

## RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

### "Casualties, Public Opinion, and U.S. Military Intervention: Implications for U.S. Regional Deterrence Strategies."

RAND Corp., 1700 Main St., P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, Calif. 90407-2138. 27 pp. \$7.50  
Author: Benjamin C. Schwarz

The American public's apparent reluctance to take in stride the casualties that result from military action is often regarded as the nation's Achilles' heel. Yet the common perception that Americans will choose to cut and run once the body bags start coming home is very much in error, contends Schwarz, a RAND researcher.

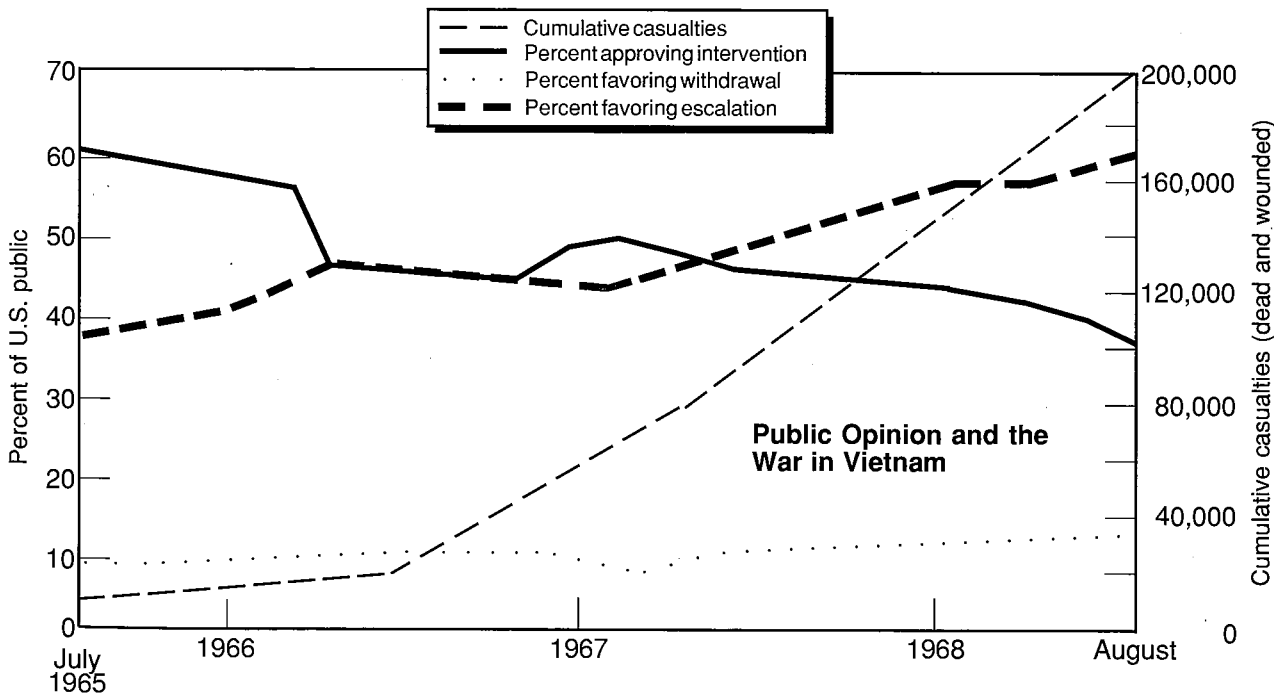
During the Vietnam and Korean wars, as the toll of dead and wounded mounted, polls reflected the public's increasing unhappiness. Public approval of the initial decision to intervene in Vietnam fell from

62 percent in July 1965, when U.S. ground troops were committed, to only 32 percent in August 1968, when casualties had risen to 200,000.

That retrospective assessment was politically important for President Lyndon B. Johnson. His popularity suffered, as the surprisingly strong showing by dovish senator Eugene J. McCarthy in the March 1968 New Hampshire primary showed. But Schwarz points out that asking the public about the initial decision to intervene was not at all the same as asking it about the best future course.

In August 1968, only nine percent of Americans favored withdrawal from Vietnam—a percentage virtually unchanged since July 1965. And, although little noted at the time, those New Hampshire voters who cast ballots for McCarthy favored, by a three-to-two margin, fighting harder in Vietnam, not withdrawing from it. Indeed, as disapproval of the original commitment grew, so did the public's desire to escalate the conflict to achieve victory.

During the Korean War, the polls told a similar story: increasing disapproval of the ini-



Source: Benjamin C. Schwarz, *Casualties, Public Opinion, and U.S. Military Intervention* (Harris, Roper, NORC, and *New York Times* polls)

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tial decision to intervene—but steady opposition by the overwhelming majority to withdrawal. “In both wars,” Schwarz writes, “far more Americans preferred to fight (harder) than to quit.”

The mistaken perception that mounting casualties will prompt America to cut and run can undermine the deterrent effect of U.S. military threats and lead to miscalculations by potential enemies, Schwarz ob-

serves. During the months preceding the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Saddam Hussein repeatedly asserted that America did not “have the stomach” for a prolonged and costly conflict. The public *was* much more divided over the wisdom of intervention than it had been before the Korean or Vietnam wars, Schwarz says. Yet once the national commitment was made, he notes, most Americans “quickly rallied around the

flag.” Just before the air offensive against Iraq in January 1991, 79 percent were in favor of going to war. And the public subsequently showed little sign of wanting to withdraw from the conflict. “In fact,” Schwarz says, “believing firmly that war with Iraq would be a horrible experience for America, most Americans nevertheless wanted to continue making war against Iraq *even after* Saddam’s forces were ejected from Kuwait.”

### “Human Capital and Economic Development.”

W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 300 S. Westnedge Ave., Kalamazoo, Mich. 49007-4686. 163 pp. \$23 (cloth); \$13 (paper)

Editors: *Sisay Asefa and Wei-Chiao Huang*

**W**ill the U.S. economy be hurt by the country’s slow population growth? In his 1987 book, *The Birth Dearth*, Ben Wattenberg of the American Enterprise Institute argued that it will: markets and productivity will grow more slowly, while an increased elderly population will consume a growing share of national wealth.

Economist Richard A. Easterlin of the University of Southern California, one of six contributors to this collection, says the historical experience of the United States and other advanced countries does not bear out Wattenberg’s thesis: “While population growth has trended downward in most of these countries over the last century, real per capita income growth has trended upward.” Moreover, Easterlin says, doomsayers forget

that the burden imposed on the working population by rising old-age dependency is likely to be offset by the declining cost of supporting infants and children as birth-rates drop.

In any event, Easterlin is not sure that population forecasters have a good picture of the future. They did not foresee the post-World War II baby boom, and also were caught by surprise when fertility started to plunge in the 1960s. They may be wrong again. The U.S. total fertility rate (estimated number of lifetime births per woman) was 2.09 in 1990—slightly less than “replacement level” fertility (2.11), but up from the 1986 “baby bust” rate of 1.77. A new “fertility upswing” may be in the making, Easterlin says.

Economist D. Gale Johnson of the University of Chicago throws cold water on another bit of conventional wisdom.

Between 1950 and 1980, he notes, population in the developing countries increased rapidly, by two percent a year or more. Yet the widely predicted disaster never occurred. In fact, per capita gross domestic product in these countries increased faster, by 2.6 percent annually.

Whether population growth is slow or fast, Easterlin and Johnson indicate, it is a minor factor in determining the value of “human capital” or a nation’s economic well-being. “Government policies are of far greater importance,” Johnson says.

In the United States, other contributors to this volume argue, making the most of human capital requires improving the education and training of the working populace rather than trying to influence such largely ungovernable forces as population size or growth rate.