

At What Cost? United States' Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Reputation, and Public Opinion

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Abstract

As the United States aggressively pursues transnational terrorists, what value does the American public put on the United States' reputation abroad? This project investigated the American public's opinion about the United States' reputation and influence abroad, and Americans' willingness to bear costs—in terms of damaged reputation and influence—in order to feel secure. Data were collected via an online survey experiment. Six different scenarios were created which manipulated the way a threat was described and the way the costs associated with a policy response were described. The threat description varied by either including specific information about a domestic threat or presenting an ambiguous warning about a global threat. After reading the threat description, subjects were asked to select the best response to that threat from a menu of four increasingly aggressive policy options. Descriptions of the potential costs associated with each of these four options varied in three ways: descriptions that emphasized non-material, reputational costs, descriptions that emphasized material costs only, or had no information about potential costs at all. We found that if the costs associated with policy options were framed as damage done to US reputation and diplomatic relationships, people were less likely to pursue more aggressive options.

Keywords: Terrorism, counterterror policy, public opinion, soft power.

Introduction

The declaration of a “global war on terror” has been criticized for being conceptually misguided and damaging potentially more effective strategic communication efforts.[1] Many have argued that a “war” against terror is essentially unwinnable. Post, for example, argues that vanquishing a psychological response to a particular form of violent political expression is fundamentally impossible.[2] Aggressive military action such as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, special operations activity to kill or capture terrorist group leaders, and the continued detention of terrorism suspects as enemy combatants has had the effect of highlighting the coercive and lethal elements of the United States' counter-terrorism strategy. Certain highly publicized scandals have become irrevocably identified with this strategy and these have negatively impacted American image and reputation abroad.[3] This negative attention comes precisely when, according to a broad consensus of experts, the US must rely more heavily upon its ability to persuade and influence through the implementation of an effective strategic communication plan.[4] Thus, the manner in which the US has prosecuted its war on terror has not only been critiqued as conceptually deficient but also has problematized non-military responses that focus on political origins of terror and strategic communication strategies.

As the United States pursues its interests abroad, it does so with a mix of coercion and persuasion. Theorists have long posited a connection between the way the United States conducts itself abroad and the reputation—and attending influence—it can expect to maintain. Hans Morgenthau referred to perceived “warlike intentions” of the United States,[5] while Nye has identified American unilateralism, and others have found that gross misbehavior in the conduct of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost the United States dearly in terms of its prestige and influence abroad.[6] This study tested whether the American public is attuned to potential non-material costs of its power projection and if so, to measure what tolerances they have with

respect to these costs. In short, what costs are Americans willing to bear in terms of “soft” power resources to accomplish their foreign policy goals?

Soft power: Definitions and Examples

Soft power is derived from three broad categories of conditions and behaviors: culture, domestic values and policies, and foreign policy “substance and style”.[7] The first of these is a general state of affairs beyond government control; the second two are borne of political decisions made by Americans and their leadership. [8] The following will briefly describe each of these.

According to Nye, one element of soft power is culture, which can be divided into high culture and popular culture; both are important. As an example of high culture, the attractiveness of the United States’ excellent higher-education system of teaching colleges and well-endowed research universities brings tens of thousands of scholars to the United States each year. American popular culture has global reach, but it has its limits. First, since popular culture is beyond the reach of government control, it cannot always be counted on to contribute to official foreign policy objectives. Secondly, some aspects of American popular culture can be, and frequently are, perceived as repulsive in some parts of the world, engendering a negative or mixed response.

“The videos that attract Iranian teenagers offend Iranian mullahs. Thus the repulsion of American popular culture may make it more difficult for the United States to obtain its preferred policy outcomes from the ruling group in the short term, while the attraction of popular culture encourages desired change among younger people in the long term.”[9]

Domestic values and foreign policy can also contribute to American soft power. The attractiveness of American-style democracy and liberty draws millions of immigrants each year, a rate that has remained steady in spite of spikes in anti-Americanism. The attractiveness of America’s liberal society can have its limits. Liberty contains in it individual freedom of expression which in turn produces a variety of moral standards, some of which may be offensive to more people in more traditional societies. In addition, when the United States appears to have a “double standard,” e.g., liberty is essential in the United States, but dictatorships can be tolerated elsewhere, American soft power is damaged. Likewise, in foreign policy, when the United States advances traditionally held values of human rights and self-determination, it gains influence. Conversely, when these same values appear to be forced unilaterally by a hegemonic United States, it loses influence and prestige.[10]

To change attitudes effectively, a message must be communicated such that its persuasive potential increases. Credible and attractive sources are generally more persuasive; messages that are sent frequently to more receptive targets are more successful. Finally, the target population must be in a position to effect the desired policy change. A person must have the correct influence and the material incentives to apply that influence. “In a few select issue areas, such as terrorism, insurgency, or civil war, the individual is an important political actor in his or her own right.”[11] Where ideas are important, the United States in particular is not seen as a credible or trustworthy source, a further handicap against soft power use.

Trustworthiness is therefore a critical element in using soft power. Comparing survey responses before and after a visit from a high-level American political figure to various African countries, Goldsmith & Horiuchi explored the effect of three distinct events associated with the United States’ counter-terrorism efforts.[12] What they found is that actions do speak louder than words. Visits closely following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks tended to reinforce positive attitudes about the United States. However, this changed after the

2003 invasion of Iraq. Visits during this period had mixed effects, reinforcing both positive and negative attitudes. After the shameful 2004-2005 Abu Ghraib prison scandal, in which photographs of US military personnel abusing and humiliating Iraqi detainees became widely publicized, high-level visits tended to reinforce already negative attitudes about the United States. This pattern of response makes cooperation with United States' counter-terrorism strategy more difficult for host nations. How durable these effects are is unclear. More recent international polling indicates that negative attitudes were not permanent.[13]

Assessing Costs & Public Opinion

If the benefit of a given strategy is great (such as avoiding a dreadful attack—real or imagined) and the cost is low, or is borne by others, then it would be rational to pursue such a strategy. However, if that same strategy were shown to be inconsistent with a people's own perception of its commonly held morals and values, then a purely material calculation may be an insufficient rubric to estimate support for a given policy. If Americans maintain certain perceptions about themselves that are strong enough, e.g. "the United States defends democracy and liberty," or "the United States is just in war," then new information about a counter-terrorism policy that is inconsistent with those self-perceptions may result in reduced support for that policy. Inconsistency between what one values and what is done in one's name, can be understood as self-imposed costs. If a moral constraint exists that makes a certain strategy too costly, then this self-imposed threshold will limit the kind of policy options that can be considered.[14] This argument implies an ability for people to acquire and effectively apply information to develop policy preferences and requires an examination of how people acquire political information, the effect this information has on preferences, and what role these preferences play in the formation of foreign policy.

We know that the way in which we fight is connected to people's perception of the fight. There have been several recent studies that demonstrate statistically that, for example, the United States' use of remotely piloted aircraft (RPAs, or "drones") has both increased negative perceptions of the United States in the areas most affected by drone activity and changed the way terror groups advertise their positions and try to gather support.[15] In terms of effectiveness, the evidence is mixed: senior terror group leaders who are killed are quickly replaced, but those who replace them may be less capable and experienced. Also, people who are continually in fear of being killed are less effective because they are then more cautious in how and how often they move.[16]

Some researchers have asserted that a gap exists between the American public and its foreign policy leaders. [17] Their research indicated that at least since the end of the Second World War, the American public has been less bellicose than American political leaders. Page and Bouton's research has found that Americans are less inclined to support the use force, and when they do, they desire it be as a last resort, in coordination with international support and using only as much force as is necessary. Their work focused on elected leaders and they have theorized that the structure of the political system is essentially un-representative or easily occupied by special interests. This effect was illustrated by public reticence about invading Iraq in 2003 absent international support, clear connections to al-Qaida terrorism, and Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Ole Holsti also found a gap between the American public and foreign policy elites.[18] He concluded that while the public debate of international affairs has grown more partisan and ideologically driven in the United States since the end of the Vietnam War, certain issues have remained consistent since at least the end of the Cold War. The American people tend to be less inclined to have the United States "go it alone" than are foreign policy makers and they are more selective about approving military action abroad. He suggests that greater information and public education about foreign affairs is a critical element in reducing

the chance that the public will hold factually erroneous opinions and may reduce the possibility that they are intentionally misled.[19] This relationship may be especially true among the more politically aware, where political elites have been able to reach a consensus on strategy.[20] Those who are generally more knowledgeable will be able to more readily access information about a particular situation and place it in context.[21]

Research Question

Controlling for knowledge about politics and foreign policy, what value does the American public put on the United States' reputation abroad, what costs in this area are they willing to bear given certain levels of threat? The burden of a particular security policy can be expressed in material and non-material costs. Material costs, such as the money spent on increased security for the transportation infrastructure, the cost of invading and occupying Iraq and Afghanistan, the costs of lost and damaged equipment and, ultimately lost lives have been analyzed *vis-a-vis* the benefits they are supposed to provide.[22] Several non-material costs in pursuit of security can be imagined: damage to civil-liberties, inconvenient and intrusive security screening and surveillance, government becoming less accessible by and less responsive to its citizens. Some of these have already been researched.[23] However, not all have been. Wide consensus exists among scholars and practitioners alike that the ability of the US to persuade allied cooperation and to improve its image abroad is a necessary element of a successful counter-terror strategy.[24]

Recent experimental work by Joseph Grieco *et al* provides additional theoretical support.[25] An online experiment was embedded in a survey to test the effect an endorsement by an international organization had on American public support for a hypothetical military action. A 2 x 2 factorial design was employed to test the interaction of domestic congressional support and/or international organization (IO) support for a president's hypothetical use of military force. Grieco *et al* found that the American public is more likely to support a policy that ends up in war if the American government first obtains international authorization or support. Specifically, people who value multilateral institutions and lack confidence in the president are more likely to support military action if an IO endorses that action. Since eighty percent of the participants in their study either support IOs, lacked confidence in the president, or both, IO endorsement had substantial influence. Their ultimate conclusion was that IO endorsement could have an indirect effect because leaders of democratic states are sometimes constrained by public opinion to obtain international institutional support prior to military action.[26]

This work by Grieco and colleagues is significant for this study in two ways. First, its experimental design is similar to the methodology used here to study public opinion and the use of force. Second, it provides direct support for the assessment regarding the respect the American public has for international institutions and legal obligations. The Grieco *et al* study focused on support for a specific, hypothetical application of lethal force. This experiment differs slightly in that respondents were asked to select a response from a menu of options, leaving to them the decision to obtain international support or not. Arriving at a similar conclusion through different approaches to the question strengthens the findings of both.

This study will investigate the American public's attitude about the United States' reputation and influence abroad, i.e., *soft power*, and its willingness to bear costs in terms of damaged reputation and influence in order to feel secure. Specifically, this study will test the relationship between the kind of information people receive and their policy preferences. If people are sensitized to non-material, reputational costs, will they be less likely to incur those costs than if those costs were described in purely material terms?

Hypothesis:

Costs described as damaging US reputation and influence will depress willingness to incur higher costs, compared to material costs or having no cost information.

Experiment Design and Procedures

This hypothesis was tested using an online survey experiment in which the way counter-terrorism policy “costs” could be effectively manipulated given a certain simulated threat scenario. Experimental settings have been specifically recommended for investigating non-material cost-benefit trade-offs in counter-terrorism policy choices.[27] Experiments have the potential for simulating decision-making processes in current national security issues, which are, by their nature secret or otherwise not easily observable.[28] Research has indicated that within an experimental setting, providing information about specific policy trade-offs, and motivating people to make a decision as a responsible official, focuses the attention of participants on making a decision, even to the point that the experimental setting environment can mitigate education and general political knowledge effects.[29]

Dependent variable

The dependent variable was the respondents’ choice of policy in response to a given scenario. There were four potential policy choices, escalating in aggressiveness, and potential costliness. These options were (as presented in the survey instrument):

Option 1. Apply diplomatic pressure:

Apply diplomatic pressure on regional allies to capture terror group leaders and hand them over to the United States. This option carries the least risk and costs.

Option 2. Deploy “drone technology” alone:

Use remotely piloted aircraft alone, sometimes called “drones,” to hunt terror group leaders on the ground where they live. This is a low risk and low-cost option.

Option 3. Deploy special forces in addition to drones:

Deploy highly trained soldiers in addition to using drones to kill or capture terrorist group leaders. This is a higher risk, higher cost option. It is an escalation over option 2.

Option 4. Conduct large-scale conventional military operations:

Attack and invade the country with large numbers of troops and aircraft without prior agreement of allies or the United Nations. This is the highest risk and cost option; it is a dramatic escalation.

Note that the escalating nature of each option is clearly described. Additional information about the nature of the costs associated with each option was part of the independent variable manipulation, described below.

Independent Variable Manipulation

For the primary variable of interest, information about costs varied by either emphasizing costs in terms of “soft power” or de-emphasizing soft power factors in favor of material costs only or by having no information about costs at all. To accomplish this, the descriptions of an option and its potential ramifications were

altered slightly. To emphasize non-material costs, damages done to diplomatic relationships and the potential for diminished foreign public opinion of the United States were described. To emphasize material costs, descriptions focused on damage done to military equipment, the cost of transporting and supporting military personnel and the potential for death or injury of US personnel. The no-cost information group served as a control group and can also be interpreted as simulating a low-information environment. For example, compare the different descriptions of the same option below in Figure 1.

Material or “Hard Power” Cost Description of Option 4:

Option 4. Conduct large-scale conventional military operations:

Action: Attack and invade the country with large numbers of troops and aircraft without prior agreement of allies or the United Nations. This is the highest risk and cost option; it is a dramatic escalation.

Potential Costs:

- Exposes soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen to high risk. An unknown number of them will be killed or wounded.
- It is expensive to transport all the people and equipment needed; equipment may be damaged or destroyed.

Non-Material or “Soft power” Cost Description of Option 4

Option 4. Conduct large-scale conventional military operations:

Action: Attack and invade the country with large numbers of troops and aircraft without prior agreement of allies or the United Nations. This is the highest risk and cost option; it is a dramatic escalation.

Potential Costs:

- Very likely that it will result in the death, injury and displacement of thousands of civilians, damage property and it violates international law.
- Anti-American groups will be able to exploit these conditions to enflame anti-American sentiment in the region this will encourage support for violent groups.

Figure 1: Comparison of Option Description

Certain assumptions have been made about what reduces soft power. Policy strategies that can be perceived as being inconsistent with an American’s own perceptions of how power ought to be used will be considered as containing non-material soft power costs. Recent survey research has indicated that the American public, while willing to use lethal force, is less inclined to act unilaterally and prefers a deployment of force proportional to a threat, often as a last resort.[30] These preferences are reflected in the “core principles that guide counter-terror policy” as found in the 2011 *U.S. National Strategy for Counterterrorism*. These core principles include respect for human rights, building strong international partnerships, and exercising force in a “thoughtful, reasoned and proportionate way.” Significantly, the strategy notes that “certain tactical successes can have unintended consequences that sometimes contribute to costs at the strategic level.” This

concern with the application of the appropriate amount of force to avoid unnecessary violence is also found in the US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency (COIN) Manual. It describes one of the paradoxes of modern warfare, “some of the best weapons do not shoot.”[31] The same manual further instructs commanders, “to adopt appropriate and measured levels of force and apply that force precisely so that it accomplishes the mission without causing unnecessary loss of life or suffering.”[32]

Terrorist threats were characterized as being either well-defined and nearby or ambiguous and remote. Well-defined threats specified the potential targets, timing and size of the threatened attack. Ambiguous threats lacked specifics about the location or timing of an attack. The combination of the independent variable manipulations resulted in six different experimental conditions, to which six different groups of survey participants were randomly assigned. These combinations are illustrated in Figure 2. A subject’s political ideology,[33] knowledge about politics,[34] their worry about terrorism generally, and their preferences regarding the national counter-terrorism strategy[35] could influence their willingness to pursue more aggressive and risky responses to the hypothetical terrorist threat scenario. These potentially confounding variables were included in this analysis.

		Costs		
		Soft-Power=C	Material=c	No Info=n
Threat	Near Target=T	T,C	T,c	T,n
	Remote Target=t	t,C	t,c	t,n

Figure 2: Matrix of independent variables

In each experimental setting, participants were presented with four different policy options along with the implications of each of those options. Each option was paired with clear costs associated with it to make comparison easy. One set contained implications that emphasized “soft power” factors, such as damage to diplomatic relationships, or enflaming anti-American sentiment. In a second set of participants two groups were presented with the same policy options, but listed implications that emphasized material costs, such as American casualties, wear on military equipment, and financial cost. In the final set of two groups, participants were given the same four options, but without cost implications; participants needed to make a choice based entirely on their knowledge and their previously held values. The first four groups allowed comparison across the kind of information supplied; the final two measured the effect of having cost information against having little or no information about costs at all. Six different tests were conducted between October 2012 and February 2013 to check the manipulations’ effectiveness. These tests were broadly divided into two categories, tests of the terrorist threat description and tests of the policy option description.

The survey experiment was deployed in March of 2013 by the University of California, Santa Barbara Social Science Research Center, which empaneled a national sample. Participants were randomly assigned to the six

experimental conditions. To negate potential priming effects the survey section might have on responding to the experimental conditions and *vice-versa*, half the participants in each condition were given the survey section first, the other half responded to the experimental conditions first.

Analysis and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

The national sample was provided by Survey Sampling International (SSI). Participants were contacted online through a three-stage randomization method from SSI's survey panels who are provided small monetary incentives for participating. The sample was sent out nationally, and was received naturally, i.e. without weighted categories. The survey experiment was conducted 19-22 March, 2013, and returned 587 complete responses; 307 were males, 292 were females. Thirty percent were high school graduates, twenty-two percent completed a bachelor's degree and ten percent attained an advanced degree, while fewer than ten percent did not complete high school. Data from the 2010 census indicate that the sample was slightly more educated; specifically, the sample had a greater number of high-school graduates. The average age in this sample was forty-four years old; according to census data, the national average age in 2010 was forty-eight years old. The average income for this sample also reflected the population, \$48,000 annually.

Ideologically, in the national sample, thirty-three percent described themselves as moderate. The remainder was very evenly distributed across liberal and conservative on a seven-point scale. They were generally well informed about politics; more than half scored either a four or five out of five on the Delli Carpini and Keeter scale.[36] Their worry about terrorism and preference for an aggressive counter-terror policy was fairly evenly distributed around the middle, neutral, value. Thirty-one percent of respondents supported a strong United States military force posture generally. These distributions are presented in Figure 3. The distribution of the dependent variable is presented in Figure 4.

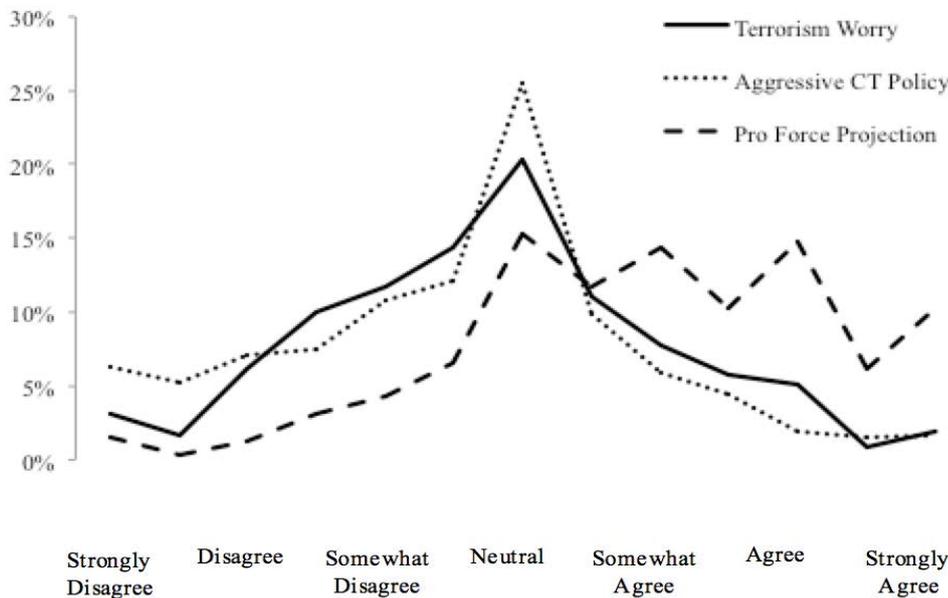


Figure 3: National sample opinions on terrorism and use of force

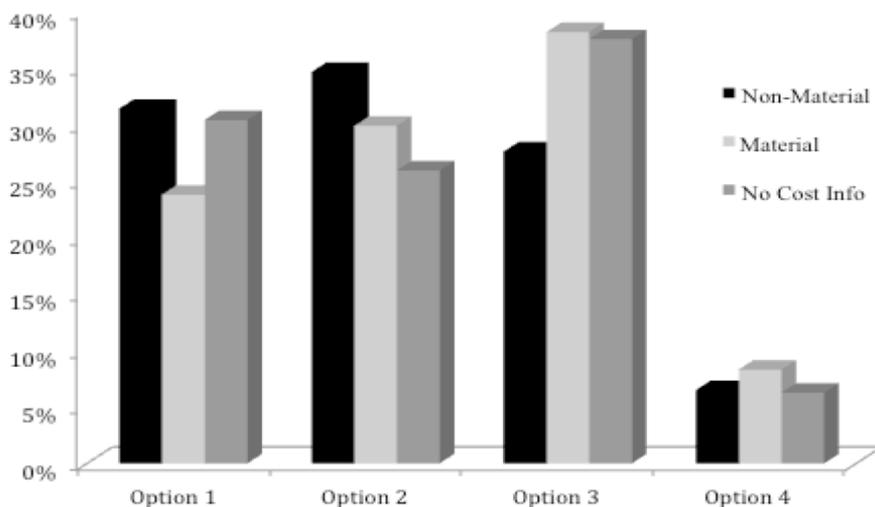


Figure 4: Distribution of the dependent variable, "policy choice" by cost description

Information and Policy Preferences

Our analysis found a statistically significant relationship between cost description and a person’s policy choice. When costs were described in terms of damage done to US reputation and diplomatic relationships, people were less likely to choose more aggressive policy options. The independent variable, cost description,

was coded in such a way that a negative coefficient would indicate decreased likelihood to escalate when presented with non-material, reputational cost information. The results are reported in Table I.

Variable	Material vs. Non-Material Information
Threat	.213 (.153)
Cost Description	-.259** (.097)
Worry about Terrorism Threat	-.003 (.033)
Pro-Aggressive Domestic Counter-terror Policy	.030 (.032)
Pro-Military Action against Terror Groups	.144*** (.035)
Pro-Military Force Projection Generally	.078* (.036)
Political Knowledge	.063 (.063)
Conservative Ideology	.094 (.052)
t_1	1.22
t_2	2.59
t_3	5.02
LR X^2	74.42
Pseudo R^2	0.0498
Log Likelihood	-709.30569
N	587

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

* denotes $p \leq 0.05$; ** denotes $p \leq 0.01$; *** denotes $p \leq 0.001$

t_1, t_2, t_3 indicate the cutoff points for the ordered dependent variable

Table I: Ordered Logistic Regression, likelihood of selecting a more aggressive policy option.

The data were then manipulated to separate the three cost-description experimental conditions. The results are presented in Table II. In that comparison political knowledge and political ideology become statistically significant for those given non-material cost descriptions. People with higher political knowledge were *less* likely to pursue more aggressive counter-terror strategies if costs were described in non-material, reputational terms. For those given the material cost information, political knowledge had the opposite affect from those in the non-material cost group. Those with more political knowledge were *more* likely to choose more aggressive, costlier options if costs were described in material terms only. For those given no cost

information, the only statistically significant predictor of policy choice was a person’s attitude about the use of military force against terrorist groups. This indicates that political knowledge sensitizes people to policy costs, but the tendency to be more aggressive is dampened when costs are described in non-material terms. Therefore, people who are more politically aware are willing to incur costs in order to be more secure, but they prefer to not damage US reputation and diplomatic relationships.

Variable	Non-Material Cost Info.	No Cost Info.	Material Cost Info
Threat	.018 (.282)	.346 (.253)	-.018 (.281)
Worry about Terrorism Threat	.054 (.062)	-.033 (.054)	.009 (.057)
Pro-Aggressive Domestic Counter-terror Policy	.008 (.050)	.047 (.054)	.016 (.057)
Pro-Military Action against Terror Groups	.169** (.058)	.155* (.061)	.136+ (.073)
Pro-Military Force Projection Generally	.064 (.065)	.050 (.060)	.313 (.113)
Political Knowledge	-.340** (.116)	.147 (.101)	.313** (.113)
Conservative Ideology	.192* (.097)	.094 (.083)	.044 (.095)
<i>t</i> ₁	1.35	1.83	2.11
<i>t</i> ₂	3.01	3.01	3.58
<i>t</i> ₃	5.25	5.70	6.06
LR X ²	37.89	27.51	28.01
Pseudo R ²	0.0814	0.0492	0.0610
Log Likelihood	-213.73826	-265.52906	-215.7936
<i>N</i>	184	223	180

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

* denotes $p \leq 0.05$; ** denotes $p \leq 0.01$; + $p = 0.061$

*t*₁, *t*₂, *t*₃ indicate the cutoff points for the ordered dependent variable

Table II: Ordered Logistic Regression, likelihood of selecting a more aggressive policy option in three models, national sample.

In light of the findings regarding the effect of political knowledge, this effect was analyzed more deeply. To accomplish this, the data were truncated to compare two groups, those who scored a five out of five on the political knowledge index and those who scored a zero or one. The results are reported in Table III.

Those who are more politically knowledgeable are less likely to incur greater costs when those costs are described in terms of damage done to reputation or diplomatic relationships. On the other hand, those who were less politically knowledgeable were more willing to incur similar costs. Thus, one can infer that the more politically aware are more cognizant of potential “soft power” costs and while they may be willing to incur

costs, they prefer to limit damage done to reputation and diplomatic relationships. The less politically aware rely more on their preferences about the use of force, than they do on potential political costs in terms of reputation or diplomatic relationships.

Finally, the data were also manipulated to compare gender and political ideology. Significantly, self-identified liberals and female respondents were less likely to choose more aggressive options when costs were described in terms of damage done to reputation and diplomatic relationships. Other manipulations of the data set were tested, such as education level and age, but these produced no significant correlations.

Variable	MODEL I High Political Knowledge	MODEL II Low Political Knowledge
Threat	.332 (.315)	-.598 (.618)
Cost Description	-.578** (.196)	.957* (.399)
Worry about Terrorism Threat	.073 (.072)	.120 (.124)
Pro-Aggressive Domestic Counter-terror Policy	.014 (.065)	.474* (.208)
Pro-Military Action against Terror Groups	.068 (.076)	.354* (.175)
Pro-Military Force Projection Generally	.261** (.076)	-.112 (.114)
Conservative Ideology	.161 (.119)	-.035 (.184)
t_1	1.76	7.39
t_2	3.60	8.38
t_3	6.81	9.60
LR X ²	50.56	17.71
Pseudo R ²	0.1311	0.1380
Log Likelihood	-167.58958	-55.332488
<i>N</i>	158	49

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

* denotes $p \leq 0.05$; ** denotes $p \leq 0.01$;

t_1, t_2, t_3 indicate the cutoff points for the ordered dependent variable

Table III: Ordered Logistic Regression, likelihood of selecting a more aggressive policy option in two models, national sample.

Discussion of Results

The results of this study suggest two major findings: First, how the costs associated with policy options are presented influences policy choice. Specifically, when costs are described in non-material, reputational terms, people are less willing to pursue riskier options. Second, political knowledge depresses a person's willingness to incur costs when framed in terms of negatively impacting the United States reputation, diplomatic relationships or foreign public's perception.

The clearest result from this study is that people responded differently to descriptions of non-material, reputational costs than they did to descriptions that focused on material costs. The fact that non-material, reputational costs depressed willingness to pursue riskier strategies means that people seem to value the United States' reputation abroad and prefer cooperative strategies that can also minimize the inevitable collateral damage that comes with the use of force. Those respondents with greater political knowledge were less likely to prefer more risky or costly options when those costs were described in terms of damage done to United States' diplomatic relationships or reputation abroad. This suggests that those who are more political aware are more attuned to possible "soft power" costs.

Together, these findings may be interpreted to mean that the American public values US trustworthiness and diplomatic cooperation. That priority is reflected in the *2010 National Security Strategy*. The word "cooperation" is found on thirty-one of sixty pages, expressing in many different ways that US national interest is best served by, "an international order advanced by US leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges." [37] Trustworthiness is also central to Nye's "power of attraction," which he argues is vitally important in today's international political order. [38] The power to attract and then obtain from others what is in the interest of the United States is part of an effective counter-terrorist security policy. [39]

Unsurprisingly, people who expressed stronger approval of an aggressive military force posture were also more likely to select more aggressive policy options. The findings did not show that ideology was a significant factor, except in one condition. When limiting these data to those who were exposed to non-material cost descriptions only, a more conservative ideology was positively correlated with a preference for a more aggressive response. Therefore, when only considering the effect of ideology on preferences, conservatives were more likely to select options that included greater risk of damage to US reputation, diplomatic relationships and which risked violating international law.

How the United States executes its foreign policy is almost as important as the strategic goals themselves. The degree to which the US does or does not adhere to a high ethical standard when it uses lethal force and collects intelligence has affected its counter-terror strategy both at home and abroad. In pursuing a national counter-terrorism strategy, as part of its larger national security interest, the United States can simultaneously make its people feel more secure, ensure that they are more secure, and yet lose the people's approval for the way in which they have been given that security. Thus, American reputation and image abroad and its ability to protect its citizens may be directly related to domestic public support for US security policy. There is evidence that the US government does care about international opinion and this is often couched in terms of observing its own domestic values, i.e., aligning what it says it values with how it pursues its interests.

The ethical application of power was discussed during John Brennan's Senate hearing to confirm him as the Director, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), Senator Dianne Feinstein opened the hearing by reporting that, "I also intend to review proposals for legislation to ensure that drone strikes are carried out in a manner consistent with our values." [40] Brennan himself testified that many people "have a misunderstanding of what we do as a government, and

the care that we take, and the agony that we go through to make sure that we do not have any collateral injuries or deaths.” One can infer from these statements that the US government values the traditional law of war principle of “discrimination,” i.e., non-combatants are not legitimate targets of lethal force and need to be strictly separated from combatants. Brennan also testified that targeted killings are never conducted to “punish terrorists for past transgressions” but rather, “as a last resort to save lives when there is no other alternative.”[41] This distinction is significant. Generally the laws of war have prohibited acts of reprisal, but a state does have an inherent right to defend itself from attack.[42] Taken together these statements represent a clear appeal to an ethical tradition that the government claims has always been how the United States uses lethal force and always will be.

How the United States pursues its own security is important. When photos of American soldiers abusing Iraqi detainees in the infamous Abu Ghraib prison emerged, American hypocrisy was confirmed for many in the outside world. This incident, and other insensitive acts, can serve to reinforce how extremists employ narratives to recruit support for their cause.[43] This reality is not lost on US military officers. Commander of the US Army Command and General Staff College, Lieutenant General Robert Caslen, in a 2010 speech concluded that,

“The complete moral and ethical collapse of one army unit [the Abu Ghraib military police battalion] completely overshadowed and neutralized the many hard fought tactical successes and boosted recruitment for anti-US Islamist extremists. This ethical lapse created foreign fighters and increased casualties to coalition and Iraqi security forces”.[44]

In a completely different setting, General Martin Dempsey, during his hearing for promotion and appointment as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was asked about his views on the government’s standards for detainee treatment and interrogation, as they apply to the US counter-terror mission. He testified that these new regulations (which he helped to write) should, “articulate the nexus of the importance of gaining intelligence with the importance of preserving our values as a Nation and an Army.”[45] These claims represent something more than a caution about reciprocity; that if we treat our detainees badly, it opens the possibility that should any of our personnel be captured, they will be treated badly too.

Caslen and Dempsey, like Feinstein and Brennan, appealed to a distinct ethical tradition and a moral standard which the United States has claimed it follows. It is important to note that these statements were made in the context of Americans speaking to Americans, underlining the maintenance of a high moral and ethical standard by which these agents of the people have promised to act. The long-term success of any security campaign relies on maintaining public support which, in turn, is dependent upon executing the campaign in a way that is morally and ethically aligned with the population’s values. Moral agency is necessary, but not sufficient, to the long-term success of a security policy. Strategies that are perceived as being inconsistent with American’s own values will lose support.

Conclusion

I have argued that the American public cares about the manner in which its government pursues security. The American people are willing to incur costs, but they prefer a particular kind of strategy that does not damage US reputation, respects diplomatic relationships, and reduces the chance that our actions will create more enemies than friends. This preference is rooted in pre-existing, self-referential values held by Americans. These values pertain mostly to the manner in which people believe the United States ought to act in the international arena. Essentially, the implication is that the US should apply an old and well-known

tactical principle to its national security strategy. Namely, in order to obtain long-term security, some risk needs to be accepted in the short-term.

“Counterinsurgents that use excessive force to limit short-term risk alienate the local populace. They deprive themselves of the support or tolerance of the people. This situation is what the insurgents want. It increases the threat they pose. Sometimes lethal responses are counterproductive.”[46]

If Americans appreciate the need to develop cooperative measures, then a counter-terrorism strategy will likely contain within it an element of respect for cultural differences and diplomatic traditions. Likewise, if Americans believe that the US should observe its international commitments, then security strategies will work within existing international institutions and treaty obligations. A successful security strategy, defined in part as one that retains support at home, and does not perversely create more enemies, and more danger, abroad, will need to fully account for potential damage done to the ability of the United States to project soft power.

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