

The Pendulum of Congressional Power: Agenda Change, Partisanship and the Demise of the Post-World War II Foreign Policy Consensus

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Abstract

Many scholars contend that Congress rarely matters in the realm of foreign policy. The source of this collective impotence is often explained by the weaknesses in congressional institutions vis-à-vis the president, as well as a general inability to respond effectively to a dynamic international political environment. We contend that the debate over congressional activism has not adequately addressed the role of agenda change. We analyze all roll call votes in the House of Representatives relating to the international affairs agenda between 1953 and 1998. We find that presidents have become significantly more likely to stake out positions on economic and trade issues as compared to other international issues. We also observe that presidential positions in the realm of foreign policy are increasingly characterized by interparty and interinstitutional conflict. While this increased conflict has dramatically decreased the president's ability to successfully pass executive priorities in foreign affairs more generally, presidential success on economic and trade issues has witnessed a significantly greater decline. We infer from these results that changes to the foreign policy issue agenda represent one important factor that has affected not only the incentives for political parties to participate actively, but also the willingness of Congress to challenge the president in the foreign policy debate.

*Asked one day whether it was true that the navy yard in his district was too small to accommodate the latest battleships, Henry Stimson (chair of the House Naval Affairs Committee early in the century) replied, 'That is true, and that is the reason I have always been in favor of small ships.'*¹

*Carriers have been, are and will be for the foreseeable future an absolutely essential part of our deterrence force. . . .*²

—John Warner, senator from Virginia,
home state of Newport News Shipbuilding

There are a variety of perspectives regarding whether or not Congress matters in the area of international affairs policy. These views range from an imperial presidency, to an imperial Congress, to an effective balance between the two branches

(see Califano 1994; Crovitz and Rabkin 1989; Hinckley 1994; Koh 1990; Schlesinger 1973; Sundquist 1981). Scholarly research explaining congressional-executive relations has focused on the importance of changes in both the internal and external political environments (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Covington, Wrighton, and Kinney 1995; Mann 1990; Meernik 1993; Shull and Shaw 1999). To be sure, external conditions have changed such that there no longer exists a national consensus regarding the threat of Soviet expansionism and the need for a containment strategy. In addition, electoral changes fostering institutional reforms in Congress during the 1970s and 1980s have reduced the executive's informational advantages. These reforms increased Congress's ability to challenge executive authority and to independently initiate policy prescriptions in the area of international affairs.

The political landscape conditioning decisionmaking in foreign affairs has changed dramatically since Wildavsky's (1969) assertions regarding the "two presidencies." The duality that he described in institutional behavior between international affairs and domestic policy has become largely indistinguishable in terms of partisan conflict. This change has lead scholars to infer that the same political forces are at work influencing conflict in the international and domestic policy arenas. In fact, the magnitude of this change with respect to partisanship across domestic and international affairs has left little reason to revive the two-presidencies model (Fleisher, Bond, Krutz, and Hanna 2000; Rohde 1994a; Wittkopf and McCormick 1998).

Certainly, international events such as Vietnam and the end of the cold war were important in shaping congressional consensus on presidential initiatives. However, the internal political context can be just as vital. Indeed, we contend that changes in the international policy agenda as well as institutional and electoral features of the congressional environment more directly determine the ability of the president to pass legislation in Congress. As Congressman Henry Stimson and Senator John Warner acknowledged, members of Congress can and will act if foreign and defense policy impacts constituents back home.

Over time, economic, intermestic, and structural issues have come increasingly to define the international affairs agenda and, not surprisingly, members of Congress have taken a greater interest in the debates and subsequently appear less inclined to defer to executive preferences. In particular, we argue that the rise of economic and trade issues on the international affairs agenda represents one important explanation for understanding changes in congressional assertiveness and presidential success. We find that not only have presidents become more likely to take positions on international trade and economic issues as compared to other issues on the international affairs agenda, but that the success rate on these votes relative to more traditional foreign and defense issues is substantially lower. We further observe that the Foreign Affairs (now International Relations) and Armed Services Committees in the House have opposed the president much more often in the postreform era. This opposition is particularly evident on international trade and economic issues and this opposition significantly decreases presidential success rates in the postreform era.

The first part of this paper discusses the linkage between legislative committees and policy issues in shaping congressional-executive behavior in interna-

tional affairs. Next, we consider how, over time, changes in the electoral and institutional context help explain intrainstitutional conflict as well as Congress's increased willingness to challenge presidential priorities. Then, we derive hypotheses relating to how the rise of economic and trade issues have contributed to greater congressional assertiveness and decreased levels of presidential success. Finally, we test our assertions with data from the House of Representatives.

CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES AND THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AGENDA

Edwards and Barrett (2000) argue that a paradox exists in the congressional-executive literature. According to them, many of the empirical findings reflect the limited ability of the president to influence successfully the passage of public policies. Yet, in comparison, the president's influence on the congressional agenda appears quite substantial. For example, Edwards and Barrett (2000) find from the period 1953-1996 that approximately one-third of the congressional agenda is made up of presidential initiatives, and that during times of unified government the proportion goes up to nearly one-half. They argue that if the president has considerable ability to influence the content of the congressional agenda, but much less ability to influence the success of those agenda items, then the factors affecting each must be different (Edwards and Barrett 2000, 112).

However, their analysis does not control for possible variations of presidential influence across specific policy issues on the congressional agenda. And their focus on bill hearings provides only limited leverage for understanding the committee system's role in Congress as the gatekeeper to the floor. We argue that issue change and congressional committees are both extremely important for understanding congressional-executive interactions. Indeed, one might suspect that the president's and Congress's influence over policies on the legislative agenda would vary from issue to issue. Time and time again, Congress has demonstrated its ability to participate effectively in a variety of policy areas such as intelligence, trade, war powers, and arms sales to name a few (Crabb and Holt 1989; Elliff 1977; Kegley and Wittkopf 1982; Rohde 1994a; Warburg 1989). The particular issues in debate differentially influence institutional behavior, because both individual goals and electorally relevant constituencies vary from member to member (Fenno 1973).

In addition, an explanation of how changes in the issue agenda affect inter-institutional relations should take into consideration the role of congressional committees (Rohde 1992). The committee system represents the primary institutional mechanism by which Congress can influence its own agenda. The extent to which a committee can shape the agenda depends in part on the relevance of the issues within its jurisdiction with respect to the membership (e.g., majority party and/or chamber) and other institutions (Maltzman 1997). Congressional control over the agenda, then, relates to how the specific issues affect member goals and a relevant set of voters (Rohde 1995).

For at least the past two decades, the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees have been at the forefront of congressional-executive struggles over the international agenda. But for a very long time, especially before the reforms

of the 1970s, these committees were largely responsive to presidential priorities, and Congress was acceptant of its junior role as policymaker in foreign affairs (Fenno 1973; McCormick 1985; Ray 1980). During this period, the legislative agenda as well as congressional decision making was largely controlled through committees and their conservative chairmen. Executive dominance over these committees translated into a disparity in executive influence over foreign affairs.

Consider, for example, the legislation considered by the Foreign Affairs and Armed Services Committees. Although both of these committees were important repositories of presidential support and their agendas tended to be responsive to executive policy goals, their support was based on very different circumstances. The membership of these committees differed with respect to goals and with respect to their relationship with the majority party and chamber respectively. Fenno's (1973, 12) analysis of the House Foreign Affairs Committee revealed a striking lack of concern on the part of committee members of both parties regarding constituency-related goals. Instead, members on Foreign Affairs were concerned with influencing the nation's foreign policy. The committee was able to achieve this goal by working closely with the president (especially through the annual foreign aid bill). The basic role of the committee was to endorse the president's policy initiatives (Fenno 1973, 71).³ During the prereform era, the House had little collective concern over the issues falling under the purview of Foreign Affairs, and thus had not developed any special institutional mechanisms (as it had for other committees) to influence the behavior of its members. Thus, scholars have found considerable evidence that the committee's agenda was heavily influenced by the policy goals of the president (Fenno 1973, 216; Rohde 1992).

The House Armed Services Committee was also considered a bastion of support for presidential initiatives. Especially in the area of defense spending, the committee tended to share the preferences of the president (Rohde 1994a). Agreement in policy preferences, though, was not fostered by a dependence on the executive to achieve the committee's goals. In fact, Ray's (1980) analysis of Armed Services suggested an institutionalized process (e.g., self-selection) that attracted a southern membership highly supportive of military spending relative to the rest of the House. In contrast to House Foreign Affairs, members on Armed Services were largely concerned with the constituency benefits associated with the committee's policy jurisdiction. The committee's jurisdiction on defense-related policies directly aligned the growth of the military establishment with local district-level interests. So, the goals of its membership, as well as the role of Armed Services in relation to the rest of the House, were different from those of Foreign Affairs.

ELECTORAL POLITICS, INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, AND THE RISE OF PARTISANSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Aaron Wildavsky's (1969) insightful observations of congressional-executive relations in foreign affairs took place in the context of the prereform era. During this period, there were few incentives for members of either the majority or minority parties to challenge the president in the international policy arena. A siz-

able group of members' districts included conservative southern Democrats and Republican voters who tended to be supportive of both the growing military-industrial complex and the presidents' escalation of the Vietnam conflict. In contrast, liberals in Congress tended to represent northern Democratic voters who clearly differed from their southern counterparts in terms of their support for defense spending and military action in Vietnam, and also on domestic issues such as civil rights. This cleavage in the electorate on defense issues was reflected in Congress. Here, the division among members of the majority party gave a distinct advantage over outcomes to members of the conservative coalition, who tended to support the policy prescriptions of the president (Rohde 1992, 246).

While the electoral circumstances of a large contingent of Democrat and Republican members effectively provided the incentive to support presidential priorities, members of the conservative coalition also benefited from a seniority-skewed distribution of power. This institutionalized disparity of power between northern and southern members resulted from the electoral dominance of the Democratic Party in southern congressional districts (Key 1949). Southern Democrats in Congress were elevated in status through the seniority system and tended to dominate committees and chairmanships. This gave supporters of the Vietnam War control over key committees and the issue agenda, that proved to be an unusually efficient combination to protect the president's foreign policy proposals. Opponents of the Vietnam war had little means for resistance, and few opportunities to offer substantive policy challenges, due to the institutional hurdles imposed by an autonomous committee system.⁴

Changes in the same electoral circumstances that once sustained political power in the hands of conservative Democrats would eventually benefit incoming liberals in Congress. In particular, as the Republican Party started to compete for conservative voters in the South, northern and southern congressional districts became more similar. These electoral forces created greater similarity of members within each party and greater heterogeneity between them (Rohde 1991). The increasing numbers of liberal Democrats in the majority party were eventually able to eliminate the institutionalized advantage in power that senior members held over their junior colleagues (Deering and Smith 1997; Maltzman 1997; Sinclair 1995). The institutional changes within Congress led Warburg (1989, 103) to assert "Congress has changed more in the past 20 years than it did during the previous 180. While these changes affect issues across the board, their impact has been greatest upon the process of shaping international policy."

Liberal reformers sought to shift the seniority-skewed distribution of power within Congress in order to enhance their own influence in the legislative process. Committee autonomy was challenged in several ways. Beginning in 1971, the Democratic caucus rules were changed providing for the possibility of a direct vote on committee chairs. Between the 1970s and 1980s, the caucus actively used this removal procedure to make committee and subcommittee leaders conform to the policy preferences of the liberal majority. In 1985, Melvin Price (D-IL) was replaced by Les Aspin (D-WI) to chair the Armed Services Committee. In so doing, the caucus skipped over several more senior members.⁵ Aspin was also

threatened with removal when he acted against many within his party in supporting Reagan's position with respect to the MX missile policy and aid to the Nicaraguan contras (Rohde 1994b, 92). In addition, the party caucus provided its leaders with seats on the Committee on Committees, significantly increasing their power over committee assignments. In effect, these institutional changes served notice to the committee power holders that they would be held accountable for challenging positions preferred by the rank and file.

The institutional changes not only affected internal decision making in Congress, but also had implications for congressional-executive relations. The institutional reforms meant that members of the majority party and their leadership now had the means to challenge the president in international affairs when his priorities were not congruent with their own. As policy differences grew between the president and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, conflict, both partisan and institutional, followed.

The Changing International Affairs Agenda

Until the end of the Vietnam conflict, there existed a broad strategic consensus among policymakers on most issues relating to U.S. international affairs (Warburg 1989). The institutionalized dominance of the presidency was legitimized through constitutional prerogative and a general agreement that executive control over foreign policy was essential for maintaining U.S. security in the face of a dangerous and highly fluid international environment (Wildavsky 1969). This consensus was characterized by a remarkable level of bipartisan congressional support for the president's foreign policy priorities (Cronin and Fordham 1999, 980; Meernik 1993; Wittkopf and McCormick 1990 and 1998).

The breakdown of the national foreign policy consensus was to some extent due to Vietnam and other increasingly salient issues confronting policy makers. The issues synonymous with national security concerns that had compelled agreement among lawmakers and the executive were changing (Pearson and Rochester 1998, 106). Oleszek (1992, 203) articulates nicely the effect of changing foreign policy issues and incentives for members of Congress: "Simply put, no member can politically afford to remain insulated from global developments because no district or state is isolated from their effects." The blurring of traditional distinctions between domestic and international issues—that is, the emergence of "intermestic" issues—represents an important factor explaining changes in congressional-executive policy making in foreign affairs (Crabb and Holt 1989; Warburg 1989, 99). Indeed, Thomas E. Mann (2001) observed that, "The presidency has shrunk, in part because of the removal of an immediate national security threat and the increased prominence of economic issues like trade in national security matters. There's simply less opportunity [for the president] to dominate policy-making." (Quoted in Bettleheim, 2001.)

Agenda change in international affairs has meant that the "line at the water's edge" has increasingly become less likely to consist of policy issues that clearly demarcate domestic interests from international policy concerns. One central

aspect of this change is the growing importance of economic and trade issues relative to other issues on the international affairs agenda. Economic and trade issues provide an electorally relevant linkage between domestic and international policy which have become more and more likely to divide along party lines (Crabb and Holt 1989, 193). As this linkage grew stronger over time, legislating foreign affairs policy was increasingly influenced by the same partisan considerations that influenced domestic policy. For members of Congress, the changes over time to the content of the issue agenda and its electoral relevance made international affairs policy an increasingly important priority for congressional activism (Smith 1989). Not only was foreign policy decision making in the 1980s characterized by greater partisan conflict, but Congress also seemed more willing to assert its policy priorities over those of the president than had been the case prior to the major congressional reforms of the early 1970s (Rohde 1994b).

Expectations

The growth of partisanship within Congress and the heightened levels of interinstitutional conflict have come at a considerable cost to presidential success in the realm of foreign policy (Fleisher, Bond, Krutz, and Hanna 2000). Yet, there exist important differences across issues within the international affairs agenda. In particular, we contend that the growing significance of economic and trade issues can help explain congressional assertiveness and the subsequent decline of presidential influence in foreign affairs. Thus, part of the explanation for congressional acquiescence at certain times, and resurgence at others, is the result of a changing policy agenda and how the issues on that agenda relate to member goals. This leads to testable expectations regarding the international affairs agenda and economic and trade issues in particular.

H₁: Economic and trade legislation should become much more salient relative to other issues on the international affairs agenda over time.

In addition, considerable evidence suggests that international affairs issues have become more like domestic policy issues, increasingly divided along partisan lines (Fleisher, Bond, Krutz, and Hanna 2000). Although one might expect partisanship and interinstitutional conflict to increase on international affairs across the board, we expect there to be differences in economic and trade issues because of their significance to the constituency interests of members of Congress.

H₂: Economic and trade legislation should be associated with an overall increase in partisan conflict within Congress and interinstitutional conflict between the Congress and the president relative to other issues on the international affairs agenda over time.

To the extent that congressional assertiveness and conflict increase differentially across issue areas, we should observe less presidential influence overall, but particularly on economic and trade issues.

H₃: *Economic and trade legislation should be associated with a greater over-time decline in presidential success relative to other issues on the international affairs agenda.*

We have argued that the debate over congressional-executive interaction has failed to address adequately the importance of the precise issues on the agenda that characterize foreign policy decision making. Without first understanding how the particular mix of issues shapes member incentives, it is difficult to assess the role of Congress, its assertiveness (or lack thereof), and congressional-executive relations in foreign affairs. The central emphasis of our argument has been that the specific issues defining the congressional agenda can differentially influence congressional willingness to participate in the foreign policy process. As economic, intermestic, and structural issues have come increasingly to define the foreign affairs agenda, members of Congress have taken a greater interest in the debates and subsequently appear less inclined to defer to executive preferences.

DATA AND EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

To test our suppositions regarding economic and trade issues on institutional and partisan conflict on the foreign policy agenda, we analyze House floor roll call data from the 83rd through the 105th Congresses. The issues we code broadly fall within foreign and defense policy and include such concerns as general authorizations and appropriations for defense and foreign aid programs, specific weapons system proposals, intelligence, veteran's affairs, human rights, arms control, and international trade and economic issues. The votes categorized within the international affairs agenda provide a total of 4,102 votes in the House out of a total of over 17,000 roll call votes during this time period. The subset of international affairs votes on which the president takes a stated position during the 1953-1998 time period is 1,207 out of 3,725 total presidential position votes on all issues in the House.⁶

Presidential Position Taking

To begin, the data allow us to assess Hypothesis 1 by comparing patterns of presidential position taking between international affairs and economic and trade votes. Table 1 shows the relative percentage of times the president took a position on international affairs and economic and trade votes between 1953-1974 and from 1975-1998. We use 1974 as our temporal break point because the major institutional reforms we have discussed were in place by this time. However, we have been mindful that some reforms may have been more important than others in effecting the changes in congressional assertiveness we observe. To account for this, we analyzed the data using break points at 1971 and 1973 to see if the results differed substantively. These alternative years correspond with the Legislative Reorganization Act, as well as the advent of recorded teller votes and the change to electronic voting, respectively. Varying the break points in this way does not

TABLE 1

Cross-Tabulation of Presidential Position Taking on International Affairs vs. International Trade and Economic Issues, 1953-1998 (final passage votes only)

Time Period	Votes on International Economic Issues	Presidential Position (%)		
		No	Yes	Total
1953-1974 ^a	All other international affairs votes	240 (56.3%)	186 (43.7%)	426
	International trade and economic votes	59 (69.4%)	26 (30.6%)	85
	Total	299	212	511
1975-1998 ^b	All other international affairs votes	376 (70.8%)	155 (29.2%)	531
	International trade and economic votes	44 (47.3%)	49 (52.7%)	93
	Total	420	204	624

^a $\chi^2 = 4.99$ ($p < .026$)

^b $\chi^2 = 19.86$ ($p < .000$)

significantly change the patterns we report or the inferences we have made. In the prereform period, the president took a position on over 43% of final passage votes on the international affairs agenda but only 30.6% of the time on economic and trade issues. During the postreform period, the president took a position on only 29.2% of the international affairs votes and nearly 53% of the economic and trade policy votes. Table 1 demonstrates that during the prereform era presidents were significantly less likely to stake out positions on economic and trade issues relative to other issues on the international affairs agenda ($\chi^2 = 4.99$). However, in the postreform era, we observe exactly the opposite relationship. Presidents have become significantly more likely to take positions on votes dealing with trade and international economics, compared to more traditional foreign and defense policy votes ($\chi^2 = 19.86$).

If position taking is an indication of salience, then Table 1 shows that economic and trade issues have increasingly occupied presidential attention. Not only are presidents more likely to take positions on economic and trade legislation, but of all the presidential position taking on the foreign policy issue agenda, the percentage dealing with economic and trade issues nearly doubles from the prereform to the postreform era. On all other foreign policy issues, there was in fact a decline in the relative percentage of presidential positions. Clearly, the patterns from the table are supportive of the first hypothesis. Economic and trade policies have become a more common target of presidential position taking and an increasingly important part of the international affairs agenda.

The next two tables allow us to assess Hypothesis 2 and the changing nature of congressional conflict. Table 2 breaks down congressional support of the presi-

TABLE 2
*Changes in Congressional Support of the President on International Affairs
 (Presidential Position Votes)*

<i>Presidential Administration</i>	<i>International Affairs Votes</i>				<i>TOTAL</i>
	<i>% of Total Votes for Each Type of Party Coalition</i>				
	<i>Bipartisan Support</i>	<i>Partisan Opposition</i>	<i>President's Party Opposition</i>	<i>Bipartisan Opposition</i>	
Eisenhower I (1953-57)	52.2	19.6	19.6	8.7	3.8 (n=46)
Eisenhower II (1957-1961)	67.8	18.6	11.9	1.7	4.9 (n=59)
Kennedy/Johnson (1961-69)	48.8	45.6	0	5.3	14.1 (n=170)
Nixon/Ford (1969-1977)	41.0	36.8	12.5	9.7	11.9 (n=144)
Carter (1977-1981)	26.6	56.4	4.3	12.8	15.5 (n=188)
Reagan I (1981-85)	32.3	53.8	6.2	7.7	10.8 (n=130)
Reagan II (1985-89)	19.9	65.1	1.8	13.3	13.7 (n=166)
Bush (1989-1993)	20.3	59.5	4.1	16.2	12.3 (n=148)
Clinton I (1993-97)	25.2	51.3	16.8	6.7	9.8 (n=119)
Clinton II (1996-99)	10.8	59.5	5.4	24.3	3.1 (n=37)
TOTAL	32.7 (n=395)	50.2 (n=606)	6.7 (n=81)	10.4 (n=125)	100.0 (N=1207)

dent across presidential administrations and by the nature of the supporting or opposing coalition. Table 2 illustrates both the increasing partisan and interinstitutional opposition presidents face in the legislative arena on international affairs. For example, during his second term President Eisenhower received bipartisan support on 67.8% of the votes on the international affairs agenda. In contrast, president Clinton received only slightly greater than 10% during the first two years of his second term. During the same time period, the proportion of times that a majority of the opposition party voted against the president's position went from only 18.6% to 59.5%. In addition, Table 2 indicates a decreasing pattern of same-party opposition to the president's position over time (column 3). However, President Clinton's first term appears more similar to patterns found during the Eisenhower administration. This tends to support arguments made by Fleisher, Bond, Krutz, and Hanna (2000) that Clinton tended to take more conservative positions

in foreign policy than many of his Democratic predecessors. At the same time, institutional opposition in Congress also increased dramatically. In fact, nearly 15% of the votes on international affairs in the House since the Carter administration have triggered bipartisan opposition to the president's stated position.

Table 3 demonstrates that the changes in the nature of congressional support or opposition of the president's position differ across issues on the international affairs agenda. Both intraparty and interinstitutional conflict have increased dramatically on international economic and trade issues over this 45-year time period. Between 1953 and 1974, about one-third of the presidential position votes were opposed by a majority of the opposition party members in Congress for international economic and trade and more traditional foreign and defense policy issues (33.9% and 35.7%, respectively). In the postreform era, opposition to presidential positions jumps to over 50% (52.7% and 57.7%). This increase in partisanship within the House has also resulted in the decreasing frequency of same-party opposition. In the prereform era presidents experienced opposition from a majority of their party on 30 of 384 international affairs votes (nearly 8%). A considerable amount of this same-party opposition was associated with international economic votes (nearly 30%). In the postreform era there is relatively less same-party opposition to presidential positions, and this is mostly attributable to increasing party loyalty on economic and trade votes. Same-party opposition does not change over time on traditional foreign and defense policy votes (6.3%), but the frequency for economic and trade votes goes from 17% to just over 5%.

Moreover, Table 3 shows that bipartisan deference to presidential preferences on foreign and defense policy issues was much more common prior to 1975. In the prereform era, bipartisan support of the president's position was more common on traditional foreign and defense votes as compared to economic and trade issues (52.6% and 37.7%). This bipartisan deference decreased substantially in both issue areas during the postreform era. While bipartisan support of stated presidential positions is nearly indistinguishable from noneconomic votes in the postreform era, there tends to be greater bipartisan opposition. In fact, during both periods the frequency of bipartisan congressional opposition to presidential positions was greater on international economic votes as compared to other issues on the international affairs agenda. Together, Tables 2 and 3 provide support for Hypothesis 2, that economic and trade issues have played an important role in influencing both intra- and interinstitutional conflict between Congress and the president.

Presidential Success

The evidence from the first set of tables has shown the importance of the dynamic issue agenda for understanding over-time changes in both presidential position taking and the nature of congressional-executive conflict. Here, we have argued that issues can differentially shape congressional incentives to participate in the foreign policy process. The differences we have discussed between more

TABLE 3

Cross-Tabulation of Presidential Position Taking and House Coalition Support on International Affairs vs. International Trade and Economic Issues, 1953-1998 (Presidential Position Votes)

Time Period	House Coalition	Issue Type		Total
		All Other International Affairs Votes	International Trade and Economic Votes	
1953-1974	Partisan opposition	118 (35.7%)	18 (33.9%)	606
	Bipartisan support	174 (52.6%)	20 (37.7%)	194
	Bipartisan opposition	18 (5.4%)	6 (11.3%)	24
	President party opposition	21 (6.3%)	9 (17.0%)	30
	Total	331 (100%)	53 (100%)	384
1975-1998	Partisan opposition	421 (57.7%)	49 (52.7%)	471
	Bipartisan support	178 (24.4%)	23 (24.7%)	201
	Bipartisan opposition	85 (11.6%)	16 (17.2%)	101
	President party opposition	46 (6.3%)	5 (5.4%)	51
	Total	730 (100%)	93 (100%)	823

traditional international affairs policies and economic and trade issues should not only have implications for congressional assertiveness, but also for presidential success. Table 4 allows us to assess the last hypothesis that economic and trade issues have contributed significantly to the decline in presidential success associated with the international affairs agenda. During the prereform era presidents succeeded on approximately 81% of the votes dealing with international affairs. In the postreform era, however, this success rate has dropped to less than 60%. More dramatic, however, has been the decline in presidential success on international economic votes. This success drops from 77.4% to 38.7%—a 50% decline. The chi-squared test demonstrates that there is no distinguishable difference in success rates between economic and trade and all other international affairs votes during the prereform period ($\chi^2=.315$, $p<.575$). However, the same test indicates that there is a significant difference in success rates across issue areas during the postreform era ($\chi^2=14.69$, $p<.000$). Although the likelihood of presidential success

TABLE 4
*Cross-Tabulation of Presidential Success in the House on International Affairs
 vs. International Trade and Economic Issues, 1953-1998
 (Presidential Position Votes)*

Time Period	Issue Type	Presidential Success		Total
		Unsuccessful	Successful	
1953-1974 ^a	All other international affairs votes	64 (19.3%)	267 (80.7%)	331
	International trade and economic votes	12 (22.6%)	41 (77.4%)	53
	Total	76 (100%)	308 (100%)	384
1975-1998 ^b	All other international affairs votes	295 (40.4%)	435 (59.6%)	730
	International trade and economic votes	57 (61.3%)	36 (38.7%)	93
	Total	352 (100%)	471 (100%)	823

^a $\chi^2 = .315$ ($p < .575$)

^b $\chi^2 = 14.69$ ($p < .000$)

has dropped for all international affairs votes, the decrease in success is significantly greater for economic and trade votes. These patterns reflect Congress's increased assertiveness in international affairs generally, but particularly with respect to economic and trade issues, more so than other issues.

Tables 5 and 6 take one additional step in evaluating presidential success by looking at the behavior of the House Foreign Affairs and Armed Services Committees on international affairs votes. Congressional committees are not only the workhorses of the legislative process, but also represent a barometer of issue salience and a vital cue giver to non-committee members on the floor. Tables 5 and 6 detail four mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive conditions capturing committee behavior in relation to the president's position, controlling for economic and trade policy and all other international affairs votes. The first two categories in each table report the percentage of times the committee majority voted in support of the president and whether the president's position won or lost on the floor. The third and fourth categories report the percentage of times the committee majority voted in opposition to the president and whether the president's position won or lost on the floor.

For example, Table 5 illustrates that a majority of the House Foreign Affairs Committee supported the president's position over two-thirds of the time on both traditional foreign policy votes and on economic and trade votes during the pre-reform era (77.6% and 71.7%). However, during the postreform period the analo-

TABLE 5
House Foreign Affairs Committee and Presidential Success on the International Affairs Agenda, 1953-1998 (Presidential Position Votes)

<i>Presidential Success</i>	<i>Foreign and Defense Policy Votes</i>	<i>Economic and Trade Policy Votes</i>
Presidential success, 1953-1974		
Committee majority supports president and president's position upheld	77.6%	71.7%
Committee majority supports president and president's position rejected	6.4%	11.3%
Committee majority opposes president and president's position upheld	2.8%	5.7%
Committee majority opposes president and president's position rejected	13.2%	11.3%
Total	100% (n=326)	100% (n=53)
Presidential success, 1975-1998		
Committee majority supports president and president's position upheld	47.6%	36.6%
Committee majority supports president and president's position rejected	5.8%	7.5%
Committee majority opposes president and president's position upheld	11.8%	2.2%
Committee majority opposes president and president's position rejected	34.7%	53.8%
Total	100% (n=718)	100% (n=93)

gous figures drop considerably to 47.6% and 36.6%. Table 6 shows a parallel drop in committee support and presidential success for House Armed Services. Here, the percentages go from 69.9% and 62.3% during the earlier period to 44.4% and 34.4% during the latter period. In addition, the tables demonstrate that over the same period of time, committee opposition and presidential losses increase substantially. During the prereform period, the percentage of times that committee majorities voted in opposition to the president, and the president's position lost, were rare. This was less than 20% of the time for both committees relating to traditional foreign and defense policy as well as economic and trade votes. But by the latter period, committee opposition and presidential losses on the floor were much more frequent. In fact, comparing Tables 5 and 6 shows that for economic and trade policies the rate of committee opposition was over 50% of the time for both House committees (53.8% and 50.5%). Finally, Tables 5 and 6 indicate the importance of committee behavior on presidential success. When a majority of committee members (either committee) oppose a president's stated position, the likelihood of that position being upheld is very low and this is even more true on economic and trade votes.

TABLE 6
*House Armed Services Committee and Presidential Success on the
 International Affairs Agenda, 1953-1998 (Presidential Position Votes)*

<i>Presidential Success</i>	<i>Foreign and Defense Policy Votes</i>	<i>Economic and Trade Policy Votes</i>
Presidential success, 1953-1974		
Committee majority supports president and president's position upheld	69.9%	62.3%
Committee majority supports president and president's position rejected	5.5%	3.8%
Committee majority opposes president and president's position upheld	10.4%	15.1%
Committee majority opposes president and president's position rejected	14.1%	18.9%
Total	100% (n=326)	100% (n=53)
Presidential success, 1975-1998		
Committee majority supports president and president's position upheld	44.4%	34.4%
Committee majority supports president and president's position rejected	13.2%	10.8%
Committee majority opposes president and president's position upheld	15.0%	4.3%
Committee majority opposes president and president's position rejected	27.3%	50.5%
Total	100% (n=718)	100% (n=93)

CONCLUSION

While the literature on congressional-executive relations is extensive, scholars cannot fully understand congressional assertiveness in international affairs without considering how the particular mix of issues influences whether legislators will actively participate in the foreign policy process. In a unidimensional world, a concern for the agenda would be unwarranted. However, as the salience of some issues changes over time, the incentives for individual members, and consequently the collective response of Congress, also changes. We do not argue that the type of legislation that comes to the House floor is the sole reason for increased congressional assertiveness and decreased presidential success. We do, however, believe that the issue agenda is part of the explanation.⁷

In general, the analysis provides strong support of all three hypotheses relating to the importance of the dynamic issue agenda on congressional-executive relations in the realm of international affairs. The evidence from Table 1 showed that economic and trade bills have become a very salient target of presidential positions relative to other issues on the agenda. In the decades prior to congres-

sional reform, presidents were significantly more likely to take positions on traditional foreign and defense policy as compared to economic and trade issues (43.7% and 30.6%). After this period, presidents were significantly less likely to take positions on foreign and defense as compared to economic and trade legislation (29.2% and 52.7%).

The transformation of issues within the international affairs agenda has also affected both the frequency and nature of conflict between Congress and the president. By the postreform era, presidents faced partisan opposition over a majority of the time on all international affairs votes (Table 3). In addition, bipartisan opposition to the president's position increased substantially over time (Tables 2 and 3). In the latter period, a majority of both parties in Congress united against the president's position over 11%, and over 17% of the time, on traditional foreign policy and on economic and trade votes, respectively. Perhaps more importantly, the evidence illustrated that no significant differences existed in presidential success rates between traditional foreign policy issues and international economic and trade issues prior to 1975 (Table 4). In fact, presidential success in these areas was quite high in both the former and the latter issue areas (80.7% and 77.4%). But, between 1975 and 1998 there were significant changes in presidential success rates across issue areas. Presidential success on economic and trade issues went down to 38.7%, while success on all other issues on the international affairs agenda was 59.6%.

By the decade of the 1990s, partisan and interinstitutional conflict had increasingly become a common feature of congressional-executive interactions. These changes in conflict have been particularly costly with respect to the president's ability to successfully pass foreign policy legislation on the floor. Still, we find the effects of this conflict to be the most pronounced on issues we expect Congress to be the most assertive on, due to important constituency-related linkages. Although only one of many important factors, the increasing importance of economic and trade issues on the international affairs agenda has heightened congressional assertiveness and explains some of the changes we observe in congressional-executive relations. We conclude, therefore, that Congress does matter in foreign policy decision making and the policy realignment that has occurred in the postreform era helps to explain increased congressional assertiveness in the realm of foreign affairs.

Notes

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¹ Cited in Kegley and Wittkopf (1996, 433-34).

² Senator John Warner (R-VA), Chairman of the Armed Services Committee (quoted in Towell 2002, 730).

³ Even the committee's internal decision rules reflected its deference to the executive branch in that the Foreign Affairs Committee questioned executive branch officials under the 5-minute rule out of consideration for them (Fenno 1973, 109).

⁴ The first recorded antiwar challenge did not occur in the House until 1967, when a floor motion was made to recommit a Department of Defense funding bill. The Senate did not register its first antiwar challenge until 1970, when a recorded vote was taken on the Hatfield-McGovern measure to limit combat activities in Cambodia (Warburg 1989, 46).

⁵ Rohde (1992, 250) notes that the chairmanship change in combination with leadership action on the floor produced the first Democratic-preferred defense bill since the Johnson administration.

⁶ One potential limitation of our analysis is that the floor roll call agenda we analyze is not necessarily the total population of issues or legislative bills considered by the House. For example, some legislation may have committee hearings but not be considered on the House floor, while other bills could traverse the legislative process via voice vote. Still, the roll call record does represent one important indicator of Congress's legislative agenda.

⁷ Our findings suggest at least two other important avenues of future research related to the significance of the issue agenda. One useful step would be to develop a theoretical model of agenda change in international affairs. We find evidence that changes in the agenda have an impact on the relationship between the branches. We do not, however, explain the formation of this agenda, and exactly how some issues filter through in Congress and others do not. Certainly, we think that events at the domestic and international levels both play an important role. In addition, a multivariate model would allow scholars to assess the relative impact of other covariates vis-à-vis agenda change.

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