the Moscow summit meeting far outstripped his overall popularity (54 percent). This suggests at least two interpretations linking public opinion to foreign policy that are not mutually exclusive.

Reagan was driven to seek a rapprochement with the Soviets in part to bolster his popularity ratings and perhaps his standing in history.
Whether or not bearbaiting was good domestic politics in 1980, by 1985, when Gorbachev assumed Soviet leadership, the domestic climate of opinion had shifted sufficiently to make dancing with the bear a more attractive option.¹²

Strong public approval for policies of seeking accommodation with the USSR extended into and swelled during the first Bush administration; for example, Bush's performance rating increased sharply after he announced that he would meet with Gorbachev at Malta. Bill Clinton's overall performance ratings were generally rather lukewarm, but his dealings with Russia have received greater public approval; in October 1993, those supporting his policies outnumbered the critics by a margin of 54 to 25 percent, with the remainder expressing no opinion (G. Gallup Jr. 1993, 175). Questions about presidential performance in dealing with Russian-American relations have rarely been posed since then, apparently another indicator of Russia's declining importance in the conduct of U.S. foreign affairs.

China

Compared to surveys on the Soviet Union/Russia, questions about China have been asked much less frequently. The reason can probably be found in the acrimonious relationship between Washington and Beijing for much of the Cold War. Asking the public about China or Sino-American relations probably seemed like an exercise in documenting the obvious. Although some Americans, including Republican foreign policy expert John Foster Dulles, called for establishing diplomatic relations after the communist regime took power in 1949, China's military intervention in the Korean War in November 1950 and the resulting two and half years of war ended any serious discussion of that option for two decades. President Nixon's trip to China in 1972, culminating in the Shanghai Communiqué, in which the United States accepted the Beijing regime as the legitimate Chinese government, initiated a process that culminated in full diplomatic relations between the two countries by the end of the decade.

Gallup polls asked for public assessments of China only three times prior to the 1980s—in 1967, 1976, and 1979—but since that time, questions about China have been posed more regularly. The results, summarized in figure 3.3, reveal some striking fluctuations
Fig. 3.3. General evaluations of China, 1967–2003. (Data from Gallup Organization; “very” and “mostly” favorable scores combined; “very” and “mostly” unfavorable scores combined)
in public sentiment. Starting from a very low base—in 1967, only one in twenty respondents expressed a favorable assessment of China—there has been a very uneven long-term trend toward a somewhat more positive evaluation. As with evaluations of the Soviet Union, important events have played a major role in how the public has reacted (see table 3.1 and figure 3.2). The opening of diplomatic relations, increased trade between the two countries, and evidence of some post-Mao reforms in China were reflected in public assessments. In May 1987, almost two-thirds of the respondents judged China in “very” or “somewhat” favorable terms. Less than two years later, the comparable figure was 72 percent, although only one-sixth of those selected the “very favorable” option. The violent government crackdown in June 1989 against the Tiananmen Square protesters, some scenes of which were covered by U.S. television, resulted in a precipitous decline in public appraisals of China—the 72 percent favorable ratings of February 1989 fell by more than half to only 34 percent, while a majority (54 percent) reported holding an unfavorable view. Since that time, only one Gallup survey, taken in November 1993, found that those with a favorable appraisal of China outnumbered those with a negative assessment. The most recent surveys have revealed, however, that the margin between those expressing favorable and unfavorable opinions of the Beijing regime is narrowing. By February 2003, the latter held a barely distinguishable edge of 46 percent to 45 percent.

Public assessments of China, in short, have been marked first by a sharp increase in positive views through the 1980s, followed by considerable ambivalence during and since the 1990s. Even among those with a favorable appraisal of that country, a great majority prefer the “mostly favorable” to the “very favorable” response option; in the Gallup surveys reported in figure 3.3, only three times did the former option even reach double digits, and it did so only once after the Tiananmen Square episode. In the absence of a core of strongly held positive views of China and its post-Mao reforms, even less dramatic actions than the Tiananmen Square crackdown against those calling for greater democracy, toleration, and adherence to the rule of law have cast doubts among many Americans about the Beijing regime.

Of the other questions that polling organizations have asked about China, the most interesting are those focusing on questions of human rights and trade. Specifically, should the expansion of trade between the two countries be made contingent on China
meeting certain standards of human rights? This question of "linkage" was at the core of debates on the appropriate trade status for China during the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations. Although Bill Clinton argued for linkage while criticizing incumbent George H. W. Bush's China policy during the 1992 presidential campaign, Clinton ultimately joined those advocating permanent normalization of China's trade status and eliminating the annual review of human rights in that country. Proponents of that position, including Henry Kissinger and other notable realists, were vocal supporters of the thesis that relations with China were too important to be held hostage to American preferences about Beijing's domestic institutions and practices; in any case, these observers argued, there was in reality no trade-off to be faced because expanding trade relations is the best vehicle for promoting political reform.

Trade is one of the few issues on which cleavages cut across rather than along party lines, a point that will be developed more fully in chapter 5. Nowhere has this been clearer than on trade with China. Within the Republican Party, its strong business constituents ("Wall Street Republicans") have staunchly supported expanding commercial relations, citing opportunities for selling goods and services to an ambitious modernizing country with a market of 1.2 billion people. In contrast, the "Main Street Republicans," including its strong religious right constituency, have questioned the wisdom and morality of trading with a country that cannot be trusted to honor the human rights of its own citizens; in this view, trade is a snare and delusion because it will in fact strengthen an adversary rather than opening it up to liberalizing influences. The Democratic Party is no more united on the issue. Many Democrats accept the thesis that greater contacts with the West, including trade, will work in the long run to erode authoritarian controls over China's economy and political life. In contrast, the strong labor, human rights, and environmental Democratic constituencies point to low wages, alleged use of slave labor in some industries, intolerance of political dissidence, and poor environmental practices as powerful reasons to link trade to domestic reform in China.

The Gallup and NBC/Wall Street Journal surveys posed two questions about the trade/human rights linkage several times during the 1990s. The results, presented in table 3.2, indicate that the public is somewhat more inclined to accept the prolinkage view, though not by overwhelming majorities. Moreover, the margin in favor of taking China's human rights record into account
eroded considerably during the decade. The figures in table 3.2 also indicate that the wording of the question is important. Version A (NBC/Wall Street Journal), which mentions human rights in China but not U.S. economic interests, yielded majorities in favor of taking the state of human rights into consideration. The Gallup wording of the question (Version B) specifically mentions the possibility that a policy of linkage could “hurt U.S. economic interests.” The result was a much more even division of opinion with only the barest of pluralities supporting linkage in the 1998 and 1999 surveys. Thus, although recent presidents of both parties have been strong proponents of lifting restrictions on expanding trade with China, divisions within the public more closely reflect those in Congress and among important interest groups.

Goals for American Foreign Policy

Although much of the data cited to this point suggests significant changes in public opinion relating to the USSR and Russia, especially during and after the Gorbachev era, some significant

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Which of the following comes closer to your point of view?</td>
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<tr>
<td>We should maintain good relations with China despite disagreements we might have with its human rights policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We should demand that China improve its human rights policies if China wants to continue to enjoy its current trade status with the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither/not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Which of the following comes closer to your view?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States should link human rights issues in China with U.S.–China trade policy, even if doing so hurts U.S. economic interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States should not link human rights issues in China with U.S.–China trade policy because doing so might hurt U.S. economic interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Item A: NBC/Wall Street Journal surveys; Item B: Gallup Organization.
continuities also exist. Since 1974 the eight CCFR surveys have included a cluster of items asking respondents to rate the importance of various foreign policy goals. A few of the same items appeared in a 2001 Gallup survey. In the wake of the attacks on the destroyer Cole, the U.S. embassy in Kenya, and New York and Washington, it is scarcely surprising that “combating international terrorism” ranked at or near the most important foreign policy goals for the public in the two most recent CCFR studies. Other results of the 2002 CCFR survey, conducted ten months after the terrorist attacks, will be presented and discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

The data summarized in table 3.3a reveal that during the 1990s the general public gave very high priority to defending the country’s economic interests. This does not, however, constitute a post–Cold War change of priorities. Protecting the jobs of American workers has ranked as the top goal in all but three of the surveys, and it just barely missed doing so in 1974 as well; in 1998 it ranked second to stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the United States, as it had done four years earlier. The question was omitted from the Gallup survey, but even in the absence of hard evidence there is every reason to believe that job protection increased rather than declined in importance, especially in light of the recession that began in 2001. Energy security also has consistently been accorded a “very important” rating by more than 60 percent of the public. Two surveys during the 1990s also saw an increase in the number of respondents who rated “protecting the interests of American business abroad” as a top priority.

In contrast to the urgency accorded to protecting economic interests—and despite occasional charges that the American public has been obsessed with Cold War concerns—such goals as “containing communism” and “matching Soviet military power” have ranked at the top of the foreign policy agenda in none of the surveys, not even in those conducted prior to disintegration of the USSR. Indeed, the public has consistently been at least as concerned about arms control and preventing nuclear proliferation. A more general military/security goal, “maintaining superior military power world wide,” ranked tenth among the sixteen goals rated by those taking part in the 1994 CCFR survey. Despite persistent Republican charges that the Clinton administration had permitted a dangerous erosion of military capabilities, this goal moved up only three places four years later. Even after the September 11 terrorist attacks, it ranked only seventh in the 2002 CCFR survey.
# TABLE 3.3a. The Importance of American Foreign Policy Goals: Assessments by the General Public in the CCFR Surveys, 1974–2002 (percentage of “very important” ratings)

“For each [foreign policy goal], please say whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all.”

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>World-order security issues</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combating international terrorism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthening the United Nations</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protecting weaker nations against aggression</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldwide arms control</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthening international law and institutions</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>World-order economic and environmental issues</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Combating world hunger</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the global environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping to improve the standard of living in less developed countries</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safeguarding against global financial instability</td>
<td></td>
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<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. economic interest issues</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the jobs of American workers</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing adequate supplies of energy</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling and reducing illegal immigration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the U.S. trade deficit with foreign countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the interests of American business abroad</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. values and institutions issues</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting and defending human rights in other countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting market economics abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
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Another Cold War concern, “defending our allies’ security,” appeared among the top three goals only after the Cold War had ended. This concern’s high ranking in 1990 reflected events surrounding the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and perhaps the fact that the United States and Soviet Union were on the same side rather than adversaries in that conflict, thereby eliminating the risk of a major confrontation between them. In 1994 and 1998, the goal of protecting allies received its lowest ratings since 1978, but the 2002 survey revealed a heightened sense of urgency for the security of allies as well over half of the respondents gave it a “very important” rating. A more general security concern, “protecting weaker nations against aggression,” received a high rating only in 1990, when Iraqi forces still occupied Kuwait. The prospect of an open-ended commitment to protect unspecified countries clearly gained less support than did fulfilling obligations to allies.

It is harder to measure long-term trends on some issues because there are no Cold War baselines against which to compare responses to the most recent CCFR surveys. Stopping the flow of illegal drugs ranked among the top three foreign policy goals in the 1990s and it remained a high priority in 2002. Concern about illegal immigration declined from its position as the fourth-highest goal in 1994. Nevertheless, 55 percent of the public still rated stopping illegal immigration as “very important” four years later, and the recession and terrorist attacks perpetrated primarily by Saudis heightened concern for that goal.

Finally, the public has rarely expressed much enthusiasm for promoting American values and institutions abroad. Although the first Bush administration and the Clinton administration placed the expansion of democracy high on their foreign policy agendas, at least rhetorically, the public seems unpersuaded. With a single exception, efforts to promote human rights or democratic forms
of government abroad have ranked among the least important foreign policy goals. "Promoting and defending human rights in other countries" as a foreign policy goal never received a "very important" rating from even half of either group, not even in 1990, when there were reports of widespread human rights violations by Iraqi invasion forces in Kuwait. Even though many communist and other authoritarian regimes collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, few respondents expressed much interest in "helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations." Indeed, that goal consistently ranked among the lowest throughout the almost three decades covered by the eight surveys. The difficulties of achieving success, especially in countries lacking any tradition of democratic institutions, probably contributed to these ratings. There is also compelling evidence that a "pretty prudent public" may support interventions abroad to cope with aggression but is much less enthusiastic about efforts to reform governments. (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Nincic 1997). Perhaps abuse of the term democracy by American officials when referring to friendly tyrants—for example, when President Reagan compared the Nicaraguan contras to the American founding fathers or when other presidents toasted the Shah of Iran or Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines in glowing terms as "friends of democracy"—has also made the public somewhat cynical about America's ability to export democracy.

The Gallup Organization also used a small cluster of items on foreign policy goals in surveys conducted in 2001 and 2003. Because the wording of several items varied somewhat from those in the eight Chicago Council surveys—for example, "building democracies in other countries" [Gallup] versus "helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations" [CCFR]—the responses are presented separately in table 3.3b, from which two general conclusions emerge. Despite wording differences, the results of the Gallup and CCFR studies are quite similar and they reveal more continuity than change. Moreover, although the Gallup results yielded some variations in the importance attached to the goals, the rank orderings of the eight goals that appeared in both surveys are identical.

Conclusion

It would clearly be overstating the results summarized here to conclude that the public was generally correct in its opinions
Challenges to the Postwar Consensus

about the Soviet Union and Russia, if only because with respect to such critical questions as Stalin’s intentions—or, indeed, those of his successors—it is often impossible to identify the “correct” answer. That observation is no less valid for China. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions that would appear to shed light on the three theories identified earlier.

Despite considerable volatility in responses to those questions, the first major conclusion is that aggregate opinions tend to reflect events and trends in the real world. When shifts take place, they appear to be neither random nor systematically out of touch with international realities, as suggested by Almond (1950) and Lippmann (1955) at the height of the Cold War. Second, the findings do not appear to offer a great deal of support for the thesis that the public has been wedded to a reflexive and unyielding hostility toward the USSR or China. Nor did such Cold War goals as containment or matching Soviet military power dominate assessment of U.S. foreign policy goals. To the contrary, substantial numbers of Americans appear to have yearned for good relations between the superpowers and, when given reasonable pretexts for doing so, Americans expressed opinions to that effect. This is not evident only in data from the World War II period, when the common war effort against Nazi Germany provided a clear mutuality of interests; it is also apparent in evidence from the détente of the

TABLE 3.3b. The Importance of American Foreign Policy Goals: Assessments by the General Public in Gallup Surveys, 2001 and 2003 (percentage of “very important” ratings)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preventing future acts of international terrorism</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons/weapons of mass destruction</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing adequate supplies of energy</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending our allies’ security</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining superior military power worldwide</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting and defending human rights in other countries</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting weaker nations against foreign aggression</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping to improve the standard of living of less-developed nations</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building democracy in other countries</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gallup Poll Social Series: World Affairs (2003), 9, 10.
early 1970s as well as the "détente II" that began in the mid-1980s. Evaluations of China also seem to reflect developments in that country and in relations between Beijing and Washington. Most dramatically, the violent crackdown against prodemocracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square arrested and reversed a long period of increasingly favorable assessments of China. In short, the survey data summarized here would seem to offer greater support for theories that depict the public as rational and events-driven than for the competing theses.

Finally, the evidence that the public reacted to what the Soviets did rather than who they were during the Cold War suggests how the masses are likely to assess Russia as the post–Cold War era is well into its second decade. Evidence of genuine success in movements toward democratization and economic liberalization, agreements on control of nuclear weapons and arms sales, and cooperation in antiterrorism policies should reverse a trend that saw the consistently favorable assessments of the early 1990s decline fairly steadily through 2000. By 2003, positive appraisals of Russia were near an all-time high just before the final acts of the Iraq issue were played out. At that point, open differences between the George W. Bush and Putin administrations were reflected in public appraisals of Russia. Although relatively few Americans have much knowledge of politics, personalities, and parties within the republics of the former USSR, wariness borne in part of an appreciation of the difficulties of creating democratic institutions in these countries is likely to persist. Moreover, support for any major U.S. aid program is likely to remain lukewarm, but that is part of a general skepticism about foreign aid—the public would also reduce assistance to such allies as Israel and Egypt—rather than an expression of displeasure targeted specifically against Moscow (Rielly 1999, 21).

Conversely, any campaign by Moscow to reconstitute the Russian empire by force, especially should such efforts be directed against the newly independent countries on Russia’s western frontier—most notably Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine—would almost surely accelerate negative appraisals of Russia and revive fears of its foreign policy goals. Similarly, a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would almost certainly create a major crisis in Sino-American relations. Although public support for using the American military to protect Taiwan is quite limited (see table 4.4), an invasion of that island would no doubt resolve the current public ambivalence about China and
could well result in unfavorable assessments similar to those of the 1970s or earlier. Repeated Russian uses of force against internal groups, most notably in a brutal civil war in Chechnya during 1995–96 and again since 1999, has elicited considerable criticism from many American opinion leaders, most of whom rejected the thesis put forward by former President Yeltsin and President Putin that the rebels are merely terrorists (Sestanovich 2001). The attacks on the World Trade Center and Washington in 2001 clearly put concerns with the plight of Chechins on the back burner of American attention. The events of September 11 also muted Washington officials’ criticism of human rights violations in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Priority has been given to the fact that Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan pledged to cooperate in the American war effort against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and even provided some basing rights for U.S. forces. Similarly, Washington has agreed with Beijing’s assertion that dissidents in western China are in fact terrorists. As long as Russia and China are perceived as cooperating in the war on terrorists, that belief is likely to dominate American assessments of those countries.

It should, of course, be borne in mind that Russian foreign policies do not exist in a vacuum; like those of all countries, they are at least in part reactions to those of others. To the extent that American actions are wholly indifferent to Russian vital interests—in keeping with the realist dictum that the strong (the United States) do what they have the power to do, and the weak (Russia) accept what they have to accept—leaders in Moscow and the Russian public are not forever likely to see much benefit in close cooperation with the United States. Some of the same voices that have warned of China as a probable future threat to U.S. interests have also been most dismissive of any Russian assertions of its vital interests. Many of the strongest Bush administration cheerleaders in the media, including Charles Krauthammer, William Safire, and the Wall Street Journal, have consistently urged the United States to regard Russian expressions of its interests as nothing more than the whining of Cold War losers. This and related issues will be revisited in chapter 6.