

*Wars and American Politics*

Since its founding in 1789, the United States government has conducted hot wars for some 38 years,<sup>1</sup> occupied the South militarily for a decade, waged the cold war for several decades, and staged countless smaller actions against Indian tribes or foreign powers. The effects of these activities on American society (to say nothing of the rest of the world) have been immense.

Yet, in general, political scientists who study American domestic politics have underappreciated these effects. That is true of “American political development” specialists as well as others.<sup>2</sup> In general, the study of elections, parties, issues, programs, ideologies, and policy making has centered on peacetime narratives and causation. Leaving aside the Civil War, a domestic event in its own right, American wars have ordinarily been treated as interrupting distractions after which politics could revert to its normal course. One source of this domesticizing thrust is an entrenched view about the fundamentals of politics: over the long haul, the enduring, chiefly economic, interests of voters infuse into public affairs through the mobilizing activities of parties and movements and then affect policy-making processes. Accordingly, the job of an explainer of politics or political history is to canvass the evolving interests of farmers, laborers, businesspeople, women, minority groups, and so on. The rest of the story is largely arithmetic. In general, this is a peacetime script.<sup>3</sup>