Inconstant Care: Public Attitudes towards Force Protection and Civilian Casualties in the United States, United Kingdom, and Israel

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Abstract: The choice between protecting friendly soldiers or foreign civilians is a critical strategic dilemma faced in modern war. Prevailing theories suggest that casualties among both groups depress war support in Western democratic societies. Yet we know little about how ordinary citizens balance force protection and civilian casualty avoidance, and whether public opinion differs across Western democracies. Using survey experiments, we test three micro-foundations for what we call individuals’ “harm-transfer preferences:” self-interest, perception of soldiers’ consent to risk-taking, and nationalism. We find that respondents’ perception of soldiers’ consent and respondents’ nationalism explain individual-level variation in harm-transfer preferences. Moreover, Israeli citizens are significantly more likely than American or British citizens to prefer protecting friendly forces over avoiding foreign civilian casualties. This is associated with higher levels of nationalism and the perceptions that soldiers do not consent to risking their lives in Israel compared to the United States and the United Kingdom.
In 2019 and 2020, the U.S.-led international coalition in Afghanistan killed approximately 1,000 civilians (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan 2020; United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan 2021). These deaths occurred despite the fact that coalition members went to great lengths to reduce expected “collateral damage” from attacks on military targets (Corn and Schoettler 2015; Dill 2015; Kahl 2007). Pre-planned air operations, as a result, rarely cause large numbers of civilian deaths. Unplanned air strikes to protect friendly troops who have come under enemy fire and ground engagements in populated areas, however, are much more likely to claim civilian lives (Human Rights Watch 2008, 3f; Center for Civilians in Conflict 2019, 11 & 14; United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan 2020, 6). In these urgent “troops in contact” situations, military decision-makers face two powerful, but frequently divergent imperatives: protect friendly soldiers or spare foreign civilians. Whether soldiers assume additional risks to reduce expected harm to civilians or whether military decision-makers put foreign civilian lives on the line to minimize risk to friendly forces partly determines who bears the human costs of war in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. International law demands that soldiers take “constant care” to spare civilians in war, but what this rule precisely requires is unclear and contested (Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, Article 57 (a) (ii), 1977).¹

When Western democracies go to war, the choice between sparing friendly soldiers or foreign civilians represents a critical strategic dilemma. In democratic societies, friendly troop deaths depress war support. At the same time, foreign civilian casualties can also be strategically costly.² Scholars have shown that in counterinsurgency operations local civilian populations often punish counterinsurgent forces for “collateral damage” by increasing support to the insurgents (Condra and Shapiro 2012; Felter and Shapiro 2017; Lyall et al. 2013). In some circumstances, excessive foreign civilian casualties also depress war support
among democratic publics (Johns and Davies 2019). Since public opinion exerts a powerful effect on how democratic states wage war (Tomz, Weeks, Yarhi Milo 2020), understanding how ordinary citizens balance the conflicting imperatives of force protection and civilian casualty avoidance is critical to understanding the conduct of modern war.

The prevailing theory of military casualty aversion, dating back to Immanuel Kant, suggests that the most important source of variation in casualty tolerance is regime type. Kant argued that because democratic leaders are accountable to their citizens, democracies are less likely than autocracies to risk their soldiers’ lives in war (Valentino, Huth, Croco 2010). The prevailing theory of attitudes towards civilian casualties suggests that citizens in prosperous Western societies have internalized a norm demanding the protection of foreign civilians in war (Crawford 2013; Pinker 2011). Yet there appears to be significant variation in attitudes towards the human costs of war among Western democracies. A 2016 report by the International Committee of the Red Cross, for example, asked respondents whether “attacking enemy combatants in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing many civilians would be killed” was “wrong or just part of war.” 62% of Israelis, 50% of Americans, and 40% of British citizens agreed that it was “just part of war” (International Committee of the Red Cross 2016, 26). We have few theories to explain these cross-national differences. Moreover, we lack an explanation for how individuals form preferences when they face a choice between force protection and avoiding civilian casualties. Recent experimental studies suggest that the majority of U.S. respondents prioritize sparing “our soldiers” over “their civilians” (Dill and Schubiger 2021; Sagan and Valentino 2017). How citizens of other Western democracies approach this trade-off remains largely unstudied.

This article articulates and tests two theoretical models to explain variation in Western democratic societies’ preferences about how to trade-off force protection and
civilian casualty avoidance. The “recruitment model” explains cross-national variation in harm-transfer preferences with differences in how countries recruit individuals into the military. We test two micro-foundations for attitudes towards wartime harming the implications of which depend partly on how countries recruit individuals into the military: first, an individual’s expectation that they themselves might have to bear the burdens of war and, second, the perception that soldiers consent to risking their lives. We hypothesize that both beliefs make individuals more likely to prioritize protecting friendly forces and we hypothesize that these beliefs are differently distributed in Western democracies that rely on conscription versus those that draw on all-volunteer forces.

The “nationalism model” links cross-national variation in harm-transfer preferences to differences in the strength and diffusion of nationalism across Western democracies. We start with the widespread observation that across prosperous Western societies, individuals’ rising expectations of self-realization have lowered their tolerance for violence and death. This distaste for the waste of human life is credited both with decreased willingness to sacrifice compatriot soldiers in war and with the spread of international norms demanding the protection of foreign civilians. We hypothesize that the extent to which individuals channel their distaste for the waste of human life into either imperative depends on their degree of nationalism. All else equal, highly nationalist individuals are more likely to prioritize sparing friendly forces over sparing foreign civilians. We hypothesize that these differences are associated with cross-national variation in public opinion about how to balance force protection and civilian casualty avoidance.

We test the recruitment and the nationalism models with an original survey experiment administered in the United States, the United Kingdom and Israel. We draw on a scenario designed to be equally plausible from the perspective of citizens in each country. Respondents in our survey were asked to choose between two military options for responding
to a terrorist attack against their naval forces operating in international waters near Libya: an air strike that is projected to collaterally kill Libyan civilians and a commando assault expected to result in the deaths of friendly soldiers. Across three experimental conditions we vary the harm-transfer ratio between friendly military and foreign civilian casualties, i.e., how many friendly soldiers would die in the commando assault versus how many Libyan civilians are expected to perish as a side-effect of the air strike.

We report three main findings. First, we find significant cross-national variation in preferences for sparing friendly soldiers versus avoiding foreign civilian casualties. Israeli respondents are by far the least willing to sacrifice friendly soldiers, followed by American, and then British respondents. Regardless of the harm-transfer ratio between friendly soldiers and foreign civilians, a majority of British respondents never preferred the option that would kill more foreign civilians. In contrast, Israeli support for the option that prioritizes force protection never dropped below 63%, even when the air strike is expected to kill 1,000 foreign civilians to spare 10 Israeli soldiers.

Second, we find partial support for the recruitment model as an explanation for how individuals balance force protection and civilian casualty avoidance. Although individuals who are by age and gender more likely to bear the burden of war do not have stronger preferences for force protection, subjects who agree that soldiers have consented to take risks with their lives are much more likely to prefer sacrificing compatriot soldiers to protect foreign civilians than those who do not believe soldiers consent to risk taking. Moreover, Israelis are much less likely than Americans and Britons to agree that their soldiers have consented to making sacrifices on the battlefield.

Third, we find strong support for the nationalism model. Subjects who score higher on standard measures of nationalism are much more likely to prefer sparing friendly soldiers, even if it means sacrificing many foreign civilians. As expected, large differences in the
strength and diffusion of nationalism across the Israeli, U.S. and British publics – reflected both in closed-ended questions and in subjects’ open response explanations for their preferences – track the striking differences in how public opinion in these three countries balances force protection and civilian casualty avoidance.

Our argument proceeds in five steps. We first briefly outline existing explanations for variations in military casualty aversion and attitudes towards foreign civilian casualties. In section two, we discuss our theoretical expectations for the micro-foundations of preferences about how to balance force protection and civilian casualty avoidance. We highlight why the recruitment and nationalism models predict that these micro-foundations differ across Western democracies and how public opinion should therefore differ across the three democracies we investigate. We then introduce our survey experiment and report its results. We conclude with a reflection on the implications of our findings for the widespread notion that there is a “new Western way of war” characterized by military casualty aversion and highlight pressure points on the legal norm that soldiers ought to take “constant care” in the protection of foreign civilians in war.

Existing explanations for public aversion to military and civilian casualties

One of the best documented developments in the study of contemporary warfare are increasing efforts of modern military organizations to avoid friendly military casualties (Coker 2000; Ignatieff 2000; McInnes 2002; Shaw 2005). Two explanations prevail to explain this important trend. The first theory emphasizes regime type. Proponents of this explanation assert that democracies are less likely to risk their soldiers’ lives on the battlefield than autocracies. It is easy to see why democratic wartime leaders who send more soldiers to their deaths are likely to lose popularity and, eventually, elections. Scholars have demonstrated that military casualties depress war support in democratic states, including the
United States,\textsuperscript{6} the United Kingdom (Gribble et al. 2015; Reifler et al. 2014), and Israel (Kober 2015; Levy 2012; Shamir 2018). To maintain public support for wars, therefore, democracies tend to adopt strategies that minimize military casualties, for instance, fighting alongside powerful partners, and devoting more resources to protecting their soldiers (Valentino et al. 2010). Autocratic leaders, by contrast, do not rely on the general population to stay in power and, therefore, have less of an incentive to pursue strategies of casualty avoidance.

The theory that links military casualty avoidance to regime type implies that individuals are more averse to military casualties the more likely they are to be asked to bear the costs of war. In this reading, self-interest drives a preference for force protection. To our knowledge, only one study has experimentally tested elements of this theory at the level of individual attitudes. Horowitz and Levendusky show that suggesting to U.S. respondents that a draft will be reinstated decreases support for a hypothetical war (Horowitz and Levendusky 2011). Of course, the extent to which individuals can insulate themselves from the costs of military interventions varies among individuals within a democratic society, by such factors as age or gender. Indeed, Horowitz and Levendusky find that the effect of a potential draft on war support is stronger among draft-aged Americans (Horowitz and Levendusky 2011). By extension, different military recruitment models could imply variation in public opinion on force protection across democracies. Whether attitudes about force protection vary across democracies based on the likelihood of bearing the costs of war is so far largely unstudied.

The second explanation for military casualty aversion focuses not on regime type, but ascribes strategies of military casualty avoidance to the less well-defined category of “Western” states. Although many studies focus specifically on the United States, the emphasis on force protection is cast as defining what Martin Shaw called a “new Western way of war,” characterized by reliance on overwhelming force, stand-off warfare, and fewer
boots on the ground (Shaw 2005; Kahl 2007; Luttwak 1996; Record 2002, 12). Force protection is also identified as a crucial driver of developments in military technology, including the increased sophistication of unmanned delivery systems, stealth, and cyber capabilities (Bacevich 2005, 159; Ignatieff 2000, 164). Although these methods of warfare are linked to Western society’s eagerness to spare their soldiers, the changes in attitudes at the individual level that have driven the increasing preference for force protection in “the West” remain unclear.

A number of studies have attributed military casualty aversion to rising expectations of individual self-realization in prosperous societies, and hence a rising distaste for the waste of human life in war (Luttwak 1996; Gat 2005-06; Pinker 2011). For example, a systematic study of opinion polls by Inglehart et. al., found that rising living standards are associated with a decreasing willingness to fight wars, leading to the conclusion that “when larger parts of a population begin to see life no longer as a source of threats but as a source of opportunities, sacrificing lives increasingly seems an intolerable waste of human potential” (Inglehart et al. 2015, 421). Some scholars have argued that decreasing tolerance for the waste of human life in war has produced not only military casualty avoidance, but also public norms demanding the protection of foreign civilians in war (Crawford 2013; Pinker 2011; Johns and Davies 2017; Kreps and Wallace 2016). A 2011 Gallup poll across 131 countries found correlations between lower Human Development Index scores and lower GDP, on the one hand, and a higher share of citizens agreeing that attacks against foreign civilians were sometimes justified, on the other hand (Gallup 2011).7

Since the differences among Western societies on measures of prosperity are relatively small compared to the vast differences between Western and Non-Western societies, explanations that focus on prosperity would not predict much variation in attitudes towards military and civilian casualties within the prosperous West. Yet, there is increasing
evidence of significant variation in sensitivity to both compatriot military and foreign civilian casualties across Western societies. A recent cross-national experimental study, for example, found significant differences in the extent to which civilian casualties depress support for the use of force. In a hypothetical scenario, 38% of Israeli respondents preferred a more effective military option that was projected to kill 100,000 foreign civilians compared to only 28% of U.S. and 21% of British respondents. These findings indicate that something other than prosperity alone seems to drive individuals’ willingness to accept or inflict casualties in times of war.

It does not appear, therefore, that public opinion on these issues converges across democracies or in the broader “West.” Moreover, even if democracies or prosperous Western societies were all equally averse to military casualties and preferred sparing foreign civilians, it remains unclear how they would choose to balance force protection and civilian casualty avoidance when these imperatives directly conflict. The only existing studies to have directly explored the trade-offs between these imperatives have focused on the United States, where evidence suggests that citizens prefer sparing their own soldiers over foreign civilians (Dill and Schubiger 2021; Sagan and Valentino 2017). These studies have neither elucidated the micro-foundations that explain why some individuals in the United States would prefer sparing compatriot soldiers and some prioritize the protection of foreign civilians nor do these studies allow us to make comparisons across Western democratic societies. In this article we do both.

Theory

We investigate cross-national variation in how Western democratic publics balance force protection and civilian casualty avoidance by exploring individuals’ attitudes towards this trade-off. We call these attitudes individuals’ soldier-civilian “harm-transfer
preference," and we test three micro-foundations of this preference: first, self-interest in avoiding the burdens of war, second, the belief that soldiers consent to bearing these burdens, and third nationalism. These micro-foundations do not imply mutually exclusive explanations, but likely work together to explain individual level variation in harm-transfer preferences. We expect that these three micro-foundations are differently distributed across three Western democracies with divergent military recruitment models and varying levels of nationalism: Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

These three Western democracies differ in several significant ways. Most importantly, Israel faces a radically different geopolitical situation than the United States and the UK, which fight wars much further from home. Although all three countries must make trade-offs between force protection and civilian casualty avoidance in their military campaigns abroad, the military and political challenges that commanders and policy-makers in these three countries otherwise face differ. Crucially, we test explanations for individual-level and cross-national variation in attitudes that account for these deep geopolitical differences between Israel and other Western democracies: differences in how soldiers are recruited and differences in degrees of nationalism. In the next two sections we suggest that conceptions of soldiers’ consent and heightened nationalism in Israel are likely outgrowths of decades of geopolitical threats to the Israeli homeland.

The Recruitment Model

The prevailing theory that suggests democratic leaders have a stronger incentive to avoid military casualties than their autocratic counterparts implies that the likelihood of being oneself asked to bear the costs of war animates an individual’s aversion to friendly military casualties. Different individuals within the same democratic society, however, face diverging probabilities of having to risk their own lives or that of a loved one on the battlefield.
Military aged males, for example, almost always have the highest likelihood of bearing the ultimate burden of war. Even in states that draft women, like Israel, the risk of death or injury in war is much lower for female soldiers than for male soldiers, who tend to be assigned to more risky combat roles. In its purest form, self-interest as a driver for casualty aversion leads to the following hypothesis about harm-transfer preferences:

**H1: Males who are eligible for military recruitment will be more likely (relative to males who are not eligible for military recruitment) to prefer force protection over civilian casualty avoidance.**

Horowitz and Levendusky tested this theory and found that draft-aged individuals became more strongly opposed to war when they were told that the draft would be reinstated. (Horowitz and Levendusky 2011). Not only has conscription become rare, however, but the conditions that Horowitz and Levendusky evoke in their experiment – that a Western democratic country would reinstate the draft in response to a discrete threat – seems unlikely. We therefore test a second micro-foundation of harm transfer-preferences that might better capture the implications of divergent military recruitment models across Western democracies: the belief that soldiers consent to risk taking.

In most democratic societies today, individuals can express a strong preference against risking their life in war simply by choosing not to join the military. If individuals believe that soldiers have actively consented to bearing the burdens of war by volunteering for military service, they may be more inclined to tolerate risks to military forces. Whether soldiers are perceived as consenting to risk their lives is only partly a function of a society’s system of military recruitment and could vary across individuals, even within the same society. After all, even joining a professional volunteer force does not amount to a conscious
choice to risk one’s life for foreign civilians. Poverty or a lack of alternative career prospects can push some into military service who would not otherwise have chosen to take on such risks. This leads to the following hypothesis:

\[ H2: \text{Individuals who do not believe that compatriot soldiers have consented to taking risks with their lives on the battlefield to protect foreign civilians will be more likely to prefer force protection over civilian casualty avoidance.} \]

If these expectations regarding individual-level variation in harm-transfer preferences hold, they have important implications for the variation we should expect across the three Western democracies that we investigate. Variation in the percentage of the population accounted for by citizens of fighting age does not diverge dramatically across most prosperous states today. The per capita size of military organizations, however, does vary markedly. This significantly affects the likelihood that any given citizen of military age might be called upon to bear the burden of war. In Israel, for example, 25.4 individuals per thousand serve in the military, compared to just 5.2 per thousand in the United States and 3.6 in the United Kingdom (NationMaster). Citizens of fighting age in Israel, therefore, have a higher likelihood of being asked to bear the costs of war than those in the United States, who in turn have a slightly higher likelihood than their counterparts in the United Kingdom.

One reason that a much larger percentage of the Israeli population serves in the military, of course, is that Israel has a policy of universal conscription for all Jewish citizens over the age of 18, while the United States and the UK rely entirely on volunteers. In addition to increasing the pool of citizens who are likely to be asked to bear the burdens of a military intervention, conscription also means that the citizens of Israel have much less control over whether or not they will personally bear the burden of war. This suggests that
Israelis should be less likely than American or British citizens to agree that soldiers have consented to risking their lives on the battlefield. According to Shaw, the end of conscription in most Western societies has shifted the perception of soldiers from “heroic warriors” to “professionals doing a job.” This job, like that of fire fighters or police officers, includes a duty to assume certain risks beyond those the ordinary population must accept. In conscripted armed forces, in contrast, soldiers are not all professionals (Shaw 2005, 79). Accordingly, in Israel, citizens are more likely to perceive their soldiers as, in Asa Kasher and Amos Yadlin’s phrase, “citizens in uniform” (Kasher and Yadlin 2005, 50; Kasher and Yadlin 2009). As such, Israelis may be less likely to distinguish between the state’s duty to protect Israeli civilians and Israeli soldiers. The recruitment model of public opinion, therefore, leads to the following expectations of cross-national variation.

\[H3a: \text{Israeli citizens will be more likely than U.S. and British citizens to prefer force protection over civilian casualty avoidance.}\]

\[H3b: \text{Israeli citizens will be less likely than U.S. and British citizens to agree that compatriot soldiers have consented to risk their lives in military operations.}\]

\[H3c: \text{When explaining their preferences, Israeli citizens who prefer sparing foreign civilians will be less likely than U.S. and British citizens to suggest that soldiers consent to taking risks.}\]

\[The\ Nationalism\ Model\]

Previous studies suggest that in prosperous Western societies, an aversion to the unnecessary loss of human life in war drives both a preference for force protection and for
civilian casualty avoidance. How this distaste for the waste of human life affects harm-transfer preferences, however, depends crucially on whether citizens consider all human life equally worthy of protection or whether they place additional value on the lives of compatriots. We hypothesize that individuals who are particularly nationalist are more likely to channel their wish to protect human life into a preference for force protection than those who are less nationalist and who may be inclined to view all human life as equally worthy of protection. This leads to the following hypothesis:

\[ H4: \text{Individuals who score higher on standard measures of nationalism are more likely to prefer force protection over civilian casualty avoidance.} \]

There are several reasons to suspect that Israelis and Americans might be more nationalist than British citizens. Israel’s history, in particular, may have contributed to a greater sensitivity to the preciousness of Israeli lives and the need to preserve and defend the Israeli people. As Canetti et al. argue “[f]or Israeli Jews, the Holocaust constitutes a collective national trauma that plays a key role in shaping identity, politics, and culture. It stands as a symbol of the past powerlessness of the Jewish people, promotes a siege mentality… serves as a constant reminder to be vigilant and take every possible precaution to ensure that genocide against the Jewish people never happens again” (Canetti et al. 2018). Moreover, since its founding, Israel has endured almost continuous external threats to its existence. Exposure to the resulting political violence in Israel has been linked to support for policies that are more belligerent (Canetti et al. 2017; Gordon 2001) and confrontational towards outgroups (Canetti-Nisim et. al 2009). In general, research suggests that external threats tend to strengthen nationalism (Hjerm and Schnabel 2010).
Britain’s location in Europe and historical connections to countries on the continent, in contrast, have promoted the growth of a transnational identity with no equivalent in Israel or the United States. Although the European identity has never been as strong in Britain as in continental Europe, even following the 2016 referendum to leave the EU, 48 percent of British citizens saw themselves as also being European citizens and 57% described themselves as very or fairly attached to Europe (European Commission 2018). Cross-national public opinion polls reveal much higher levels of nationalism among Americans and Israelis than British citizens. A 2003 survey, for example, found that while 40.7% of Americans and 22% of Israelis strongly agreed that their country was “better than most other countries,” only 13.8% of British citizens said so.\textsuperscript{15} The same found that 79.0% of Israelis said they felt very close to their country, as did 52.4% of Americans, but only 33.7% of Britons.\textsuperscript{16} More recently, separate polls in the three countries have shown that 65% of Americans, 55.5% of Israelis, but just 32% of British citizens reported that they were “very proud” of their nationality (YouGov 2020; National Opinion Research Center 2014, question 460; Israel Democracy Institute 2018, 215). This leads to the following hypotheses of individual-level variation in harm-transfer preferences and country-level differences in the distribution of beliefs.

\textit{H5a: Israeli and U.S. citizens will be more likely than British citizens to prefer force protection over civilian casualty avoidance.}

\textit{H5b: Israeli and American citizens will score higher on standard measures of nationalism than British citizens.}
**H5c: When explaining their preferences, Israeli and U.S. citizens who prefer sparing compatriot soldiers to foreign civilians will be more likely than British citizens to suggest that the lives of compatriots are worth more than the lives of foreigners.**

**Research Design**

To test these hypotheses, we designed and fielded an original survey experiment simultaneously in the United States, the UK, and Israel. The international survey firm YouGov conducted the experiment in June and July 2018. An average of 835 subjects, all citizens over the age of 18, were interviewed in each country.\(^\text{17}\) YouGov utilizes a technique called “sample matching” to approximate a representative sample in each of the four countries we surveyed.\(^\text{18}\) All results presented in this paper are weighted, using survey weights provided by YouGov, which are calculated to match the age, gender, race and education distributions of the target populations.

We randomly assigned subjects in each country to one of three treatment groups or to a control group (each treatment group in each country constituted an average of 170 subjects and an average of 325 subjects per country in the control condition). Respondents in the experimental conditions read a fictional newspaper article (each subject read only one story). The stories were clearly identified as fictional, but all subjects were encouraged to “imagine how you would feel about these events if they were happening in the real world today.”

In all three versions of the article, subjects read that the military leadership of their country was considering military options to retaliate against a recent suicide terrorist attack (using speedboats armed with explosives) on one of their country’s warships operating in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea. The article reports that the attack, “carried out by a previously unknown Islamic terrorist group,” killed 17 sailors and injured 39 others, the same number killed in the Al Qaeda attack on the USS Cole in Yemen’s Aden harbour in
2000. The article states that the terrorists responsible for organizing the attack were tracked to a compound in a village in Libya. The article emphasizes that the citizens of the village “have no history of supporting terrorist groups and it is believed they have no knowledge of the terrorist leaders hiding there.”

According to the article, after the attack, top military officials presented the country’s president/prime minister with a report detailing two options for striking the compound. The first option calls for navy commando forces to deploy by helicopter into Libya to attack the compound on the ground. The second option would launch an airstrike against the compound. Subjects read that both options were equally likely to kill the terrorists, but each posed different risks for military forces and local civilians. Because the terrorist compound has no antiaircraft defenses, the president/prime minister’s military advisors project that no pilots would be killed in the strike. Some local civilians, however, would be unavoidably killed as a result of the strike.

The commando assault, in contrast, would kill no civilians because, subjects read, “there are no civilians inside the compound and the soldiers will not open fire until they enter.” The president/prime minister’s military advisors conclude, however, that using ground forces would likely result in military fatalities among the commandos, since they were “expected to come under heavy fire.” The news article noted that the military advisors’ report did “not recommend either of the two options” but cautioned that the country “only has one shot at eliminating this threat, since the terrorists are likely to relocate quickly after any attack.”

Across the three experimental treatment groups, we varied the harm-transfer ratio implied by the choice between the two military options from 1:1 (the commando assault would kill 10 friendly troops, the air strike would lead to the death of 10 civilians), to 1:10 (1 dead soldier or 10 dead civilians), and 1:100 (10 dead soldiers or 1,000 dead civilians). The
differences between treatments were highlighted in the new article headlines, head-leads and pull quotes as well as in a large graphic comparing the number of military forces and Libyan civilians likely to be killed in the airstrike and the commando assault. The full text of the American version of the first condition (with a 1:10 harm transfer ratio) is provided in figure 1 below. All other treatments are provided in the online appendix.
U.S. Considering Options for Attack on Terrorist Leaders in Libya Responsible for Attack on U.S. Warship: Joint Chiefs Estimate One U.S. Military Fatality in Special Forces Assault


U.S. intelligence has located the leaders of the previously unknown Islamic terrorist group who claimed responsibility for last week's suicide-speedboat attack on the USS Prompt, an American warship operating in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea. The leaders were tracked to a compound near the center of the Libyan village of Duray. The citizens of Duray have no history of supporting terrorist groups and it is believed they have no knowledge of the terrorist leaders hiding there.

A report from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the president and senior officials compares two American military options for retaliating and killing the group's leaders. A copy of the report was obtained from a high-ranking administration official involved in planning the military operations.

Option 1 calls for a special forces unit to be helicoptered into the village to attack the compound on the ground. Because the terrorists are known to be well-armed and extremely unlikely to surrender, U.S. forces are expected to come under heavy fire. Based on similar special forces operations in the past, the report expresses high confidence that all the terrorists will be killed, but estimates that 1 U.S. soldier would also be killed in the firefight. Because there are no civilians inside the compound and the soldiers will not open fire until they enter, no Libyan civilians are expected to be killed.

Option 2 calls for two U.S. fighter aircraft to bomb the compound. The report expresses high confidence that the terrorist leaders would be killed by the air strike, but based on the size of the weapons required to destroy the compound and the similar past bombing operations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff estimates that approximately 10 Libyan civilians in the surrounding neighborhood will be killed.

Because there is no risk of anti-aircraft fire, the report estimates that no American military personnel would be killed in the air strike operation.

"Both options would kill the terrorists, but the air strike would kill more Libyan civilians, while the special forces operation would result in a U.S. military fatality."

The report does not recommend either of the two options and estimates that both operations are equally likely to succeed.

It stresses that no other nation currently has forces in the area that could act in time and cautions that the U.S. "only has one shot at eliminating this threat," since the terrorists are likely to relocate quickly after any attack.

The report comes two days after two suicide bombers piloted a small speedboat filled with high explosives into the USS Prompt killing 17 sailors and injuring 39 others. The Joint Chiefs of Staff report concludes: "Both options would kill the terrorists, but the air strike would kill more Libyan civilians, while the special forces operation would result in a U.S. military fatality."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target: Terrorist Leadership Compound in Libya</th>
<th>Special Forces Option</th>
<th>Air Strike Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated U.S. military deaths</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Libyan civilian deaths</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If no action is taken, terrorists will escape and are likely to carry out additional attacks.
This scenario was designed to appear equally realistic from the points of view of respondents in each of the three countries. The United States, UK and Israel each face significant threats of Islamic terrorism from North Africa. Each country also has naval forces in the Mediterranean and has the military capabilities needed to carry out either an airstrike or a commando assault in Libya.

After reading the news stories, we asked respondents to indicate their preference for the airstrike or the commando assault. We then asked a series of questions relating to respondents’ beliefs about the use of force, the risks assumed by soldiers, and questions designed to measure their degree of nationalism. The relevant details of each condition are summarized in Table 1, below.
Table 1: Treatment Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TREATMENT CONDITION</th>
<th>CONDITION 1 (1:10)</th>
<th>CONDITION 2 (1:1)</th>
<th>CONDITION 3 (1:100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESTIMATED MILITARY DEATHS IN COMMANDO ASSAULT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTIMATED LIBYAN CIVILIAN DEATHS IN AIRSTRIKE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In all conditions, no military fatalities are expected in the airstrike and no Libyan civilian fatalities are expected in the commando assault.*
Results

Figure 2: Preference for Airstrike by Country and Condition
Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents in each country who preferred the airstrike. Responses from subjects in all three countries followed a similar pattern. Subjects were most likely to prefer the airstrike in condition 2, in which the airstrike would kill 10 civilians and the commando assault would result in the deaths of 10 compatriot soldiers. They were least likely to prefer the strike in condition 3, in which 1,000 civilians would be killed to spare 10 compatriot soldiers in the commando raid. Preference for the airstrike in condition 1, in which subjects read that the airstrike would kill 10 civilians and the assault would cause 1 compatriot military fatality, fell between the other two.\(^{20}\)

Nevertheless, we found pronounced and consistent differences between countries within each condition. Israeli respondents were significantly more likely than U.S. or British respondents to prefer the airstrike, regardless of the harm-transfer ratio. Indeed, a clear majority of Israelis preferred the strike in every condition, while a majority of British and American citizens consistently preferred the commando assault, with the exception of Americans in condition 2, in which 59% preferred the airstrike. Americans were also more likely to prefer the airstrike than were British respondents in all three conditions, although those differences were much smaller and only statistically significant in condition 2.\(^{21}\) There were no statistically significant interactions between the countries and the conditions, however, suggesting that subjects in each country responded similarly to the changes in the harm-transfer ratio. Thus, although citizens in all three countries were sensitive to the harm-transfer ratio, Israelis were consistently more willing to accept foreign civilian casualties to minimize fatalities among their troops than citizens in the United States and Britain were. This provides strong support for both H3a and H5a, above.

What explains this stark pattern of preferences between countries? What factors influence individual level preferences in the trade-off between friendly soldiers and foreign
civilians within countries? To answer these questions, we turn first to the original version of the military recruitment model.

Figure 3 represents the test of H1, which posits that citizens who believe they are likely to be called up for military service should be more likely to prefer sacrificing foreign civilians to spare compatriot soldiers. The figure shows the percentage of military age males (age 18–40) in each country who preferred the airstrike, compared to females or older males. Because military age males and other citizens differ on a variety of dimensions, the results control for support for conservative political parties, educational attainment and religiosity (which is especially relevant to political views in Israel). The results show no significant differences between these two groups in the UK or even in Israel, where the likelihood of military service for this demographic group is greatest. In the United States, young males are actually less likely than other citizens to support the airstrike. Thus, we do not find support for H1.
Figure 3: Airstrike Preference by Country and Males of Military Age
This finding differs significantly from that of Horowitz and Levendusky. We believe this is due to two differences in our scenario and measures. First, unlike their scenarios about initiating a major war, our scenarios suggest no possibility of an extended war in which a draft might be necessary. The discrete nature of the threat and the one-off military response described in our hypothetical scenarios is not likely to activate young males’ concerns that they might personally be asked to take on the burden of defending their country. Since the expected military losses never exceed 10 fatalities, the personal risk is extremely low, even in Israel. Given the improbability of a draft in the United States and the UK, we also examined whether immediate family connections to military service members might make subjects in the UK and United States more sensitive to risks to soldiers. We found no effect. Second, Horowitz and Levendusky included women in both the hypothesized future U.S. draft and in their measured young respondents. It is possible that male respondents may have been influenced by the inclusion of women in the proposed draft and, moreover, military age women respondents were more likely than men to object to entering the war (Horowitz and Levendusky, 351). In contrast, our Figure 2 reports only on military age males, since they are much more likely to be killed in combat today, even in Israel. Overall, therefore, we think our scenario more accurately reflects the kinds of conflicts that these three states are likely to be involved in. Our findings suggest that in these conflicts, variation in perceptions of personal risk do not drive preferences on soldier-civilian harm-transfer.

Nevertheless, differences in the structure of military service across the three countries might be reflected in differences in the belief among all citizens that compatriot soldiers have consented to take risks as part of their service. To test this, we asked all respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “By serving in the military, [British/American/Israeli] soldiers consent to military commanders putting their lives at risk on the battlefield to protect foreign civilians who do not participate in the war.” Figure 4
shows the relationship between subjects’ belief that soldiers have consented to risk their lives to protect foreign civilians and preference for the airstrike. Because this belief might be correlated with other individual level characteristics that could influence support for the airstrike, we controlled for the respondents’ sex, age, education, support for conservative political parties and religiosity.
Figure 4: Airstrike Preference by Country and Belief That Soldiers Consent to Take Risks
The results demonstrate that subjects in all three countries who agreed that soldiers have consented to take risks are much less likely to prefer the airstrike, providing support for H2. We also found that Israelis were much less likely than U.S. or British citizens to believe that their soldiers had consented in accordance with H3b. As figure 5 shows, while 75.1% of British citizens and 66.6% of Americans agreed that soldiers had consented, only 38.4% of Israeli respondents did. Because respondents answered the question about soldiers’ consent after receiving the treatment there is a risk that these results could be influenced by post-treatment bias. However, we found no significant differences in the number of subjects who agreed that soldiers consented, either across the three experimental conditions or compared to the control group, in which subjects read no story.
Figure 5: Agreement that Country’s Soldiers Consent to Risk Their Lives to Save Foreign Civilians
In addition, we asked all subjects who preferred the ground assault to “briefly describe the single most important reason you preferred the special forces assault.” We then manually coded whether or not each subject asserted a belief that soldiers had consented to take risks as a reason for preferring the ground assault to the airstrike. The results are shown in Figure 6.
Figure 6: Percentage of Subjects Mentioning Soldier Consent, by Country

(Among Subjects Who Preferred Ground Assault)
As expected, pooling across all three conditions, Israelis who preferred the ground assault were less likely than British and American subjects who prefer the ground assault to mention soldier consent as a justification for their preference, providing support for H3c.28 This explanation from a British respondent in Condition 1 was typical of subjects who referenced the concept of soldier consent, “A soldier, especially a special forces soldier, knows they could be killed. It's their choice. Civilians have no choice.” However, given the very small numbers of Israelis who preferred the ground assault in any of the conditions (never more than 37%), the standard errors are relatively large, making it hard to quantify differences with precision.

Next, we turn to the hypotheses relating to the nationalism model of harm-transfer preferences, which attributes variation in sensitivity to compatriot military and foreign civilian casualties to variation in the degree to which people accept the belief that all lives are equally valuable, regardless of nationality. Drawing on measures developed in previous studies of nationalism, we first tested H4 by asking subjects how much they agreed or disagreed that “The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like people from [subject’s country]” and “How much does being [subjects’ nationality] have to do with how you feel about yourself?” (Davidoff 2009; Coenders and Scheepers 2003). We normalized the scales and combined the two scores, and then created a binary variable indicating whether the subject was in the highest or lowest 50% of scores across all three countries.

Figure 7 shows the relationship between subjects’ degree of nationalism and their preference for the airstrike. As above, we controlled for the respondents’ sex, age, education, support for conservative political parties and religiosity. As expected, highly nationalist subjects were significantly more likely to prefer the airstrike in every country, providing strong support for H4.
Figure 7: Preference for Airstrike by Country and Nationalism

If you had to choose between one of the two U.S. military options described in the news article, would you prefer the special forces assault or the airstrike?

- **UK**: 0.21
- **USA**: 0.29
- **Israel**: 0.78

Legend:
- ● bottom 50% nationalism score
- ♦ top 50% nationalism score
Moreover, as expected by H5b, figure 8 clearly shows that Israel had the highest percentage of highly nationalist citizens, with 63.2% receiving high scores compared to 41.3% in the United States and just 34.5% in the UK. As above, we checked for post-treatment bias by comparing the nationality scores of subjects in each condition to each other and to the control condition. There were no significant differences.
Figure 8: Percent of Subjects with High Nationalism Scores, by Country

- UK: 34.5%
- USA: 41.3%
- Israel: 63.2%
To further explore this mechanism, we asked subjects to “briefly describe the single most important reason you preferred the airstrike.” We manually coded whether each subject explicitly stated that their own compatriots’ lives were more important than the lives of foreigners. The results are presented in Figure 9. As can be seen, pooling across all three conditions, Israelis were far more likely than British and American subjects to mention an explicit preference for their compatriots in every condition. This supports H5c. Indeed, Israelis were 1.7 times as likely as were Americans to reference a clear preference for compatriots, and almost 4 times as likely as British citizens. Some of the Israeli justifications were shockingly blunt. One respondent in condition 1 wrote, “One soldier of the IDF is worth more than 10 citizens of enemies, one soldier could save the lives of Israeli civilians, particularly a special forces soldier.” Another subject, in condition 3 simply wrote, “It is better that they die than our children. Our children are worth more, period.”
Figure 9: Percentage of Subjects Mentioning Compatriot Preference, by Country

(Among Subjects Who Preferred Airstrike)
These feelings were also reflected in the responses to a survey question from the control condition. Subjects were asked, “In times of war, which do you think ought to be more important to the [subject’s country], protecting the lives of [subject’s country’s] soldiers or protecting the lives of foreign civilians?” 76.7% of Israelis indicated that their soldiers were more important, compared to 51.9% of Americans and 40.5% of British citizens.32

To place these results in perspective and identify other determinants of attitudes relevant to harm transfer ratios, we also estimated a larger model that includes all countries and treatment conditions, the measures of soldier consent and nationalism described above, as well as variables measuring age, sex, conservative political orientation, religiosity, and support for the death penalty.33 The marginal effects of these variables are presented in figure 10 below.34
Figure 10: Marginal Effects of Treatment Condition, Citizenship, Demographic and Attitudinal Factors on Preference for the Air Strike

(Islael and Condition 2 are reference categories)
The results demonstrate that nationalism and beliefs about soldier consent have the strongest effects of any of the attitudinal measures on preferences for the air strike. Conservative political orientation and support for the death penalty also have strong positive effects on the preference for the air strike. As above, the results show that subjects were most likely to prefer the air strike in condition 2 (when the expected deaths of soldiers and civilians would be equal). Even after controlling for these attitudinal measures, however, Israeli subjects were much more likely to prefer the airstrike than subjects in the United States or the UK, suggesting that additional factors not accounted for in the model are necessary to fully explain variation between Israelis, Americans, and British citizens.

**Conclusion**

Article 57 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions stipulates that, “in the conduct of military operations, constant care shall be taken to spare the civilian population, civilians, and civilian objects.” The rule requires that soldiers “take all feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack with a view to avoiding, and in any event to minimizing, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects” (Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, Article 57). Although Article 57 does not specify whether soldiers must put themselves into harm’s way to provide constant care to foreign civilians, it is widely accepted that customary international law has evolved to include such a demand. A.P.V. Rogers summarizes this understanding: “In taking care to protect civilians, soldiers must accept some element of risk to themselves. The principle is unclear as to what degree of care is required of a soldier and what degree of risk he must take” (Rogers 1982, 310). David Luban similarly observes, “International humanitarian law
requires soldiers to do everything feasible to avoid unintended civilian casualties, but it never defines ‘feasible’” (Luban 2014, 279).35

Scholarship and doctrine across the three countries we investigated here diverge about whether “constant care” means exposing friendly troops to potential harm.36 Prominent Israeli military lawyer Noam Neumann, for instance, argues that this provision “does not require a commander to risk his soldiers’ lives in order to reduce civilian casualties” (Neumann 2004, 82-83). Yoram Dinstein, one of the most influential legal scholars in Israel, similarly maintains that constant care does not mean a commander is “bound to sustain unnecessary military losses only in order to spare enemy civilians” (Dinstein 2016, 168). Prominent Israeli philosophers Asa Kasher and Amos Yadlin link this position to conscription in Israel and argue that conscripted compatriot soldiers deserve even more protection than foreign civilians (Kasher and Yadlin 2005). The most recent U.S. Law of War Manual is less absolute, stating that a commander may consider “whether taking the precaution poses a risk to one’s own forces or presents other security risks” (U.S. Department of Defense 2015, Section 5.3.2.3).37 The American lawyer, Michael Schmitt, explains this position as implying that a “sliding scale exists along which precautions become less feasible the greater the risk assumed in the operation” (Schmitt 2006, 297). The British Law of War manual likewise suggests that a commander “will have to pay regard” to risks to his own forces when ordering a precautionary measure, but also stresses that “[t]raditionally commanders have accepted some risk in identifying targets by using, for example, artillery spotters, forward air controllers, and intelligence gatherers operating in enemy-held territory” (United Kingdom Ministry of Defence 2004, Section 5.32.2).

Our findings about public opinion cannot adjudicate between these different conceptions of what it means for soldiers to take constant care to spare civilians.38 It is striking, however, that scholarship and doctrine align with public opinion in a clear
prioritization of force protection in Israel, a more moderate position in how to manage trade-offs between force protection and civilian casualty avoidance in the United States, and more emphasis on sparing foreign civilians in the UK. Our findings demonstrate that both conceptions of soldiers’ consent and nationalism drive these variations in harm-transfer preferences across individuals and across countries. Israelis tend to be the most protective of their own soldiers because most Israelis do not accept that their conscript soldiers have consented to risk their lives in war and because they are less likely to espouse the belief that all human lives are equal, regardless of nationality. British citizens, in contrast, are much more likely to believe that members of their all-volunteer military have agreed to sacrifice their lives, if necessary and that even the lives of non-compatriots are worth making that sacrifice. Americans sit between these positions. Unlike the British public, a majority of Americans (59%) supported the airstrike in the condition in which the number of American soldiers’ lives saved were equal to the number of foreign civilians killed. Unlike Israelis, however, an even stronger majority of Americans (76%) was willing to sacrifice compatriot soldiers when the harm transfer ratio was 1:100.

These striking differences demonstrate that political leaders and military decisionmakers in the United States, the UK, and Israel face very different constraints on the use of force. There is no one “Western way of war” characterized by intense aversion to compatriot military casualties. Political leaders and military commanders from Israel, the UK and the United States face different military challenges. Our experiment shows, however, that even in similar military scenarios, they would face different pressures from their publics to make different kinds of tragic trade-offs. The Israeli public wants its leaders to impose minimal risks on compatriot soldiers, even at the cost of high levels of foreign civilian casualties. British public opinion encourages leaders in London or decision-makers on the battlefield to trade-off force protection for the sake of protecting foreign civilians. The
American public puts more complex pressures on decision-makers, to prioritize force protection when the costs to foreign civilian lives are moderate in number, but to accept the sacrifice of American soldiers when “collateral damage” estimates rise.

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APPENDIX 1 (NEWS STORIES)

USA CONDITION 1: 1 COMPATRIOT SOLDIER / 10 LIBYAN CIVILIANS

U.S. Considering Options for Attack on Terrorist Leaders in Libya Responsible for Attack on U.S. Warship: Joint Chiefs Estimate One U.S. Military Fatality in Special Forces Assault


U.S. intelligence has located the leaders of the previously unknown Islamic terrorist group who claimed responsibility for last week's suicide speedboat attack on the USS Purpse, an American warship operating in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea. The leaders were tracked to a compound near the center of the Libyan village of Daraya. The citizens of Daraya have no history of supporting terrorist groups and it is believed they have no knowledge of the terrorist leaders hiding there.

A report from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the president and senior officials compares two American military options for retaliating and killing the group's leaders. A copy of the report was obtained from a high-ranking administration official involved in planning the military operations.

Option 1 calls for a special forces unit to be helicoptered into the village to attack the compound on the ground. Because the terrorists are known to be well-armed and extremely unlikely to surrender, U.S. forces are expected to come under heavy fire. Based on similar special forces operations in the past, the report expresses high confidence that all the terrorists will be killed, but estimates that 1 U.S. soldier would also be killed in the firefight. Because there are no civilians inside the compound and the soldiers will not open fire until they enter, no Libyan civilians are expected to be killed.

Option 2 calls for two U.S. fighter aircraft to bomb the compound. The report expresses high confidence that the terrorist leaders would be killed by the air strike, but based on the size of the weapons required to destroy the compound and the similar past bombing operations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff estimates that approximately 10 Libyan civilians in the surrounding neighborhood will be killed.

Because there is no risk of anti-aircraft fire, the report estimates that no American military personnel would be killed in the air strike operation.

"Both options would kill the terrorists, but the air strike would kill more Libyan civilians, while the special forces operation would result in a U.S. military fatality."

The report does not recommend either of the two options and estimates that both operations are equally likely to succeed.

It stresses that no other nation currently has forces in the area that could act in time and cautions that the U.S. "only has one shot at eliminating this threat," since the terrorists are likely to relocate quickly after any attack.

The report comes two days after two suicide bombers piloted a small speedboat filled with high explosives into the USS Purpse killing 17 sailors and injuring 90 others. The Joint Chiefs of Staff report concludes: "Both options would kill the terrorists, but the air strike would kill more Libyan civilians, while the special forces operation would result in a U.S. military fatality."

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Target: Terrorist Leadership Compound in Libya</th>
<th>Special Forces Option</th>
<th>Air Strike Option</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated U.S. military deaths</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Libyan civilian deaths</td>
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<td>10</td>
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</table>

If no action is taken, terrorists will escape and are likely to carry out additional attacks.
USA CONDITION 2: 10 COMPATRIOT SOLDIER / 10 LIBYAN CIVILIANS

U.S. Considering Options for Attack on Terrorist Leaders in Libya Responsible for Attack on U.S. Warship: Joint Chiefs Estimate Ten U.S. Military Fatalities in Special Force Assault


U.S. intelligence has located the leaders of the previously unknown Islamic terrorist group who claimed responsibility for last week's suicide speedboat attack on the USS Purpose, an American warship operating in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea. The leaders were tracked to a compound near the center of the Libyan village of Danaya. The citizens of Danaya have no history of supporting terrorist groups and it is believed they have no knowledge of the terrorist leaders hiding there.

A report from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the president and senior officials compares two American military options for retaliating against the group's leaders. A copy of the report was obtained from a high-ranking administration official involved in planning the military operations.

Option 1 calls for a special forces unit to be helicoptered into the village to attack the compound on the ground. Because the terrorists are known to be well-armed and extremely unlikely to surrender, U.S. forces are expected to come under heavy fire. Based on similar special forces operations in the past, the report expresses high confidence that all the terrorists will be killed, but estimates that 10 U.S. soldiers would also be killed in the firefight. Because there are no civilians inside the compound and the soldiers will not open fire until they enter, no Libyan civilians are expected to be killed.

Option 2 calls for two U.S. fighter aircraft to bomb the compound. The report expresses high confidence that the terrorist leaders would be killed by the air strike, but based on the size of the weapons required to destroy the compound and the similar past bombing operations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff estimates that approximately 10 Libyan civilians in the surrounding neighborhood will be killed.

Because there is no risk of anti-aircraft fire, the report estimates that no American military personnel would be killed in the air strike operation.

"Both options would kill the terrorists, but the air strike would kill more Libyan civilians, while the special forces operation would result in 10 U.S. military fatalities."

The report does not recommend either of the two options and estimates that both operations are equally likely to succeed.

It stresses that no other nation currently has forces in the area that could act in time and cautions that the U.S. "only has one shot at eliminating this threat," since the terrorists are likely to relocate quickly after any attack.

The report comes two days after two suicide bombers piloted a small speedboat filled with high explosives into the USS Purpose killing 17 sailors and injuring 39 others. The Joint Chiefs of Staff report concludes: "Both options would kill the terrorists, but the air strike would kill more Libyan civilians, while the special forces operation would result in 10 U.S. military fatalities."

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated U.S. military deaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Libyan civilian deaths</td>
</tr>
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</table>

If no action is taken, terrorists will escape and are likely to carry out additional attacks.
USA CONDITION 3: 10 COMPATRIOT SOLDIER / 1,000 LIBYAN CIVILIANS

U.S. Considering Options for Attack on Terrorist Leaders in Libya Responsible for Attack on U.S. Warship: Joint Chiefs Estimate Ten U.S. Military Fatalities in Special Forces Assault

Report: Air Strike Would Eliminate Risk to U.S. Troops, But Would Kill an Estimated 1,000 Libyan Civilians.

U.S. intelligence has located the leaders of the previously unknown Islamic terrorist group who claimed responsibility for last week’s suicide speedboat attack on the USS Cole, an American warship operating in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea. The leaders were tracked to a compound near the center of the Libyan village of Darna. The citizens of Darna have no history of supporting terrorist groups and it is believed they have no knowledge of the terrorist leaders hiding there.

A report from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the president and senior officials compares two American military options for retaliating and killing the group’s leaders. A copy of the report was obtained from a high-ranking administration official involved in planning the military operations.

Option 1 calls for a special forces unit to be helicoptered into the village to attack the compound on the ground. Because the terrorists are known to be well-armed and extremely unlikely to surrender, U.S. forces are expected to come under heavy fire. Based on similar special forces operations in the past, the report expresses high confidence that all the terrorists will be killed, but estimates that 10 U.S. soldiers would also be killed in the firefight. Because there are no civilians inside the compound and the soldiers will not open fire until they enter, no Libyan civilians are expected to be killed.

Option 2 calls for two U.S. fighter aircraft to bomb the compound. The report expresses high confidence that the terrorist leaders would be killed by the air strike, but based on the size of the weapons required to destroy the compound and the similar past bombing operations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff estimates that approximately 1,000 Libyan civilians in the surrounding neighborhood will be killed.

Because there is no risk of anti-aircraft fire, the report estimates that no American military personnel would be killed in the air strike operation.

“Both options would kill the terrorists, but the air strike would kill more Libyan civilians, while the special forces operation would result in 10 U.S. military fatalities.”

The report does not recommend either of the two options and estimates that both operations are equally likely to succeed.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Libyan civilian deaths</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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If no action is taken, terrorists will escape and are likely to carry out additional attacks.
APPENDIX 2 (OPEN RESPONSE CODING PROCEDURES)

A human coder (an undergraduate research assistant at a major American university) was recruited to evaluate subjects' text answers in response to the following questions:

- For subjects who preferred the air strike: “In your own words, please briefly describe the single most important reason you preferred the airstrike.”
- For subjects who preferred the special forces assault: “In your own words, please briefly describe the single most important reason you preferred the special forces assault.”

The coder was given the following instructions:

Your task is to determine whether or not the response fits the following concept categories.

**Consent** [for subjects who preferred the special forces assault only]: Use this category only when the subject indicates that soldiers are professionals who consent to take a risk with their lives, and therefore should bear more risk than civilians.

**Compatriot Preference** [for subjects who preferred the air strike only]: Use this category only when the subject explicitly indicates that their own country’s soldiers are worth more than Libyan civilians.

If you believe the response definitely corresponds with a particular concept category, code it as 2. If you believe it probably corresponds to the response, code it as 1. If it
definitely or probably does not correspond to the response, code it as 0. Every cell must have a code.

In this paper, we collapsed the definitely and probably categories to create dichotomous variables. The results remain consistent even if we limit the analysis only to responses coded “definitely.”
APPENDIX 3 (FRIEND/FAMILY MILITARY SERVICE)

To explore the possibility that harm-transfer preferences might be driven not only by subjects’ perceptions that they might personally be asked to fight in a war, but also by the chance that a loved-one might bear that risk, we asked subjects in the United States and UK whether or not they or “immediate family members (spouse, siblings, or parents only) ever served in the U.S. [UK] military.” This question was not asked in Israel since universal conscription means that there would be virtually no variation there. We acknowledge that measure is imperfect, since it includes some subjects whose service was in the long past, but we expect it should be strongly correlated with the chances that a subject has a family member who might be at risk of serving in a war. As shown in the figure below, subjects in the UK with family members who served were 5% more likely to prefer the airstrike, but this difference was not statistically significant.
APPENDIX 4 (TOPIC MODELING EXCERCISE)

We employed a commonly used algorithm known as Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to analyze subjects’ open responses explaining their preferences for the air strike or the special forces assault. First, we spell checked all the responses, eliminated common “stop words” and “stemmed” the words to remove common suffixes. Next, we specified that the algorithm should group responses into 3 topics for those who preferred the air strike and three for those who preferred the special forces assault. Given the short length of the responses (median of 7 words) and the small number of responses in each category, a relatively small number of topics was appropriate.

After running the algorithm on each set of responses, we identified the 10 most common words associated with each topic (see table below) and generated a list of the full text of all responses that were assigned an 80% or higher probability of belonging to each of the three topics. The full list of these responses is included in a separate spreadsheet, and an illustrative response is included in the table below as an example the kinds of responses assigned to each topic.
## TOP 10 MOST LIKELY WORDS, BY TOPIC

### SUBJECTS WHO PREFERED AIR STRIKE

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<th>Word</th>
<th>Probability of appearing in topic</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>soldier</td>
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<td>kill</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>attack</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>terrorist</td>
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<td>force</td>
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<td>elimi</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>chanc</td>
<td>0.01380863</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Typical response full text**

”More chance of killing the terrorists who pose a threat to our national security”

### SUBJECTS WHO PREFERED SPECIAL FORCES ASSAULT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Probability of appearing in topic</th>
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<td>8</td>
<td>should</td>
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<td>9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

**Typical response full text**

”Killing the civilians isn't right”

### TOPIC 2 (minimize military deaths)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Probability of appearing in topic</th>
<th>Topic 2 (soldiers know the risks)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>live</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>british</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Typical response full text**

”Less risk of losing us military personal”

### TOPIC 3 (our soldiers first)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Word</th>
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<th>Topic 3 (loss of life)</th>
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</thead>
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<td>civilian</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Typical response full text**

”One soldier's life are important to me than 10 Libyans”

**Typical response full text**

”Fewer fatalities”
Although it is often difficult to interpret the topics generated by topic modelling algorithms, we believe most of the topics we identified are relatively coherent. For subjects who preferred the air strike, topic 1 seems to focus on the desire to maximize the probability that the terrorists will be eliminated, regardless of consequences to civilians. Topic 2 centers on the need to minimize military fatalities in general. Responses cluster in topic 3, in contrast, often make explicit reference to the greater value placed on compatriot military lives. Some representative responses in this topic included the following:

- “One soldier's life are important to me than 10 Libyans”
- “Preferably one IDF soldier than 10 Libyan civilians”
- “As an Israeli citizen and a Jew I feel that guarantee the Jewish soldiers than civilians in Libya (full disclosure - I felt would have been different if there were Jewish Libyans.)”
- “It just seems safer for our soldiers. I am sorry for the civilians who would be killed, but this cannot be helped, our soldiers come first. If the terrorists get away with this, many more innocent people will be killed. It seems the lesser of two evils.”

As the figure below shows, and as anticipated by our theory, responses of Israeli subjects had a much higher probability of clustering in topic 3 than responses of US and UK subjects. Consistent with our human coded results, US subjects were also more likely to be assigned to topic #3.
For subjects who preferred the special forces assault, responses assigned a high probability of belonging in topic 1 appeared to focus on the ethical problems of killing civilians. Responses in topic 3 tended to focus more on the general desire to minimize total deaths. These responses were more likely from UK citizens than Americans or Israelis and were more often recorded in conditions 1 and 3 (where more civilians would die than soldiers) and often seemed to point to the desire to cause the fewest deaths in general – not just to avoid killing civilians.

Topic 2, however, was the most relevant the perspective of this article. Responses assigned a high probability of belonging in this topic tended to refer to the fact that soldiers had been trained and knew the risks of combat and, therefore, it was just that they should accept more
risk of death than civilians. Some representative response assigned a high probability of belonging to topic 2 included the following:

- “The soldiers who are in the special forces have chosen to be soldiers. I am the mother of a soldier in the US Army. He chose to make a choice and become a soldier. If he loses his life I would be broken. But I can not abide the loss of life of civilians who have no part in the war.”
- “The special forces operators have control over the operation and the ability to save their own lives while the Libyans would be completely helpless.”
- “Military personnel choose to take the risk of loss of life while unaware citizens have no choice. Also, the special forces assault will take far fewer lives.”
- “Innocent Libyan citizens would die where as 1 British soldier would die and that the soldier signed up to the army.”

The figure below shows that, consistent with our theory, responses from subjects in the US and UK were much more likely to be assigned a high probability of belonging to topic 2.
Results for topic 1 and topic 2 for subjects who preferred the air strike and for topic 1 and topic 3 for subjects who preferred the special forces assault are also included below for reference. We have also included charts illustrating the probability that responses assigned to each topic were referenced in each of the three treatment conditions. Because these topics do not appear to align directly with any of the hypotheses we advanced in the paper, however, we do not speculate on the findings here.

PREFER AIR STRIKE TOPIC #1 (BY COUNTRY)

PREFER AIR STRIKE TOPIC #2 (BY COUNTRY)
PREFER AIR STRIKE TOPIC #1 (BY CONDITION)

PREFER AIR STRIKE TOPIC #2 (BY CONDITION)

PREFER AIR STRIKE TOPIC #3 (BY CONDITION)
PREFER SPECIAL FORCES TOPIC #1 (BY COUNTRY)

PREFER SPECIAL FORCES TOPIC #3 (BY COUNTRY)

PREFER SPECIAL FORCES TOPIC #1 (BY CONDITION)

PREFER SPECIAL FORCES TOPIC #2 (BY CONDITION)
PREFER SPECIAL FORCES TOPIC #3 (BY CONDITION)
APPENDIX 5 (MARGINAL EFFECTS BY COUNTRY)
Footnotes

1. Israel and the United States have not ratified the Protocol. However, the precautionary principle is widely considered to have the standing of customary international law in both international and non-international armed conflict.
2. In this article we use the terms fatalities and casualties interchangeably, meaning deaths among civilians or combatants.
3. It is impossible to know what respondents in the ICRC study meant when they indicated that killing civilians is “part of war”. They could mean that the collateral killing of civilians is morally acceptable in war, or they could simply be affirming an empirical observation about the way wars are actually waged.
4. For the argument that prosperity reduces willingness to fight, see Luttwak 1996; Mueller 1989; Gat 2005/06; and Pinker 2011.
5. For arguments linking casualties to a decline in leadership popularity, see Gartner 2008; Gartner and Segura 1998; Mueller 1973. For the connection between casualties and electoral outcomes, see Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995.
7. Interestingly, the poll showed no correlation between measures of democracy and support for attacks on civilians.
9. The GDPs per-capita of the United States, UK and Israel are $63,000, $43,000 and $42,000 respectively.
10. This issue is sometimes referred to as “risk-transfer” between soldiers and civilians. In our study we hold the probability of harm constant at a high level. We hence do not study preferences for when soldiers should take risks, but preferences about whether soldiers should accept expected harm in order to avoid expected harm to civilians.
11. From 2000 to 2021, females accounted for 8.6 percent of military fatalities in the Israeli Defense Force according to the B’Tselem Database on House Demolitions and Fatalities.
12. The fact that the members of professional volunteer forces actively consent to assuming their role may also mean that fellow citizens perceive them as better equipped to take risks on the battlefield. They have self-selected into the societal sub-group that bears the greatest burdens of foreign military interventions.
13. In the UK, evidence suggests that the military recruits enlisted soldiers disproportionately from the poorest segments of the British population – especially among the youngest recruits. In the United States, in contrast, while African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to join the armed forces, citizens from poor families are less likely to enlist. See Asoni, Gilli, Gilli, and Sanandaji 2020 and Child Rights International Network 2019.
14. Druze, or Circassians, are also eligible for the draft. Arab citizens of Israel are exempt.
15. The United States ranked the highest on this measure of all 33 countries in the survey. See International Social Survey 2003.
16. Israel ranked the highest on this measure of all 33 countries in the survey. See International Social Survey 2003.
17. In Israel, we excluded Arab Israeli subjects (about 14% of the Israeli population) from our sample. Arab citizens are not eligible for military service and Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel are known to have dramatically different opinions on the use of force. Although those differences could be interesting, surveying Israel’s Arab population over the internet is especially difficult, and combined with our relatively small sample size, we would have been unable to draw confident conclusions about their beliefs. For more detail on Israel’s ethnic and religious landscape, see Pew Research Center 2016.
18. For a detailed description of this methodology, see George Washington University School of Media & Public Affairs n.d.
19. After reading the story, subjects were asked an attention check question requiring them to identify the correct conclusion of the JCS report from a list of six options. 73.29 percent of subjects correctly answered the question on the first attempt. Subjects who failed the check were asked to re-read the news story. One hundred percent of subjects answered the question correctly on the second attempt.
20. All these differences were statistically significant at the p<.1 level, with the exception of the difference between the United States in conditions 1 and 2 (p=.11).
21. Averaging across all three conditions, Americans were statistically significantly more likely to prefer the airstrike than British citizens and Israelis were more likely than Americans or British citizens to prefer it.
22. Though rating questions were asked on a 6 or 7-point interval scale, we present our results in binary form for ease of interpretation. Unless otherwise noted, our results remain consistent using either the interval or binary form.
23. See appendix 3.
24. These results hold even if military age female Israeli respondents are included.
25. These differences also persisted for each country in each treatment with the exception of Israel in condition 3.
All differences between countries are statistically significant.

See Appendix 2 for details on the coding procedure. In addition, we used a Latent Dirichlet Allocation topic model to automatically identify topics in the text of the open responses. We identified a topic that appears strongly consistent with the concept of soldier consent. As expected, responses from U.S. and UK citizens who preferred the special forces assault were assigned significantly higher probabilities of belonging to this topic than responses of Israeli subjects who preferred the special forces assault. See appendix 4 for details.

All differences were statistically significant, although the difference between the United States and the UK was only marginally significant at $p=.074$.

Using the same topic modelling methodology we employed for soldier consent, we automatically detected topics in the text of the open responses of those who preferred the air strike. In these responses we identified a topic that appears consistent with the concept of compatriot preference. Responses from Israeli citizens who preferred the airstrike were assigned significantly higher probabilities of belonging to this topic than responses of U.S. and UK subjects who preferred the air strike. See appendix 4 for details.

All differences were statistically significant.

Several studies have identified support for the death penalty as a significant determinant of support for the use of force (Stein 2019; Liberman 2011). Although the United States is the only country of the three to retain the death penalty for murder, majorities of subjects in all countries in our sample (66% in the U.S., 61% in Israel and 52% in the UK) express support for the policy.

This model does not include the indicator for military age males, since it was not significant and including it prevents a straightforward interpretation of variables representing age and sex. Results disaggregated by country can be found in Appendix 5.

The Law of War Manual of the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence (2004, Section 2.7.1) likewise acknowledges the legal uncertainty: “The Law is not clear as to the degree of risk that the attacker must accept (…)”. For systematic interpretive studies that take stock of these interpretations, see Dill 2019 and Haque 2012.

David Luban cites a military ethicist at West Point as arguing that force protection “violates the very essence of soldiering. The moral basis of soldiering is the protection of the innocent.” See Luban 2014, 284.

For efforts to do this, see Bohrer and Osiel 2013.