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# How democracies exit small wars: the role of opposition parties in war termination

ADAM LOCKYER\*

*This article argues that opposition political parties can play an important role in determining when and how a democracy exits a small war. Recent theoretical and empirical research on small wars has further uncovered the restrictions and constraints that democratic societies place on their government's war strategies. However, the mechanisms through which public opinion constrains and pressures government strategies have received relatively less academic attention. This article examines the role that opposition political parties play in providing an avenue through which society can shape foreign policy—namely, the exiting from small wars. It argues that opposition political parties can be instrumental in determining democracies' war termination in three ways: through 'elite cuing', applying electoral pressure, or winning an election and assuming government.*

**Keywords:** electoral pressure; elite cuing; opposition parties; war termination

## Introduction

All wars end. The degree to which public opinion influences war termination, however, has been shown to vary significantly depending on the type of governments involved and category of war (Drumbrell and Barrett 1990; Holsti 2004; Mueller 1973; Nathan and Oliver 1994). Democratic states, in particular, have been shown to be highly sensitive to the opinions of their citizens. When public support for a war diminishes, then it becomes increasingly difficult for a government to continue waging it. There seems to be ample empirical evidence of this dynamic. From ancient Athenians, through to Vietnam, and now the Iraqi and Afghan conflicts, public opinion has not only influenced how democracies have fought wars, but also their duration (Merom 2003).

The type of war also seems to play an important role in democratic war termination. Jonathan Caverley (2009–10: 123) has found that democracies win 62 percent of conventional interstate wars, but only 47 percent of small

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wars. In contrast, non-democracies win only 40 percent of conventional interstate wars, but 58 percent of small wars. Clearly, democracies make better interstate fighters than non-democracies, and vice versa. The puzzle deepens when one considers that the attributes which apparently make democracies effective in fighting interstate conventional wars are the same attributes (for example, ‘accountable leaders’, ‘open media’ and a ‘more rational decision-making elite’) which are frequently cited as those responsible for democracies’ inefficiencies in fighting small wars (Lyall 2010: 168). In interstate wars, society’s strong influence over policy making improves outcomes, while in small wars it negatively affects the outcomes. This is a persisting puzzle in the literature, which a close examination of the mechanisms through which society impacts foreign policy making will shine considerable analytical light upon.

How do citizens in democracies hold their leaders to account in international relations? Or, more precisely, how does public opinion force a change in foreign policy? There are no simple answers to these questions. Robert Randle (1970) has convincingly pointed to the multitude of different domestic sources of pressure on a democracy’s foreign policy, including the legislature, the judiciary, the elites, public opinion, advisors and bureaucrats. In addition to this list, I would argue that domestic opposition parties play an important role in extracting military forces from small wars. This element of war termination has largely been overlooked in the existing literature. To be clear, I do not argue that opposition parties are the sole cause of all democracies’ conflict termination in small wars. I do not even argue that opposition parties must play even a minor role in a democracy’s decision to end its participation in a small war.<sup>1</sup> Rather, my contribution is to highlight and explain the important role that opposition parties can play in small-war termination. Opposition political parties represent a crucial missing piece in further unravelling the puzzle of democratic failures in small wars.

I argue that public hostility to a democracy’s involvement in a small war will be most potent when combined with a political opposition party that holds similar attitudes. This alignment of preferences will apply significant domestic pressure on the incumbent government to adjust its policy position. For an incumbent government, losing office is the ultimate domestic cost of continuing an unpopular war. By building upon previous work on opposition political parties’ ability to influence domestic public policy change, I argue that opposition parties can influence war termination through three processes (McDonald and Budge 2005; Müller and Strøm 1999; Strøm 1990). First, ‘elite cuing’ has been shown to influence public opinion. The political opposition can shape public perceptions about the war by constructing alternate narratives of events than those generated by the government. The public will be more likely to question the necessity and conduct of the war when presented with a quarrelling political elite. Second, the government might attempt to reduce its war commitment as an election issue by announcing a similar policy position to that of the opposition. This might, for instance, involve an

immediate or phased withdrawal from the conflict. Finally, the government might lose a national election and the opposition—now in power—might fulfil its election promise and withdraw from the conflict. These three mechanisms suggest that opposition parties can play an instrumental role in determining when and how a democracy ends a war.

Opposition parties are defined as organised political groupings within a democracy's legislature that do not currently hold power. They serve as the 'government-in-waiting', contesting the current government with the aim of seizing power at the next election. The article will concentrate on the 'main' opposition parties—those parties that have a realistic chance of forming government in the future. For the most part, these will be the two main parties in first-past-the-post electoral systems. In proportional representation systems, the opposition parties will be discussed where they have a chance of being able to form government or to be a part of a coalition government in the future. Thus, opposition parties are formalised political groups that possess the capacity of winning sufficient votes at the next election to remove the sitting government and seize power.

The article will proceed as follows. The first section will define and discuss the current literature on small wars. It shows that although previous literature on democratic exits from small wars has pointed to 'society' placing restrictions on the 'state', it has failed to identify the precise mechanisms through which this occurs. The second section will discuss the relationship between the democratic form of government and war termination. It shows that a recurring empirical finding is that wars tend to become increasingly unpopular the longer they last. The third section will describe the three processes through which opposition parties can influence war termination: 'elite cuing', election pressure and electoral defeat. The article will conclude with a discussion of the implications of these insights for the literature and policy. It is clear that democracies end small wars for more reasons than simply battlefield defeat. Indeed, decisive battlefield defeats at the hands of the insurgent's military forces are rare. A better conceptual understanding of the domestic constraints on democracies' war-fighting will not only have significant academic value, but may also aid practitioners' own public relations management and their alliance relations during wartime.

### Small wars and democratic governments

The United States Marine Corps' *Small Wars Manual* defines small wars as conflicts where

military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation (United States Marine Corps 1940: 1).

Thus, small wars pose no immediate threat to the continued existence of the intervening state. They are ‘wars of choice’, where a democracy intervenes in a conflict to assist the incumbent government in defeating an insurgent.

In the late nineteenth century, British strategists began turning their attention to ‘small wars’. One of their leading thinkers, Charles Callwell, classified small wars as:

all campaigns other than those where both opposing sides consist of regular troops ... it comprises campaigns undertaken to suppress rebellions and guerrilla warfare in all parts of the world where organized armies are struggling against opponents who will not meet them in the open field, and it thus obviously covers operations very varying in their scope and in their conditions (Callwell 1996: 21).

Generally, given the balance of capabilities between the belligerents, the stronger incumbent and its foreign supporters will assume a counterinsurgency strategy, while the weaker insurgent actor will adopt a form of guerrilla strategy (Lockyer 2011). By emphasising evasion in defence and ‘hit-and-run’ ambushes in offence, guerrilla strategy allows the weaker belligerent to survive multiple engagements with a stronger opponent (Janos 1963). As Che Guevara (1998: 15) emphasised: ‘the essential task of the guerrilla fighter is to keep himself from being destroyed’. In such conflicts, it is uncommon for intervening democracies to suffer annihilating defeats at the hands of insurgents. Defeat has normally been the result of the democracy calculating that the struggle is not worth the costs of victory.

Small wars present democracies with a unique set of challenges. In small wars, the incumbent’s political objectives are often ‘limited’, which places restrictions on the amount of military force, firepower and destruction that can be brought to bear on the enemy. First, although the incumbent will usually possess a much stronger potential military capability, it will generally not be able to convince society to mobilise the state’s full military capabilities. As the survival of the incumbent state is not at stake and the opposition is significantly weaker, the incumbent will not be able to mobilise for ‘total war’. Alternately, the incumbent can potentially reduce the military capabilities necessary to defeat the insurgency by increasing the level of brutality inflicted upon the enemy and target civilian population (Merom 1998)—that is, the incumbent can employ indiscriminate violence (such as aerial bombing) to reduce the costs of fighting the war. However, as the aims of democracies are ‘limited’, society will often oppose the use of indiscriminate violence. Although there was very little domestic opposition to the United States’ strategic bombing of Germany and Japan during World War II, the bombing of Vietnam met with significant domestic political opposition (Mack 1975: 183–4). As Jason Lyall surmises:

The combination of a desire to protect one's soldiers and a need to avoid reputation costs may conspire to impose additional battlefield restraints on a democracy's military. Overly restrictive rules of engagement, along with a chronic unwillingness to deploy soldiers in sufficient numbers, have been cited as two deficiencies of democratic [counterinsurgency] operations (Lyall 2010: 169–70).

Merom (2003) refers to these constraints as the 'balance of tolerance'—that is, the relationship between whether the democracy is willing to mobilise adequate resources and employ sufficient 'brutality' to defeat the insurgents.

This process is usually conceptualised as 'society' restricting the options of the state, where 'society' is 'a space where individuals think and act under no mental tyranny of the state. These individuals act on and promote preferences that are derived from liberal and non-statist values' (Merom 2003: 18). The literature refers to 'society' by different names, including 'public opinion' (Cohen 1984), 'the median voter' (Caverley 2009–10) or the 'middle class' (Merom 2003). Nevertheless, however these 'politically relevant actors' within society are defined, they are understood to be able to influence the manner in which a democracy fights a war and how long it sticks in the fight. Although these works suggest that society influences the state's foreign policy marking, they fail to adequately identify the precise mechanisms involved in this process. The following section seeks to remedy this paucity by identifying one of these mechanisms—namely, opposition political parties.

### **The neglected role of opposition parties**

It has long been accepted that public opinion acts to constrain how a democracy fights a small war (Howard 1979; Mack 1975). Although effective interstate war fighters, democracies have had trouble staying in the fight in small wars. Democratic peoples like their wars to be short, cheap and decisive. In contrast, guerrillas prepare for long, exhaustive, indecisive wars of attrition. When elected officials and generals cannot deliver a quick victory, democratic societies frequently become disillusioned with the conflict. This is especially true when faced with mounting casualties. John Mueller's (1971, 1973) seminal work found that public support for the war in Vietnam dropped as the log of casualties increased (see also Boettcher and Cobbs 2006; Burk 1999; Halperin 1970).<sup>2</sup> The logic of the argument is that after the initial 'rally around the flag' effect (Edwards 1985; Gertner and Segura 1998; Karol and Miguel 2007), casualties would inevitably mount as the war continued, which would inexorably reduce public support. This, and similar findings, led scholars such as Steve Chan and William Safran to conclude that:

There is a tendency for the public to increase its support of incumbent officials at the initial stage of a militarized dispute. This popular support,

however, declines sharply if the conflict becomes protracted and when its financial and human costs mount (Chan and Safran 2006: 137).<sup>3</sup>

As a general rule, popular support for a small war decreases over time.

This being the case, it is not surprising that democratic governments might choose to fight small wars, particularly those they expect to be of limited intensity and duration.<sup>4</sup> The ‘rally around the flag’ effect means that there will often be short-term political gains for the incumbent (Levy 1988). Short, decisive wars can be highly popular in democracies.<sup>5</sup> It is also clear, however, that the incumbent will wish to be on the way to victory before the next election. When victory is not achieved within a reasonable time, democratic societies can apply electoral pressure on the government to withdraw their troops. Timothy Cotton (1986) found that, in general, US politicians who were associated with the entry into war were punished in wartime elections. Cotton surveyed the United States’ involvement in the Spanish–American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, and found that voters did not necessarily oppose the war aims, but, rather, resented the high costs of the war and the seeming incompetence of the leadership. Using more recent data, David Karol and Edward Miguel (2007) found a similar pattern. Although the 2004 re-election of President George W. Bush is often held up as an example of support for incumbents fighting small wars, Karol and Miguel found that at the state level, regions which had suffered higher casualties also experienced swings against the incumbent president. As small wars tend to be longer and more indecisive than interstate wars, democratic societies are expected to apply more pressure on their government.

Although this literature has been successful in uncovering a relationship between casualties and voting patterns, recent empirical studies have begun to suggest a more complicated relationship. It is emerging that public opinion will also be influenced by society’s ‘beliefs about the rightness or wrongness of the war’ and its ‘beliefs about a war’s likely success’ (Gelphi *et al.* 2005–6: 8; Feaver and Gelphi 2004). These two factors combine to influence the level of ‘casualty sensitivity’—that is, the number of casualties that the public will be willing to suffer before it becomes discontented with the government’s conduct of the war. The more ‘right’ the public perceives the war and the more likely it expects victory to be, the more casualties the public will be willing to tolerate.

Overall, research on democracies’ war termination has assumed that elections are a key mechanism through which the public influences foreign policy. It has achieved considerable success in uncovering the relationship between casualties and voting patterns, which seems to exist across democracies and over time. Yet, this literature leaves many questions unasked and, therefore, unanswered. First, why do foreign policy decisions have domestic ‘audience costs’ at all? And, what role do opposition political parties play in this process? Surely, if election politics is at the heart of this relationship, then opposition parties’ policies and behaviour must also have an influence? The following section will

move towards answering these questions by outlining the instrumental role that the electoral system and opposition parties can potentially play in war termination.

### The instrumentality of opposition parties in forcing policy change

Citizens who are discontented with the aims and conduct of wars will look to domestic opposition parties as a way of bringing the war to an end. This process is not unique to democracies or small wars. By 1917, the Russian people were war-weary and enthusiastically supporting any opposition party (Bolshevik, Menshevik or Social Democrat) that promised to end the war and bring their troops home. In World War II, the threat of Allied invasion resulted in Italian trade labour unions calling a general strike (Randle 1970: 78). A fundamental difference between a democracy and a non-democracy, however, is that within the former there exists the possibility that the opposition party or parties may win a relatively open, free and fair election and replace the incumbent. This provides political opposition parties in democracies with increased political influence and significance. I argue here that the democratic electoral system creates three mechanisms through which the opposition party may influence war termination: (1) elite cuing; (2) election pressure; and (3) assuming power after an election.

These three avenues can act in isolation or cumulatively. In other words, each of these three mechanisms possesses sufficient power to independently influence government policy. Each may exist atomistically without necessarily preceding and following the others. Yet, it is also foreseeable that the mechanisms might act as a precursor to the next. In this later situation, it is likely that they will follow a predictable sequence with elite cuing acting to apply electoral pressure, which might result in a change of government, and the new leadership can then directly change the foreign policy course.

#### *Opposition elite cuing*

As suggested above, a widely applied method for analysing democracies at war has been to track longitudinally the number of casualties and public opinion (Burk 1999; Feaver and Gelphi 2004; Gelphi *et al.* 2005–6; Mueller 1971, 1973). It is assumed that citizens continually update their information on the war's course, and conduct themselves and form their attitudes accordingly. When success begins to appear unlikely or the costs begin outweighing the benefits, citizens in democracies will reconsider their positions on the war (Gartner 2008). The puzzle arising from this explanation is that although these studies assume the public possesses 'perfect knowledge', historical studies on public awareness during World Wars I and II have shown that 'significant segments of the mass public possessed little knowledge of the most basic facts of

these conflicts' (Berinsky 2007: 975). How does the public construct its views on the course and conduct of wars if it remains largely ignorant of facts, including being able to accurately recall the number of casualties?

Elite cue theory advances that the public reaches its opinion about the war not only by consuming information directly, but also by listening to trusted elites, such as newspapers, politicians and other community leaders. Acting as a form of cognitive heuristic, many voters may arrive at their own attitude towards the war by observing those they believe share their values, preferences and interests.<sup>6</sup> Adam Berinsky (2007) found that party affiliation influenced not only individuals' attitudes towards the Iraq War, but also their estimates of the number of casualties. Those respondents who reported their political affiliation as Democrat or Independent were more likely to overestimate the number of Iraq War casualties, while Republicans would underestimate casualties and have a more favourable view of the war. More generally, elite cuing explains why many individuals will have strong positions on political issues which are considered 'rational' or 'right' for their particular economic and social circumstances, while also possessing extremely limited knowledge of even the simplest details of events and policy (Lau and Redlawsk 2001).

Elite cue theory contains many interesting implications for opposition political parties. Most prominent among these implications is that the opposition's relationship with the public will not be unidirectional or mono-casual. It is likely that the opposition party will strike a policy position which is different from the government. Opposition parties that assume identical policy positions in respect to both the aims and the conduct of the war present the public with no real electoral choice. Particularly in 'wars of choice' (such as small wars), the opposition party will generally aim to wedge the government by differentiating itself on the proper conduct or course of the conflict. This position may be more hawkish or dovish, but will rarely be identical to that of the incumbent government. As we have seen, this tactic has generally been successful, as governments have a documented tendency to lose votes in elections held during wartime (Cotton 1986).

What position will the opposition take? In his seminal survey of opposition parties, Anthony Downs (1957: 138) concluded that the 'strategies of opposition parties depend on their views of the voters' utility incomes from government activity and on the actions taken by the government in power'. Being 'vote maximisers', the opposition party will most likely track the attitudes of the median voter (Strøm 1990). Hence, during the initial 'rally around the flag' phase, the opposition and public are expected to have relatively high support for the war. Indeed, the conventional social science wisdom is that there will be political costs for opposition parties which oppose declarations of war (Regens *et al.* 1995). However, as the financial costs and casualties mount, the public may become disillusioned with the war, and the opposition may be tempted to chase those voters. In other words, the opposition party will progressively become increasingly negative towards the rationale and management of the war.

Paul Burstein and William Freudenburg (1978) discovered some support for this trend. Their empirical study found that anti-war demonstrations and public rallies had statistically significant effects on the US Senate's voting patterns during the Vietnam War.

Yet, elite cue theory suggests a more complicated picture to the causal arrows than what I have so far sketched. It maintains that the opposition party's critique of the war also influences the opinions of the public, particularly those citizens who hold partisan affiliations. For instance, a spike in casualties might indicate that the war is going badly and the objectives are not worth the price; alternately, a sharp rise in the number of casualties might show that the democracy's soldiers are taking the fight to the enemy, winning battles and making steady progress towards victory. Many Western opposition parties and incumbent governments are currently making these very arguments and counterarguments in relation to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The breakdown of the public that accepts one narrative or the other will vary across democracies and fluctuate over time; nevertheless, the opposition party will make an important contribution to the political discourse (Larson 1996).

The relationship between the opposition party, the war and the public is thus complicated, with multiple causal relationships. It does seem clear, however, that when the political parties are divided, the public also divides (Berinsky 2007; Zaller and Feldman 1992). This then leads to the second mechanism through which opposition parties can play a prominent role in bringing wars to an end: via election pressure.

### *The threat of election defeat and foreign policy change*

The second process through which opposition parties can influence war termination is through election pressure. According to Anthony Downs (1957: 138): 'the government expects voters to vote according to (a) changes in their utility incomes from government activity and (b) the strategies of opposition parties'. The source of changes in voters' utility incomes can either be foreign or domestic. Hence, Ben Mor (1997) pointed out that governments must weigh up the benefits of pursuing their preferred foreign policy against the prospect of losing office.<sup>7</sup> The spectre of election defeat can thus influence government policy. Pressure on government policy will be particularly intense when the leading opposition parties assume a different policy position. For instance, in February 2005, 10 days out from the polls, the Portuguese government announced the withdrawal of its forces from the Iraq war in an attempt to neutralise it as an election issue (Freire and Lobo 2006).

As discussed in the previous section, a bipartisan war policy leading up to an election will be rare. The zero-sum character of an election means that an opposition party, by providing unconditional support for the government's war aims and strategy, will strengthen the government's political position while weakening its own. As such, even if its position is only marginally different, the

opposition party will generally strike a distinct policy position. Moreover, the opposition's policy position will be more flexible than that of the government and better able to adjust in relation to updated information. This is for three reasons. First, generally, the incumbent's policy platform will be announced prior to the opposition party being required to submit its position. The opposition party will respond to the government's policy announcement by agreeing, disagreeing or suggesting an alternative (Wittman 1973: 490). Second, the government is not only expected to make announcements, but also to act upon them. Thus, there will be budgetary and political costs associated with the government's change of policy, whereas the opposition party can continually refine and update its message without incurring material costs. Finally, the government has access to the full apparatus of the state. The public will assume that it is making its policy decisions with close to perfect knowledge. The opposition, on the other hand, is able to adjust position as new information 'comes to light'. As such, at election time, the opposition's adopted policy is likely to be closer to the median voter. When confronted with this challenge, incumbent governments will come under pressure to adjust their own position to the war.

Overall, however, incumbent governments will face barriers to yielding to election pressure. A government's sharp reversal in foreign policy position will come with its own set of international and domestic political costs. The act might well be perceived as a lack of commitment and negatively impact the incumbent's credibility and reputation. Hence, policy reversals for electoral benefit will be more readily available to those incumbents that have invested less national resources (especially troops) or domestic political capital (for example, selling an unpopular war). Those incumbents that make greater investments in the war will be less able to reverse position. The greater the investment, the less able incumbents will be to exit the war before achieving anything less than their stated war aims.

Indeed, the political psychological literature would predict that the more costly the war has been in terms of political capital and material losses, the more the incumbent government will chase its losses. Prospect theory, in particular, would predict that the government, while in the domain of losses, will take riskier decisions than it would in the domain of wins (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Levy 1992; McDermott 2004). When the government is staring down the barrel of either battlefield or electoral defeat, it might well prefer to escalate the conflict than retire from it. In 2006, for instance, there was a strong correlation between those US politicians who had been the greatest supporters of the initial decision to invade Iraq and those who supported the 'surge' strategy. At the time, Iraq was spiralling out of control, and clearly an exit from the conflict at that stage would have been a defeat and be framed as an international and domestic 'loss' to those who had initially supported the invasion (Nagourney and Thee 2006). As such, instead of exiting the conflict, these leaders were more willing to gamble by escalating the war.

Loss aversion and chasing losses is certainly not the sole purview of democratic leaders. Audrey McInerney (1992), for instance, has supplied a useful case study of the Kremlin's desperate efforts to maintain its position in the Middle East in 1966–7. In non-democracies, however, failure in war is less likely to be fatal in the domestic political sphere. Christopher F. Gelpi and Michael Griesdorf (2001) have argued that democratic institutions produce domestic audience costs on foreign policy formation. In a democracy, failure in war can have severe domestic as well as international consequences. This makes war termination especially difficult for governments prior to achieving their declared war aims. Hence, while still in the domain of losses, it will be difficult for incumbent governments to exit a war, even when staring down the barrel of election defeat.

#### *A change in government and war exit*

Finally, opposition parties can terminate war through defeating the government in a general election. Newly elected governments have shown a propensity for exiting small wars. The day after taking office, the Spanish prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, ordered the withdrawal of 1300 Spanish soldiers from Iraq (Jeffrey 2004). Similarly, after taking office, Ehud Barak fulfilled a campaign promise to end Israel's 22-year occupation of southern Lebanon. Elections are the most direct mechanism through which citizens in a democracy can influence policy. On taking power, the opposition will confront similar international pressures to those of the outgoing government. The democracy's international relationships, reputation and credibility will all play heavily on the new government's mind. However, two forces enable political oppositions to more easily exit wars than the incumbents they replace—namely, election promises and lower sunk costs.

First, newly minted governments that come to power on an anti-war platform will have incentives to deliver on election promises. Although finding substantial variation between countries, studies on election promises have reported that the vast majority are delivered; empirical studies have shown that new governments fulfil most of their election promises, most of the time (Klingemann *et al.* 1994; Pétry and Collette 2009). New governments are said to have received a mandate to translate their policy proposals into action. Failure to achieve these proposals will strike directly at the new government's creditability and perceived effectiveness. This pressure to deliver will be particularly strong on opposition parties that assume government (compared to second-term governments) and those promises that relate to prominent issues, such as war termination. As such, although the speed of exit will vary significantly, new governments that have come to power on dovish platforms will have strong incentives to begin the process of exiting from war.

Second, in his influential book, Hein Goemans (2000) argued that wars only end when the minimal terms of settlement of both sides are aligned (see

also Wittman 1979). The war will continue while either belligerent is demanding more than its opponent is willing to concede.<sup>8</sup> New governments will be able to concede more, thus expanding the 'win set' for agreement. New governments will generally suffer fewer domestic political costs associated with war termination, as they will have sunk less political capital into the war. This frees them from many of the domestic considerations that had restricted the former government from considering a negotiated settlement or unilateral withdrawal. In the vernacular of Robert Putnam's (1988) 'two-level game', the decrease in the new government's domestic (level-two) constraints allows it to make greater international (level-one) concessions. New governments will be less constrained by the initial war aims, thus possessing a higher tolerance for concessions and making peace negotiations or unilateral withdrawal more likely. Ongoing wars of choice will normally hold few benefits for incoming governments, but continue to hold many costs and risks.

## Conclusion

In democracies, opposition parties are a key component in holding the government accountable to the people. Public opinion alone can force the government to change its foreign policy. But, public opinion when aligned with the opposition party's policy position is even more potent. A mutually held position between the majority of voters and the opposition party threatens the government's long-term survival. Therefore, it is surprising that opposition parties have received so little attention in the literature on foreign policy making, in general, and in the 'why democracies lose small wars' literature, in particular. This article attempts to make a modest step towards rectifying this paucity. It submits that there are three main processes through which opposition parties influence war termination: elite cues, election pressure and by replacing the existing government. Although these three processes can be found in the political science literature on domestic public policy change, they have yet to be applied to the international domain.

Further research on opposition parties' influence on foreign policy is needed. The next step will be to theoretically deepen and empirically verify the conceptual framework outlined here. This might be achieved quantitatively or qualitatively. Although a rich quantitative literature exists on the relationship between casualties and public opinion towards the government, there has been virtually none that has attempted to incorporate public opinion towards opposition parties into this analysis. In addition, the elite cue theory creates abundant room for qualitative studies to examine the complex and multifaceted relationship between opposition parties, public opinion and war termination.

## Notes

1. Berenice A. Carroll (1969), for instance, points to nine different variables that supposedly influence war termination.
2. Other research has shown that support for the governmental leadership, however, exhibits a more complicated relationship, with opinion polls strengthening regardless of what the government does—escalate war or seek negotiations—as long as it is seen as doing something (see, for example, Verba *et al.* 1967: 333).
3. More recent research has pointed to a more complicated dynamic. Christopher F. Gelphi, Peter D. Feaver and Jason Reifler (2005–6) have found that casualties alone do not cause a corresponding decline in public support in war. Indeed, when progress is being made and citizens believe that success is likely, the public can be extremely tolerant of high casualty rates (see also Eichenberg 2005).
4. Indeed, there are a number of empirical irregularities relating to democracies at war, including that they seem to fight shorter wars, conduct them more brutally and win more often (see Reiter 2009; Stam 1996).
5. Patrick Dunleavy and Christopher Husbands (1985: 154) present evidence that the 1982 Falklands War increased support for the Thatcher government by 16 percent and, like many, consider the war to have contributed significantly to the Conservatives' win in the 1983 election.
6. The government, for its part, knows that the public will often adopt similar views as the elites and, as a consequence, will try to silence them and limit the intrusion of domestic politics on foreign policy (Rothstein 1970).
7. Others have noted that there have been occasions when the disapproval of the public on foreign policy has registered in national elections (see, for example, Chan and Safran 2006; Verba *et al.* 1967; Voeten and Brewer 2006).
8. Suzanne Werner (1998) has made a similar argument. Werner posited that belligerents' original aims affect their respective bargaining positions in negotiations by increasing the costs of and political risks beyond continuing the war past a certain point.

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