

# **EXPLAINING PRESIDENTIAL SABER RATTLING**

B. Dan Wood

[bdanwood@polisci.tamu.edu](mailto:bdanwood@polisci.tamu.edu)

and

Clayton Webb

[cwebb@polisci.tamu.edu](mailto:cwebb@polisci.tamu.edu)

Department of Political Science

Texas A&M University

4348 TAMU

College Station, TX 77843-4348

Phone: (979) 845-1610

FAX: (979) 847-8924

## **ABSTRACT**

Presidential saber rattling has become an increasingly important tool of U. S. foreign policy in the post-World War II era. Yet, there has been no study explaining why presidents make foreign policy threats. Is presidential saber rattling purely reactive to external threats? If so, then presidents are acting as statesman representatives who primarily serve national interests. Or, do presidents react primarily to domestic stimuli in their decisions to make threats toward external actors? If so, then they are potentially behaving as self-interested politicians attempting to bolster their domestic standing. We evaluate these competing perspectives by examining presidential saber rattling across eleven presidents over sixty-four years. We find that modern presidents respond to both foreign and domestic stimuli when making threats. War, crisis, elections, partisanship and media attention are all important covariates of presidential threats. Thus, presidents are sometimes statesmen and sometimes self-interested support-seekers in their manner of foreign policy representation.

# EXPLAINING PRESIDENTIAL SABER RATTLING<sup>1</sup>

There has been no study explaining why presidents make threats toward foreign actors. Yet, this phenomenon is itself important, and can also inform us about the nature of presidential foreign policy representation. Presidents are often described by American government and presidency textbooks, social scientists, and political pundits alike as *the nation's chief foreign policy representative*. Yet, scholars actually know little about the nature of presidential representation in the area of foreign policy.

We ask whether the causes of presidential saber rattling are purely foreign. Do presidents simply respond with saber rattling to perceived external threats? If so, then presidents are acting as statesman representatives who primarily serve national interests. Or, do presidents react primarily to domestic stimuli in their decisions to make threats toward foreign actors? In other words, do presidents make threats to build standing with the public, the media, or fellow partisans? If so, then they are potentially behaving as self-interested politicians attempting to bolster their domestic standing.

This study addresses these questions both theoretically and empirically. Theories of what might explain the president's foreign policy behavior are discussed in the next section. Expectations from these theories are then evaluated empirically by examining relations among presidential saber rattling and variables reflecting both foreign and domestic factors. A measure of presidential saber rattling is constructed using machine and human coding

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<sup>1</sup> Support for this research was provided by ..... An online appendix with supplementary material for this article is available at [www.cambridge.org/cjo/whatever](http://www.cambridge.org/cjo/whatever). Data and supporting materials necessary to reproduce the statistical results will be made available on the author's website at www.xxxx.edu upon publication.

techniques for all foreign policy sentences uttered by the president from April 1945 through December 2008. Spectral time series methods are then used to evaluate the importance of the electoral cycle to presidential behavior. Poisson autoregressive regressions (Zeger and Qaqish 1988) are also applied using monthly data to explore relations between foreign and domestic factors and the changing intensity of presidential saber rattling through time.

### **The Theoretical Basis of Presidential Foreign Policy Representation**

The Founders did not intend for presidents to be the dominant foreign policy representatives in the U. S. system. Yet, it is now widely understood that presidents exercise significant foreign policy powers independent of Congress, and presidents are the sole representative of the nation to the outside world.

The courts affirmed early on that as sovereign leaders, presidents are the nation's chief foreign policy representative. Future Supreme Court Justice John Marshall stated in 1800 when he served in the U.S. House of Representatives "The President is the sole organ of the nation in its external relations, and its sole *representative* with foreign nations." (10 Annals of Congress 613) Relying on Marshall's "sole organ" doctrine, Supreme Court Justice George Sutherland wrote in 1937 (*United States vs. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp*, 299 U.S. 319) "In this vast external realm [foreign policy], with its important, complicated, delicate and manifold problems, the President alone has the power to speak or listen as a *representative* of the nation." While the plenary nature of executive authority in foreign relations is not universally accepted (e.g., see the persuasive arguments by Fisher 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e, 2008a, 2008b), the modern chief executive relies extensively on the "sole organ" doctrine to define presidential power broadly, and it is now commonly assumed that presidents are *the sole representatives of the nation to the outside world*.

### *The “Statesman” Ideal of Presidential Representation*

How do presidents perform this representative role? Many of the Founders believed that presidents should *always* be motivated by the nation’s best interests. They should be virtuous and wise leaders, divorced from their passions and personal considerations, beyond the partisan fray, oblivious to the press and whims of public opinion, with behavior motivated solely by the common good. This “statesman” ideal of executive leadership suggests that presidents should use their foreign policy tools *only* to achieve just foreign policy goals.

However, the Founders had little confidence that future leaders could be entrusted to live up to this ideal. John Jay, writing as *Publius* in Federalist #4, expressed this skepticism as follows. “But the safety of the people of America against dangers from FOREIGN force depends not only on their forbearing to give JUST causes of war to other nations, but also on their placing and continuing themselves in such a situation as not to INVITE hostility or insult; for it need not be observed that there are PRETENDED as well as just causes of war.” (Jay 1788)

Jay’s remarks suggest that presidential foreign policy behavior, like nations’ propensities to make war, may be motivated by a variety of causes beyond the “statesman” ideal. Leaders may “INVITE hostility or insult” through “PRETENDED,” rather than “JUST causes.” In this regard, foreign policy behavior may arise from leaders’ passions, ambitions, revenge, desire for personal glory, or to build standing with the public or fellow partisans.

Federalist #4 recognized that the self-interested proclivity for leaders to concoct hostility toward other nations must be constrained through institutional design. The Founders viewed “good national government” as a constraint on *pretended* criteria for hostility with other nations. In particular, Madison’s notes at the Constitutional convention suggest that authority to “make war” was vested jointly in Congress and the president to make war less

likely. The Founders saw Congress as slow and contentious, making it difficult to act in haste. The chief executive was viewed by some as too much like a monarch to avoid malevolent behavior. Thus, the power to “declare war” was given solely to Congress whose collective judgment was viewed as more deliberate. The power to “conduct war” was given to the president, who as commander-in-chief was more adept at responding to emergency and singularly responsible for the military hierarchy (Madison 1911, August 17, 1787).

Further, the intention of the Founders was a government staffed by virtuous individuals who would always pursue the interests of the nation-at-large. As expressed by James Madison in Federalist #57, “The aim of every political Constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust.” (Madison 1788) Thus, many Founders believed presidents should reflect the interests of the nation-at-large while remaining oblivious to their passions, partisanship, and public opinion.

#### *“Rational Choice” and Presidential Foreign Policy Representation*

The “statesman” ideal of presidential representation endorsed by the Founders runs counter to much modern social science theory and research on what motivates politicians. The dominant theoretical model used today to explain politician behavior is grounded in “rational choice.” Rational choice argues that *self-interest*, rather than *community-interest*, drives most political behavior. Specifically, politicians seek to maximize a payoff function that considers their own benefits and costs. In maximizing this payoff function, they consistently seek advantages for themselves and their political party.

Applying this approach to presidential foreign policy representation, we might ask what goals generally enter into the modern president’s foreign policy payoff function. Clearly,

statesmanship and achieving a good foreign policy outcome on behalf of the nation would be important factors. Indeed, most presidents probably have intrinsic preferences that hold the “statesman” ideal in high regard. As noted above, high regard for the “statesman” ideal extends all the way back to the Founders.

Beyond statesmanship, however, modern presidents seek a multiplicity of other goals. They value domestic support for themselves and their policies. Of course, stronger domestic support implies more presidential power, and freedom to make future policy. If domestic support enters into the president’s payoff function, then the president’s foreign policy behavior may be rooted in whether actions are likely to be well-received by the public, media, or Congress.

Potential electoral support is a related dimension of the president’s payoff function. Presidents seek reelection for themselves and their political party. When elected, it is the party in power which reaps the most benefits. Therefore, presidential foreign policy behavior may be rooted in perceptions that a foreign policy activity will enhance future electoral prospects.

Partisanship may also enter into the president’s payoff function. Partisanship captures an individual’s primary politically relevant beliefs. Viewed from the perspective of the “guns versus butter” tradeoff, it is widely believed that Republicans prefer guns over butter, while the opposite is true for Democrats. Thus, we might expect Republican presidents to be more aggressive than Democrats in their foreign policy behavior toward other nations.

Presidential saber rattling can also be viewed as a form of political drama. Mueller’s (1970) classic study first showed the importance of dramatic foreign policy events to presidential approval ratings. Since then a plethora of other researchers have followed this

lead.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, MacKuen (1983) showed that political drama is about equal in importance to economic factors in affecting presidential approval.

Modern presidents understand this relationship. As a result, they may use saber rattling strategically to bolster their public support. Presidents continuously play to the mass media, because the media transmit presidential messages to the public and world (e.g., see Brace and Hinckley 1992; Edwards 1983; Kernell 1997). Presidents depend on the media to build images of strength and rectitude which are critically important to public support. Such images may also bolster the president's credibility in the international arena.

Conversely, modern presidents may also be "caught-up" in the various media frenzies which have so often characterized crisis and conflict since the Iran hostage crisis. For example, Wood and Peake (1998; see also Edwards and Wood 1999) found that the media drive presidential attention to foreign policy issues. However, the reverse relationship did not hold. Presidents do not systematically drive media attention. Of course, the media has increasingly through time focused on crisis and conflict. The Iran hostage-taking, Grenada, Libya bombing, Panama invasion, Persian Gulf War, Haiti, Kosovo, September 11<sup>th</sup>, Afghanistan, and Iraq invasion were all periods during which media coverage escalated dramatically. Many of these crises involved significant national security concerns. Under these conditions presidents should speak more loudly to both the media and public (e.g., see

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see Mueller (1973), Hibbs (1974), Brody and Page (1975), Kernell (1978), Monroe (1978), Fiorina (1981), MacKuen (1983), Chappell and Keech (1985), Ostrom and Job (1986), Hibbs (1987), Markus (1988), Simon and Ostrom (1989), Brody (1991), MacKuen et al. (1992), Ostrom and Smith (1993), Haller and Norpoth (1994), Clark and Stewart (1994), DeRouen (1995), Norpoth (1996), Fordham (1998), Erikson et al. (2002).

Baum 2004). Similarly, the media and public are more interested in what presidents have to say during these periods.

Beyond seeking greater support, presidents may also be emboldened to make foreign policy threats by strong support. They may feel they are on better footing when they have a supportive public (e.g., see Canes-Wrone 2006). Further, the strength of the president's coalition in Congress might increase the presidential propensity toward saber rattling. For example, Howell and Pevehouse (2007) suggest that presidents are systematically more likely to exercise military force when their own party controls Congress. Similarly, high presidential approval ratings and a strong economy might also embolden presidents in their foreign policy behavior.

#### *International Relations Theories and Presidential Threats*

Beyond representation theories, prominent international relations scholarship holds that a nation's behavior toward other nations is primarily a function of the international environment in which that nation resides (i.e., realism, neo-realism, Waltz 1979). The most important factor for explaining a nation's behavior is its power relative to other nations. States seek power, and have a strong preference for dominance over other nations (Mearsheimer 2001). As a result, their foreign policy behavior often tends toward coercion (George 2009). Like the "statesman" ideal discussed above, these theories predict that a nation's foreign policy behavior is primarily determined *externally* by the system.

Further, bipolar systems in which power is distributed evenly are viewed as more stable and less prone toward conflict. Relations between adversarial nations that are power equals depend on maintaining a balance of power, rather than political, economic, or military coercion. Equals have less incentive to fight, because the cost of doing so is high for both parties. Among equal adversaries coercive foreign policy strategies are less likely to be

successful, because effective coercion requires more power than one's adversary. Thus, saber rattling would not be a preferred foreign policy strategy in a bipolar system of equals.

On the other hand, nations that are power dominant relative to a set of weaker nations have more incentive to pursue coercive strategies. Because their economic and military power is greater, they are more likely to prevail in application of sanctions or war. As a result, coercive strategies are viewed as more credible. Threats perceived as credible are seen as dangerous by the targets of those threats. Therefore, realist theory would predict that strong nations like the United States would be more likely to use coercion when there is a multipolar, rather than bipolar system.

A more recent line of international relations scholarship suggests that both external and internal factors drive leaders to make foreign policy threats. The “signaling” literature suggests that leaders make public threats to bolster their credibility in the international arena (e.g., see Dorussen and Mo 2001; Fearon 1994; Fearon 1997; Gelpi and Griesdorf 2001; Kurizaki 2007; Leventoğlu and Tarar 2005; Partell and Palmer 1999; Ramsay 2004; Schultz 1998, 2001a, 2001b; Smith 1998; Tarar and Leventoğlu 2009; Tomz 2007; Weeks 2008). Public threats are viewed by foreign adversaries as more credible than private threats because they incur audience costs. Further, public threats may well bolster presidential approval and institutional support, further increasing presidential credibility in the international arena.

However, the same scholarship also suggests that potential audience costs may constrain leaders from making threats. Models of international conflict and cooperation now commonly assume that leaders suffer losses if they issue threats and fail to follow through. Citizens punish leaders who back down relative to leaders who never commit in the first place. The presence of audience costs and the associated prospect of losing domestic support should, therefore, discourage leaders from playing to the media and public. Thus,

contrary to the earlier predictions, presidents may actually “stay private” in the face of domestic stimuli pushing them toward seeking greater support through “going public” (Baum 2004; Kurizaki 2007).

Another line of international relations scholarship suggests a more devious rationale for presidents to make threats. The diversionary theory of war posits that strategic presidents “embark on risky foreign ventures in an attempt to achieve diplomatic or military gains that will help solve their domestic problems.” (Levy 1989, 272) When presidential approval ratings are low, the economy is doing poorly, or the administration is in scandal, the diversionary theory posits that presidents are more likely to involve the nation in conflict. This “folk theory” is commonly invoked by political pundits and is widely believed by the mass public. Historians also commonly posit that leaders are motivated in their foreign policy decisions by domestic conditions (Levy 1987).

The diversionary theory has attracted significant scholarly attention, but remains much in doubt. Various quantitative studies have reported mixed evidence on the diversionary theory. Some research suggests the probability of hostile activities directed toward other nations is higher when the U.S. is experiencing a weak economy or low presidential approval ratings (DeRouen 1995, 2000; James and Hristoulas 1994; James and Oneal 1991; Morgan and Bickers 1992; Ostrom and Job 1986; Russett 1989; Smith 1996). However, other studies seriously undercut this work by suggesting that the diversionary theory is a myth (Gowa 1998; Meernik 1994; Meernik and Waterman 1996; Yoon 1997). There is little evidence from this research that presidents use their foreign policy tools strategically to bolster their own approval or reelection prospects. Some researchers have found that presidential uses of force are actually more likely when public approval is high than when it is low (James and Oneal 1991; Ostrom and Job 1986), and rarely occurs just prior to an election. Further, when

military interventions do occur public support for presidents routinely increases in the short-term, but support wanes if a conflict becomes long-term (Brody and Page 1975; Cotton 1987; Kernell 1978; MacKuen 1983; Mueller 1973).

## **Measurement and Research Methods**

### *Constructing the Saber Rattling Measures*

If we are to evaluate expectations about presidential saber rattling which flow from these theories, then we require measures of presidential saber rattling. Defined narrowly, saber rattling is “a show or threat of military power, especially as used by a nation to impose its policies on other countries.” (Random House 2007) In this study, hostile foreign policy rhetoric of all styles and contexts will be labeled “saber rattling.” The term will be used to imply threats of either a general or specific nature directed toward other nations, international actors, or interests. Appendix A.1 on the *Journal of Politics* website contains representative examples of modern presidential saber rattling drawn from *Public Papers of the Presidents*. These presidential remarks reflect a variety of responses to foreign adversaries in differing styles and context during the changing eras of American foreign policy.

Rather than focusing on single presidential speeches or statements, this study employs a continuous time perspective to measure the *flow* of presidential saber rattling through time. The measures consist of monthly time series that gauge the changing intensity of presidential saber rattling through time. The intensity of presidential saber rattling is gauged simply by counting the number of bellicose presidential remarks during each month.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, one could rightly argue that some presidential remarks should carry more weight than others. Thus, presidential remarks known to be especially hostile might be weighted heavier. However, there is no objective criterion upon which to base such a weighting

The data source for the presidential saber rattling measures is *Public Papers of the Presidents*. The volumes of *Public Papers* from 1945 to 2009 comprise a massive amount of text, covering all public remarks by eleven presidents over a time span of sixty-four years. It would be a near impossible task for a single researcher to read and code all saber rattling from this massive amount of text. Therefore, we used a computer assisted technology for constructing the measures.

An electronic file was first created containing the entire *Public Papers of the Presidents* from April 12, 1945 through January 19, 2009. The resulting electronic file for content analysis of presidential saber rattling contained around 380 megabytes of ASCII text.<sup>4</sup> With this massive electronic file in hand, we then used a combination of machine and human coding to extract the measures. Practical Extraction and Report Language (PERL) was used to manipulate the text contained in the electronic file.<sup>5</sup> In implementing the electronic searches, we first developed a PERL program to extract from the *Public Papers* every sentence spoken publicly by the president containing keywords and phrases indicative of foreign policy. There were 261 foreign policy indicators, including country names, organizational acronyms,

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scheme. Therefore, the measurement scheme used here assumes simply that presidents threaten more often when they want to emphasize a message more strongly.

<sup>4</sup> The master text file for this project is available on request from the authors.

<sup>5</sup> PERL is a public domain open access code software package for logical manipulation of text. It is a high-level programming language derived from the ubiquitous C programming language and to a lesser extent from sed, awk, the Unix shell, and at least a dozen other tools and languages (Schwartz et al. 1997). A full description of PERL, as well as various user support functions is available at <http://www.perl.com>. PERL can be downloaded free from a link on this website.

international leaders, and words generally associated with U.S. foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> The keywords were validated by human coders to assure that all extracted sentences related to foreign policy.

The resulting sentence file contained roughly 400,000 distinct presidential remarks on foreign policy. Having identified the president's foreign policy remarks, the task was then to identify which of those remarks contained saber rattling. This again involved a combination of both electronic and human coding. It was initially helpful to identify the nations and activities likely to have provoked presidential bellicosity. The Wikipedia Timeline of United States Diplomatic History<sup>7</sup> was used to identify American adversaries and periods of crisis or conflict. Adversaries are more likely to be targets of presidential saber rattling. Therefore, keywords were included to capture when the president was talking about a particular adversary or adversarial activity.

Additionally, a PERL program was developed to list every unique word in the foreign policy sentence file. The list contained roughly 58,000 unique words and phrases. Human coders were then used to identify those keywords and phrases commonly used by presidents when engaging in saber rattling. Around 120 words and phrases were identified and validated as indicative of presidential saber rattling. Validation was accomplished through manual keyword searches in the foreign policy sentences file by recording the percentage of correct hits using the search function in a DOS text editor on restricted segments of the text.

Finally, a PERL program was developed using the saber rattling keywords to tentatively identify the sentences involving hostile presidential rhetoric. In recognition that machine

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<sup>6</sup> The keywords referenced here and below are contained in PERL programs available on the author's website at xxxx.

<sup>7</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_diplomatic\\_history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_United_States_diplomatic_history).

coding techniques are fallible, human coders were again used to validate the results. The PERL coded saber rattling file was a starting point that enabled more efficient human identification of presidential saber rattling sentences. Human coders were used to verify that all PERL extracted sentences were relevant and actually constituted presidential saber rattling. This iterative process effectively identified all instances where the president made general threats, as well as threats toward specific countries.

This coding framework identified a total of 4,269 distinct instances of presidential saber rattling from 1945 to 2009. Of these saber rattling remarks, 3,163 were of a general nature directed toward no particular country or group. The remaining 1,106 were specific and directed toward particular countries or actors. Among these, there were 508 threats seemingly intended to deter activities by other countries or groups, 398 presidential threats of economic or political sanction, and 200 threats of military action.

Using the resulting saber rattling sentence file, the coded presidential threats were then aggregated into monthly time series along each dimension. This was accomplished simply by summing the number of threatening presidential remarks during each month. The resulting measures capture the relative intensity of presidential hostility of each type during each month. Months with a large number of presidential threats are assumed to be periods of intense presidential hostility. Months with few threats reflect periods of relative calm presidential rhetoric.

#### *Describing the Saber Rattling Measures*

We can gain a sense of how the intensity of presidential saber rattling has varied through time by examining graphs of the measures and calculating some descriptive information. Figure 1 contains a plot of all types of presidential saber rattling aggregated during each

month from April 1945 to January 19, 2009. Labels marking some of the most important foreign policy events during this time frame are also included.

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### INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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The time series covers 766 total months. From these, there were 119 months during which the president made no hostile remarks, 299 months during which the president made two or fewer hostile remarks, and 641 months during which the president made less than ten hostile remarks. The maximum intensity of presidential saber rattling occurred in November 1990 when President George H. W. Bush made 70 threatening remarks toward Iraq over their invasion of Kuwait.

Visual examination of Figure 1 also shows other intense periods of presidential saber rattling. There are peaks associated with the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Iran hostage crisis, the Libyan bombing, the Persian Gulf War, Haiti, the Bosnian crisis, September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. These graphical results suggest that war and crisis are important causes of presidential saber rattling.

However, visual examination of Figure 1 also reveals that presidents engaged in saber rattling during the intervening periods. Considering months during which the president made fewer than ten hostile remarks, the average intensity of saber rattling was roughly 3.5 remarks. These remarks during the intervening periods imply that presidents may have engaged in symbolic saber rattling.

Additionally, there are several peaks in presidential saber rattling associated with no specific foreign policy event. For example, President Ford made 26 hostile remarks during March 1976. Examining the saber rattling sentence file entries for this month shows that these remarks were presidential campaign statements directed at no particular nation, but asserting the nation's ability to defeat foreign aggression. Similarly, President George H.W.

Bush made 28 hostile remarks in May 1989. Again examining the saber rattling sentence file for this month, these remarks do not seem to have been associated with a foreign policy event. President Bush's remarks were generally aggressive, but seemingly for no apparent reason. Again, these peaks suggest that presidents sometimes engage in saber rattling without a specific foreign policy goal.

We can further refine our understanding of the data by dividing the time series according to whether presidential saber rattling was general versus country-specific. Figure 2 provides an overlay time series plot separating out these two types of saber rattling. Visual examination of the two plots again shows that substantially more presidential saber rattling was general than was country-specific. There were roughly three times more general than country-specific remarks. Further, the overlay shows that the two time series do not usually line up. The simple correlation between the two plots is only about 0.19. The plots also show that presidents engaged in significant amounts of general saber rattling for prolonged periods, without referring to a specific country.

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#### **INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE**

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Figure 2 also suggests a structural break through time in the types of presidential saber rattling. From 1945 to the mid-1980s, general saber rattling was the predominant mode. Country-specific presidential saber rattling during this period was restricted almost exclusively to the Korean and Vietnam War eras. From the mid-1980s through 2008 the intensity of both general and country-specific saber rattling increased. This apparent structural break is consistent with the transition from a bi-polar to multi-polar world in the 1980s. Hence, the data provide some descriptive support for a realist interpretation of changing presidential behavior through time.

More generally, Presidents from Truman through George W. Bush made an average of 5.67 hostile remarks per month. Within this average, 4.17 remarks per month were of a general nature, and 1.50 remarks were country-specific. The median monthly number of hostile presidential remarks for the three variables in Figures 1 and 2 was four, two, and zero respectively. The differences between the means and medians reveal a distribution that is skewed right. The modal frequency of hostile presidential remarks was zero for all three variables. The probability of successively higher frequencies declines sharply toward zero. Examining the frequency distributions of the three time series, the decay rate of probable counts is not strictly exponential, but may be characterized by one of the discrete distributions related to the exponential distribution. Thus, when presidential saber rattling is considered as a dependent variable below, we need to use a non-linear statistical estimator such as Poisson or Negative Binomial regression.

#### *Constructing Measures for Foreign and Domestic Factors*

We cannot know with certainty what motivates presidents in their foreign policy behavior. Such knowledge would require psychological data that can only come from within a president's mind. Moreover, presidents can always rationalize foreign policy threats as flowing from a statesman-like desire to increase their foreign policy credibility, project American interests, or protect the nation. Yet, other observers may simultaneously believe that presidential threats are rooted in diversionary tactics, self-interest, or other pretended motivations. As a result of these uncertainties, the best we can do is develop measures that are indicative of presidential motivations.

We use both foreign and domestic indicators of presidential motivations in the analyses below. Foreign factors considered include the presence of war and the presence of major foreign policy crises and events. Domestic factors considered include presidential election

seasons, institutional alignments relative to the president, economic conditions, presidential approval, scandal, and the magnitude of media frenzies.

The presence of war is measured using an indicator variable switched on for the Korean War (1950:05-1953:06), Vietnam War (1965:02-1975:03), Persian Gulf War (1990:07-1991:01), U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (2001:9-2001:11), and U.S. invasion of Iraq (2003:2-2003:4). The rationale for cutting off the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq after November 2001 and April 2003, respectively, is that the U.S. from those points on became an occupation force. Presidential saber rattling toward these two countries effectively ceased after the successful invasions. Therefore, even though hostilities continued, presidential remarks were directed at the respective insurgencies, rather than at the countries themselves.

A second indicator time series was included to capture the major foreign policy events and crises which occurred from 1945 through 2008. The included events are listed on the *Journal of Politics* website in Appendix A.2, along with the dates of each event. The 54 listed events range from the dropping of the Atom bomb on Japan in August 1945 to the London tube bombing in July 2005. The decision of which particular events to include in the events time series involved searching <http://Spiritus-Temporis.com>. Spiritus-Temporis contains a timeline of important historical dates in world history. If an event was listed there, pertained to U.S. interests, and related to a foreign policy event or crisis, then it was included. The events series should be considered complementary to the war series. Most of the included events were orthogonal to war, sometimes preceding, sometimes following, and sometimes unrelated. However, in a few cases the events series overlaps with the war series.

Election seasons were measured as an indicator variable starting in January and ending in October of each presidential election year. This timing is selected because presidential campaigns usually start with the New Year and end when the election is held. During this

period presidents seek to project an image of strength for themselves and their political party.

More generally, presidents may be emboldened by high approval ratings or a strong economy. Or, they may also seek to increase their support through saber rattling when their approval ratings are low, the economy is doing poorly, or the administration is embroiled in a scandal.

The standard Gallup approval measure was used to gauge public approval of the president's job performance. The Gallup survey organization has routinely asked the approval question since March 1949. Prior to 1978 the question was asked irregularly with some missing months. After 1978 the question was asked every month, but with different timing, and sometimes multiple times in the same month. These potential complications were addressed using the procedure and software WCALC developed by Stimson (1991). The approval time series was lagged by one month to avoid potential problems of reverse causality.

Current U.S. economic performance was measured using the annualized monthly percent change in the Conference Board's Composite Index of Coincident Indicators. This is an index constructed from four time series chosen by the Conference Board because they are consistently in step with the *current* state of the economy. The four time series comprising the Coincident Index are employment, personal income, industrial production, and manufacturing/trade sales in 1996 dollars. According to the Conference Board (2001, 13), the Coincident Index is a "broad series that measures aggregate economic activity; thus they define the business cycle." The Coincident Index was also lagged by one month, again to avoid potential problems of reverse causality.

The presence of scandal was measured using an indicator variable for the three major scandals involving the presidency. The Watergate scandal (1972:06-1974:08), the Iran-Contra scandal (1986:11-1987:8), and the Monicagate scandal (1998:1-1999:2) all produced potential incentives for presidents to attempt moving public and media attention away from their domestic problems and toward foreign affairs. Therefore, presidents may have engaged in increased saber rattling during these periods.

The partisan alignment of institutions relative to the president may have also affected presidential saber rattling. Presidents may be emboldened toward aggressive foreign policy stances when they have greater institutional support. Alternatively, they may turn to their strong suit, foreign policy, when they have weak institutional support. Thus, the direction for this potential relationship is again ambiguous. The partisan alignment relative to the president was measured using a set of indicator variables to reflect when there was unified or divided government.

Finally, a measure of media frenzy was also included in the analysis. Media frenzy was gauged by recording the monthly count of New York Times stories associated with the events listed in Appendix A.2 on the *Journal of Politics* website. Think of each event as an intervention. Then, given a pre-intervention equilibrium number of stories, a tally was recorded for each intervention for every month until the number of media stories returned to the pre-intervention levels. This approach was applied separately for each event. Then, the results were summed to reflect the total media frenzy in each month for the entire saber rattling time series. The expectation is that greater media frenzy should be associated with more presidential saber rattling.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Media coverage may not be exogenous, perhaps also responding to the president. Thus, Granger (1969) exogeneity tests were performed to evaluate this possibility. Controlling for

## Evaluating the Rationale for Presidential Saber Rattling

### *Looking for an Electoral Connection: Univariate Spectral Decompositions*

In this section, univariate spectral time series analyses are reported for the three dependent measures described above. The three time series consist of all types of presidential threats (graphed in Figure 1), general threats (graphed in Figure 2), and target-specific threats (graphed in Figure 2). The intent of this analysis is to evaluate whether and how presidents respond to the electoral cycle. The electoral cycle occurs regularly in the United States with a frequency of 1/48 and period of 48 months. Because of this regularity we can evaluate the various saber rattling time series for changes at this frequency and periodicity. Spectral decomposition of the six time series into their component frequencies is used for this purpose.

Spectral time series analysis is commonly used for evaluating regularities in physical phenomena such as mechanical vibrations, acoustics, climate change, the oceans, and galactic phenomena. However, this approach can also be used for evaluating social science phenomena where one expects regular periodicities (e.g., see Beck 1991; Enders and Sandler 2000). Analyses of this type are sometimes called frequency domain analyses.

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events, the tests show that the relation runs from the media to presidential saber rattling, rather than in the opposite direction. The  $\chi^2_4$  statistic from the media to presidential saber rattling of all types is 14.49 with p-value 0.01. In the reverse direction, the  $\chi^2_4$  statistic from presidential saber rattling to the media is only 2.01 with p-value 0.73. Note that this finding is consistent with the results reported in Edwards and Wood (1998; see also Edwards and Wood 1999). Therefore, the media series is treated as exogenous in subsequent analyses.

Every time series can be expressed as the sum of a set of Fourier frequencies. The goal of frequency domain analysis is to uncover the power contained in “hidden” frequencies within a time series. If a time series is random with respect to the Fourier frequencies, then a spectral decomposition will show that all frequencies contain equal power. However, if some frequencies contain more power than others, then this will show up through spikes at particular frequencies. In spectral time series analysis, the dependent time series is regressed on the set of all sinusoidal frequencies defined by Fourier decomposition.

### **INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE**

Figure 3 contains the spectral decompositions of the three saber rattling time series into their separate Fourier frequencies. The three graphs contain analyses of saber rattling of all types, general saber rattling directed at no particular target, and target-specific saber rattling. The low end of the frequency spectrum, toward the left of the graphs in Figure 3, shows that the series contain more power at the low end of the frequency spectrum. Higher power at this end normally implies a process that is positive autoregressive. Beyond this autoregressive property, however, one particular spike near the low end stands out for all three time series. This spike is marked with a dashed vertical line, and occurs at frequency 16/766 (i.e.,  $1/47.875$ ), or about 0.021 cycles relative to the entire series. This frequency corresponds with a periodicity of one cycle every 47.875 months. This number is sufficiently close to 48 months to conclude that there is a strong periodic component to the presidential saber rattling time series which coincides with the American electoral cycle.

This 48 month periodicity occurs in all three time series with different amplitudes. Thus, the univariate evidence suggests that presidents do respond to election seasons in the relative

intensity of their saber rattling.<sup>9</sup> While this univariate finding is suggestive, it is not definitive. There are no statistical controls in the analyses. Also, we do not know when the cycle is at its maximum. If the maximum occurs just prior to elections, then we could draw strong conclusions about presidents using saber rattling for electoral purposes. However, further analysis is required to draw this conclusion.

### *A Multivariate Poisson Autoregressive Analysis*

#### *Estimation Method*

Again, the dependent variables of this study consist of monthly counts from April 1945 through December 2008 of presidential threats. These data are, by nature, always positive integers, characterized by many zeros, with a preponderance of small integers in any given month. As noted earlier, these characteristics suggest we need either Poisson or Negative Binomial estimators.

However, standard Poisson and Negative Binomial estimators do not take into account possible interdependence between time series observations. Presidential saber rattling may be inertial, with the counts in any given month being a function of the counts in prior

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<sup>9</sup> One might reasonably wonder whether this increase in the intensity of presidential saber rattling during election periods is just a function of overall increasing presidential rhetoric. To evaluate this possibility we did a machine search on the words “the” and “a” to construct a monthly time series containing the count of most presidential sentences spoken from 1945 through 2009. Using this time series, spectral analysis was again performed to search for periodicities. There was no similar 48 month periodicity in the overall count of presidential sentences. Thus, the result for saber rattling reported in this section is not merely an artifact of increasing presidential rhetoric during elections.

months. More substantively, presidents may engage in a stream of saber rattling through time as they deal with various foreign policy issues. This feature of the dependent variables suggests the need to test for and possibly estimate time serial interdependence (i.e., autocorrelation), but in the context of discrete data.

To begin, standard Poisson and Negative Binomial regressions of presidential saber rattling on a set of presidency indicator variables were estimated. The statistical results showed similar coefficients and standard errors for the two estimators. However, the Negative Binomial overdispersion parameter was large and statistically significant, indicating that an estimator allowing for overdispersion is most appropriate for this research problem.

Using the Negative Binomial estimator, Pearson residuals were calculated using the actual saber rattling data and model predictions. The Pearson residuals were then evaluated using the autocorrelation and partial autocorrelation functions. The results showed time serial interdependence. The nature of the process appeared autoregressive, of either first or second order. Therefore, an estimator that allows for both overdispersion and autocorrelation is used for all of the analyses below.

Cameron and Trivedi (1998, chapter 7) detail a variety of estimators that can be used under these conditions. Based on their discussion, the quasi-likelihood Markov estimator proposed by Zeger and Qaqish (1988) was used for the analyses below. This specification is sometimes called the *conditional* model because it includes a transformation of the lagged dependent variable on the right side. The core of this model is a Negative Binomial regression to take account of the overdispersion. It also includes a lagged dependent variable, transformed by logging the data adjusted by a constant to enable the log transformation.

Because this estimator includes a transformed lagged dependent variable, it is somewhat more conservative than other possible estimators. The lagged dependent variable also has a substantive interpretation; it accounts for inertia in presidential saber rattling. Thus, it contains all of those historical factors that might have been omitted from the model.

### *The Multivariate Results*

Consider now a multivariate analysis of presidential saber rattling of all types, general, and target-specific. Table 1 reports the results of these analyses. The numbers in the table are estimated coefficients, with robust t-statistics in parentheses. We can interpret the coefficients as follows: for a one unit change in the predictor variable, the difference in the logs of expected counts of the response variable changes by the respective regression coefficient, given the other predictor variables are held constant. However, this interpretation is a bit complex for imparting meaning to readers. Therefore, a more commonly used metric is to calculate incidence ratios (also called factor changes). Incidence ratios are obtained simply by exponentiating the estimated coefficients. Thus, Table 1 also reports incidence ratios in square brackets.

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### **INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE**

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For example, the incidence ratio for Logged Presidential Threats<sub>t-1</sub> in the first column and row of Table 1 is obtained by  $ir = \exp 0.02 = 1.02$ . This number is interpreted in terms of percent change over the expected count reported in the first row of the diagnostics (5.14 threats per month). Thus, the effect of one additional unit of presidential threats in the prior month is about two percent. In other words, presidential threats are mildly inertial, after controlling for foreign and domestic factors. However, the real importance if this variable is in controlling for history.

How do foreign factors affect presidential saber rattling across the three dependent variables? The coefficients for the War variable in Table 1 are large and statistically significant for all three measures. In the first column, the incidence ratio for War on all types of saber rattling shows an increase of about 62 percent (i.e., to  $1.62 * 5.14 = 8.33$  threats per month). In the second column, the effect of War on general presidential saber rattling is an increase of about 53 percent (i.e., to  $1.53 * 3.83 = 5.86$  threats per month). Finally, in the third column, the effect of War on target-specific presidential saber rattling is an increase of about 110 percent per month (i.e., to  $2.10 * 0.87 = 1.83$  threats per month). Thus, War is an obvious determinant of presidential behavior.

Major Foreign Policy Crises and Events produce increases that are more target-specific. The results for all types of saber rattling in the first column show an increase of about 26 percent (i.e., to  $1.26 * 5.14 = 6.48$  threats per month). The second column shows no statistically significant increase in general presidential saber rattling. Finally, the third column reveals an increase of about 90 percent in target-specific saber rattling when Major Foreign Policy Crises and Events are present (i.e., to  $1.90 * 0.87 = 1.65$  threats per month). Thus, the increase in saber rattling of all types in the first column is clearly due to the effect of target-specific threats in the third column.

Presidents respond as one might expect of a “statesman” president to the external foreign policy environment? However, are they also domestic support-seekers when conducting American foreign policy? Controlling for the presence of War and Major Crises and Events, the results reported in the remainder of Table 1 suggest that they are.

The results for Election Seasons in the fourth row again show that presidents use bellicose rhetoric more often during election seasons. This result is consistent with the spectral time series analyses reported above in Figure 3. Those analyses showed a 48 month

periodicity to modern presidential saber rattling. The results in Table 1 confirm that the peak of the 48 month cycle occurs when presidents are campaigning for reelection of themselves and/or their political party.

More specifically, the fourth row of Table 1 shows that during election periods presidential saber rattling of all types increases by about 23 percent over the expected count (i.e., to  $1.23 * 5.14 = 6.32$  hostile remarks per month). The statistical results also suggest, however, that the nature of presidential bellicosity during election seasons does not always pertain to particular targets. The Electoral Season coefficient for target-specific saber rattling is non-significant. In contrast, general presidential saber rattling increases during elections by about 36 percent (i.e., to  $1.36 * 3.83 = 5.21$  threats per month). Presidential saber rattling during elections appears to be more general “chest-pounding” than goal-oriented, probably intended to produce an image of presidential strength.

How, if at all, does the president’s legislative coalition affect the president’s propensity toward threatening rhetoric? The statistical results in the fifth row of Table 1 do not resolve the ambiguity in our earlier predictions for this variable. One argument in the literature is that institutional support emboldens a president in relations with foreign adversaries (Howell and Pevehouse 2007). This argument would predict increased saber rattling during unified government. An alternative argument is that divided government might produce more saber rattling as presidents turn to their strong suit, foreign policy. The reported analysis provides ambiguous results for either interpretation. Unified Government is not statistically associated with more threatening presidential rhetoric when considering all types. It is associated with a significant increase in general presidential saber rattling directed toward no particular nation or actor. However, Unified Government is also associated with a significant decrease in target-specific presidential saber rattling.

Next, consider the variables reflecting domestic political and economic conditions. As discussed earlier, poor economic conditions, the presence of scandal, and low approval ratings are all conditions where presidents might seek to bolster their sagging support. However, the statistical results in the sixth through eighth row of Table 1 yield little evidence that presidents respond to these stimuli with increased bellicosity. The coefficient for Economic Conditions<sub>t-1</sub> for saber rattling of all types is actually positive, suggesting that presidents are emboldened by good economic times. However, the coefficients for general and target-specific saber rattling belie this result. These coefficients are non-significant, suggesting no relationship between economic conditions and presidential propensities to use threatening rhetoric. The coefficients for Scandal and Approval<sub>t-1</sub> are also non-significant for all types of saber rattling, as well as general and target-specific. Thus, the results for these three variables suggest that presidents do not engage in strategic saber rattling to bolster their domestic support.

Finally, the effects for Media Frenzy reported in the last row of coefficients in Table 1 are strongly significant across all three regressions. Each additional media story uniformly produces about a 1 percent increase in the count of presidential threats per month. We can obtain perspective on what these results mean by considering the average, standard deviation, and maximum of the Media Frenzy variable. The mean number of stories in this time series is 8.92, with standard deviation 16.91. The maximum number of stories in any single month is 104.

Now, assume that there is no current media coverage of a foreign policy crisis or event. Under this scenario, the expected counts would be 5.05, 3.78, and 0.78, respectively, for the

three saber rattling measures.<sup>10</sup> Then, suppose the media suddenly moves in response to a foreign policy event by one standard deviation in new media coverage. The resulting increase in the count of presidential threats would then be 16.91 percent across all measures (given the similar coefficients in the last row). That is, presidential saber rattling of all types would increase to 5.90 threats per month; general saber rattling would increase to 4.42 threats per month; and target-specific saber rattling would increase to 0.91 threats per month.

Of course, this number grossly understates the magnitude of media frenzies since the mean and standard deviation are calculated on the entire time series which contains many zeros. Therefore, we might also want to consider the effect at the maximum. Consider the largest media frenzy where there were 104 stories, producing a change in the expected count of 104 percent. This change produces saber rattling of roughly 10.30, 7.71, and 1.59 hostile remarks per month, respectively. These are large effects indeed, of about the same magnitude as that for War. Thus, it appears that presidents are substantially influenced by the mass media when using bellicose rhetoric.

Finally, let us return to the question of whether partisanship affects the presidential propensity to make threats toward foreign actors. For the sake of parsimony the indicator coefficients for each president were not reported in Table 1. However, those coefficients have potential meaning with respect to how partisanship affects presidential behavior. Controlling for the foreign policy environment, significant coefficients for a president imply effects specific to that presidency. Also, systematic differences across presidents relating to partisanship may imply a partisan bias to the intensity of presidential saber rattling. Thus, Table 2 reports the presidency-specific coefficients for the regressions reported in Table 1.

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<sup>10</sup> This number is obtained by subtracting 8.92 percent (i.e., 1 percent \* 8.92) from the expected counts reported in Table 4.2.

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## INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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The results show that President Eisenhower was consistently below President Truman in bellicosity for all three measures. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter were either less bellicose than or similar to President Truman after controlling for their respective foreign and domestic policy environments. Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush were considerably more prone than Truman toward general saber rattling directed at no particular target. Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush made far more target-specific threats of each type than any other president. Thus, there are clearly presidency-specific effects starting with Reagan.

Does partisanship drive presidential bellicosity? The bottom row of Table 2 provides statistical comparisons of the Democrat and Republican presidential averages. The third column shows that Democrats were more prone than Republicans toward target-specific saber rattling. However, the coefficients in Table 2 show that this result is driven largely by President Clinton. The second column shows that Republicans were statistically more prone than Democrats toward general saber rattling directed at no particular country. However, the coefficients in Table 2 suggest that this result is driven largely by presidents Reagan and George H. W. Bush. Thus, the statistical comparisons suggest that presidency-specific effects, rather than partisanship, were more important in affecting presidential foreign policy behavior. Of course, it is difficult to separate presidents after Reagan from their partisanship, so one might also argue that partisanship has been important.

### **Conclusions**

As noted in the introductory section, presidents have been described by American government and presidency textbooks, social scientists, and political pundits alike as *the nation's chief foreign policy representative*. Yet, past research has yielded almost nothing about the

nature of presidential representation in the area of foreign policy. This study has been an effort to fill that gap using saber rattling as an object of analysis.

The analyses reported above show that presidential saber rattling increases during times or war, crisis, and in response to dramatic events such as terror attacks. Such responses are understandable, given that presidents are charged with protecting the nation-at-large from external threats. The presence of such threats justly evokes responses from the president consistent with the circumstances faced by the nation-at-large.

This study also provides evidence that presidents issue threats when war, crisis, and dramatic events are not present. Some of these unprovoked threats might be justifiable in the sense that the nation faced ongoing dangers from communism prior to the late-1980s and from terrorism starting in the mid-1980s. Presidents may issue threats with the intention of deterring certain behaviors by foreign adversaries. They may also issue threats to bolster their credibility in the international arena. In this capacity, presidents may be acting as statesmen to protect the nation from external dangers.

However, this study has also revealed regularities suggesting that presidents use *pretended* bellicose rhetoric to bolster their domestic support. The empirical evidence is strong that during election seasons presidents increase their saber rattling toward foreign adversaries. The spectral time series analyses reported in Figure 3 show a strong 48 month periodicity in presidential saber rattling of all types, general, and country-specific. The multivariate analyses reported in Table 1 confirm these increases due to elections, after statistical controls, for saber rattling of all types and general saber rattling, but not for country-specific saber rattling. Thus, the evidence is strong that presidents use bellicose rhetoric to build their domestic support when elections are approaching.

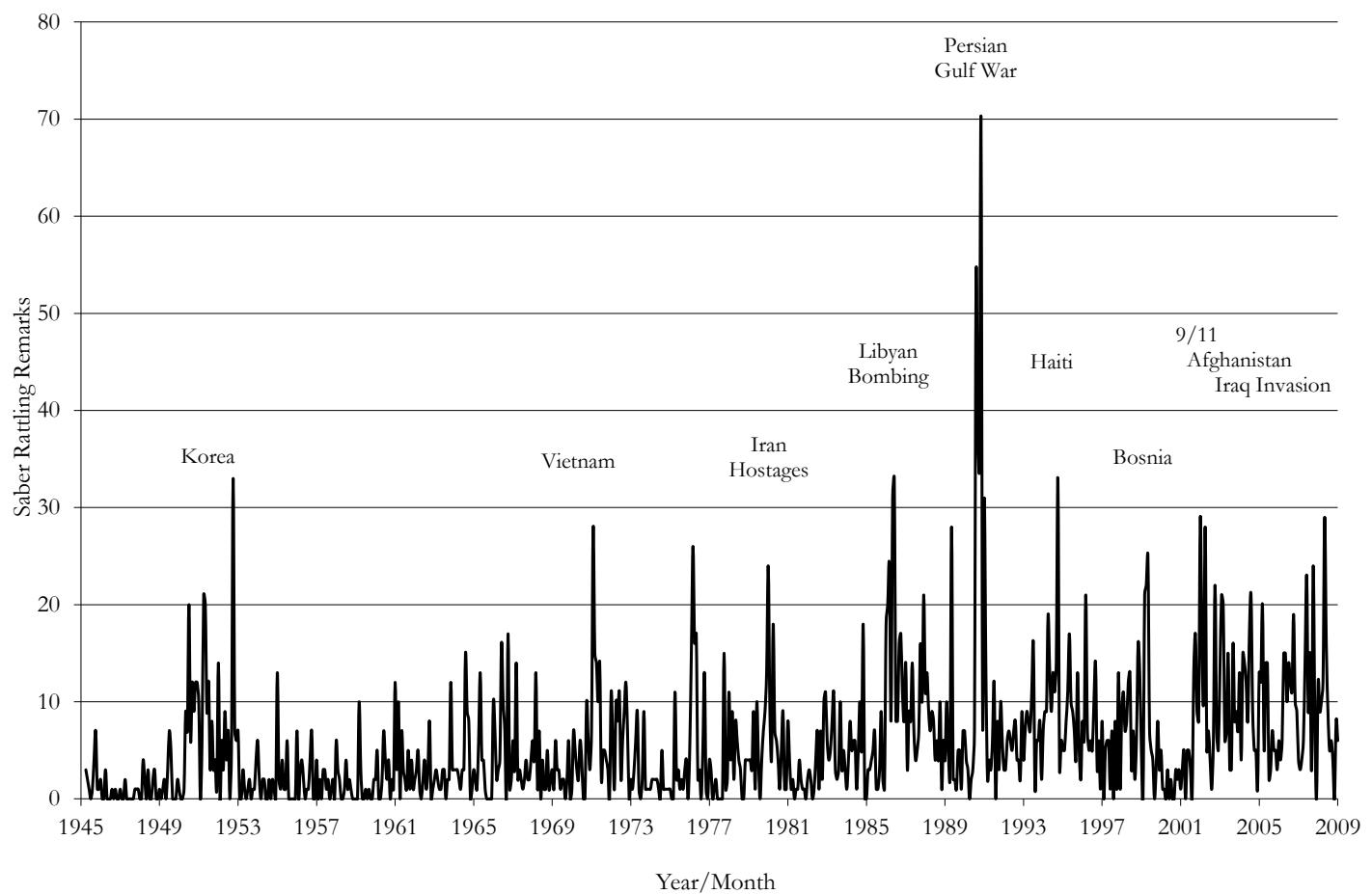
The preceding analyses also yield evidence of presidency-specific and potentially partisan effects. Presidents starting with Reagan were considerably more bellicose than earlier presidents. Controlling for their respective foreign policy environments, Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush made far more target-specific threats than earlier presidents. Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush used more general saber rattling directed at no particular foreign actor. These findings suggest that presidents since Reagan may have engaged more in symbolic saber rattling, perhaps to bolster their domestic support.

A final regularity revealed by this study concerns the effect of the mass media on presidential use of threatening rhetoric. Presidents have commonly been "caught-up" in the multiple media frenzies that have characterized American foreign policy since the 1980s. The multivariate results for media frenzies were strong and statistically significant for presidential saber rattling of all types, as well as for general and country-specific saber rattling. Indeed, the effect of media frenzies on the intensity of presidential rhetoric was similar in magnitude to that for war. The magnitude of this effect suggests that the media may have an outsize effect on presidential behavior. Such responses probably reflect presidential efforts to appease the press and public by appearing strong in the excited environment so often created by media.

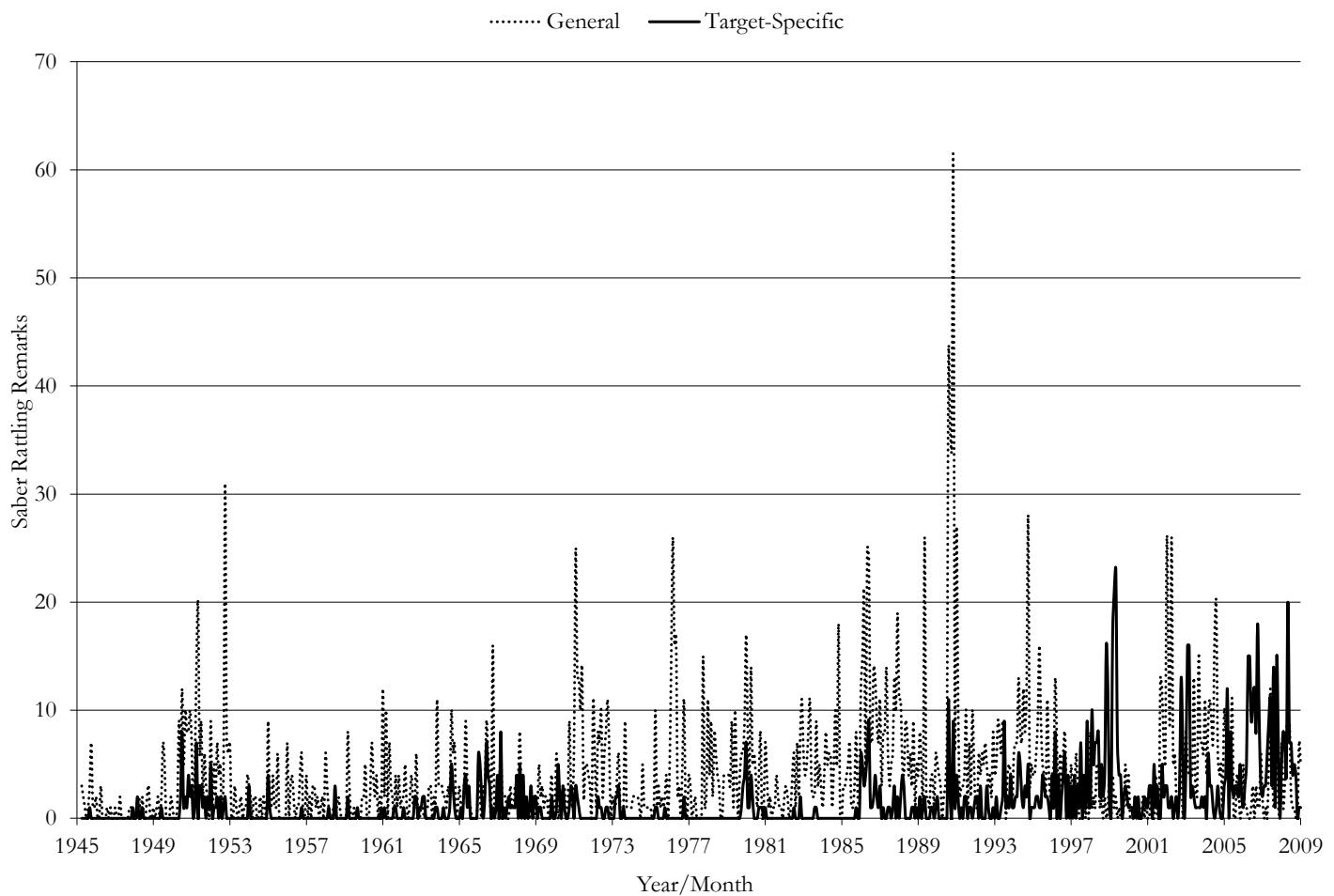
The larger implication of this study is that presidents are not the dispassionate statesmen suggested by Founders' model of presidential representation. They are also not the crass support-seekers suggested by rational choice explanations suggesting a relentless presidential thrust toward maximizing domestic support. Rather, the truth lies somewhere in between these two extremes. Presidents are pragmatists, sometimes responding on behalf of the nation to external threats, and at other times seeking to maintain and increase their domestic support. Whether this presidential posture is normatively appropriate is a question for others

to answer. Future research should evaluate other dimensions of presidential foreign policy behavior to obtain a better understanding of presidential representation in the American system.

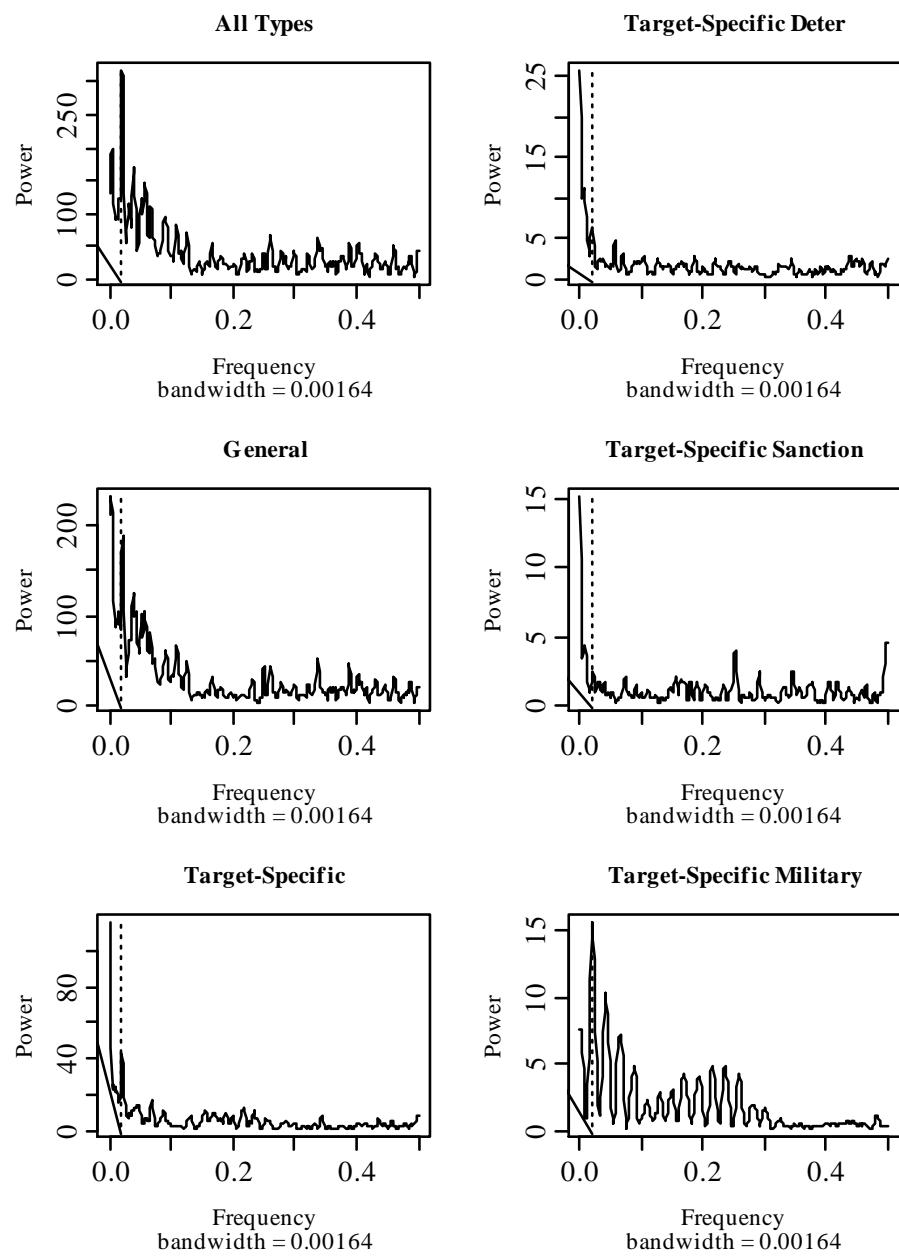
**FIGURE 1: Presidential Saber Rattling of Any Type**



**FIGURE 2: General and Target-Specific Presidential Saber Rattling**



**FIGURE 3: Spectra of Presidential Saber Rattling Time Series**



**TABLE 1: Statesmanship and Support-Seeking in Presidential Saber Rattling**

Variable	All Types	<u>Saber Rattling Type</u>	
		General	Target-Specific
Logged Presidential Threats <sub>t-1</sub>	0.02 (2.27) [1.02]	0.02 (2.72) [1.02]	0.03 (5.04) [1.03]
<b>Foreign Factors</b>			
War	0.48 (2.78) [1.62]	0.43 (2.31) [1.53]	0.74 (3.06) [2.10]
Major Foreign Policy Crises and Events	0.23 (1.70) [1.26]	0.12 (0.81) [1.13]	0.64 (3.15) [1.90]
<b>Domestic Factors</b>			
Election Seasons	0.21 (2.51) [1.23]	0.31 (3.37) [1.36]	-0.10 (-0.77) [0.90]
Unified Government	-0.07 (-0.64) [0.93]	0.24 (1.67) [1.27]	-0.58 (-3.11) [0.56]
Economic Conditions <sub>t-1</sub>	0.03 (2.04) [1.03]	0.02 (1.33) [1.02]	0.02 (0.89) [1.02]
Scandal	-0.05 (-0.40) [0.95]	-0.19 (-1.21) [0.83]	0.13 (1.16) [1.14]
Approval <sub>t-1</sub>	-0.00 (-0.50) [1.00]	0.00 (0.94) [1.00]	-0.01 (-1.18) [0.99]
Media Frenzy	0.01 (3.81) [1.01]	0.01 (3.06) [1.01]	0.01 (2.85) [1.01]
<b>Diagnostics</b>			
$\lambda = \exp X\beta_k$ (Expected Count)	5.14	3.83	0.87
N	717	717	717
Wald $\chi^2$	195.35	136.59	339.33
$\alpha$ (overdispersion parameter)	0.65 (13.02)	0.78 (12.58)	0.97 (8.82)

Note: The numbers in the table are coefficients, robust t-statistics (in parentheses), and incidence ratios (in square brackets) from Poisson Autoregressive Regressions (Zeger and Qaqish 1988) of presidential saber rattling of the indicated types on the variables in the left column. An unreported constant and indicator variables for each presidency were also included in the regressions.

**TABLE 2: Presidency-Specific Saber Rattling and Partisanship**

Presidency	<u>Saber Rattling Type</u>		
	All Types	General	Target-Specific
Constant (Truman)	1.32 (5.05)	0.80 (2.72)	0.45 (1.16)
Dwight Eisenhower	-0.79 (-3.10)	-0.59 (-2.16)	-1.29 (-2.66)
John Kennedy	-0.34 (-1.26)	-0.45 (-1.47)	-0.01 (-0.02)
Lyndon Johnson	-0.49 (-2.46)	-0.81 (-3.53)	0.34 (1.26)
Richard Nixon	-0.43 (-1.82)	-0.08 (-0.30)	-1.18 (-3.36)
Gerald Ford	-0.06 (-0.21)	0.26 (0.79)	-1.69 (-2.81)
Jimmy Carter	-0.07 (-0.28)	-0.04 (-0.17)	-0.41 (-1.14)
Ronald Reagan	0.28 (1.14)	0.56 (2.06)	-0.34 (-0.85)
George H. W. Bush	0.32 (1.22)	0.58 (1.94)	-0.18 (-0.45)
William J. Clinton	0.36 (1.58)	0.11 (0.43)	0.99 (2.97)
George W. Bush	0.63 (2.96)	0.15 (0.61)	1.51 (4.88)

**Comparisons**

Average Democrat	-0.14	-0.30	0.23
Relative to Truman			
Average Republican	-0.01	0.15	-0.53
Relative to Truman			
$\chi^2_{Democrat=Republican}$ (p-value)	0.48 (0.49)	6.20 (0.01)	10.34 (0.00)

Note: The numbers in the table are coefficients and robust t-statistics (in parentheses) from the Poisson Autoregressive Regressions (Zeger and Qaqish 1988) reported in Table 1.

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## **ONLINE APPENDIX A.1: Examples of Presidential Saber Rattling from *Public Papers of the Presidents***

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President Truman, April 30, 1951 – “If the Soviet Union chooses to unleash a general war, the free world must be in a position to stop the attack and strike back decisively and at once at the seats of Soviet Power.”

President Kennedy, October 22, 1962 – “It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring the full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.”

President Johnson, August 5, 1964 – “I urge the Congress to enact such a Resolution promptly and thus to give convincing evidence to the aggressive communist nations, and to the world as a whole, that our policy in Southeast Asia will be carried forward – and that the peace and security of the area will be preserved.”

President Nixon, August 21, 1969 – “They are the very aggressive North Korean Communists who continue to commit bellicose acts of provocation and infiltration, constantly seeking an opportunity for renewed aggression.”

President Ford, March 12, 1976 – “...this country will defend freedom, will be willing to support an adequate defense budget to make America strong, so that we can handle the problem of Soviet and any aggression by the communists...”

President Carter, January 8, 1980 – “They know that the consequences to Iran will be quite severe if our hostages are injured or killed ...”

President Reagan, January 7, 1986 – “In light of this latest evidence of Libya's growing role in international terrorism, it is clear that steps taken so far have not been sufficient...”

President George H.W. Bush, September 11, 1990 – “Our quarrel is with Iraq's dictator and with his aggression. Iraq will not be permitted to annex Kuwait. That's not a threat, that's not a boast, that's just the way it's going to be.”

President Clinton, December 16, 1998 – “The credible threat to use force and, when necessary, the actual use of force, is the surest way to contain Saddam's weapons of mass destruction program, curtail his aggression, and prevent another Gulf war.”

President George W. Bush, September 14, 2001 – “I can hear you, the rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon.”

President George W. Bush, March 17, 2003 – “Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing.”

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## ONLINE APPENDIX A.2: Major Events and Crises Affecting US Interests from 1945-2008

Event	Date	Event	Date
Atom bomb dropped on Japan	1945:08	US attacks San Juan del Sur	1984:03
Start of the Berlin Blockade	1948:06	Berlin discotheque bombing	1986:04
Soviets test first atomic bomb	1949:09	Libya bombing	1986:04
US forces cross 38 <sup>th</sup> parallel	1950:10	Iceland summit conference	1986:10
CIA overthrows Iran government	1953:08	Iran Air 655 shot down	1988:07
Soviets invade Hungary	1956:10	Second Gulf of Sidra incident	1989:01
Suez crisis	1956:11	Tiananmen Square	1989:05
Marines land in Lebanon	1958:07	Velvet Revolution in Prague	1989:11
Bay of Pigs	1961:04	US invades Panama	1989:12
Cuban missile crisis	1962:10	Iraq invades Kuwait	1990:08
Gulf of Tonkin Resolution	1964:08	UN authorizes intervention in Kuwait	1990:11
US troops in Dominican Republic	1965:04	Start of NATO intervention in Bosnia	1992:06
U.S. Mekong Delta Operation	1967:12	Iraq refuses UN inspection team access	1992:07
Tet offensive/Battle of Hue	1968:01	US marines land in Somalia	1992:12
Soviets invade Czechoslovakia	1968:08	First World Trade Center bombing	1993:02
US troops authorized in Cambodia	1970:04	Battle of Mogadishu	1994:10
Signing of Salt I treaty	1972:05	Rwanda genocide made public	1994:04
Munich Olympics terror attack	1972:09	UN authorizes intervention in Haiti	1994:08
Fall of Saigon	1975:04	Iraq reveals has biological weapons	1995:07
Iran militants take U.S. hostages	1979:01	Iraq suspends UNSCOM cooperation	1998:08
Salt II treaty signed	1979:06	NATO Kosovo air campaign	1999:03
Attack on US embassy in Pakistan	1979:11	USS Cole terror attack	2000:10
Soviets invade Afghanistan	1979:12	September 11 terror attack	2001:09
First Gulf of Sidra incident	1981:08	Bali Bombings	2002:10
Start of Lebanese civil war	1982:06	UN authorizes Iraq invasion	2002:11
Soviets shoot down KAL 007	1983:09	Madrid bombing	2004:03
US invasion of Grenada	1983:10	London train bombings	2005:07

Note: All events are switched on at the indicated years and months and off for all other periods

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