

## *Rallying Around The President*

"A Reconsideration of the Rally Phenomenon in Public Opinion" by Richard A. Brody and Catherine R. Shapiro, in *Political Behavior Annual* (Volume 2), Westview Press, 5500 Central Ave., Boulder, Colo. 80301.

Scholars and politicians have long cited the "rally around the flag" effect: thanks to patriotic sentiment, public approval of the president always goes up in times of international crisis.

Not so, say Brody and Shapiro, of Stanford University. Such grassroots support is "far from automatic." In some cases, the president suffers a loss of public approval. Surveying media coverage and polling data since 1947, the authors note that Harry Truman dropped six points after the Soviets announced that they had an atomic bomb (1949), and three points after the Chinese Communists entered the Korean War (1950). Lyndon Johnson lost five points after U.S. destroyers engaged North Vietnamese PT-boats in the Gulf of Tonkin (1964). Richard Nixon lost six points after the controversial "Christmas bombing" of Hanoi (1972).

What shapes public reaction to the president is less patriotism in crisis than the response of "opinion leadership," as reported in the press. If the president's political foes, notably in Congress, do not criticize his performance (flawed or not), the public "rallies." If the opposition is vocal but divided, the public may not rally, but will await the outcome of events.

Two recent cases:

- Ronald Reagan's 1983 Grenada inva-

sion. U.S. troops landed on the Caribbean island on October 25; the president's overall approval rating remained at 48 percent as leading congressional Democrats voiced dismay. No "rally." On October 27, Reagan addressed the nation. Polls showed no gain in his overall rating but registered the usual initial public support for U.S. action abroad. After Reagan's speech, and the U.S. military success, the Democrats muted their criticism. The Gallup Poll in early November showed a five-point gain in public approval of Reagan.

- Jimmy Carter's 1979-80 "Iran hostage crisis." When Iranians seized the U.S. Embassy and its staff in November 1979, Carter was already facing political trouble. Senator Edward Kennedy (D.-Mass.) was ready to seek the 1980 presidential nomination, as were Ronald Reagan, George Bush, John Connally, and other Republicans. But few initially exploited the Iran crisis. (Kennedy in December 1979 spoke out against the Shah, without naming Carter; he was widely chastised for hurting Carter's efforts to free the hostages.) There was a "rally": Carter's overall approval rating in the polls went from around 33 percent to over 50 percent during the 90 days after the crisis began. Then, as the hostages' ordeal continued, he began to suffer a steady decline in the polls.

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## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

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### *Pacific Vistas*

"America in the Pacific Century" by Jerry W. Sanders, in *World Policy Journal* (Winter 1988-89), 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Looking west during the 1988 campaign, George Bush said that he hoped to "transform this amazing relationship [with Japan] into a new form of partnership, with the U.S. continuing to play the predominant military role and with the Japanese

becoming a major donor of aid to the Third World."

What is surprising, writes Sanders, a Berkeley political scientist, is that Bush actually seems to envision "more of the same" in Washington's links with Japan