

## ATTITUDES TOWARD WAR AND THE ABORTIVE RAID ON IRAN

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. Earlier work on attitudes toward war had found what appeared to be a situational explanation for variations in support for war as an instrument of foreign policy. Putney and Middleton (1962) found basic support for the use of war as an instrument of political strategy. Their survey was conducted in 1962 at the height of the Cold War, when there was emphasis on an escalation strategy along with the politics of international confrontation, as symbolized by the Cuban Missile Crisis.

. A decade later, the Vietnam generation was much less supportive of war as an instrument of foreign policy, and there was a reversal of the earlier attitudes (Handberg 1972). At that time, it was argued that the change was an artifact of the Vietnam War. One particular generation had learned the "lessons" of Vietnam, as an earlier generation had learned the "lessons" of Munich. Among the lessons of Vietnam was realization that war or the use of force was not an efficient or effective instrument of foreign policy except as a last resort, in self-defense. Therefore, war would not be supported as much by the generation of the early 1970's as it was in earlier generations.

. The issue of whether attitudes toward war are strictly situational constructs, or represent a deeply held conviction, remains unresolved. But we can provide some rather unique evidence about attitudes toward war during a time of international crisis. In late 1979, 53 American nationals were seized as hostages by Iranian student militants. In the late Spring of 1980 an attempted military rescue mission aborted in the desert with several deaths among the military personnel. Prior to this abortive military action, a survey instrument was distributed to several introductory social science classes. The instrument developed for other purposes also

included the earlier Snell and Middleton Pacifism Scale. In the week after the mission failure, the survey instrument was again distributed. As a result, we have a natural experiment. Unfortunately, because of the nature of the survey, we were unable to match individuals, so we can report only aggregate differences.

. Table 1 shows the results for the three surveys: Snell & Middleton 1962, Handberg, 1972, and Handberg, 1980. In the 1980 sample we report the aggregate pattern and the results divided between those responding before and after the raid. Demographically, the two groups are similar in race, age, religion, political party preference, and self-ascribed ideology. The major difference is a slightly higher percentage of females in the post-raid group. However the control for sex disclosed no significant differences. Thus, Table 1 shows a secular change which affected both sexes equally.

. The 1980 sample is less pacifist than the 1972 respondents, but less supportive of war than the 1962 group. What is interesting is the high degree of stability exhibited in the response patterns across the seven items in the Pacifism Scale. Essentially, only items 1 and 3 show any significant change between the two groups. The difference in both instances was in the direction of increased pacifism. The impact of the raid mission failure was fairly minimal. This appears to indicate that attitudes toward war are not as fluid as one might suppose. Rather, the movement in attitudes observed earlier came only after a long period of international crisis. In fact, the events in Iran were so confused when the survey was being administered that the students may not have reacted as strongly as expected, due to the universal confusion as to what had actually happened in the raid.

. Generalizations are necessarily

TABLE 1: TRENDS IN PACIFIST ATTITUDES AND THE IRAN RAID

<u>Pacifism Scale Items</u>	<u>Percent of Students Agreeing</u>				
	<u>1962</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>Before Raid</u>	<u>After Raid</u>
1 The U.S. must be willing to run any risk of war which may be necessary to prevent the spread of Communism.*	72	25	56	70	51
2 If disarmament negotiations are not successful, the U.S. should begin a gradual program of unilateral disarmament i.e., disarm whether other countries do or not.	6	31	11	14	8
3 Pacifist demonstrations: picketing missile bases, peace walks, etc., are harmful to the best interests of the American people.*	44	17	25	30	20
4 The U.S. has no moral right to carry its struggle against Communism to the point of risking the destruction of the human race.	34	85	70	70	69
5 It is contrary to my moral principles to participate in war and the killing of other people.	17	49	47	50	45
6 The real enemy today is no longer Communism, but rather, war itself.	31	67	62	61	63
7 Pacifism is simply not a practical philosophy in the world today.*	54	37	52	49	54
Number of cases:	(1199)	(150)	(213)	(121)	(92)

\*Reverse-scoring item on the Pacifism Scale.

limited, but it appears that the attitudes toward war, both positive and negative, are held rather firmly. This generation of college students inherited the basic attitudinal structure of their 1972 predecessors, but the secular drift is toward a less unidirectional position than that of the 1962 group. Crises have an effect on public attitudes, but an ultimate impact is the culmination of a long-term process (Erskine 1972). Crashing helicopters in the Iranian desert does not demark such a long-term process.

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