

British Public Opinion During the Gulf War

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For the duration of the Gulf War in 1991 National Opinion Polls conducted weekly surveys of opinion amongst a panel of approximately 1,000 respondents. The purpose was to map British public opinion during the hostilities. The responses are grouped under two broad headings. First, there were responses to a series of core questions which were asked in every survey. Second, public attitudes towards specific aspects of a changing situation were elicited from a series of context questions. The nature of these responses is explored in detail and comparisons are drawn between this war and that of the Falklands war.

On 2 August 1990 Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army invaded and took control of neighbouring Kuwait. Over the weeks and months which followed, world opinion led principally by the United States, worked to liberate Kuwait by words and economic pressure. Various resolutions were passed by the United Nations Security Council to the effect that Iraq should retire to its former borders and relinquish all its claims over Kuwaiti territory. At the same time a massive array of allied military equipment and personnel, drawn from many countries including Britain, was assembled ready to force Iraq out of Kuwait should economic sanctions and moral argument fail. The United Nations set a deadline of 16 January for Iraqi forces to commence their withdrawal from Kuwait. The deadline was ignored. The following day orders were given to commence Operation Desert Storm which began with an aerial bombardment of Iraqi military targets in both Kuwait and Iraq itself.

Britain, therefore, was at war again less than a decade after the Falklands conflict. During that war there had been various efforts to map public attitudes to events, but a survey by Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) for *The Economist* had been more ambitious. That organisation had set up a panel of respondents with the intention of periodically returning to the same people in order to gauge more accurately the flow of opinion. Unlike ordinary surveys conducted by

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Contemporary Record, Vol. 6, No. 2, Autumn 1992, pp. 376-388
PUBLISHED BY FRANK CASS, LONDON

polling organisations a panel study, such as that conducted during the Falklands War, aims to return to the same set of respondents. The advantages and disadvantages of panel studies have been discussed elsewhere but it is worth summarising briefly why this method is particularly appropriate for this type of situation.¹ The main advantage of a panel survey where the same respondents are re-interviewed in successive waves is that it uncovers real changes of attitude unlike snapshot polls which may not give evidence of underlying trends where different samples of respondents are taken.

Moreover, because the sample of respondents is more or less constant the sampling error is likely to be less than might have been the case if a completely different sample had been drawn. Since media interest in public opinion during the war was primarily concerned with how events in the war altered attitudes and support for the war a panel survey proved the most appropriate mechanism for eliciting that information. The inherent disadvantage of a panel survey, that respondents become more politically aware than would otherwise be the case, was, in the circumstances, a risk worth taking.

The first of the MORI Falklands' War panel surveys, therefore, was conducted on 14 April 1982 among a representative quota sample of 993 adult respondents. There were five subsequent waves of the panel. The first, a week following the original survey, had a sample size of less than half the initial number of respondents, while the last survey was conducted between 21-23 June.² The Gulf War presented another opportunity to study the public's response to their country at war. At the beginning of January 1991 the *Sunday Times* inquired about the logistics and feasibility of a 'war panel' survey should hostilities commence. As soon as the allied offensive began, therefore, the *Sunday Times* commissioned one of Britain's leading polling companies, National Opinion Polls (NOP), to conduct a telephone survey of over a 1,000 respondents representing a cross section of the British public.

A further six weekly polls followed, covering the period from the outbreak of the Gulf War on 17 January to 3 March when Iraq had all but surrendered. The first survey was of 1,081 respondents and by the seventh week no fewer than 595 of this original sample had been with the surveys from the outset.³ Each survey consisted of two different sets of questions. First, there was a set of three questions which were asked in each of the seven surveys. The first dealt with public support for the Allied military action against Saddam Hussein and asked "Do you approve or disapprove of the continuing Allied military action in the Gulf?". A second question was more specific and asked "Do you think that the liberation of Kuwait is important enough to justify the loss of the

lives of the British service personnel". The final core question sought to measure public satisfaction with the British government's handling of the war and asked simply, "How satisfied are you with the way the British Government is handling the war in the Gulf?". Our purpose in establishing a series of core questions was to enable us to monitor more effectively any trends in public attitudes towards the war. The choice of core questions partly reflected the experience of the earlier panel survey conducted at the time of the Falklands war and partly the specific circumstances surrounding the onset of hostilities in the Gulf.

The second set of questions was shaped by specific events or possible developments in the war. There were questions, for example, about the Allies' war aims; whether Saddam Hussein should become a military target; how the Allies should respond to the use of chemical weapons by Iraq; and, towards the end of the war, what should happen once hostilities ceased. Below, we will examine British public responses to the Gulf war in more detail beginning with those core questions which featured in all seven of the surveys.

Core Questions

To an important degree public opinion had been primed for the eventuality of a Gulf war. Diplomatic and economic initiatives had been going on since the previous August and, with little sign of conciliation from the Iraqi regime, it became almost inevitable that a peaceful solution would not be reached. The setting of the January deadline was critical in concentrating public opinion and getting it accustomed to the fact that this date represented the last realistic hope for a peaceful settlement to the Gulf crisis. When that deadline came and went and when the allied forces under General Schwarzkopf began operation Desert Storm, the British public were far from surprised by the subsequent chain of events.⁴

Few could have predicted, however, that public approval for the war would have been so high and still fewer could have speculated that this level of support would be sustained throughout. In the first survey, conducted on 17-18 January, no less than 80 per cent of respondents approved of the American decision to go to war in the Gulf.⁵ By the second week, and after an intense air bombardment of Iraqi military positions, public approval of the war had risen six points to 86 per cent. As Table 1 shows this level of support for the allied war effort continued unabated throughout, eventually rising to 88 per cent by the seventh week. Among panelists who responded to all seven surveys, there was a similar pattern. Eighty-four per cent approved or approved strongly of the action at the outset; by week seven this figure had risen to 92 per cent.

The movement in opinion was almost entirely one-way with only ten individuals expressing less approval for the war at the end than at the beginning. Such findings are supported by other studies of public opinion conducted during the Gulf War.⁶

Support for the allied military action in the gulf varied only narrowly between male and female, different age and social groups. However, in the first week of the war support was greater among male than female respondents and this trend continued throughout the subsequent surveys. A similar level of difference was discernible among social groups with respondents in the AB social categories generally registering a higher level of approval for military action than those in the DE categories.

A similarly high level of public support was also found for the government's management of the war. When the public was asked in the first survey how satisfied they were with the way in which the British government was handling the Gulf War no fewer than 84 per cent were satisfied. In subsequent surveys the satisfaction rating never fell below this and, indeed, by the seventh and final survey no fewer than 92 per cent expressed satisfaction with the government's performance.

Table 2 summarises the high level of public satisfaction with the way in which the government handled the crisis. Similar questions asked in surveys conducted during the Falklands war displayed a much greater variation in support. Only after the islands had been recaptured by the British task force did the government achieve a satisfaction rating of 84 per cent. Earlier events, such as the sinkings of the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* and the British destroyer *HMS Sheffield*, had seen the government's satisfaction rating falling from 76 per cent to 71 per cent. The high overall level of support for the government during the gulf crisis was also to be found in support for the new prime minister, John Major. A MORI poll conducted in the second week of the war saw a big surge in support for the prime minister with 60 per cent of respondents believing he was doing a good job. Such a figure represented a personal satisfaction rating twice as high as that recorded by the previous prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, at the height of her personal popularity during the Falklands War.⁷

The generally high level of support for the government is further underlined by Table 3 which not only shows almost unanimous satisfaction among Conservative supporters for the government's handling of the war but also a very high level of approval among Labour voters. Such support for the government, however, was not sustained after the end of the war and after a brief period of popularity with the electors the Conservatives began once again to fall behind Labour in the polls. Whatever 'Gulf factor' existed after the war's conclusion was neither as

DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THE CONTINUING ALLIED MILITARY ACTION IN THE GULF? (FIGURES ARE FOR THOSE RESPONDENTS APPROVING/APPROVING STRONGLY)

	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7
All	80	86	86	85	85	85	88
male	85	92	90	89	91	90	91
female	76	80	82	80	81	81	85
18-34	80	86	84	84	82	84	87
55+	77	84	87	83	86	83	87
AB	86	90	86	84	87	86	88
DE	74	83	87	82	83	82	87
Base							
N=	1081	1079	1042	1010	1022	1064	1060

TABLE 2

SATISFACTION RATING WITH GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE WAR

	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7
Satisfied/very satisfied	84	89	89	89	88	87	92
Dissatisfied/very dissatisfied	8	8	9	10	10	11	7
Don't know	7	3	3	2	6	1	-
Net satisfaction	+76	+81	+80	+79	+78	+76	+85

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS SATISFIED/VERY SATISFIED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE WAR BY PARTY

	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7
Con voters	92	97	96	98	98	97	99
Lab voters	77	81	81	82	79	80	84

great nor as prolonged as the 'Falklands factor' which had helped propel Mrs Thatcher towards her 1983 general election success.⁸

The third core question in the war panel survey concerned the likely loss of life among British service personnel in the fight to liberate Kuwait. In the event, of course, allied military casualties were remarkably light once the Iraqi forces had been contained by the aerial bombardment.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE LIBERATION OF KUWAIT IS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO JUSTIFY THE LOSS OF THE LIVES OF BRITISH SERVICE PERSONNEL?

	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7
Yes	60	70	68	68	70	71	79
No	28	23	26	27	25	25	19
Don't know	13	8	6	6	4	4	3
per cent of respondents answering yes							
Male	70	80	77	77	81	81	84
Female	50	60	59	59	61	62	74
18-34	53	66	65	65	65	70	74
35-54	70	74	72	71	73	74	82
AB	68	73	70	69	72	74	80
DE	53	64	64	64	68	71	79

TABLE 4

Nevertheless, there was considerable evidence of the Iraqi army's size and firepower and its willingness to resort to chemical weapons. There was, in addition, a great deal of speculation about Iraq's nuclear weapons capacity. Given the possibility, therefore, that the enemy had the ability to inflict heavy damage on the allied forces, it was not surprising to discover a degree of reticence among the public concerning their willingness to see British men and women losing their lives in the Gulf. At the outset, while a majority (60 per cent) said they would accept loss of life among the military in the fight to liberate Kuwait, 28 per cent said they would not and 13 per cent were undecided. During the first phase of the war, which consisted almost entirely of an air war with few British troops involved, the number prepared to accept British deaths in the fight for Kuwait increased. In the second survey this figure rose to 70 per cent of respondents, a level which scarcely changed until the final week when no less than 79 per cent expressed their belief that loss of life among British service personnel would be an acceptable price for liberating Kuwait. By this time, of course, the war was virtually over; British casualties had been light; and further losses looked unlikely. It was certainly the case, however, as we shall see below, that there was considerable anxiety among some sectors of the population over the risk to British lives. Had the war gone badly with mounting allied casualties, then it seems possible that the whole tenor of public opinion would have changed accordingly, as had happened to some extent during the Falklands War.

Table 4 shows the initial concern about casualties in week one of the

TABLE 5
DO YOU THINK THAT THE LIBERATION OF KUWAIT IS IMPORTANT ENOUGH
TO JUSTIFY THE LOSS OF THE LIVES OF THE BRITISH SERVICE PERSONNEL?
— PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS ANSWERING 'YES'

	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7
Con male	81	88	88	88	92	89	95
(n=285)							
Con female	60	72	69	72	73	75	85
(n=269)							
Lab male	59	69	63	63	70	70	68
(n=151)							
Lab female	35	48	49	41	45	46	63
(n=141)							

surveys with almost a third saying the liberation of Kuwait would not be worth the risk to British lives. As the war progressed, however, those saying no declined slightly while the 'don't knows' appeared to have come down on the side of risking British lives. Among various categories of respondent, women retained the clearest doubts about the potential human costs of the war.⁹ Until the very last week, scarcely more than six in ten gave a positive response to this particular question. That the war was virtually over and casualties had been much lighter than anticipated doubtless contributed to this effect among female respondents. A similar difference in attitudes to casualties can be found among different age groups, with those aged 18–34 (the generation from whom the armed forces were largely drawn) consistently less in favour of risking life to liberate Kuwait than those aged 35–54. Differences between social groups existed early on in the conflict, but consistently narrowed and by the conclusion of hostilities such variations had all but disappeared. Respondents in social groups D and E had been most averse to seeing British service personnel killed in the Gulf war, but the gap between these groups and socio-economic groups A and B had vanished by the final survey.

The party preference of respondents also seemed to be a factor in their preparedness to accept British service casualties (see Table 5). Labour supporters were consistently less likely to believe such a loss of life was justifiable than were Conservatives. Labour women were the group least convinced of all, and only when the war was virtually over did a majority of them say any loss of life would be worth it. The lesser willingness of Labour supporters in general to tolerate casualties, and the gender divide between them in particular, go some way towards explaining the dif-

ferences faced by the party leadership in presenting its policy on the Gulf conflict. Indeed, not only were divisions within the parliamentary Labour Party over the use of force as opposed to the continued use of economic sanctions apparent from the first week of the war, but they were matched by the concerns of voters. In the first survey, whereas only ten per cent of Conservatives thought economic sanctions would have succeeded even if given more time, 29 per cent of Labour men and 36 per cent of Labour women still believed sanctions to be the proper course.

Context questions

In addition to the core topics there were various questions suggested each week by the context of the war itself. In the first week of the war, therefore, we asked respondents what they saw as the main purpose of the conflict. In later surveys, as the intensity of the fighting increased, we asked specific questions related to allied military tactics. In the final survey, with hostilities suspended, we asked respondents for their thoughts about the future of Iraq, its leader and army. Below, we will examine responses to some of these questions.

The first survey conducted in the days immediately following the outbreak of war asked respondents 'What do you consider to be the main reason for war?' The largest group (39 per cent) believed the liberation of Kuwait as an independent nation to be the main reason. This was followed by 28 per cent of respondents who thought the destruction of Saddam Hussein as a force in the middle east was of primary concern. Less tangible aims were expressed by the one in five who thought the protection of oil supplies was the major factor determining the war and by the very small minorities believing the defence of Israel (three per cent) and the need to assert America's superpower status (two per cent) to be the main war aims.

In the fourth week, and with the land war in prospect, the survey asked how the allied forces should respond if Saddam Hussein were to carry out his threat to use chemical weapons. At that time only 11 per cent of respondents were prepared to see allied forces reply in kind, but two weeks later, with rumours persisting about Iraq's possible use of these weapons, this figure rose slightly to 14 per cent. A further 14 per cent, moreover, believed such a move on Iraq's part would legitimise the allies' use of battlefield nuclear weapons. In other words, more than a quarter of the sample was prepared to see a very tough response to any Iraqi 'first strike'. On the other hand, 29 per cent of those surveyed believed the correct response to chemical weapons would be to continue using conventional weapons and the largest group, 35 per cent, that the best form of retaliation would be to use B52 heavy bombers to increase the bombing of

Baghdad. Manual workers and Labour supporting men were above average in their support of the use of either chemical or nuclear weapons. By contrast, non-manual workers and Conservative women were more sceptical about the desirability of their use. A similar response was evoked when we asked how the allies should respond if a land war produced substantial and mounting casualties. While 40 per cent believed this problem should be matched with a stepping up of the air war, an almost equal proportion once again argued for the use of B52 bombers to increase the pressure on Baghdad itself and, by implication, its civilian population. Almost one in ten respondents, and as many as 15 per cent of both Labour and Conservative voting men, believed allied casualties on a substantial scale would warrant the use of battlefield nuclear weapons.

Support for retaliation to allied losses did not appear matched by sympathy for Iraqi casualties. Although accurate information on Iraqi dead and injured was difficult to obtain, even conservative estimates suggested loss of life on a large scale. Nevertheless, in the fifth survey 80 per cent of the panel said their support for the war effort had not been changed by the recent increase in known Iraqi civilian casualties. Moreover, 71 per cent did not think that the allies should stop bombing military targets in or near Iraqi cities even if civilian dead and injured resulted. This response would have brought comfort to allied military planners concerned, perhaps, that Saddam Hussein was using a human shield strategy of placing his communications network and some military hardware close to centres of population in an attempt to soften western public opinion. There was, however, a greater reluctance among Labour voters to tolerate Iraqi civilian casualties than there had been to see British personnel killed and wounded. Over a third of this group thought the bombing of military targets in or near Iraqi cities should stop. In general, however, the level of toughness in British public opinion often exceeded that recorded during the Falklands War.

The figure of the Iraqi dictator was clearly central to the Gulf conflict so it was not entirely unexpected when the second survey found that 70 per cent of respondents felt the allied forces 'should target Saddam Hussein personally'. In the British media this question was interpreted as providing legitimisation for his assassination. Labour supporting women who, it will be recalled, had been the most concerned group over the matter of casualties were most in favour (75 per cent) of this particular tactic. Their support for targeting the Iraqi leader would appear utilitarian in character. Their attitude appeared to be that if Saddam's assassination would bring the war to an end more swiftly and with fewer casualties, then it was justifiable or even desirable.

In the event the bogey figure of Saddam Hussein continued to domi-

nate public attitudes towards the war. By the sixth week's survey, and with the allied land offensive now launched, the British public were virtually unanimous in wanting Saddam Hussein tried as a war criminal. No fewer than nine in ten took this view with support equal across different age groups, manual and non-manual workers and party allegiances. This provided further evidence that the general public held Saddam personally responsible for causing the war and that he should somehow pay for his actions. Such a clear cut response was thrown into confusion, however, by the decision to suspend hostilities with Iraq's army partly intact. The final survey again asked the question of what should happen to the defeated Saddam Hussein. Now, 62 per cent wanted him tried as a war criminal, one in ten favoured assassination, but 26 per cent said they thought he should be left alone on the basis that his power had been broken. In view of our earlier findings it is interesting that the most hawkish group towards Saddam Hussein personally remained Labour voting women, with only 16 per cent believing enough was enough.

The public were as undecided over the proper allied military tactics towards the end of the land offensive as they had been at the beginning of the conflict. Nearly half the war panel believed the allied forces should limit themselves to recapturing Kuwait; one in five thought Iraq itself would need to be invaded to neutralise Saddam Hussein's crack troops, the republican guard; and almost three in ten favoured the most aggressive option, that the allied forces should march all the way to Baghdad to guarantee victory. The significant minority demanding an emphatic end to the war remained even after President Bush had announced the suspension of hostilities. While 78 per cent of respondents in the final survey agreed with his decision, one in five did not. Moreover, one third believed allied troops should continue to occupy Iraqi territory until Saddam Hussein was overthrown. In general, however, the British public adopted a largely conciliatory attitude towards Iraq. Only 15 per cent believed that sanctions should be maintained on all goods except medicine, while 42 per cent thought sanctions should be relaxed on both food and medicine. At the other end of the scale, 8 per cent supported the immediate ending of all sanctions and a surprisingly large proportion (32 per cent) thought Iraq should be allowed to rebuild with controls remaining only on arms. There was, therefore, a clear feeling among the majority of the public that once the power of the Iraqi dictator and his military machine had been, as they believed, virtually destroyed there was no purpose to be served by further demoralising the Iraqi people. With hindsight this has perhaps proved to be an over optimistic and generous interpretation.

Public Opinion in the Falklands and Gulf Wars

There are some interesting differences between public opinion during the Falklands War and that of the Gulf war nine years later. Once the die of war is cast British public opinion rallies in defence of its government. In the case of the Falklands, however, there was an underlying view that the British government itself was partly to blame for the crisis. Decisions on defence expenditure had seen a cutback in the Royal Navy's operations around the Falklands. In turn, this had sent the wrong signal to the Argentine military junta, which, anxious to deflect criticisms of its poor handling of the ailing Argentine economy had pursued an adventurist foreign policy. Individual ministries, such as Defence and the Foreign Office, therefore, appeared as incompetent in the prelude to the Falklands War. That the government should shoulder some of the blame for the Falklands may help explain why overall levels of public satisfaction with the government were lower than those registered in the surveys conducted during the Gulf War.

In the case of the Gulf conflict the guilty party was identified as Iraq. While some commentators attempted to highlight long-standing Iraqi resentment over the creation of the independent state of Kuwait and the role of that country in the complicated politics of oil pricing, the vast bulk of British public opinion identified Saddam Hussein as the reason for war. Moreover, John Major's government was following rather than dictating policy. The response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait had been shaped by unprecedented condemnation at the United Nations and led militarily by President Bush and the Americans. The British government had little more to do than lend support to our most powerful ally. To that extent public opinion recognised that the Gulf conflict was not of Britain's doing, had not been encouraged by failures of past policy, and that our government was being carried along on the tide of a much broader policy engineered principally by the United States.

This proved to be a double-edged sword for Mr Major. Unlike Mrs Thatcher he was not to enjoy any long term public support for his stewardship of the country at war. Neither, it must be said, did he risk as much as Mrs Thatcher had done during the Falklands. Then, she had gambled her political future on a military rather than diplomatic response to Argentine's invasion. As the polls showed at the time public opinion was nervous of this policy and setbacks such as the sinking of *HMS Sheffield* had caused the government's satisfaction rating to dip. The risks associated with war, therefore, were all Mrs Thatcher's. But so too were the rewards of success. In the case of the Gulf war the British government had been asked simply to assent to the American decision to launch the

military offensive. British troops had been under the command of an American general. Moreover, as the allied campaign progressed so smoothly and with very few casualties public opinion might well have devalued the political risks involved, and in turn, of course, the political rewards for success. Whatever the actual size of the Falklands factor and its role in Mrs Thatcher's electoral success, there can be little dispute that the Gulf War did not produce anything comparable for Mr Major.

There were, however, some close similarities between the findings of the MORI panel conducted during the Falklands and that of NOP's seven surveys on public attitudes to the Gulf war. Women were generally less in favour of war and its possible consequences than men. Labour supporting women in particular displayed a marked reluctance to endorse the loss of life in the gulf conflict. Nevertheless, as with the Falklands there was a solid core of opinion (about 20 per cent) in favour of strong military responses. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents in a MORI poll conducted on 14 April 1982 wanted Argentine military and naval bases bombed while one in five wanted an invasion of the mainland to take place. Similarly, 25 per cent of the Gulf war panel questioned on 7-8 February 1991 had wanted the allies to consider using chemical weapons or battlefield nuclear weapons in the event of Saddam Hussein authorising the use of his chemical weapons capability. Such polarisation of public opinion causes problems for governments. Squeezed on both sides by a significant minority, one wanting a de-escalation of violence, the other seeing increased violence as a means of settling the dispute quickly, it is not surprising to find governments steadfastly steering a middle course. In the case of the Falklands the 200 mile exclusion zone served to set limits on the physical zone of conflict, while in the Gulf war the government was anxious to avoid accusations that it had allowed Iraq's military to be attacked once its threat had been removed. Governments, it seems, are reluctant to espouse openly the ideas of either the doves or the hawks among their population.

NOTES

1. See, for example, W. L. Miller, *The Survey Method in the Social and Political Sciences* (London: Frances Pinter, 1983), pp. 37-40.
2. See various issues of *The Economist* between 17 April and 26 June, and L. Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), Ch. 8 and Appendix 2.
3. As respondents dropped out others were recruited to replace them, with the sample being weighted each week to ensure that it continued to be representative of the British population.
4. See the comments of the sociologist Anthony Giddens reported in M. Shaw and R. Carr-Hill, *Public Opinion, Media and Violence*, University of Hull, 1991, p. 2.

5. In subsequent weeks the wording of this question was altered to 'do you approve or disapprove of the continuing Allied military action in the Gulf?'
6. R. Whybrow, 'The Gulf Crisis: A British Perspective', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1991), pp. 260-76; 'MORI, The Gulf Conflict: War Supported', *British Public Opinion Newsletter*, Dec. 1990.
7. See *Sunday Times*, 27 Jan. 1991, p. 4. In his book *British Public Opinion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), Robert Worcester notes how all 'just' wars in recent times have been associated with high levels of public support for both the government and the prime minister. See p. 87.
8. The economic circumstances prevailing on the two occasions are, of course, relevant to public reactions. In the spring of 1982 Britain was beginning to emerge from an economic recession; in 1991 she was still firmly trapped in one. For an exhaustive analysis of the electoral importance of a 'Falklands factor', see D. Sanders *et al.*, 'Government Popularity and the Falklands War', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1987), pp. 281-313.
9. For a fuller discussion of women and pacifism, see Shaw and Carr-Hill, *Public Opinion*, Ch. 4.

THIRTY-ONE YEARS ON

January-April 1961

C. J. MORRIS

In overseas affairs the Cabinet's attention was focused on the unfolding crisis over Laos. While the newly elected President Kennedy prepared to flex his cold war muscles with the Bay of Pigs operation, launched at the end of the period under consideration, he also threatened to involve the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth through its commitments under the South East Asia Treaty Organisation in yet another South-East Asian cold war conflict over Laos. The crisis necessitated Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's absence for consultations with Kennedy during Macmillan's visit to the West Indies, the United States and Canada between 24 March and 12 April, which proved to be the occasion for the first meeting between the young President and the elder statesman. Unfortunately it appears that the records of many of the Cabinet meetings in which the Laos crisis was discussed are closed.

At home, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Selwyn Lloyd prepared his 1961 Budget he continued to warn his Cabinet colleagues against embarking on any new public expenditure commitments while at the same time he tried to persuade them to reduce existing expenditure levels.

The worsening economic situation cast a shadow over domestic issues in this period. In view of the projected increase in government expenditure for the year 1961-62 of £380 million, the Cabinet discussed ways in which savings could be made by reducing National Health Service expenditure. On 17 January, the Health Minister Enoch Powell proposed a two pence reduction in welfare milk subsidies. Because he was concerned about the effect this change might have on childrens' diet, Powell argued that the reduction could be waived for a family numbering four children or a family of three children and a pregnant mother. The Cabinet

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