What are the domestic determinants of international conflict? A number of political scientists have proposed that leaders in democracies initiate interstate disputes or use force abroad to divert the electorate’s attention away from a flagging economy. Some scholars have integrated measurements of partisanship into their theoretical explanations, but extant scholarship has not effectively introduced the foreign policy position of the executive into the equation. Here I employ elements of salience theory to build the issue emphasis approach to foreign policy. I hypothesize that presidential candidates in the United States credibly signal their foreign policy positions prior to their election and that this foreign policy position has an effect on US behavior in the international arena. The approach I take here is an important one because it more accurately models elite preferences. From this viewpoint, we can connect competing foreign policy platforms to behavior in a new way and link voters’ preferences to foreign policy outcomes more clearly. I estimate the frequency of major uses of force and initiation of militarized interstate disputes from 1946-2000 in my empirical test. The results of these tests suggest my theoretical approach is a valid one. Presidents who maintain a hawkish foreign policy stance prior to being elected use force more often and initiate militarized interstate disputes more frequently. These results suggest that citizens can directly influence foreign policy in the voting booth.