CHAPTER SEVEN

Presidential Beliefs Orientations Since World War II

Earlier chapters demonstrated the applicability of the beliefs model to two decision makers across a range of cases. An examination of more presidents can show the broader applicability of the beliefs model. Even though this analysis does not have the same depth, an examination of the beliefs of presidents from Harry Truman through Bill Clinton reveals that though these individuals display a range of beliefs from all four orientations (see chapter 1), each view is not equally represented. Of the postwar presidents, five (including Eisenhower) are coded as pragmatists, three as guardians, and one each as an executor and a delegate. This finding suggests that a potentially broad range of reactions to public opinion might be observed in the decisions reached by the postwar presidents.

Harry S. Truman: Guardian

President Harry Truman's views regarding the place of public opinion in foreign policy decision making identify him as a *guardian*. In his normative beliefs, he thought that public input should not affect his foreign policy decisions. He decided that rather than looking to the near-term popularity of a position as a standard, he would make the "right" decision based on his evaluation of the best policy to serve American national interests and let history judge his actions. In one 1949 press conference, he insisted:

> I have no more confidence in polls than I had before the [1948] election. . . . I never did have any confidence in polls, and I haven't got any confidence now. I make my decision on whether it's right or wrong from my point of view, after I have all the information and all the facts I can get to go on. Polls have no effect on me whatever.[1]

This negative view of public influence appears to derive from Truman's conception of the role of a leader. In his memoirs, he asserted:

> A man who is influenced by the polls or is afraid to make decisions which may make him unpopular is not a man to represent the welfare of the country. . . . I have always believed that the vast majority of people want to do what is right and that if the President is right and can get through to the people he can always persuade them.

This statement illuminates Truman's disdain for those influenced by public opinion and his belief that if he made the "right" choice, the public would support him. He viewed the goal of doing what the public wanted or gaining its support as diametrically opposed to what he should be trying to accomplish. For example, he stated, "I have never felt that popularity and glamour are fundamentals on which the Chief Executive of the government should operate. A President has to know where he is going and why, and he must believe in what he is doing."[2]

In his practical beliefs, Truman rejected the need for public support of his policies and concluded that what he saw as temporary public sentiments were irrelevant to achieving the long-term objectives of the nation. For example, he believed that leaders should go their own way regardless of public opinion:

> I wonder how far Moses would have gone if he had taken a poll in Egypt? What would Jesus Christ have preached if He had taken a poll in the land of Israel? Where would the Reformation have gone if Martin Luther had taken a poll? It isn't polls or public opinion alone of the moment that counts. It is right and wrong, and leadership—men with fortitude, honesty and a belief in the right that make epochs in the history of the world.[3]

This reliance on the long-term judgment of history rather than short-term public support was buoyed by his belief that even though his (correct) policies might not be accepted at the time, the public would eventually adopt his perspective. "Throughout history, those who have tried hardest to do the right thing have often been persecuted, misrep-

resented, or even assassinated, but eventually what they stood for has come to the top and been adopted by the people." To a certain extent, he considered that unpopularity even was a job requirement, given the need to confront tough issues and make difficult choices. "A President cannot always be popular. If a President is easily influenced and interested in keeping in line with the press and the polls, he is a complete washout."[4]

Given his opposition to public input and his rejection of the need for public support, Truman would likely have relied on his perception of the national security interests at stake to make decisions. He would not have shifted his policy in accordance with potential public support or opposition. After reaching a decision, however, he might have attempted to lead the public, especially in long decision-time cases, an effort that would have emphasized the national interests at stake.

John F. Kennedy: Pragmatist

In contrast to Truman, President John Kennedy possessed the public opinion beliefs of a *pragmatist*. In his normative beliefs, he stressed the need to base his decisions on the national interest and then to cultivate the public's support. He told his pollster, Lou Harris, "You must come down on the merits of the issue, regardless of public opinion."[5] In a 1960 speech to the National Press Club, Kennedy stated that a president should do more than register the public view, that he instead has a responsibility to inspire the public in the correct direction.

> It is not enough merely to represent prevailing sentiment—to follow McKinley's practice, as described by Joe Cannon, of "keeping his ear so close to the ground he got it full of grasshoppers." We will need in the sixties a President who is willing and able to summon his national constituency to its finest hour—to alert the people to our dangers and our opportunities—to demand of them the sacrifices that will be necessary. FDR's words in his first inaugural still ring true: "In every dark hour of our national life, a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory."[6]

Not only does this statement affirm Kennedy's belief in the necessity of making difficult decisions and leading the public, but by mentioning Roosevelt's statement, he was implying that public support was a necessary component of a successful policy.

Ironically, Kennedy compared his belief in the proper role of public opinion in formulating foreign policy with what he saw as the Eisenhower administration's timidness in the face of public opposition. In a 1960 speech to the California Democratic Clubs Convention, he contrasted successful foreign policy presidents who led the public and took the actions that, though unpopular, were correct with failed foreign policy presidents who "yielded to public pressure instead of educating it." He argued, "In 1960 we must elect a President who will lead the people—who will risk, if he must, his popularity for his responsibility."[7] These passages suggest both a normative belief rejecting the desirability of public input into foreign policy decision making and an emphasis on executive leadership.

In his practical beliefs, Kennedy recognized the necessity of obtaining public support for his foreign policies. In a letter to the editor of *Newsday*, he stated, "Each time we make any move or commitment in foreign affairs, I am in the need of support of the American people."[8] Despite stressing the need to lead the public to win this support, he did not completely reject the possibility of adjusting his policy in the face of persistent and strong public sentiment. In a continuation of the earlier quotation from Louis Harris, Kennedy emphasized that although a president should make decisions without regard to public opinion, he still needed to keep an eye on public support. "But if you find yourself outside those jaws of consent of the governed, then you'd better *look around fast*. You can educate the public to extend those jaws. But if you're outside them too often, then you can get voted out of office."[9]

Because Kennedy found public input into foreign policy decisions to be undesirable but believed that the public's support was necessary, Kennedy would likely have reached foreign policy decisions based on the national security interests at stake and then attempted to lead the public to support his chosen policy. If he perceived that the public would strongly oppose a policy option and that he could not persuade them to support it, then public opinion would have constrained him. This effect would have been particularly pronounced if he saw the issue as one that the public could use to vote against him or his party in the next election.

Lyndon Johnson: Guardian

As a *guardian*, President Lyndon Johnson held the normative belief that foreign policy decisions should be based on the "right" policy, with no regard to how the policy might stand up in the polls or the

public's opinion. At a 1967 news conference, he reflected on popular input,

> Well, they [the polls] are never as good as you would like to have them. . . . We just must do what we think is best for the country, regardless of how it stands up in the polls. You never know, when you make a decision, what the end results are going to be. . . . You do what you think is right.

Johnson emphasized that the popularity of a policy should not be the determinant of his choice because he saw public opinion as somewhat fickle and unpredictable. At a late 1967 press conference, he recalled Truman's decision to enter the Korean War, which began as a popular choice but soon became unpopular:

> Now, those things [shifts in popularity] have happened in all of our crises—economic, domestic, and international. A President learns to expect them and learns to live with them. The important thing for every man who occupies this place is to search as best he can to get the right answer; to try to find out what is right; and then do it without regard to polls and without regard to criticism.[10]

Johnson took a relaxed view of the public's opinion on policy issues, remarking that the public would have an opportunity to express their feelings at election time. At a 1966 press conference, Johnson acknowledged, "I think we all read them [the polls] and are affected by them" and stated that he would "like to have as much approval as we can get." But "we have to make our own judgments and do what we think is right. Then we trust the judgment of the people at election time."[11]

In his practical beliefs, despite Johnson's view of public opposition to his policies as a detriment, he still believed that his policies could succeed without public support. When asked at a 1966 press conference whether he worried about public support, Johnson responded,

> No. We always would like to see what we do and what we say approved by our associates and by our constituency—but that is not always the case. When it is not, we regret it and take due notice of it and engage in proper introspection. But the polls vary from week to week, and month to month. Those are things that we do not ignore, but they are not one of my burdens.

Instead of relying on public support, Johnson saw his role as gathering the necessary information and making the judgment on his own. In his memoirs, he emphasized that when making a decision, a president

> must search out the best information available. He can seek the counsel of men whose wisdom and experience and judgment he values. But in the end the President must decide, and he must do so on the basis of his judgment of what is the best— for his nation and for the world.

When these judgments, which he felt were the right ones, led to public disapproval but he felt the decisions he reached were the right ones, Johnson was willing to take "it on the head."[12]

Because Johnson—much like Truman—rejected public input and the necessity of public support, he would likely have made his decisions without regard to public opinion, in accordance with his assessment of the correct policy for national security interests. Especially when he had a long decision time, he would have led the public to support his chosen policy but would not have changed his mind to suit public support or opposition.

These views suggest that Johnson would best be categorized as a guardian, although some information about his practical beliefs is somewhat contradictory. In his memoirs, Johnson made a statement that would clearly place him in the pragmatist camp. In defining the need for consensus on his policies, he explained his decision process as, "first, deciding what needed to be done regardless of the political implications and, second, convincing a majority of the Congress and the American people of the necessity for doing those things."[13] If this statement were representative of his practical beliefs, then his beliefs would appear much closer to those of Eisenhower and Kennedy. But even though this coding is less certain than for the other presidents considered, Johnson's other comments appear more like those of a guardian.[14] Given his other beliefs about the decision-making process itself, the difference in behavior based on changes in his pragmatist beliefs would likely have been manifested in a policy constraint by public opinion if he determined he could not win over the public.

Richard Nixon: Pragmatist

Like Eisenhower and Kennedy, President Richard Nixon's public opinion beliefs identify him as a *pragmatist*. In his normative beliefs, Nixon firmly believed that public opinion should not influence his foreign policy choices. For example, he rhetorically asked a radio audience several weeks before the 1972 presidential election that even though the government may respect the public's views, "Does this mean that a Pres-

ident should read all the public opinion polls before he acts, and then follow the opinion of the majority down the line? Of course not." At about the same time, he privately recorded the same view in his diary: "I don't give one damn what the polls say insofar as affecting my decisions. I only care about them because they may affect my ability to lead, since politicians do pay attention to them."[15]

Nixon thought of polls as a way of understanding the public's views and which ones needed changing, but he did not think he should use them to formulate his position on an issue. He expounded on this view in his book on leadership:

> If the successful leader has to know when to compromise, he also has to know when to go his own way. Too many politicians today ride toward destiny "at full Gallup." The candidate who slavishly follows the polls may get elected, but he will not be a great leader or even a good one. Polls can be useful in identifying those areas where particular persuasion is needed. But if he sets his course by them, he abdicates his role as a leader. The task of the leader is not to follow the polls but to make the polls follow him.[16]

Nixon's strong normative view complemented his practical ideas about the necessity of public support, which he thought should result from changing public opinion rather than changing his policy positions. He underscored the critical role of a leader, "A leader must be willing to take unpopular stands when they are necessary. . . . And when he does find it necessary to take an unpopular stand, he has an obligation to explain it to the people, solicit their support, and win their approval." In fact, in his reelection campaign in 1972, Nixon pledged to take the necessary steps in foreign policy, regardless of domestic support: "In the years to come, if I am returned to office, I shall not hesitate to take the action I think necessary to protect and defend this nation's best interests, whether or not those actions meet with wide popular approval."[17]

Whereas Nixon valued making the correct foreign policy choice without regard to public input or initial support, he did think that he would ultimately require the public's support of foreign policy in order for it to succeed. To obtain this support, however, policymakers needed to exert leadership through public education efforts, rather than in responding to public opposition by shifting their policy position. During an early 1969 press conference, Nixon described his decision-making obligations along similar dimensions: "It is the responsibility of a President to examine all of the options that we have, and then if he finds

that the course he has to take is one that is not popular, he has to explain it to the American people and gain their support."[18] This calculus applied to wartime efforts as well:

> There are times when the Congress and the people may not recognize our vital interests in Third World conflicts. Leaders should lead and not just follow uninformed public opinion. It is their responsibility to educate the people and the Congress about where our vital interests are and then gain support for whatever military actions may be necessary to protect them. Leaders who do only what opinion polls indicate uninformed voters will support are not true leaders, and if America follows them, it will cease to be a great nation.[19]

Nixon also recognized the limitations on his ability to lead. "A leader can be out in front, ahead of public opinion, but not too far ahead. While trying to bring the public around, he often has to conceal a part of his hand, because to reveal it too soon could cost him the game."[20]

Since Nixon rejected the desirability of public input but thought its support was necessary, he would have made the decision that he regarded as being in the national interest and then taken action to persuade the public to support it. At the same time, since he thought that getting too far ahead of public opinion might cause the policy to fail, if he sensed he was pulling away from the public, he would either have worked secretly on the policy until he generated the public's support or slowed his action on the issue in order to give him time to construct the necessary base of support. In this sense, public opinion might have acted as a temporary brake on his foreign policy.

Nixon's ideas about how to win public support differ from the two other pragmatists, Eisenhower and Kennedy. In contrast, they appeared ready to adjust their policies in accordance with public opinion, if required, whereas Nixon emphasized changing public opinion to create support for his policies. Although Nixon still believed in the necessity of public support, he probably would have been less responsive to it in his decisions than either Eisenhower or Kennedy would have been. A pattern of belief similar to Nixon's is found in the remaining pragmatists, Ford and Bush. Although all these pragmatists share the same beliefs regarding public opinion, their ideas about how to achieve the needed public support varied. As indicated in the predictions for their behavior, these differences were likely to be manifested in how they reacted to potential public opposition.

Gerald Ford: Pragmatist

President Gerald Ford's beliefs suggest that he was most likely a *pragmatist*. His normative beliefs imply a desire to make decisions based on the national interest, regardless of public opinion. In an interview in early 1976, Ford stated,

> As we move ahead, we are going to try and predicate our foreign policy on the best interests of all the people in this country, as well as our allies and our adversaries, rather than to respond to a highly articulate, a very tightly organized pressure group of any kind. We cannot let America's policies be predicated on a limited part of our population or our society.

He recognized that this position might make him unpopular. In a different interview in early 1976, he commented that presidents should not focus on their popularity but instead should concentrate on the national interest. "A President has to make some decisions that are not always popular, as long as he thinks they are right. And I can assure you that I will do what is right and, hopefully, have the backing of the American people." In a similar vein, a former administration official recalled, "If I heard it once I heard it a hundred times in confidential conversations with the President: 'I [Ford] don't care what the polls say, it's the right thing to do,' or 'Whatever the election outcome, I think this is best for the country.' "[21]

In his practical beliefs, Ford considered public support to be an important component of foreign policy, but he also believed that he did not require public support at the moment of decision. Like Nixon, he emphasized leading public opinion, which he thought he could do fairly easily, rather than responding to it. When asked in early 1976 whether it was possible for him "to make decisions in the name of national security if those decisions do not reflect the popular will of the people," Ford replied,

> It does make it somewhat difficult . . . but I think it is the responsibility of a President to fully inform the American people and convince them that what we are seeking to do in foreign policy is in our best interests. And if a President carries out that responsibility, then he can and will have the support of the American people.[22]

This position seems to accept public opposition to his foreign policies with the belief that the public could eventually be persuaded to support his chosen policy.

Since Ford rejected public input as a basis for a decision, his foreign policy decisions would likely have been based on his perception of the national interest while ignoring the dictates of public opinion. After reaching a decision, Ford would have explained the decision to the public in an attempt to build public support because he thought such support was necessary. Unlike pragmatists such as Eisenhower and Kennedy, he would not have altered his policy in response to public opposition. Instead, he would have continued focusing on leading the public to generate support.

Jimmy Carter: Executor

As an *executor*, President Jimmy Carter believed that it was desirable for public opinion to influence foreign policy. In his normative beliefs, Carter thought that the public's involvement in open decision making would benefit foreign policy by preventing mistakes that might occur in a foreign policy formed in secret. In a mid-1977 interview, Carter argued for public input into foreign policy:

> But I think the openness of it [foreign policy negotiations] and the involvement of the public in the debates and discussions will prevent our making some of the mistakes that were so devastating to our country in the past. . . . I think it possibly avoids the risk of a serious mistake when a decision is made in secret without the sound judgment and the experience and the common sense of the American people and the Congress being involved in making those crucial decisions.[23]

Carter saw the process of gathering information and making a decision as a two-way street in which he would gain a greater understanding of what the public thought and could share his views with the public. But even though Carter wanted this input, he still believed that he should make his own decisions about foreign policy. In mid-1977, comparing his view with that of previous administrations, Carter stated:

> And on many of the controversial issues that in the past have been decided in a very secret way between the Secretary of State and the President, for instance, are now discussed openly with the American people. I feel that's a good move. It exposes our doubts and uncertainties and controversies on occasion, but after that debate goes back and forth in the Congress and throughout the Nation, among American people, we monitor that opinion very closely. And I think that by the time I

> make a decision—which may or may not always agree with what the people are thinking at home—I have a much surer sense of what our country ought to do.[24]

In his practical beliefs, Carter felt that public support was not necessary and that he could and should make the right decision even if it cost him public support. When asked in an early 1980 interview whether unfavorable polls affected him, he replied, "No. I have never lost any sleep at all, even over matters much more important than public opinion polls. I've just done the best I could, made decisions whether they were popular or not."[25] He also expressed a commitment to address issues regardless of their popularity. In a late 1979 radio interview, Carter reflected that "I hope I never fail, as long as I'm in this office, to address a necessary and difficult question just to avoid criticisms or a lower rating in the poll." As a basis for this view, he commented,

> I didn't come here looking for glory or looking for everyone to approve what I did; I came here to do a job for our country. And if it results in either temporary or permanent criticisms or lower opinion among the American people, if I think I'm right and doing what is best for this country, I'm going to do it.[26]

Interestingly, he believed that the American public approved of his approach to decision making. He told an interviewer in mid-1978,

> I can't run the White House and make my decisions as President based on what's more popular. I have to make decisions sometimes when I know that either way that I go will be unpopular. But I think in the long run that's the kind of President the American people want.[27]

In his behavior, Carter would likely have considered public opinion in policy deliberations because he favored public input. Because he did not think that public support was necessary, he would not have felt bound by public opinion and would have led it only to affect another actor such as Congress. After factoring it in, he would have made his decision based on his conception of the national interest, even if his choice happened to be unpopular. Unlike the guardians, who thought they should rely solely on their perceptions of American national interests, Carter was willing to use public opinion as one measure of the "right" policy. If he determined that public opinion provided valuable insight, information, or the correct view of a situation, Carter might have been constrained by it. In this sense, public opinion would have

provided a first cut in decision making to find out where the public stood and where he might be incorrect in his formulation of the problem, but the final basis for a decision would likely have rested on Carter's own assessment of the correct policy after taking public opinion into account.

Ronald Reagan: Guardian

President Ronald Reagan's beliefs fall into the *guardian* orientation. In his normative beliefs, Reagan expressed, several times during his career in remarkably similar fashion, his desire not to allow the potential political ramifications of his decisions affect his policy choices. In his memoirs, Reagan recalled the instructions he gave to his advisers in Sacramento when he was governor of California and in Washington when he was president:

> One of the first things I told the members of my cabinet was that when I had a decision to make, I wanted to hear all sides of the issue, but there was one thing I didn't want to hear: the *political ramifications* of my choices. The minute you begin saying, "This is good or bad politically," I said, "you start compromising principle. The only consideration I want to hear is whether it is good or bad for the people." I made the same statement at our first cabinet meeting in Washington.[28]

Again, in 1985, Reagan gave the same view with an added element:

> I told them [his staff when he became governor] that the one thing I did not want to hear was the political ramifications of any issue. I wanted only to hear debate on what was good or bad for the people, because the minute you start thinking about votes and political things, it's a bit like seeing a player's card—you can't take out of your mind that you know where that card is no matter how honest you want to be.[29]

In this last quotation, Reagan emphasized that not only did he not want to consider the potential popular support for a policy but that he also wanted to avoid contact with those considerations altogether because he felt it would contaminate his decision process. The reason that he rejected considering the political ramifications was his view that often only the president would have all the relevant information necessary for a decision.[30]

In his practical beliefs, Reagan did not think that a foreign policy required public support for it to be successful. For example, at one point,

Reagan commented that "on matters of national security, the real issue is not whether it's the popular thing, but whether it's the right thing."[31] He believed that he needed to act to protect the nation's security interests even in the face of domestic opposition especially when he needed to act quickly. However, based on Vietnam, he did express one caveat to this broader beliefs framework in reference to the long-term uses of force: "We all felt that the Vietnam War had turned into such a tragedy because military action had been undertaken without sufficient assurances that the American people were behind it."[32] If an issue concerned a protracted war, therefore, he would probably have viewed public support as necessary.

Because Reagan opposed including input from public opinion and thought that the public's support was not usually necessary, he would likely have based his decisions on his perception of the national interest and would not have included public opinion in this process. Like Truman and Johnson, especially on long-term decisions, he might have attempted to persuade the public to support his view by explaining the national security reasons for his decision. The one exception would have been a decision regarding an extended war. If public support appeared problematic, he would likely have been constrained by it.

George Bush: Pragmatist

President George Bush held public opinion beliefs most consistent with those of a *pragmatist*. In his normative beliefs, Bush thought he should not pay attention to public opinion because polls often vacillated and/or the public did not have the information necessary to make a decision. For example at a 1990 news conference, Bush commented:

> I don't believe in polls . . . . That's not the way I try to call the shots on the policy. You just raised a question about China. If I had my finger in the wind, I might have done that one differently. I might have done differently about going to Cartagena if I put my finger in the wind in terms of polls, but that's not the way I run this administration.[33]

In this quotation, Bush is emphasizing his refusal to make foreign policy decisions based on polling and his distrust in polls because of their transitory nature. He did concede in a mid-1991 interview on Air Force One that though he did not ignore polls, he did not think them very important. "From time to time I look at them [the polls], but I don't live by them or make decisions by them."[34]

Bush saw his job as making decisions based on the national interest, to which polls and public opinion would be a poor guide. In a late 1989 news conference, Bush described the responsibility he felt to reach the correct decision:

> I have an obligation as President to conduct the foreign policy of this country the way I see fit, reporting under the law to the United States Congress . . . . The whole opening to China never would have happened if Kissinger hadn't undertaken that mission. It would have fallen apart . . . . But I have mine [a job], and that is to conduct the foreign policy of this country the way I think best. If the American people don't like it, I expect they'll get somebody else to take my job, but I'm going to keep doing it.[35]

In these statements, Bush is conveying a view similar to that of a guardian, of being selected by the public to make foreign policy decisions as needed. He saw himself as responsible to the public at election time only, when the public would have an opportunity to evaluate his conduct. Bush did not see himself as needing to respond to the public on specific foreign policy decisions and, in between elections, did not feel beholden to public opinion.

In his practical beliefs, though, Bush considered public support necessary for the ultimate success of a foreign policy. However, unlike some other pragmatists who thought they either had to lead to develop public support or stay in the confines of what the public would allow, Bush believed that the public would almost automatically support his foreign policy if it were the "right" one. He told a 1990 press conference that it bothered him that the public supported his foreign policy more than his domestic policy because "perhaps it has to do with the fact that in one, I think the Vandenberg theory applies. People really basically want to support the President on foreign affairs, and partisanship does, in a sense, stop at the water's edge."[36] He took it for granted that public support would follow after merely informing the public of his decisions.[37]

Since he opposed public input, Bush would likely have chosen the foreign policy he saw as required by the national interest without regard to public opinion. Because he believed public support to be necessary, he would have regarded it as an essential component of any policy, but he also would usually have assumed that if he made the "correct" decision, the public would follow his lead. For this reason, under normal foreign policy conditions, Bush would not have been concerned about

public opinion or felt burdened to pursue an extensive leadership effort to generate support. If he believed that public support was questionable, then he would have explained his policy to the public to generate support. Even so, he would not have expended much effort. If for some reason he decided that the public would not respond to his explanation, he might be constrained by it because of his belief in the need for public support of his policies. In short, under most circumstances, his dominant mode of reaction to public opinion would be to disregard it because of his assumption that public support was automatic. But when public support was doubtful, he would have coped by either leading public opinion or being constrained by it. Interestingly, although he held pragmatist beliefs, the peculiarities of his beliefs made him less likely to react to public opinion than the typical pragmatist and less likely to lead it than even some guardians.

Bill Clinton: Delegate

Bill Clinton's public opinion beliefs are consistent with those in the *delegate* orientation. In his normative beliefs, Clinton views public opinion as desirable in the decision-making process. In fact, in late 1994, he stressed to one audience the importance of both public input and his communication with the public.

> If I had to say what I needed to do to improve as a leader, it would be to find ways to be able to share with the American people what I know to be the facts here, what we're doing, and to give them some sense that I'm listening to them and they have some input, but that I'm moving the country in the right direction.[38]

Clinton believes that the public communicates its will and sets policy at election time, and he sees his obligation as acting on his campaign promises in regard to foreign policy. He told one reporter in the summer of 1993 that the voters "gave me a contract, and I'm going to fulfill it to the best of my ability, and then they can make their judgments."[39] This connection with elections does not occur just retrospectively but also in looking to the next election. Clinton told radio reporters in the fall of 1993, "I have a contract that runs for a specific limit—amount of time. I'm going to do the very best I can during that time, and then when the time is up the American people can make their own judgments."[40] In this sense, Clinton does not derive his policies from public opinion but tries to act according to the promises he made at the previous election

and also to adjust a policy's timing and shape to the anticipated public reaction in the next election.[41]

By providing him with a contract to fulfill his stated campaign objectives and an opportunity for the public to judge his decisions, elections play an important part in Clinton's view of his relationship with the public, which he sees as making the correct decision for the long run and explaining the policy to the public at the next election when he will be held accountable. He focuses not so much on the near-term popularity of a policy but more on a policy's long-term (defined as the next election) political viability. In an appearance on CNN's *Larry King Live*, Clinton explained:

> What I have to do is to do the job the people gave me. And I really believe, in the world we're living in, with so much change going on and people being bombarded from all sides with so much information, people like me who are in office should not worry so much about being popular. We ought to do what we think is right for the long run and then hope—believe the election can be our friend. Because only when the elections start do people really begin to focus on it.[42]

Even though he does not face election again, Clinton, in his second term, appears to be applying his concern about public opinion to the Democrats' prospects in the next elections, since he sees these elections as judgments on his policies. Although many reports show that much of Clinton's attention has shifted to ensuring that Vice President Albert Gore succeeds him,[43] in public, Clinton has been less committed to Gore over other Democrats. For example, in December 1997, in response to a question about his support for Gore, he remarked,

> What I would say among all the Democrats is that there's plenty of time for presidential politics . . . and that the most important thing is that we show the people we can make progress on the problems of the country and on the promise of the country. As for the Vice President [Gore], himself, he needs no defense from me. I have simply said . . . He's had the most full partnership with the President of any Vice President in history and he has performed superbly.[44]

Although Clinton's endorsement of Gore was strong, he directed his comments to his performance's effect on the chances of whoever is the next Democratic nominee.

In order to anticipate the public's views, Clinton relies on polls to learn the public's perspective on an issue and sees governing as an inter-

active process between his preferences and public opinion. Clinton described this interaction to a reporter:

> I can tell you categorically that I do not use polls to decide what position to take. . . . I have used polling information to try to make sure I understand where the American people are, what they know and what they don't know, what information they have, and to determine what arguments might best support a position that I believe is the right position for the country.[45]

In his practical beliefs, Clinton thinks that public support remains necessary for the success of a foreign policy. As with public input, however, public support is measured over the long term at the next election, suggesting that immediate public support for a foreign policy initiative is not necessarily critical except to the extent that it indicates future public opinion about the issue. At the base level, Clinton sees public support as necessary because it gives him a freer hand in foreign policy. At one point in 1994, Clinton underscored the need for an effective communications program to develop public support for his foreign policy so that it "will give me the flexibility I need."[46] Speaking at a September 1994 press conference, Clinton emphasized the critical elements of his formulation of foreign policy: the choice of the correct policy, its possible unpopularity in the short term, and the need of public support in the long term.

> In terms of popular approval, the American people—probably wisely—are almost always against any kind of military action when they first hear about it, unless our people have been directly attacked. . . . The job of the President is to try to do what is right, particularly in matters affecting our long-term security interests. And unfortunately not all of the decisions that are right can be popular. So I don't believe that the president, that I or any other president, could conduct foreign policy by a public opinion poll, and I would hope the American people would not wish me to. . . . Any sustained endeavor involving our military forces requires the support of the people over the long run.[47]

Clinton thus does not try to make policy in response to public opinion, but he recognizes the need to select a policy that is eventually acceptable to the public. Reflecting on foreign policymaking in a democracy after Prime Minister Shimon Peres's electoral defeat in Israel, Clinton said, "You can't push people faster than they are ready to go. . . . It's the price of making foreign policy in a world increasingly

composed of democracies. You can't get too far out ahead of the people, or they bring you up short."[48] Part of this process concerns educating the public about foreign policy. Reflecting on his first year in office, Clinton said he had learned

> that explaining to the American people what our interests, our values, and our policies are requires a more systematic and regular explaining. In a time when the overall framework is not clear and when people are bombarded with information, I think a President has to do that with greater frequency and to try to make a continuing effort not only to shape a new world but to find ways to explain that world to the American people.[49]

In the governing process, Clinton sees information about public opinion as a critical element in determining policy. He believes that he should behave as the public's agent, which he defines as acting as the public would want him to if it had the information he does. The important implication of this view is that he may act against the public opinion of the moment if he determines that the public eventually will wish that he had acted differently. As a result, he thinks he should evaluate the potential long-term public support of a decision in reference to its expected electoral effects, as opposed to the short-term public support of a policy as evidenced in public opinion polls. By knowing where the public stands on an issue, he can then determine how and when to move toward the policy he prefers, always keeping in mind how the policy may affect future electoral prospects. If a policy is going to hurt his future electoral prospects, he will likely avoid the issue or choose a different policy. As a result, his policy choices will usually result from an interaction between his anticipation of public opinion on an issue and what he thinks is the correct direction to move on policy.

Clinton also views communication as an important part of governing and likely sees its purpose as telling the public how his policy represents what the public wants or how his policy addresses what the public will prefer in the long term. He sees this action primarily as educating and explaining his policy to the American public rather than moving, pushing, or leading the public to support a policy that it otherwise would not.

The implications of this beliefs analysis for Clinton's second term when he will not face election again could be manifested in several ways. First, he may direct his concern with public opinion to the Democrats at the next congressional and presidential elections.[50] Second, he may focus on implementing his campaign promises from the

previous election. Either of these directions would be in keeping with his beliefs as a delegate. Finally, he may make his decisions more for the long-term judgment of history rather than any near-term political calculation. To the extent that these judgments will be based on criteria other than fulfilling the public will, he may be less responsive to *public* opinion and more responsive to *historical* opinion. Although this behavior would be in keeping with Clinton's focus on the long-term popularity of his policies, his shift from public opinion would be an interesting one. Given the beliefs model, I expect him to rely more on public opinion and the electoral prospects of his party and vice president than on the judgment of history.

This survey of beliefs orientations of the post–World War II presidents reveals that these men held a wide range of views about the place of public opinion in foreign policy decision making (see table 7.1). Five of these presidents are coded as pragmatists, which is not entirely surprising, since most presidents enter office with confidence in their own abilities and feel the need to reach their own decisions, especially in the foreign policy arena. Presidents should feel somewhat driven to achieve and maintain public support for their policies, at least because public opposition can make some foreign policies practically impossible, especially if manifested in congressional opposition.

The other three beliefs orientations are represented to a lesser extent. Three of the presidents are coded as guardians. Interestingly, two of

TABLE 7.1 **Beliefs Orientations of Recent Presidents**

Is it desirable for input from public opinion to affect foreign policy choices?		**Is public support of a foreign policy necessary?**	
		Yes	No
	Yes	Delegate *Clinton*	Executor *Carter*
	No	Pragmatist *Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Ford, Bush*	Guardian *Truman, Johnson, Reagan*

them were known for their tenacity in support of their views and either an almost belligerent acceptance of decision responsibility (Truman: "the buck stops here") or a strong ideological approach to decision making (Reagan). The delegate (Clinton) and executor (Carter) orientations were not widely represented, with only one president of each type.

The relative lack of presidents who favor input from the public on foreign policy is striking, especially given the norms of democratic theory. Across the board, presidents were more likely to admit that they should reach their own conclusions about policies. Many of the presidents seemed to share the view that the public also does not have the information necessary to take a knowledgeable position or does not completely understand the complexities of foreign policy. Even Clinton, the lone delegate, appeared to acknowledge this view. This sentiment is reflective of the literature on public opinion and foreign policy that, at least up until the early 1980s, portrayed public opinion on foreign policy as emotional and unstructured. Since that time, a large body of research has suggested that the public holds both rational and structured views on foreign policy.[51] It will be interesting to see whether these findings in political science eventually become a commonly accepted fact in the policymaking community, as the previous negative perspective did.

The necessity of securing public support for foreign policies was shared by all but a few of the presidents. One commonly held notion is that after Vietnam, decision makers are now much more sensitive to public support when making foreign policy decisions than they were before it. Surprisingly, there has been little difference between the beliefs of the pre- and post-Vietnam presidents about the necessity of public support. With Ford as the first post–Vietnam War president, two of five presidents before the end of American military involvement in Vietnam and two of five afterward rejected the necessity of public support for foreign policy.

Interestingly, across all orientations, presidents recognized that they should or needed to do the "right" thing, but they differed in how they defined the "right" policy. Both Clinton and Carter believed that public opinion should be factored into their evaluation of policy. Clinton saw the "right" policy as partially defined by what the public would eventually view, in the long term, as the correct policy, and Carter was willing to consider input from the public on what they thought the correct policy was.

The pragmatists felt that policy should be based on their perception of the right policy to meet the national interest, but this determination

was tempered by their need for public support. Even the pragmatists differed on how to react when the public opposed a policy that might serve the national interest. Under certain conditions, some decision makers (Eisenhower, Kennedy) seemed ready to change their policy positions in light of public opinion if support appeared doubtful. These presidents recognized strong limitations on a leader's ability to change public opinion. But other pragmatists (Nixon, Ford, Bush) almost exclusively emphasized a leader's ability to change public opinion to gain its support if a problem appeared. They were much more optimistic about the president's ability to mold public opinion to support administration policies, even in the face of strong potential opposition.

Finally, the guardians (Truman, Johnson, Reagan) were determined to do what was "right," regardless of public support. Truman seemed to believe that greatness was defined by sticking to his guns in the face of public opposition and counting on future generations to appreciate his policy choices. Johnson obviously preferred public support to opposition, but he still thought that he needed to implement the policy required by the national interest, despite public opposition. In a similar vein, Reagan favored pursuing policy only in response to the national interest. The guardians seemed to embrace the necessity of sometimes being out of step with public opinion on critical issues affecting the national interest.

These differences among orientations also affected how the presidents conceived of leading the public. Many presidents thought they should "lead" or "educate" the public, but what they meant by that varied according to their orientation. The delegate (Clinton) saw public education as a means of communicating to the public how his policies matched the public's long-term policy preferences. The executor (Carter) thought only about gaining public input and not about leading the public to support his policies. If he did try to lead the public, he would have done so only because it was necessary in order to affect another actor (such as Congress), rather than as an end in itself. The guardians (Truman, Johnson, Reagan) thought about leading as merely stating why a policy was necessary because of the national interest and not whether their explanations necessarily enhanced the public's support of a policy. In contrast to the guardians and delegates, when the pragmatists (Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Ford, Bush) spoke of leadership, they meant explaining the policy in terms that would create public support. In addition to affecting how public opinion was seen by the presidents, the next two chapters discuss how these differing orientations altered the formulation of foreign policy.