



**At the Water's Edge:**  
**Measuring Bipartisan**  
**Cooperation on National**  
**Security and Foreign Policy in**  
**Congress, 1945-2009**

- April 2010 -



*The Partnership for a Secure America (PSA) is dedicated to recreating the bipartisan center in American national security and foreign policy.*

Past decades have witnessed a hardening of partisan divisions on national security and foreign policy, limiting productive debate and blocking effective action by Congress and the Executive Branch on critical policy issues. This rising partisanship has soured working relationships among policymakers and their counterparts across the aisle at all levels of government, and our national security and foreign policy discourse has suffered as a result.

The Partnership for a Secure America was created to respond to this growing problem and to help foster sensible, bipartisan, consensus driven solutions to the major national security and foreign policy challenges facing our country.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past half century has witnessed a pronounced shift away from the tradition of bipartisan foreign policy and toward partisan polarization of all political debates, including those dealing with the country's basic national security interests. Experts, advocates, and politicians themselves have taken note of this trend, citing anecdotal evidence of a broad "partisan drift" in American politics. However, to date, there has been little formal study of the role of partisan politics in national security and foreign policy decision-making in Washington. This report seeks to address that gap by measuring bipartisanship and partisanship in Congressional voting records on national security and foreign policy from the end of World War II to the present. Based on this analysis of over six decades of Congressional voting, the Report concludes that there is indeed an overall trend of increased partisanship in national security and foreign policy voting, despite significant upward and downward variation in the short term.

The rise of partisanship in a policymaking arena once thought immune from bitter partisan fights is clearly troubling. In the words of PSA Advisory Board member Ambassador Thomas Pickering, "There simply is not enough trust between leaders on opposite sides of the aisle, and it is hurting our ability to reach bipartisan consensus on critical national security and foreign policy issues." But why has such distrust and destructive partisanship taken hold? Some have laid blame on individual party leaders or argued that partisanship in Congress is simply a symptom of deep divisions in the American public as a whole. Yet these explanations do not stand up to close scrutiny. This report finds that over time, bipartisanship in Congressional action on national security and foreign policy has had no relationship to control of Congress, and varies only slightly if there is unified or split party control of both the Legislative and Executive branches. In addition, public opinion polls show that regardless of partisan affiliation, Americans share broadly the same outlook on a variety of top foreign policy and national security priorities.

This Report concludes instead that increasing partisanship appears to derive from three main factors: first, polarizing pressures on the campaign trail, including gerrymandering of voting districts, lopsided fundraising rules, and the costs of political advertising; second, the contraction of the Congressional work week to three or four days, with unrealistic "face time" requirements for members to engage with media, constituents and special interests; and third, the increasing infiltration of "infotainment" into news reporting on political topics, including national security and foreign policy debates.

To slow and ultimately reverse the decline of bipartisan cooperation on national security and foreign policy, this Report recommends a series of reforms that will require presidential leadership, support and follow through from Congress, as well as basic structural changes to the American political process:

- ★ In addition to repeating and strengthening his rhetorical commitment to a bipartisan approach to U.S. national security and foreign policy challenges, symbolized by his appointment of prominent Republicans to national security posts, President Obama should



- ★ establish bipartisan working groups of experts and former officials to provide advice on specific foreign policy issues, and should consult regularly at the White House with Congressional leaders from both parties on national security and foreign policy issues.
- ★ For its part, Congress must work to compartmentalize partisan debates on domestic issues to prevent the poisoning of dialogue on pressing national security challenges. Increased face-to-face interaction between members on opposite sides of the aisle, such as through a members-only weekly foreign policy caucus, would help repair working relationships, and enable the next level of necessary reform, including reducing committee assignment loads, requiring members to actually participate in committee hearings designed to increase their substantive understanding of issues, and increasing the transparency and frequency of official travel abroad, so that such travel serves the purpose of education, not recreation.
- ★ Finally, Presidential and Congressional leadership cannot succeed in reversing the trend of destructive partisanship without significant structural change in the American political environment. Wherever possible, redistricting should be conducted by states according to neutral, non-partisan guidelines, reducing the number of “safe seats” on both sides, and increasing the importance of the general election over more polarizing partisan primaries. Meanwhile, large and often overtly partisan institutions, organizations and corporations still wield outsized influence in financing political campaigns, making it difficult for candidates to appeal directly to voters and still bring in the funds necessary for modern media-intensive campaigns. Finally, the media itself must commit to stricter labeling of content, clearly distinguishing between truly unbiased news reporting and partisan infotainment.

This Report’s findings confirm the common wisdom that Washington is broken: partisan bickering has displaced thoughtful deliberation and effective action in too many policy areas that are central to our national welfare. However, the imperative for a return to bipartisanship in U.S. national security and foreign policy is as strong today as ever. The President himself has acknowledged a well-worn truth that no single leader or political party possesses a monopoly on wisdom, and therefore the majority and minority must respect one another’s perspectives and experience, even when they disagree about the direction of policy. In a town built on relationships, trust is essential to the basic functioning of government, and must be rebuilt on a basis of mutual respect and loyalty to country over party. Politicians across the political spectrum should recall that today’s majority can easily become tomorrow’s minority, but that the United States plays a far more effective role in the world when our foreign policy is stable and consistent. It is this principle that lies at the heart of Senator Vandenberg’s half-century-old injunction that Americans must leave partisanship “at the water’s edge.”

Matthew Rojansky  
Washington, DC  
April 14, 2010

*Many thanks to Daniel Cassman and Alexis Collatos for their invaluable contributions to this project.*



*“To me ‘bipartisan foreign policy’ means a mutual effort, under our indispensable two-Party system, to unite our official voice at the water’s edge so that America speaks with maximum authority against those who would divide and conquer us and the free world.”*

– Sen. Arthur H. Vandenberg, Jr.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the very beginning of American government, there have been laments about the terrible state of “politics in America,” with a corresponding dose of nostalgia for the good old days. Often cited are the failure of our elected officials to work together on problems of pressing national importance, and the bitter factional rivalries which inject excessive political partisanship into the policymaking process. But while the idea of political partisanship as an obstacle to good government is not a new one, strong evidence indicates that over the past half century, partisan politics has increasingly encroached on national security and foreign policy debates in Congress, so that bipartisan action, informed by reasoned, fact-based dialogue, is now the exception not the rule.

The anecdotal evidence for this trend of increasing partisanship in foreign policy decision-making is overwhelming. In 2008, both Presidential candidates decried Washington’s excessive partisanship, and both campaigns fought for the mantle of political outsider, committed to taking on a broken system rather than being co-opted by it. The same heartfelt denunciation of partisanship by candidates on all sides, coupled with campaign tactics designed to profit from political polarization, has characterized the ramp-up to the 2010 mid-term elections as well. Even in the 1990s, partisan divisions over the causes and

consequences of the Cold War, how or whether to exploit a “peace dividend,” and the role of the United States as the sole superpower, resulted in foreign policy stalemate between the Clinton White House and Republican Congress. During the Administration of George W. Bush, foreign policy and national security became the fodder for bitter partisan political attacks as never before, despite a brief period of bipartisan cooperation in the aftermath of the tragedy of 9/11.

Despite the obvious importance of national security and foreign policy decision-making to the country, and the increasing impact of partisan politics on how those decisions are made, the topic has received little study. Experts have examined foreign policy and national security decision-making, and many have reported on the rise of partisanship in American politics more generally, but few have presented concrete evidence to support the assertion of political leaders themselves that political partisanship is on the rise in foreign policy and national security debates. The purpose of this Report is to provide an objective, up-to-date analysis of bipartisan cooperation on foreign policy and national security, which may be used not only to evaluate claims of rising partisanship, but to establish a benchmark against which policymakers’ behavior may be measured in the years ahead.

Following an overview of the Report’s methodology and findings is a review of



Congress's record of bipartisan cooperation on foreign policy in the context of specific historical events, including consideration of potentially significant patterns and historical context. While these historical events and patterns can explain many individual upward and downward fluctuations in bipartisan voting, they are not sufficient to explain the overall downward trend in bipartisan cooperation revealed through the data in this study. The question therefore arises whether America has become more partisan across the board during the time period in question, and if so, why? To address this question, the Report includes a brief review of some structural and cultural trends that have driven Democrats and Republicans toward more partisan positions, from the electoral process to daily work and life on Capitol Hill. Finally, the Report offers recommendations for Presidential and Congressional action to rebuild working relationships on foreign policy across the aisle, and suggests structural reforms to create a political environment more conducive to bipartisan cooperation on these pressing challenges.



## Part I: Data

### METHODOLOGY

This Report focuses on the period from the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War to the present. This period was chosen for two main reasons. First, data about Congressional voting was most widely available for this period, and, unlike in earlier periods of American history, there was no major change in the status of Democrats and Republicans as the two dominant political parties. Second, the U.S. emerged as a global superpower during this period, and arguably broke free of the cycles of engagement and isolationism that dominated the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, making foreign policy an important issue for leaders in Washington throughout the period.

Given the Constitutional authority of the President in foreign affairs, some might suggest that this Report's focus on Congress is misplaced. In reality, Congress has a broad and deep role in the foreign policy process, ranging from the power to declare war, to authorization and appropriation for defense and foreign aid spending, to the Senate's power to confirm Ambassadors and ratify treaties. Moreover, Congress is the institution in which American voters' parochial political interests come into direct contact with high affairs of state. It is in Congress that conflicts between trade protectionism to benefit U.S. industry and free trade to promote diplomatic goals must be resolved, and it is Congressional appropriators who will decide which new weapons systems the Pentagon gets, which bases will be kept, and where they will be located. Lastly, as the crucible of direct democracy, Congress reflects the national political mood, including public

attitudes toward the President and the President's political party.

The data set on which this Report's analysis is based uses a measure of bipartisanship developed by *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*.<sup>1</sup> By this measure, a vote in Congress is considered "bipartisan" if at least fifty percent of voting Republicans and at least fifty percent of voting Democrats voted the same way.<sup>2</sup> It includes data from the "Vote View" project administered by Dr. Keith T. Poole of the University of California<sup>3</sup> and *Congressional Quarterly Library, Congress Collection*<sup>4</sup> to construct a continuous record of roll call votes in both chambers from 1945 to the present. Although the final data set is a hybrid of these two sources, records and coding schemes in both were nearly 100% consistent for the years in which the two data sets overlapped. Thus, combining the two data sets to cover the complete period from 1945 to the present had no discernible effect on the final result.

Unlike previous studies of bipartisanship, this Report focuses only on votes related to foreign policy and national security. Each vote tracked in the data sets mentioned above was coded by issue, which allowed national security and foreign policy votes to be separated from other votes. During the period in question, Congress voted a total of 45,227 times, of which 10,030 votes - roughly 22% of the total - dealt with national security and foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Once the universe of votes was narrowed to only national security and foreign policy votes, the percentage of bipartisan votes could be calculated with the following simple equation:

**Bipartisanship Percentage =**

**Bipartisan Votes ÷ Total Votes**



This formula is by no means the only way to measure bipartisanship, and its definition of bipartisan cooperation is susceptible to some criticism. For example, observers might consider a bill bipartisan if it were passed by a majority of Democrats and a significant minority of Republicans, but that bill would not be counted as a bipartisan vote here. However, while this Report may not include every vote that could be considered bipartisan, it is certain that each vote counted here as bipartisan enjoyed strong support from both parties.

Another legitimate criticism might be that bipartisanship is a *process*, and even a genuine effort at bipartisan cooperation may not always produce a product that both parties will support. It should also be acknowledged that there are meaningful long term positive impacts of a robust, bipartisan debate even if it results in a vote that falls short of full bipartisan support. Thus, it might be argued that this Report, in looking only at actual votes, is too results-oriented to evaluate the complete picture of bipartisanship in the policymaking process. On the other hand, votes on non-binding and concurrent resolutions, which are included in the roll call vote database used here, are arguably less meaningful measures of partisanship because they do not carry the force of law, and may be taken less seriously by members.

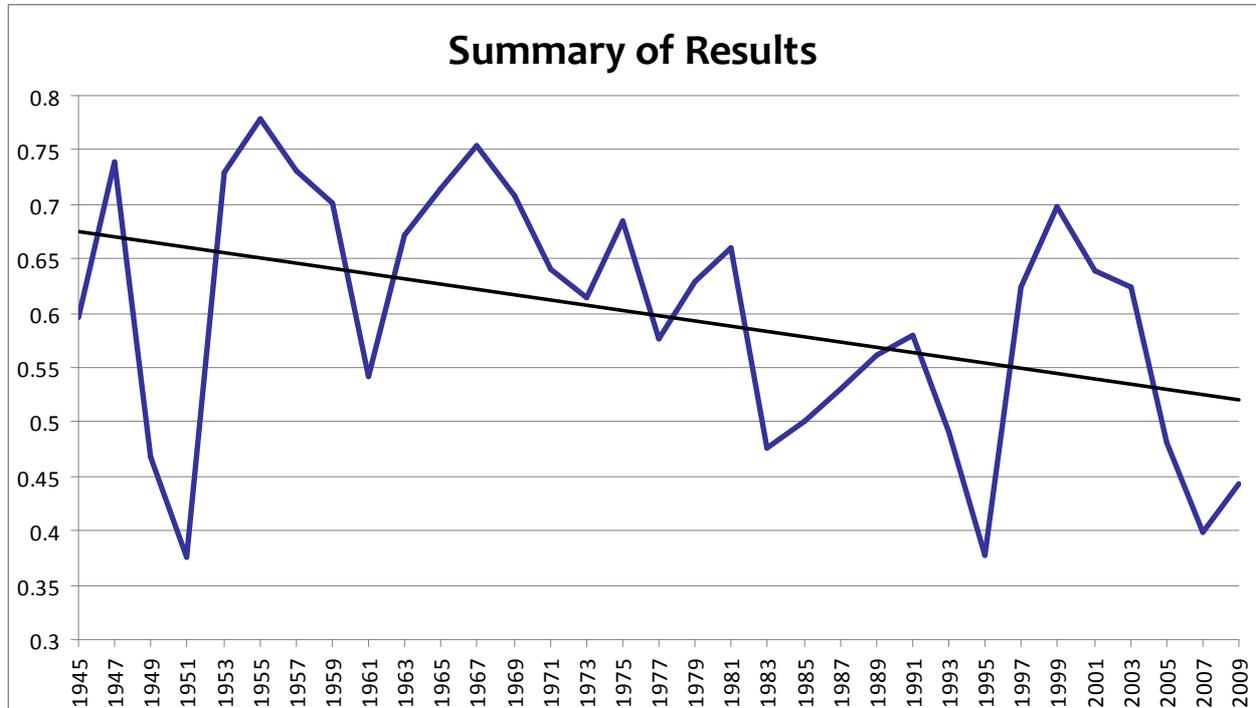
While these criticisms have merit, they are countered by the major advantage of using roll call vote data: it provides a complete, consistent and continuous record of Congressional activity. Bipartisanship is a process that does not necessarily always produce results, but during periods of more bipartisan cooperation, it is logical to expect that, in the aggregate, there should be more bipartisan votes, and more resulting legislation with strong bipartisan support. Since this data set included every vote in the relevant period, it should reflect the fact that a bipartisan process

*generally* (though not always) produces bipartisan results. Conversely, bitterly divided Congresses should produce fewer bills that gain the support of both parties. Another important advantage to looking at roll call data is that the meaning of voting “Yea” or “Nay” has not changed since 1945. Other measures of bipartisan process - for example co-sponsorship of bills - have undergone significant changes in their rules and meanings since 1945. Roll call votes are one of the few available records that permit accurate comparison across Congresses from 1945 to the present.

A final important methodological consideration is the role of unanimous votes. One potential hypothesis about unanimous votes is that they tend to be meaningless, which is why they are unanimous - for example, in 1998 the House unanimously passed a resolution condemning the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. An alternate hypothesis is that unanimous votes in fact represent the ultimate in bipartisanship: complete agreement on a solid policy. While the frequency of unanimous votes over time was itself an interesting phenomenon, occasionally shedding light on the broader political process, it appears that excluding unanimous votes from the data set does not have a significant impact on the results.



## RESULTS



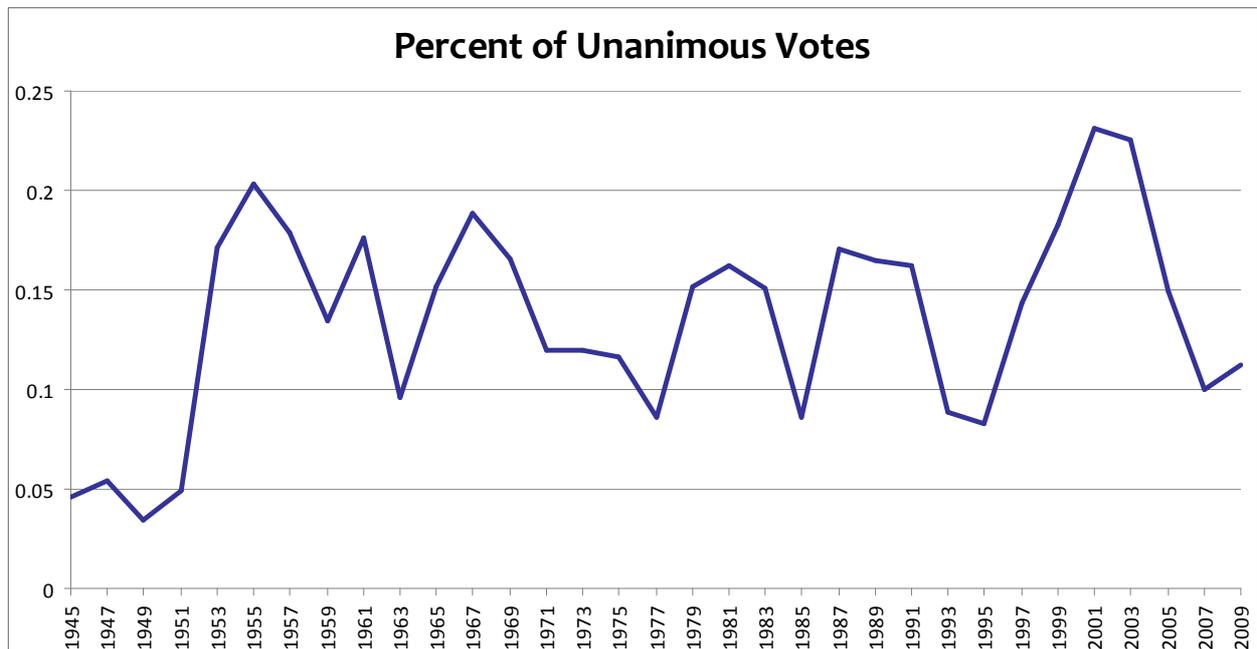
**Figure 1** Y-axis is the bipartisanship percentage; x-axis is the year a Congress assumed office (i.e. the 79<sup>th</sup> Congress was elected in November 1944, and it took office in 1945). The black line represents the average level of bipartisanship, with its downward slope showing change over time.

The Report's results are summarized graphically in **Figure 1**. The general trend in bipartisan cooperation in foreign policy since 1945 appears to be downward, though there has been significant variation. The percentage of bipartisan voting during the time period ranges from .778 (84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1955) to .376 (82<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 1951). The mean percentage is .598, the median is .624, and the standard deviation is .113. Except for three low points, every Congress from 1945 to 1975 was at or above average; except for four high points, every Congress since 1983 has been below average.

Unanimous votes appear to have little effect on bipartisanship, as measured by the *Congressional Quarterly* equation. When analyzed with and without unanimous votes,

the data set yielded almost identical results ( $r = .98$ ). Consequently, unanimous votes are included in the final data set. Discounting a vote *only* because it was unanimous would have imposed an unjustified artificial constraint on the data, even if it would not have significantly altered the outcome.

Note that the percentage of votes that were unanimous has changed over time (**Figure 2**). On average, 13.5 percent of national security and foreign policy votes in a given Congress were unanimous. During the first four Congresses in this analysis (79<sup>th</sup>-82<sup>nd</sup>, 1945-1952), the percentage of unanimous votes was low, hovering around five percent. From 1953 to 2000, the percentage of votes that were unanimous fluctuated around the average in the range between eight and twenty percent. From 2001 to 2004, the unanimous percentage jumped above 22.5 percent. Since then it has



*Figure 2* Percentage of foreign policy votes in each Congress that were unanimous.

returned to the 10-15 percent range. Unanimity tracks poorly with levels of bipartisanship - there is a weak positive correlation of .476.

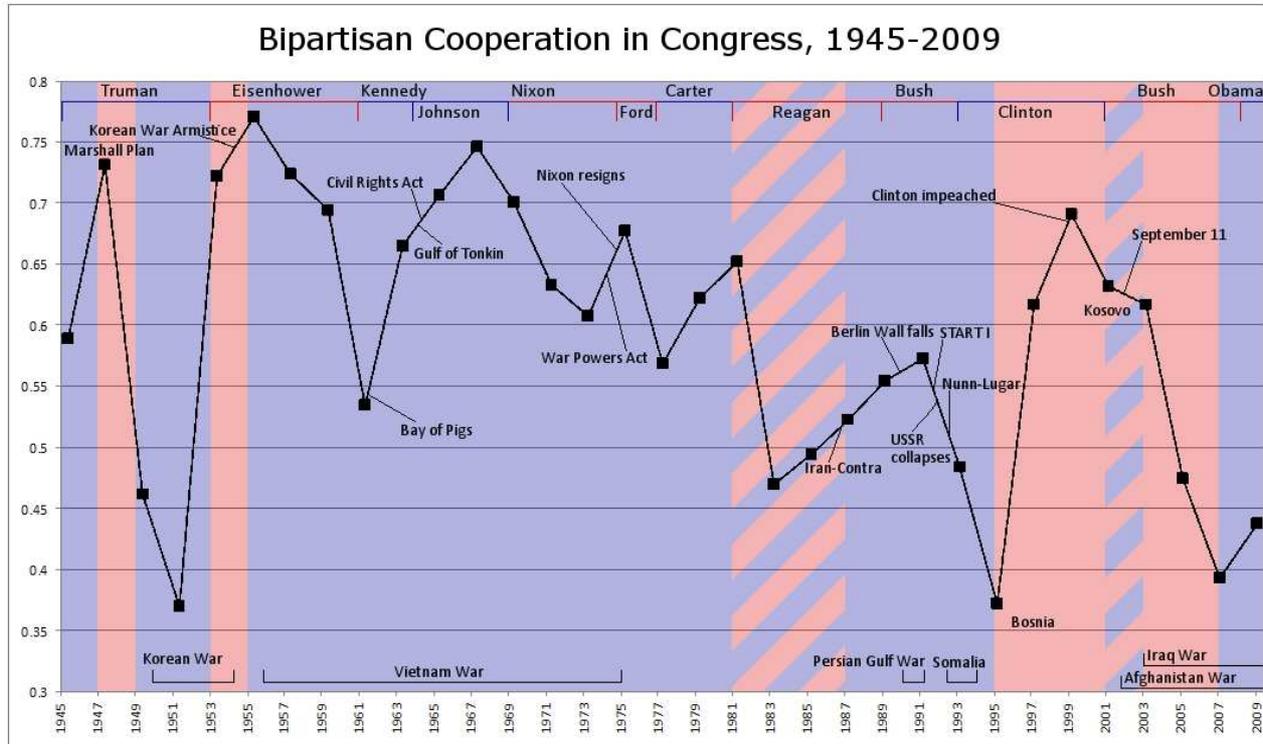
## BIPARTISANSHIP IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The data summarized here tell the story of bipartisan cooperation in Congress on national security and foreign policy issues (see **Figure 3** for a chart of the bipartisanship data in historical context). While major peaks and valleys in the graph can be attributed to unique domestic and international political circumstances during the relevant Congresses, the overall downward slope is best evaluated in terms of broader structural and cultural factors impacting our national political life, and life in Congress in particular. This will be addressed further in Part II, below. The data begins with the 79<sup>th</sup> Congress, which met from the last months of World War II through the end of

1946. As the graph illustrates, the Congress in office during the final year of the War achieved a relatively high level of bipartisan cooperation.

Since many members had served throughout the war years, there was no doubt a strong lingering sentiment of bipartisanship based on the necessity of wartime cooperation. Following World War II, despite bitter and frequently partisan disagreements about the complexities of returning to a peacetime economy, partisan divisions did not appear to extend to the foreign policy arena. On the whole, bipartisan cooperation on foreign policy and national security was about average for the first postwar Congress.

The eightieth Congress, which took office in January 1947 and met during the early days of the Cold War, was one of the most bipartisan Congresses since World War II. Chief among its foreign policy achievements was the creation and implementation of the Marshall Plan to rebuild post-World War II Europe and strengthen Western Europe as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism. A product of bipartisan cooperation between the Democratic



**Figure 3** Bipartisan cooperation in historical context. Red background indicates Republican control of both houses of Congress, blue background indicates Democratic control, and diagonal stripes indicate split control.

administration of President Harry Truman and Republicans in the Senate led by Michigan’s Arthur Vandenberg, the Marshall Plan offers a powerful example of how such cooperation can produce effective and enduring foreign policy. The Plan’s namesake, Secretary of State George C. Marshall, described the importance of a non-partisan approach to persuading American citizens to support the policy: “An essential part of any successful action on the part of the United States is an understanding on the part of the people of America of the character of the problem and the remedies to be applied. Political passion and prejudice should have no part.”<sup>6</sup>

As the United States entered the Korean War, however, Congress’s willingness to collaborate

across the aisle declined rapidly. The war became a deadly stalemate, and a very public debate about the firing of General Douglas MacArthur contributed to a decline in bipartisan cooperation to some of its lowest postwar levels in 1952. However, with the war’s end and a period of relative peace and prosperity under President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961), bipartisanship returned to very high levels. Bipartisan cooperation was the norm despite a changeover in power when Democrats wrested control of both the House and Senate from Republicans in 1955, and lasted through the remaining six years of Eisenhower’s Republican Administration.

During the early years of John F. Kennedy’s presidency, with the 87<sup>th</sup> Congress (1961-1963) in session, bipartisanship declined again to a level significantly below preceding and subsequent years. This may have been because



the new Kennedy Administration pursued a Latin America policy that some conservatives considered naïve, peaking early with the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion which empowered Kennedy's critics. Divisions over the administration's foreign policy were reflected in partisan splits on foreign aid votes. Domestic politics provided little respite, with intense regional (though not as much partisan) divisions over civil rights and segregation.

During Lyndon Johnson's presidency and Richard Nixon's first term, bipartisanship in foreign policy was the norm once more, tracking a broader trend of cooperation on major legislation, such as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution (authorizing the war in Vietnam), the Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act. However, as divisions over the Vietnam War increasingly dominated the national political discourse, bipartisan cooperation on foreign policy began to evaporate. In 1973, the 93<sup>rd</sup> Congress passed the War Powers Act over President Nixon's veto, largely along party lines.

Bipartisanship recovered briefly after Nixon's resignation, and was on average high during the 94<sup>th</sup> Congress and the Ford Administration, perhaps in part because Ford had himself so recently been House Minority Leader and maintained close working relationships on Capitol Hill. In the two Congresses of the Carter years, the 95<sup>th</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup> (1977-1981), bipartisanship hovered at or above average for the entire period, with united Democratic control of the House, Senate and the White House and progress on several important foreign policy initiatives begun in the Nixon Administration, including Middle East peace and normalization of U.S.-China relations. Most famously, President Carter secured the support of a bipartisan group including Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Minority Leader Howard Baker (R-TN) to ensure ratification of the Panama Canal

Treaties in 1978, which promised a return of the Canal to Panamanian sovereignty by the end of 1999.<sup>7</sup>

Despite high bipartisan cooperation in the split 97<sup>th</sup> Congress during the first two years of the Reagan Administration (1981-83), bipartisanship fell dramatically with the 98<sup>th</sup> Congress (1983-85), making modest recoveries with each subsequent Congress during the Reagan years but remaining well below the average of the preceding three decades. For the most part, Democrats and Republicans cooperated on crucial nuclear nonproliferation, foreign aid, and defense spending issues during these years. Although support fell short of majorities on both sides, wide margins in the House and Senate supported President Reagan's request for funding for the new MX missile in 1985, in large part thanks to Reagan's personal appeals to members of Congress through frequent phone calls, visits to the Hill, and small group breakfast meetings he hosted at the White House. Both parties also felt pressure to support the Administration's negotiating position with the Soviets, which the President argued would have been weakened by rejection of the MX program.<sup>8</sup> A similar argument prevailed to win bipartisan ratification of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1988, with prominent supporters observing that ratification was key to "the reconstruction of a bipartisan center in U.S. national security policy."<sup>9</sup>

Of course, Democrats and Republicans were divided on important foreign policy issues throughout the 1980s. Most famous were debates over providing aid to the Contras in Nicaragua, brought to a head by revelations in 1986 that senior U.S. officials had agreed to sell arms to Iran (as part of a deal to secure release of hostages in Lebanon) and allocate proceeds to support the contras.<sup>10</sup> Other partisan divisions emerged over the



Administration's provision of military aid to El Salvador, research into anti-satellite weapons, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and whether to support divestment and sanctions against apartheid South Africa.

Despite these historic challenges, bipartisan cooperation on foreign policy in Congress continued through the late 1980s, peaking under the George H.W. Bush Administration and the 102<sup>nd</sup> Congress (1991-93), which witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Key bipartisan achievements of the immediate post-Cold War period included ratification of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) and the creation of the Nunn-Lugar cooperative threat reduction programs, named for their Democratic and Republican co-sponsors. In particular, the Nunn-Lugar program became a model for bipartisan national security and foreign policy cooperation in the modern era. However, there were partisan divisions in both houses of Congress over the 1991 Persian Gulf War and other projections of U.S. military power which some criticized as overextensions of U.S. power to play "world policeman."

Bill Clinton took office in the midst of a controversial U.S. military intervention in Somalia, now infamous for the failed operation depicted in the Hollywood film *Black Hawk Down*. Somalia became illustrative of an enduring partisan divide over the use of the American military in humanitarian operations. Many Republicans, including future Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, opposed what they saw as President Clinton's misuse of the U.S. military for "nation-building" operations abroad.<sup>11</sup> As a result, bipartisanship in foreign policy fell during the first two years of Clinton's presidency, despite Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress. In 1995, a "Republican Revolution" swept into control of both the House and Senate for the first time since 1954, and hard-charging House Speaker

Newt Gingrich (R-GA) allowed a federal government shutdown as part of bitter political fights over spending and budget priorities. Not surprisingly, bipartisanship dropped to some of its lowest postwar levels during this period. The 1995 NATO bombing campaign in Bosnia also provoked opposition from isolationists in Congress, who were broadly opposed to U.S. intervention in a foreign conflict, even with credible evidence that genocide was occurring.

Bipartisanship on foreign policy issues recovered significantly during Clinton's second term, despite the President's impeachment and the war in Kosovo. This recovery may have represented the sense of possibility stemming from what some experts described as a "unipolar moment," though divisions were still very much in evidence.<sup>12</sup> While Democrats and Republicans disagreed vehemently on NATO-led bombing in Kosovo, on most other security and foreign policy issues they agreed that America had a unique chance to leverage its unparalleled power in a relatively peaceful world. This sentiment was manifested in numerous bipartisan votes on efforts to promote democracy and human rights, nuclear nonproliferation efforts related to Iran and North Korea, and most defense and foreign operations appropriations.

Cooperation across party lines dipped slightly during the first years of George W. Bush's presidency, though it remained above average in the first two Congresses following September 11. Beginning with the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005), however, bipartisanship declined sharply. There was no shortage of divisive security and foreign policy issues that contributed to the fall in bipartisan cooperation during Bush's second term. Foremost among them was certainly the Iraq War, which quickly degenerated from a nearly unanimous 2002 vote to authorize military force against Saddam Hussein into constant partisan bickering over



the conduct and exit strategy for the war. Other policies connected to the Administration's "Global War on Terror," such as the opening of the Guantanamo Bay detention center and abuses of detainees at Abu Ghraib, reinforced opposition from Democrats increasingly skeptical of the Administration's approach to fighting terrorism. A final straw may have been revelations that national security agencies conducted surveillance of American citizens in violation of U.S. laws, and that Bush Administration Justice Department lawyers officially condoned harsh interrogation techniques in violation of the laws of war.

As with so much of recent American political history, September 11, 2001 provides an important reference point for this Report. Following September 11, there was certainly a veneer of increased bipartisanship that culminated in members of both parties holding hands and singing "God Bless America" on the steps of the Capitol. However, the data suggest that September 11 only temporarily arrested a decline in bipartisanship. Bipartisanship percentages for the 107<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup> Congresses (2001-05) were only two or three percentage points above average, and they were six to seven points lower than the percentage for the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress (1999). Despite a small uptick in bipartisanship in the first session of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (2009), the overall trend remained downward, and bipartisan voting on national security and foreign policy today is still well below historical averages.

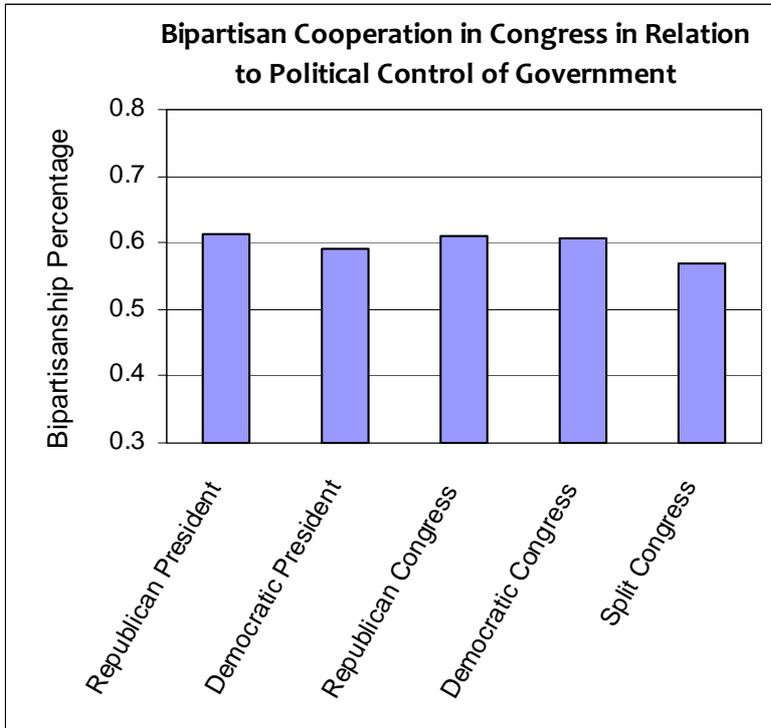
At the same time, the data on unanimous votes present a different side of the story for the immediate post-9/11 Congresses. The 107<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup> Congresses had the highest percentage of unanimous votes of any Congresses in the time period considered (23.1 percent and 22.45 percent, respectively). Only one other Congress since World War II broke the twenty percent mark - the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress (1955) with 20.4 percent. There is additional

evidence that September 11 may have played an important role in these figures. Many of the unanimous votes, especially in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, dealt directly with 9/11 or with anti-terrorism issues that were prompted by the attacks.

Some have argued that the U.S. response to 9/11 missed an opportunity for a reorientation of U.S. foreign policy around the outpouring of international sympathy and support in response to the attacks.<sup>13</sup> Still others believe that the Bush Administration and Congress could have done much more, much earlier, to reduce and eliminate the continued threat of Al Qaeda and allied terrorist groups, which continue to target Americans and our allies around the world.<sup>14</sup> The findings in this Report illustrate yet another missed opportunity in the aftermath of 9/11 - the opportunity to restore Washington's lost tradition of bipartisanship in national security and foreign policy decision-making. While the late 1940s and 1950s witnessed similar extremes in partisanship and bipartisanship to the post 9/11 period, the trend line of bipartisan cooperation in the earlier period sloped upwards, whereas in this decade, bipartisanship has primarily declined.

## TRENDS

In addition to relationships between key historical events and specific instances of bipartisan agreement or partisan division, it is important to consider recurring trends that could help explain how bipartisanship affects policy or how the state of the world affects bipartisanship. The level of bipartisanship in Congress appears unrelated to which party controls the government. The average bipartisan vote percentage under Republican presidents was .613; under Democrats it was .590. When Republicans controlled Congress, the average percentage was .611; when

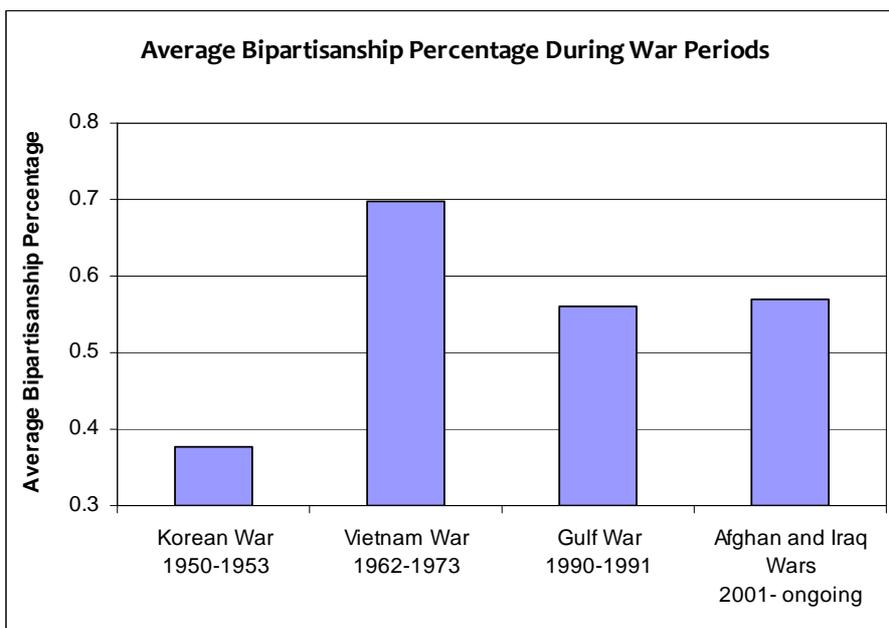


Democrats held both Houses it was .607. When control of Congress was split, levels of bipartisanship were somewhat lower, at .569. Bipartisanship was about 5.2 percent higher when different parties controlled Congress and the White House (divided government) than when the same party controlled both the

Executive and Legislative branches (unified government).

Of course, there are significant potential problems with drawing a correlation between wars and bipartisan voting. First, the data considered here are not fine-grained enough to examine the correlation closely. An individual

Congress, lasting two sessions of one year each, is the smallest unit of analysis, and two years is not a short enough period to determine exactly how levels of bipartisanship correlate with the progress of a war, which changes weekly or even daily. Equally important is the fact that a wide variety of factors affect how well Congress cooperates across party lines, and foreign wars represent only one of





those factors. Finally, the direction of causation in this area is far from clear; it is likely that policy outcomes and bipartisanship both affect and are affected by one another. However, since these wars were all major foreign policy issues, they undoubtedly had some effect on Congress's ability to work together.



## Part II: Root Causes of Partisanship

### IS THE COUNTRY BECOMING MORE PARTISAN?

The data presented in this Report indicate which historical periods and which major foreign policy decisions were associated with the peaks and valleys of bipartisan cooperation as measured by Congressional floor votes. However, as previously noted, demonstrating correlation is quite different from proving causation. Therefore, in addition to noting where specific foreign policy and national security challenges provoked bipartisan responses in Congress, it is useful to consider changes in the broader landscape of American politics and policy decision-making, which may explain the overall decline in bipartisanship over the past half century.

A threshold question is whether the country as a whole, and thus the American electorate, has become more partisan over the past six decades. If it has, then perhaps the rising partisanship in government, and on issues of foreign policy and national security

specifically, is merely a symptom of that larger problem. According to *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman, “a cocktail of political and technological trends have converged in the last decade” to permit extreme partisanship from both sides of the aisle to “overwhelm and paralyze” serious discussion of issues, and decision-making based on the national interest.<sup>15</sup>

A 2009 Gallup survey found a dramatic decline in the percentages of self-identifying Republicans and Democrats who could be counted as moderates relative to their party mainstream.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, public opinion polling indicates that Americans are increasingly divided along party lines when it comes to important political questions. For instance, while 59% of Republicans believe “the media exaggerates the seriousness of global warming,” only 17% of Democrats agree.<sup>17</sup> Presidential job approval ratings have seen a similar strongly partisan divergence over the past four decades. Whereas in March of 1969, 84% of Republicans and 55% of Democrats approved of the job President Nixon was doing,

#### Job Approval Ratings for First-Year Presidents

	Total	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	R-D Diff
Job Approval	%	%	%	%	
Obama, March 9-12, 2009	59	27	88	57	-61
Bush, April 18-22, 2001	55	87	36	56	+51
Clinton, April 1-4, 1993	49	26	71	47	-45
Bush, May 4-7, 1989*	56	79	41	48	+38
Reagan, March 13-16, 1981*	60	87	41	61	+46
Carter, March 25-28, 1977*	72	56	81	70	-25
Nixon, Mid-March, 1969*	65	84	55	65	+29

\* 1969-1989 data from Gallup<sup>18</sup>



### Foreign Policy Priorities and Threats

	Rep.	Dem.
<b>Foreign Policy “Top Priorities”</b>		
Preventing the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction	64%	61%
Protecting against Terrorist Attacks	90%	77%
Reducing Energy Dependence	80%	78%
<b>Foreign Policy “Major Threats”</b>		
China’s Emerging Power	52%	48%
North Korea’s Nuclear Program	62%	55%
Pakistan’s Political Instability	46%	38%
Iran’s Nuclear Program	74%	56%

20

two months into his first term in 2009, President Obama enjoyed only 27% job approval from Republicans, as against 88% from Democrats.

Yet public opinion is nowhere near as divided along party lines when it comes to foreign policy and national security issues. According to a Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll, 81% of Republicans and 88% of Democrats agreed that improving America’s standing in the world was a “very important” foreign policy goal. Pew Foundation research found similarly high levels of agreement between Democrats and Republicans about the “top priorities” and “major threats” for U.S. national security.

These results suggest that while the country as a whole, and thus the American electorate, may have grown more reflexively partisan over the past half century, foreign policy and national security issues - when viewed on their merits and not through a political lens - remain subject to bipartisan consensus, at least among voters.<sup>19</sup>

If the American people are not deeply divided on national security and foreign policy priorities, then the increased partisanship of the

electorate is probably not by itself a sufficient explanation for the increased partisanship of Congress when it debates, deliberates, and votes on national security and foreign policy. Instead, we must consider the factors that cause individual members of Congress to behave in a more partisan way generally, and thus inhibit bipartisanship on foreign policy and national security issues. In other words, if members of Congress feel intense pressure to hew to party lines, they may actually override the voters’ preference for a bipartisan foreign policy.

### STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL DRIVERS OF PARTISANSHIP

It is often remarked that the top priority of every member of Congress is winning the next election and thus preserving his or her job. This is necessarily true in the House of Representatives, where members come up for reelection every two years, but is increasingly true in the Senate as well, despite a six-year term originally intended to insulate Senators from immediate partisan and electoral pressures. Even members who occupy so-called “safe” seats are sometimes threatened by primary challengers from their own party.



Given this inevitable focus on winning elections, it is no surprise that Congressional decision-making on policy issues is impacted not only by voters' opinions, but by the structure and tone of the electoral process itself.

Two main factors have driven increased partisanship in recent Congressional elections: Gerrymandering of political districts, a practice which dates back to the eighteenth century (the term was coined to describe Massachusetts governor Elbridge Gerry's partisan redistricting plan in 1812); and the increasing financial burden of running for office. Gerrymandered political districts are generally created either to split up and thus neutralize a powerful voting bloc, such as urban voters, or to artificially concentrate in a single district voters who are geographically widespread (e.g. in commuter towns along an interstate, or in a patchwork of small communities). When a single party has sufficient power in the state legislature to control the redistricting process, it can transform a single strong district into two or more "safe" districts, and make otherwise hostile districts competitive.<sup>21</sup>

With a handful of exceptions like Iowa, which mandates that districts be drawn neutrally, the national trend is toward more gerrymandered districts. According to one recent analysis, "advances in computer technology have made it increasingly easy to surgically cut out a nettlesome pocket of Republicans or Democrats to create districts designed to produce reliably conservative or reliably liberal members of Congress."<sup>22</sup> The upshot, for Congressional elections, is that fewer districts are naturally balanced among different types of voters, and candidates are therefore forced to compete not for voters in the political center, but for the support of the district's most powerful voting bloc. This puts the real onus of the election, in many cases, on the partisan primary, and pushes individual candidates to the political extremes to capture more votes from among

registered party members. In short, gerrymandered districts are likely to be more partisan, and to send more partisan representatives to Congress, resulting in what Friedman terms "erasing the political middle" in Washington.<sup>23</sup>

Like the shape of Congressional districts, money has always been an issue in electoral politics. Yet thanks to the rise of broadcast media and the political consulting industry, the cost of campaigning for Congress has never been higher. Between 1976 and 2000, the cost of the average winning Senate race rose more than tenfold, from \$609,000 to \$7.2 million, while the cost of living only tripled. Between 1974 and 2002, the cost of beating an incumbent Representative in the U.S. House rose from under \$100,000 to over \$1.5 million, adjusted for inflation.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, campaign finance laws have imposed ever-stricter limits on the size of "hard money" campaign contributions, so that a candidate must raise more money, from more individual givers, than ever before. The only way to do so is to tap into the growing universe of Political Action Committees (PACs), which can "bundle" thousands of small sums into large campaign contributions. In this way, even as the influence of national and state party organizations has waned, PACs have worked to ensure that winning Congressional candidates pass partisan litmus tests.

The Supreme Court's recent decision to treat corporate and labor union campaign contributions as Constitutionally protected speech effectively allows these large, wealthy organizations to join the ranks of partisan bundlers, spending huge sums on behalf of their members and shareholders.<sup>25</sup> As Senator Evan Bayh (D-IN) wrote in an op-ed explaining his decision to retire from Congress, "The threat of unlimited amounts of negative advertising from special interest groups will only make members more beholden to their



natural constituencies and more afraid of violating party orthodoxies.”<sup>26</sup>

The drivers of increased partisanship do not disappear after Election Day. Once a candidate is elected to Congress, he or she enters a world in which the priority is no longer on forging working relationships with colleagues across the aisle, but on keeping pace with non-stop demands for face time from constituents, special interests, and the media. In the 1980s, there was a famously close friendship between “middle America conservative” Republican Bob Michel, the House minority leader, and House Speaker Tip O’Neil, an “FDR-liberal” Democrat from Cambridge, Massachusetts. One colleague described it this way: “They didn’t agree with each other philosophically on almost any issue [but] they traveled together, they played golf together, they bet on sporting events, they went to sporting events together, they drank in the evening together, and they spoke more in one day than current leaders speak in a year.”<sup>27</sup>

The Michel-O’Neil friendship, forged in the 1950s, simply could not have been replicated afterwards, even by the 1980s, when the two leaders were still serving. Consider this description of a part of “the normal work day” of a member of Congress from the latter period:

Early in the morning he bangs the gavel calling a committee hearing to commence and, reading from a sheet, announces the subject, which is always of grave importance, and welcomes the visitors, who are always distinguished and dedicated experts. While the expert rambles on about this issue, the senator listens to an aide explaining about the upcoming meeting with a 4-H Club and at the same time signs a batch of documents thrust at him by his secretary. As soon as another senator stumbles into the room with his handful of question cards, the presiding senator turns the hearing over to him and excuses himself. He then dashes over to the Senate floor, where he presents a one-minute oration on the need to increase widget exports to Third World countries, the national importance

of the upcoming peach festival in his home state, and why he favors another round of disarmament talks as a way of solving the energy shortage. Having been delayed on the floor by a long line of other one-minute orators, he is late for another committee meeting that is supposed to mark up and report a bill. The amendment his staff drafted is not presented because the bells ring and the lights flash in the committee room, calling him back to the floor for a vote. Running out of the room with all the other senators, he asks if anyone knows what the vote might be on. Before they can decide, they are in the crowded hall in front of the chamber. Surrounded by lobbyists and by aides trying to find their masters, he barely catches a glimpse of his own legislative assistant pinned against a fluted column on the far side of the room. Unable to get closer than twenty feet to one another, the aide gestures a set of prearranged signals to his boss telling how they need “to go on this one.” Still not knowing the topic, he hurries into the chamber, registers his vote, and tries to get back to the subway before most of the other senators leave the chamber....

Even though our senator wants to return to the committee mark-up of the farm bill and propose his amendment, his aide tells him that he must go back to the original committee hearing because two teachers from his home state are about to testify as representatives of the huge and politically active State Education Association. As he arrives back at the hearings, the teachers are almost finished, but he interrupts to welcome them, restate the importance of the grave subject and distinction of the witnesses, and to beg their forgiveness, for he has an appointment at the White House. The White House bill-signing ceremony is not for another four hours, but such excuses sound much better to hometown folks than telling them that he has a photograph appointment with the 4-H Club. Leaving the 4-H on the Capitol steps with an aide to give them a personal guided tour through the building, he runs back into the chamber, where he must introduce three bills that his staff has worked on for the past several weeks. Then comes a reception for the President of Italy, but he stays only long enough for a friendly photograph to be used in the hometown Italian newspaper. Finally getting back to the committee mark-up, he finds that the meeting is almost over, but his clever assistant has managed to get another senator to sponsor the amendment in exchange for his voting



proxy, which the aide rapidly drafted and signed with the senator's name.<sup>28</sup>

As incredible as it sounds, today's Congressional schedules are even busier than this. Technological advances in wireless networking, telecommunications, and air travel, rather than making life easier for members of Congress and their staffs, have arguably increased the burdens on them, since constituents can literally bombard members' offices with email, make a cell phone call any time the mood strikes, or arrange a trip to Washington, DC with a few clicks of the computer mouse and a few hundred dollars. Likewise, lobbyists and specialized media have proliferated in the past half century, and with the average member of Congress sitting on two or more committees, plus subcommittees, he or she will be expected to submit to briefings and interviews even when no relevant legislation is up for debate.

In response to these pressures, and the demands of campaigning for reelection, Congress has sought to lighten (or at least condense) its own legislative workload, with further negative consequences for aisle-crossing cooperation. The typical Congressional work week now runs from late Monday or early Tuesday through Thursday afternoon or evening, to facilitate travel home and back for members who maintain their primary residences in their home states and districts, as a majority do. A Tuesday-to-Thursday work week leaves only three days in Washington for members to work and socialize with one another, the key to building personal relationships which can transcend party discipline and political divisions. Even social contact that was once unavoidable when members milled about on the House floor waiting for roll call votes has been eliminated since the implementation of electronic voting in the House in 1973.<sup>29</sup> Although the Senate remains somewhat more collegial thanks to smaller numbers, it is quite possible to serve several terms in Congress

today without developing any close relationships with colleagues across the aisle. Former Senator Warren Rudman (R-NH) described life in Congress in the 1990s this way: "I don't socialize at all. My friends are the people I left in New Hampshire. I don't see much socializing among the others either."

Under such excessive time pressure during the work week, and with so little time in Washington to interact face-to-face with colleagues, members of Congress have become inevitably more dependent on political guidance from party leaders. Structural changes in Congress over the past half century have also ratcheted up the influence of party leadership, while reducing individual members' political independence. In the 1950s, Committee Chairs, selected by seniority, exercised power independent of party leadership, with additional leverage in the hands of Rules Committees that determined when and whether votes would take place. Reform-minded politicians at the time, including President Kennedy, railed against the parochialism and inertia of a system that permitted powerful chairmen to rule their committees with absolute authority. The effect of President Kennedy's campaign against the Senate Rules Committee in the 1960s and the end of seniority-based committee chairmanship in 1975 was that the relative importance of offices outside the party leadership declined. Rather than being more dispersed to individual members, power became even more concentrated in the hands of a few party leaders. Following the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress, House Speaker Newt Gingrich solidified leadership control of most aspects of Congressional life. As Former Senator John Breaux (D-LA) explained it, "the Congress has become players on the team" led by "party strategists, the public relations firms [and] the party structure."<sup>30</sup>



Together with party leadership, special interests exercise increasing influence on members of Congress. In part this is because time and resource pressure forces members to rely on trusted outsiders for substantive policy education and guidance on votes. Equally important is the interest groups' own growth from a handful of marginal voices in the 1950s to a major national industry today.

Among the first highly influential special interests were liberal social and environmental action groups founded in the late 1960s, such as the Environmental Defense Fund (1967), the Union of Concerned Scientists (1969), the Natural Resources Defense Council (1970), Common Cause (1970), the National Organization for Women (1966), and the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (1968). These groups brought bright young idealists from top universities to Washington, where they put their wits and energy to work winning over members of Congress for their causes. A conservative and pro-business response crystallized in the 1970s with the founding of the Business Roundtable (1972), and the reinvigoration of the National Federation of Independent Business and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. A grassroots conservative response also spawned Jesse Helms' National Congressional Club, the National Right to Life Committee, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, the National Conservative Political Action Committee, and Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, to name but a few examples. Taken together, special interest groups like these now control budgets in the tens of billions, and can mobilize millions of grassroots supporters across the country. Members of Congress are not immune to such massive levers of political influence.

A dramatic increase in congressional staff size has of course also helped members manage their greater workload. While in the 1950s, 535 members of Congress were served by just

over 3,000 staff, by the 1990s, the same number of members employed over 15,000 staff.<sup>31</sup> However, this vast pool of talent and energy has not been a bulwark against rising partisanship on Capitol Hill. Staff are dependent on members for their livelihoods and their prospects of future advancement (including, often, launching their own political careers), so if members defer to party leadership and special interests, naturally, so will staff. Also, because staff move in and out of Congress through Washington's "revolving door," many are veterans of the very lobbying groups and PACs that impose partisan polarization and ideological discipline on members in the first place.

Finally, an increasingly invasive, polarized and conflict-hungry news media inhibits meaningful, bipartisan dialogue on the issues—national security and foreign policy being no exception. Conventional wisdom holds that until Watergate, the news media refrained from wading into the muck of partisan political struggles. Whether or not that is true, television has opened the legislative process to media and public scrutiny, beginning with televised committee hearings in the 1950s and the creation of C-SPAN in 1979. While that openness has arguably enhanced American democracy, it has stifled meaningful dialogue among members of Congress in the public arenas of Capitol Hill. Instead of using committee hearings to probe and expand their understanding of issues, members now grandstand for the cameras, talking much more than the ostensible expert witnesses, and refraining from asking critical basic questions so as not to appear ignorant before constituents on camera.

More recently, the media has taken a more active role in provoking or manufacturing controversy, usually along partisan lines. Tom Friedman describes today's "24/7 cable news cycle that makes all politics a daily battle of



tactics that overwhelm strategic thinking; and a blogosphere that at its best enriches our debates, adding new checks on the establishment, and at its worst coarsens our debates to a whole new level, giving a new power to anonymous slanderers to send lies around the world.”<sup>32</sup> Partisan TV personalities like Keith Olbermann on the left and Bill O’Reilly on the right are broadcast into American homes nightly, and they, in turn, determine which party representatives appear on camera, and what each is allowed to say.

Some argue that with the Republican Party in the minority, “talk radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, TV personalities such as Glenn Beck and websites such as the Drudge Report...have much more power than John Boehner or Mitch McConnell to drive a story narrative — or get conservative activists worked up.”<sup>33</sup> On the left, too, media “thrive on partisan fights, reward partisan sniping and make it harder for party leaders to seek common ground.” Moderate Delaware Republican Congressman Mike Castle concludes that to keep pace with cable TV and the blogosphere, even newspapers now “highlight writers and columnists who are very opinionated.”<sup>34</sup>

It is clear that members of Congress today have more obligations in Washington and back home, and less time in which to address any of them, than did their counterparts of the 1940s and 1950s. Far from helping ease this burden, new technologies and Congressional procedures have forced members to rely almost exclusively on party leadership and special interests for political and policy advice. Especially when filtered through a conflict-hungry media, the parties in Congress appear divided into armed camps, willing to exploit any opportunity to score political points at the other side’s expense. In this environment, it is no surprise that bipartisan cooperation on national security and foreign policy has

suffered, despite broad bipartisan agreement among voters on these same issues.



## Part III: Recommendations

The story of bipartisan cooperation in national security and foreign policy is more than an interesting historical footnote. Bipartisanship's decline has in many cases blocked the kind of fact-based, reasoned and respectful dialogue among experts that is essential to developing policies that serve this country well in a complex, interconnected and dangerous world. It is telling that even in the immediate aftermath of September 11, Congress had to reach outside its own ranks, creating a now famous blue ribbon commission, to produce actionable policy recommendations for preventing future terror attacks on the United States. Leaders from both sides wisely recognized that any effort to do so within the government would have quickly bogged down in a partisan morass. Even so, the 9/11 Commissioners themselves found it initially difficult to overcome ingrained patterns of partisanship, and only with strong leadership from the Chairs, and close cooperation over time did they reach consensus on 41 critical policy recommendations.<sup>35</sup> It should be no surprise that Congress took more than five years from when the Commission issued its recommendations to pass legislation implementing a majority of them.

It is true that in some cases, notably in decisions authorizing foreign wars and other projections of American military power, bipartisan cooperation produced obviously flawed results, or policy outcomes whose weaknesses quickly became apparent to subsequent policymakers. But, in many more cases, it appears that bipartisan cooperation has been associated with the most successful foreign policy outcomes, including the creation of such indispensable institutions as the UN and NATO, implementation of the Marshall

Plan, ratification of arms control treaties, and the Cooperative Threat Reduction (Nunn-Lugar) program. Bipartisan national security and foreign policy legislation has also tended to endure, facilitating effective foreign policymaking, even in the face of domestic political turmoil, such as in the late 1990s.

While this Report alone does not conclusively prove that bipartisan foreign policy is necessarily better foreign policy, it adds a quantitative dimension to the substantial consensus among policy practitioners and experts that this is true. At a minimum, based on this Report and the personal testimony of so many distinguished current and former political leaders, we can conclude that bipartisan cooperation is a very important element of an effective national security and foreign policy. Yet if that is true, the findings of this Report are also deeply troubling.

Bipartisan cooperation in U.S. foreign policy has followed a strongly downward trend in the more than six decades since World War II. Except for the eight years from 1997 to 2004, every Congress since 1983 has had a bipartisanship percentage below (and usually well below) the historical average. This lack of respectful, consensus-oriented dialogue and cooperation has been felt in the policymaking process. The bitter controversy surrounding U.S. foreign and security policies in the past decade has been both a cause and a consequence of increasing partisanship. American politics is fast approaching the point where national security and foreign policy are treated as no different from domestic social issues or the political scandal of the month, a 180-degree turnaround from the days of



Truman and Vandenberg. It is past time to address this crisis.

A return to higher levels of bipartisan cooperation and a more collegial foreign and security policymaking process will promote better substantive policy outcomes and a more secure America. But to reverse the partisan drift in Washington will demand broad and deep reform, addressing both the substance of our national discourse, and the procedures that govern our political and policy process. Real progress toward restoring the proud tradition of bipartisanship in U.S. foreign policy will require a comprehensive reform effort with the following elements:

## Presidential Leadership

- ★ President Obama's commitment to "bipartisanship and openness" in national security and foreign policy and his appointment of two Republicans to key national security posts - Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and National Security Advisor Jim Jones - were important first steps. The President sets the overall vision and tone for American foreign policy, and he has the ability to compel cooperation from his direct appointees, while using his bully pulpit to cajole it from others. In public and private, the President must continue to emphasize the unique importance of bipartisanship to the national security and foreign policy process, so that inevitable partisan divisions on domestic issues do not derail foreign policy cooperation.
- ★ The President should establish formal, bipartisan expert working groups on national security and foreign policy issues, composed of leading experts and former officials from both sides of the aisle. These consultations will not only provide access to the best wisdom and experience on the topic from

previous administrations, but help build the foundations for a bipartisan consensus to turn the resulting policies into reality.

- ★ The President should also consult directly with Congressional leaders from both parties, and do so on a regular basis, not just when a national security emergency requires Congressional action. Regular, face-to-face meetings with party leaders from both sides will, in the words of former Senator David Boren (D-OK), "help dilute the partisanship of party caucuses and help prevent party leaders from being held captive by the most extreme elements of their constituencies."<sup>36</sup>

## Congressional Follow-Through

- ★ Cooperation between the White House and Congressional leadership from both parties must be a two-way street. When Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) extended President Obama an open invitation to weekly GOP caucus luncheons in order to work together and "reach for big accomplishments," a door was opened.<sup>37</sup> House and Senate Republicans must make a concerted effort to compartmentalize disagreements over domestic issues like health care and spending, so that the White House does not perceive openings for dialogue as mere political posturing.
- ★ Members of Congress bear responsibility for the decline of their own aisle-crossing cooperation, and should begin repairing these working relationships by simply increasing face-time with one another devoted to serious discussion of issues, away from the glare of media and public scrutiny. A monthly or weekly caucus meeting, without staff or press, devoted solely to discussion of pressing national security and foreign policy issues, would



help members understand one another's concerns, make subsequent committee hearings and floor debates more useful and civilized, and help members identify important stakeholders on the other side. As Senator Evan Bayh (D-IN) put it, "listening to one another, absent the posturing and public talking points, could only promote greater understanding, which is necessary to real progress."<sup>38</sup>

- ★ The committee system must also be revamped. Overlapping jurisdictions on national security and foreign policy issues must be eliminated, and members should not be expected to serve on more than two committees or subcommittees in their first one or two terms, so that they actually have the time to develop expertise and credibility on the committee's portfolio. This would have the additional effect of reducing committee size, especially valuable in the House, where committees of three dozen or more members are simply too large for members to know each other well, travel together, or hold substantive full committee meetings.
- ★ To ensure that committee deliberations serve a substantive purpose related to the committee's jurisdiction, committee chairs must impose a firm "rule of the question mark" to forbid grandstanding speeches by members, who speak for the cameras and often depart before the expert witnesses have even responded. Instead, members should be required to attend committee or subcommittee hearings, barring absolutely unavoidable conflicts, and limited to 30-second or 1-minute direct questions for the witnesses. With smaller committee sizes, this will also facilitate more engagement between members and witnesses, ensuring members are better informed before they write or vote on legislation.

- ★ Because members will always be under intense time pressure in Washington and at home, usually forcing them to focus on domestic political and fundraising challenges, more time must be set aside for careful study and analysis of foreign policy issues. Ideally, this should occur in the context of bipartisan Congressional Delegation (CODEL) trips to foreign policy hot spots like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, or Honduras (but not golf junkets to Jamaica). Taking time off, and potentially missing votes, to travel abroad is never a politically popular move for a member of Congress, but it is absolutely essential for good foreign policy decision-making, and both parties can agree not to exploit CODELs for political gain. Likewise, trips should be 100% publicly funded, and private or foreign government sponsorship should be prohibited so that members will not be tempted to abuse the travel privilege.

## Structural Reform

- ★ While the onus for improving aisle-crossing individual relationships is on members of Congress, members will not last long enough in office to achieve these goals if they are penalized in the electoral process for bipartisan cooperation. When members cater to the extreme wings of their party to fend off primary challengers in gerrymandered districts, a record of bipartisan cooperation is not an asset. Thus, state legislatures must commit to redistricting reform based on politically neutral principles. Iowa, where all five congressional districts are reasonably competitive, offers a good example.
- ★ Together with gerrymandering, the influence of big political money on elections must be limited by undertaking further campaign finance reform. Pure public financing is an appealingly simple option, but given recent



- ★ Supreme Court jurisprudence enshrining private campaign donations as protected political speech, a Constitutional amendment would be needed. Short of such fundamental reform, it should be possible to extend the current limits on “hard money” contributions to include contributions to groups engaging in targeted political advertising during election season, and to limit out-of-state cash contributions to reduce the influence of national PACs relative to voters in the state or district. Public matching contributions for small donations, plus enhanced disclosure requirements, can empower individual citizen donors over special interests.
- ★ It is, finally, time to un-blur the line between news and entertainment on television and in other media. It is well and good for networks, newspapers and bloggers to give the people what they want - controversy and scandal - but when reporting the news crosses the line into manufacturing or spinning hyper-partisan warfare, content should no longer be labeled “news” or even “news analysis.” As a recent Time Magazine poll found, Daily Show host Jon Stewart may be America’s most trusted newsman, but even he admits his show is primarily for entertainment.<sup>39</sup> Clearer rules for political news media will allow leaders in Washington to focus more on the issues, and help Americans make informed choices about national security and foreign policy.



## CONCLUSION

Despite high-minded rhetoric about changing Washington on both sides of the 2008 election, cynics inside and outside the beltway declared bipartisanship dead on arrival, even before Washington had a chance to prove them right. Open partisan warfare over corporate bailouts, health care reform, taxes and other hot button issues seems only to deepen the conflict. In David Boren's words, "partisan agendas have crowded out the national interest, and partisanship has been institutionalized. In Washington today, there are no offsetting forces to promote bipartisanship."<sup>40</sup> If expert opinion and recent history, not to mention this Report's disturbing findings, are any guide, it appears bipartisanship is doomed.

Yet if we recall the basic significance of bipartisan cooperation for the American political process, there is cause to be hopeful. Far from being a myth embraced only by naïve optimists, bipartisanship is a proven strategy for long term political success - especially on national security and foreign policy. Policies forged through a collaborative process tend to be more effective and more enduring, while agreement across the aisle allows America to present a unified front to the rest of the world.

Bipartisanship is about smarter policymaking. From a President who concedes that neither party has a monopoly on wisdom, we should demand more open and inclusive dialogue in the policy development phase, long before bills are sent to Congress. The "opposition" may not always volunteer its support, but smart legislators in the minority should also see the value of having input early in the process.

Bipartisanship is also about trust. One visit or phone call from the President is not enough to undo decades of partisan antipathy, but it is an opening that Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill would be foolish to ignore. In Washington, relationships are everything, and greater trust between leaders on both sides can help break the monopoly of special interests and prevent future partisan gridlock.

Lastly, bipartisanship is about stability over the long term. In a democracy such as ours, political power is fleeting, and the majority party today should use its advantage to forge enduring bipartisan coalitions, especially on economic, national security and foreign policy challenges. These global issues demand that U.S. leaders speak with one voice on the world stage. Without enduring consensus, the next handover of power might bring total reversal, perpetuating endless cycles of abortive, ineffective policy.

Critics can point to any number of recent debacles in which bipartisan consensus was stillborn, but this does little to negate a proud American tradition of bipartisan cooperation on key national security challenges. One need only recall famous legislative partnerships like those of Truman and Vandenberg on the Marshall Plan, Goldwater and Nichols on military reform, or Nunn and Lugar on nuclear nonproliferation to see that good policy and bipartisan process fit together.

Politicians will never find consensus on every issue, nor should they. But on issues of critical national importance, we waste resources and undermine our long term interests by dismissing bipartisanship as a vague idea.



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<sup>3</sup> Poole, Keith T. (2001, July 3). DW-NOMINATE Roll Call Coordinates and Issue Codes, Congresses 1 - 106. Retrieved July 8, 2009, from [http://voteview.com/dw-nominate\\_textfile.htm](http://voteview.com/dw-nominate_textfile.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Export Data. Washington: CQ Press. Dynamically generated July 13, 2009, from CQ Press Electronic Library, CQ Congress Collection: <http://library.cqpress.com/congress/>

<sup>5</sup> An average Congress conducted 1,413 floor votes, of which 312 dealt with national security and foreign policy. Representative samples: For the 79th Congress (1945), there were 475 total votes; 109 ns/fp votes. For the 94th Congress (1975), there were 2584 total votes; 376 ns/fp votes. For the 109th Congress (2005), there were 1855 total votes; 880 ns/fp votes. It should be noted that the 109th Congress is something of an outlier; it had by far the most ns/fp votes of any Congress (the next largest is the 95th Congress with 509). It had a relatively normal number of total votes, but significantly more ns/fp votes.

<sup>6</sup> George C. Marshall, Text of the Marshall Plan Speech June 4, 1947

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<sup>8</sup> See William R. Doerner, Sam Allis, and Barrett Seaman, "Battle of the Missiles," *Time Magazine*, April 1, 1985. Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,964834-1,00.html>

<sup>9</sup> Allison, Graham and Albert Carnesale. "Why Ratifying the INF Treaty Really Matters." *Christian Science Monitor*, May 3, 1988. Available at: [http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/1311/why\\_ratifying\\_the\\_inf\\_treaty\\_really\\_matters.html](http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/1311/why_ratifying_the_inf_treaty_really_matters.html)

<sup>10</sup> See *The Iran-Contra Report*, The American Presidency Project. Available at: [http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/PS157/assignment%](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/PS157/assignment%20files%20public/congressional%20report%20key%20sections.htm)

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Kagan, "Bipartisan Spring," *ForeignPolicy.com*, March 3, 2010. Available at: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/03/bipartisan\\_spring](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/03/bipartisan_spring)

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<sup>14</sup> See, e.g. Clifford D. May, "Sins of Commission." 4/7/2004. Scripps Howard News Service. Available at:

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<sup>17</sup> Newport, Frank. "Conservative Democrats, Liberal Republicans Hard to Find." *Gallup*. 2 Sep 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. "Partisan Gap in Obama Job Approval Widest in Modern Era." 2 April 2009. Available at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1178/polarized-partisan-gap-in-obama-approval-historic>

<sup>19</sup> Of course, broad bipartisan agreement about the goals for U.S. foreign policy should be understood in the context of general indifference to foreign policy questions relative to more immediate domestic policy concerns, especially economic and welfare issues impacting voters' daily lives. According to a January, 2010 national poll, more Americans identified the economy (47%), health care (15%) and the federal budget deficit (11%) as "the most important issue facing the country today" than picked terrorism (11%) or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (7%). CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll. Jan. 8-10, 2010. N=1,021 adults nationwide. MoE ± 3. <http://www.pollingreport.com/prioriti.htm>. Such inattention from voters may mean that substantive foreign policy priorities are more easily crowded out by narrower partisan or parochial concerns on lawmakers' agendas.

<sup>20</sup> Table compiled of data from the following report: PEW Research Center for the People and the Press.



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