

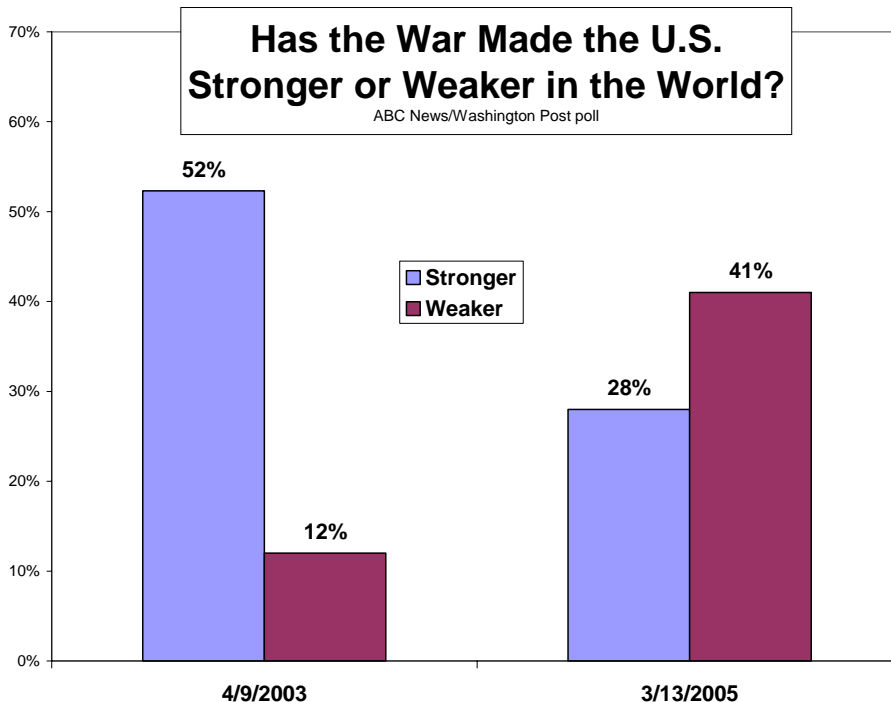
Two Years After War's Start, Deeper Doubts About its Cost

Two years after the shooting began, Americans are deeply conflicted about the costs and benefits of the war with Iraq – and broadly reluctant to enter into any similar military confrontation with either Iran or North Korea.

The public sees some benefits of the war – but more for Iraq than for the United States, and, for many, not enough to justify its costs. Seven in 10 call the level of U.S. casualties in Iraq unacceptable, and 53 percent, on balance, say the war was not worth fighting.

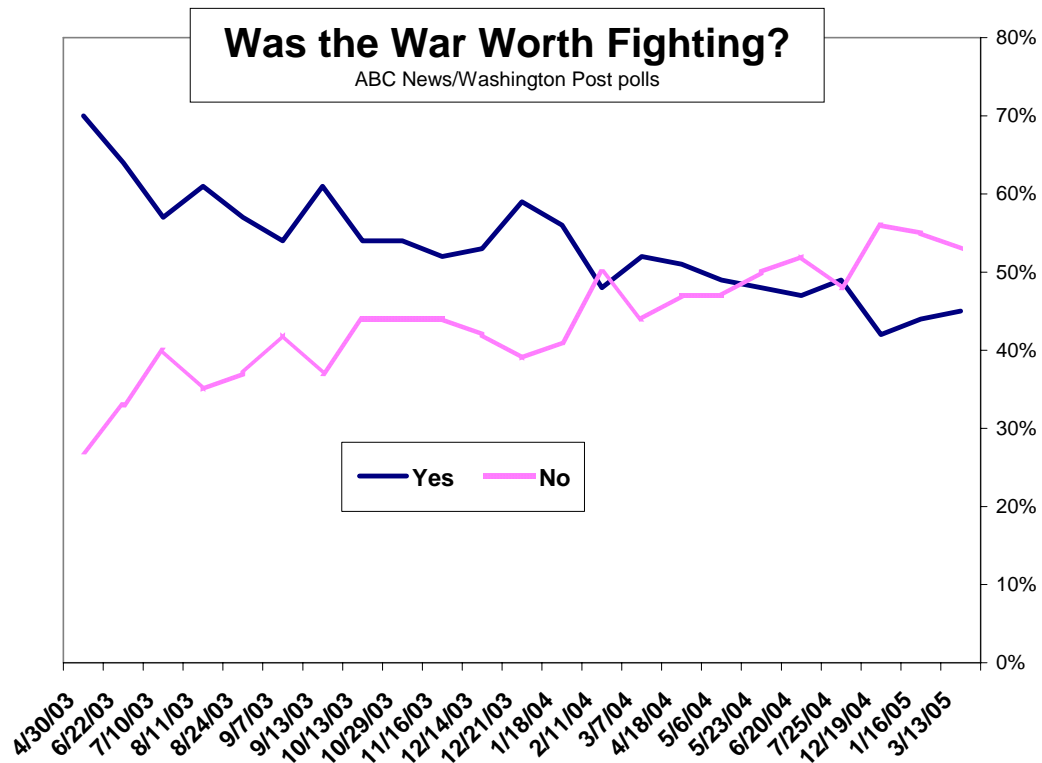
This ABC News/Washington Post poll finds a huge comedown from public opinion before, during and just after the main fighting two years ago. George W. Bush's wartime job approval rating reached 77 percent; it's 50 percent now. His approval specifically on Iraq was 75 percent as the main fighting ended; it's 39 percent now, a career low.

The number of people who say the war was worth fighting has fallen from 70 percent during the war to 45 percent now. And the number who say it's put the United States in a stronger position in the world has fallen from 52 percent to 28 percent. (It was a vastly higher 84 percent after the 1991 Gulf War.) Indeed more now say the war left the United States weaker (41 percent) than stronger.



Most, 57 percent, also say the Bush administration lacks a clear plan for handling the situation overall. And 64 percent say the administration lacks a clear plan specifically for eventually withdrawing most U.S. forces from Iraq.

Nonetheless, the successful Iraqi elections in January appear to have helped moderate what was an increasingly negative trend in views of the war. While 54 percent say the United States is bogged down in Iraq, that’s down from a peak of 65 percent last spring. And whatever the difficulties, few Americans – just 12 percent – call for an immediate pullout of U.S. forces.



ELSEWHERE – One clear finding of this poll is that the public has little desire for battles elsewhere. While nearly three-quarters call North Korea a threat to the United States (and 54 percent call it a “serious” threat), more than three-quarters oppose a military confrontation to force Pyongyang to relinquish nuclear weapons.

North Korea’s apparent possession of those weapons may be one reason most Americans rule out a military option, but not the prime one: Two-thirds also oppose military action against Iran, which is not believed yet to possess nuclear arms.

A non-military option gets a more mixed result: Fifty-one percent favor offering financial incentives, such as aid money or more trade, to induce North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. Fewer, 44 percent, favor offering such incentives to Iran. That may have to do

with the lower perceived threat from Iran; 62 percent see it as a threat, but a good deal fewer, 39 percent, call it a serious threat.

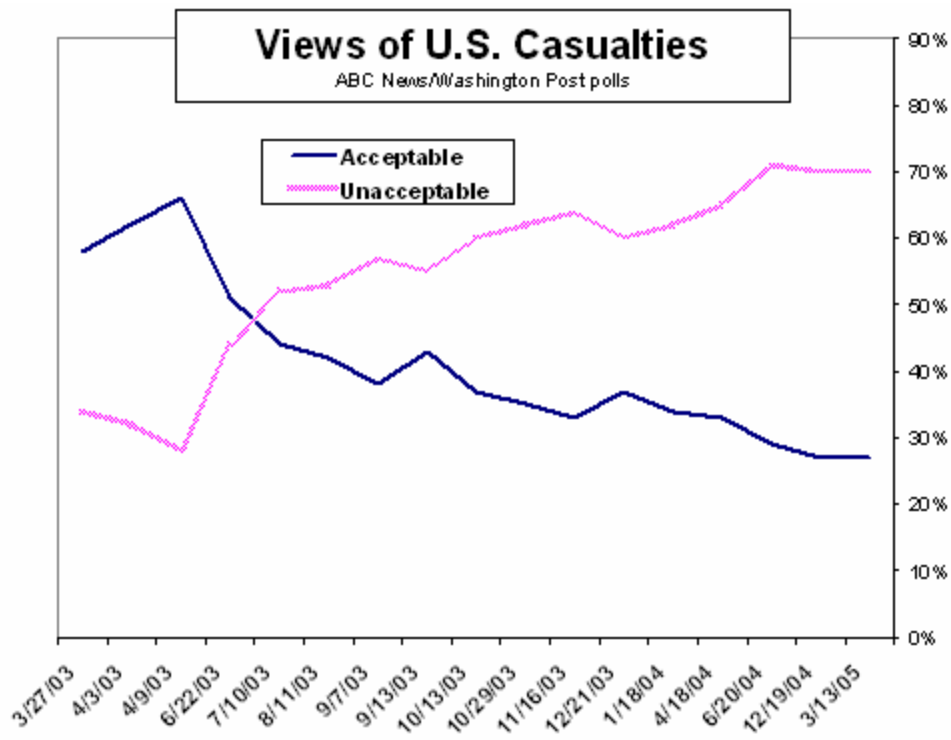
The lack of appetite for military action against either North Korea or Iran underscores the extent to which Iraq has been a special case in U.S. public opinion. Saddam Hussein was seen as a particular villain ever since the Gulf War; majorities supported invading Iraq and overthrowing him as long ago as the mid-'90s, long before the threat of terrorism came clear on Sept. 11, 2001.

COSTS/BENEFITS – Americans clearly view the January election as a positive development in Iraq. Fifty-six percent now express confidence the election will produce a stable Iraqi government, up sharply from 42 percent before the vote was held. Six in 10 think the vote will speed the day U.S. forces can be withdrawn.

In another positive, 44 percent say they think the war has improved the chances that democracy will spread in the Mideast; just nine percent say it's lessened the odds.

Again, though, Iraqis, rather than Americans, are seen as the main beneficiaries – and for many Americans that's insufficient justification for the costs of war.

On the positive side for the United States, 52 percent believe the war has contributed to the nation's long-term security – a majority, but not a large one; and just 29 percent think it's contributed "a great deal." By contrast, far more, 67 percent, think the Iraqi people are better off as a result of the war, and 74 percent think they'll be better off in the future.



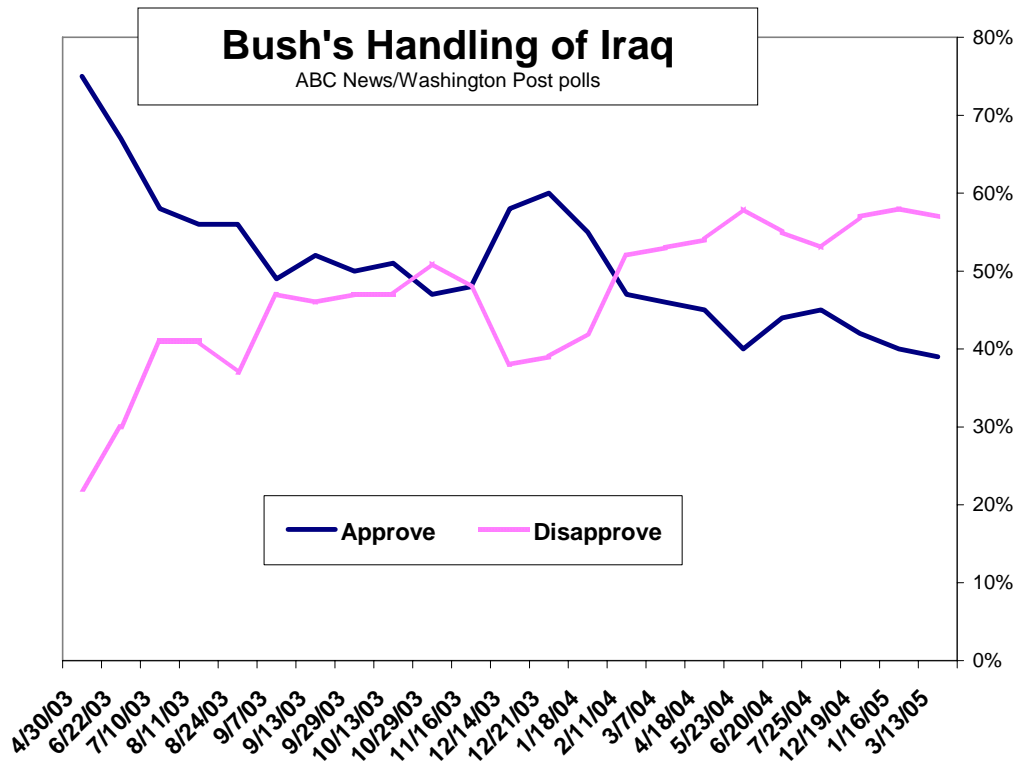
Fewer, though still a majority, seem to think the Iraqis appreciate it: Fifty-four percent think most of the Iraqi people support what the United States is trying to do there. Thirty-nine percent think not.

BOTTOM LINE – As noted, some bottom-line attitudes on the war, while not broadly supportive, are at least stable. That’s better than it might have been for the administration, which had been threatened (and could be again) by deteriorating views of the situation.

While 53 percent say the war was not worth fighting, for example, that’s been roughly stable since December. (In a similar question, 51 percent call the war “a mistake,” about the same as in a Gallup poll in January.)

While 70 percent say the level of casualties is unacceptable, that has been stable since June, when it increased from the low- to mid-60s. The long-term security number likewise is stable, as is the number who say the administration lacks a clear plan for handling the situation.

There’s also stability in perceptions of the administration’s veracity as it prepared for war: Fifty-five percent think the Bush administration told the American public what it believed to be true. Fewer – but still a substantial 43 percent – believe instead that the administration “intentionally misled” the public in making its case for war.



AQ, WMD – The issue of veracity also plays out in views of weapons of mass destruction and links to Al Qaeda. Fifty-six percent of Americans still think Iraq did

possess WMDs shortly before the war, though none have been found; that's sharply down, though, from the 89 percent who thought before the war that it had such weapons.

It's worth noting that, for most Americans, finding WMDs was never a prerequisite for war. In a prewar ABC/Post poll, 20 percent said the war could be justified only if such weapons were found; 63 percent said it could be justified even if not. (The rest, 14 percent, said it couldn't be justified in either case.)

Similarly, six in 10 Americans also continue to think that before the war Iraq provided direct support to the Al Qaeda terrorist group. But nearly four in 10 say this is their "suspicion only"; just two in 10 believe there's been any solid evidence of it. And again, there's no evidence that any alleged Al Qaeda link formed the basis of public support for the war, since most Americans favored overthrowing Saddam years earlier, long before Al Qaeda became broadly known.

GROUPS – As long has been the case, there are huge partisan and ideological divisions in views on Iraq. Most fundamentally, 81 percent of Republicans say the war was worth fighting, as do 69 percent of conservatives; that falls to about four in 10 independents and moderates, and about two in 10 Democrats and liberals.

	War worth fighting?	
	Yes	No
All	45%	53
Democrats	18	80
Independents	43	55
Republicans	81	18
Liberals	20	79
Moderates	39	58
Conservatives	69	30

There also are gender, racial and regional differences: Among men, who tend to be more supportive of military action, 51 percent say the war was worth fighting; that falls to 40 percent of women. While 50 percent of whites say the war was worth fighting, just 29 percent of nonwhite Americans agree. And in the so-called "red" states that Bush won in the 2004 election, 51 percent call the war worth fighting – barely a majority, but more than the 39 percent who say so in the Kerry "blue" states.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 10-13, 2005, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1 Previously released.

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling (ITEM)?

a, c, d, e Previously released.

b. The situation in Iraq

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
3/13/05	39	57	4
1/16/05	40	58	2
12/19/04	42	57	1
9/26/04 RV	47	50	3
8/29/04 RV	47	51	2
7/25/04	45	53	2
6/20/04	44	55	2
5/23/04	40	58	2
4/18/04	45	54	1
3/7/04	46	53	1
2/11/04	47	52	1
1/18/04	55	42	2
12/21/03	60	39	2
12/14/03	58	38	4
11/16/03	48	48	4
10/29/03	47	51	2
10/13/03	51	47	2
9/29/03	50	47	3
9/13/03	52	46	2
9/7/03	49	47	4
8/24/03	56	37	7
8/11/03	56	41	3
7/10/03	58	41	2
6/22/03	67	30	2
4/30/03	75	22	2

Compare to: The situation with Iraq and Saddam Hussein

3/27/03	69	26	5
3/23/03	71	26	3
3/20/03	65	29	5
3/17/03	64	29	7
3/9/03	55	38	8
2/23/03	55	39	6
2/9/03	61	37	2
2/5/03	61	32	7
2/1/03	61	35	3
1/28/03	58	38	4
1/27/03	57	40	3
1/20/03	50	46	4
12/15/02	58	37	5
11/4/02 LV	56	40	4
11/3/02 LV	57	40	4
11/2/02 LV	56	41	3
10/27/02	57	38	5
9/26/02	58	39	3
9/14/02	65	31	4
8/29/02	52	36	12

3-10 Previously released.

11. On another subject, all in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----Worth fighting----			----Not worth fighting---			No op.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/13/05	45	34	11	53	11	42	2
1/16/05	44	32	12	55	10	45	1
12/19/04	42	31	11	56	10	47	2
10/3/04 LV	49	34	15	48	11	37	3
9/26/04 LV	48	36	12	50	7	43	2
RV	46	35	12	51	8	42	3
9/8/04 RV	51	38	13	45	10	34	4
8/29/04 RV	48	34	14	50	11	39	2
7/25/04	49	36	13	48	11	37	3
6/20/04	47	32	14	52	13	39	2
5/23/04	48	35	13	50	13	37	1
5/6/04	49	NA	NA	47	NA	NA	5
4/18/04	51			47			2
3/7/04	52			44			3
2/11/04	48			50			2
1/18/04	56			41			3
12/21/03	59			39			2
12/14/03	53			42			5
11/16/03	52			44			4
10/29/03	54			44			2
10/13/03	54			44			2
9/13/03	61			37			2
9/7/03	54			42			4
8/24/03	57			37			5
8/11/03	61			35			4
7/10/03	57			40			3
6/22/03	64			33			3
4/30/03	70	"	"	27	"	"	4
Gulf War:							
2/2/92*	66	NA	NA	32	NA	NA	2
7/28/91	67			30			3
6/2/91	70			26			3
3/4/91	86	"	"	13	"	"	1

*2/2/92 and previous: "the Persian Gulf war"; 3/4/91: "this war"

12. Again thinking about the goals versus the costs of the war, so far in your opinion has there been an acceptable or unacceptable number of U.S. military casualties in Iraq?

	Acceptable	Unacceptable	No opinion
3/13/05	27	70	3
12/19/04	27	70	3
6/20/04	29	71	1
4/18/04	33	65	2
1/18/04	34	62	4
12/21/03	37	60	4
11/16/03	33	64	3
10/29/03	35	62	3
10/13/03	37	60	3
9/13/03	43	55	2
9/7/03	38	57	5
8/11/03	42	53	5
7/10/03	44	52	3
6/22/03	51	44	5

4/9/03	66	28	6
4/3/03	62	32	5
3/27/03	58	34	9

13a. (HALF SAMPLE) Do you think the Bush Administration does or does not have a clear plan for handling the situation in Iraq?

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/13/04	42	57	2
5/23/04	40	58	2
5/6/04	38	57	5
4/18/04	45	53	2
3/7/04	43	53	3
12/21/03	48	47	5
10/13/03	42	53	5
9/13/03	42	55	2
8/26/03*	44	54	2

*Gallup.

13b. (HALF SAMPLE) Do you think the Bush Administration does or does not have a clear plan for eventually withdrawing most U.S. troops from Iraq?

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/13/04	32	64	4

14. Do you think the war with Iraq has or has not contributed to the long-term security of the United States? IF YES: Has it contributed to the long-term security of the United States a great deal, or somewhat?

	-----Contributed-----			Has	No
	NET	Great deal	Somewhat	not	opin.
3/13/05	52	29	23	46	2
1/16/05	50	30	21	47	3
12/19/04	51	27	23	46	4
10/3/04 LV	53	32	22	42	4
9/26/04 LV	54	36	18	43	3
RV	54	36	18	42	4
9/8/04 RV	57	36	22	40	3
8/29/04 RV	54	33	20	42	4
7/25/04	51	32	19	45	3
6/20/04	51	28	23	46	2
5/23/04	54	30	24	43	3
4/18/04	57	33	24	40	3
3/7/04	57	29	29	40	3
2/11/04	58	32	26	38	4
1/18/04	59	34	25	38	3
12/21/03	62	34	29	34	4
7/10/03*	62	33	29	35	3

*"did or did not"

15. Do you think the number of U.S. military forces in Iraq should be (increased), (decreased), or kept about the same?

	Increased	Decreased	Kept about the same	No opinion
3/13/05	15	44	37	4

16. (IF DECREASED, Q15) Should all U.S. forces in Iraq be withdrawn immediately, or should they be decreased, but not all withdrawn immediately?

	Withdrawn immediately	Decreased but not withdrawn immediately	No opinion
3/13/05	27	72	1

15/16 NET. Do you think the number of U.S. military forces in Iraq should be (increased), (decreased), or kept about the same? (IF DECREASED) Should all U.S. forces in Iraq be withdrawn immediately, or should they be decreased, but not all withdrawn immediately?

	Increased	NET	-----Decreased----- Withdrawn	Not withdrawn	DK	Kept about the same	No op.
3/13/05	15	44	12	31	1	37	4

17. Do you think the United States (has gotten bogged down in Iraq), or do you think the United States (is making good progress in Iraq)?

	Has gotten bogged down	Is making good progress	No opinion
3/13/05	54	43	4
10/3/04 LV	58	38	4
9/26/04 LV	59	37	4
RV	60	36	4
9/8/04 RV	54	40	6
5/23/04	65	33	2
5/6/04	60	35	5
4/18/04	59	41	0

18. Do you think the war in Iraq has left the United States in a stronger position in the world, a weaker position, or hasn't it made much difference to the U.S position in the world?

	Stronger	Weaker	No difference	No opinion
3/13/05	28	41	30	1
4/18/04	29	35	36	0
4/9/03*	52	12	31	5
Persian Gulf War:				
3/4/91	84	3	13	1

*4/9/03 and previous: "Do you think the war will leave the United States..."

19. Considering everything, do you think most of the Iraqi people support or oppose what the United States is trying to do in Iraq?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
3/13/05	54	39	7

20a. (HALF SAMPLE) As a result of the war, do you think the Iraqi people are (better off) or (worse off) now than they were before the U.S-led invasion of Iraq?

	Better	Worse	No difference	No opinion
3/13/05	67	25	4	4

20b. (HALF SAMPLE) In the long run, do you think the Iraqi people will be (better off) or (worse off) as a result of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq?

	Better	Worse	No difference	No opinion
3/13/05	74	18	4	4

21a. (HALF SAMPLE) How confident are you that the elections held in Iraq this past January will produce a stable government that can rule Iraq effectively - very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not confident at all?

	-----Confident-----			-----Not confident----			No opin.
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	At all	
3/13/05	56	11	44	43	29	14	1
1/16/05*	42	6	36	57	29	27	1
12/19/04	44	6	38	54	29	25	2

*1/16/05 and previous: "that these elections will produce"

21b. (HALF SAMPLE) Do you think the elections held in Iraq this past January did or did not bring the United States closer to the day U.S. forces can be withdrawn from Iraq?

	Did	Did not	No opinion
3/13/05	61	36	3
1/16/05*	57	39	4

*"Do you think holding these elections will or will not bring"

22. As a result of the war, do you think the chances that democracy will spread in the Middle East are better, worse or unchanged?

	Better	Worse	Unchanged	No opinion
3/13/05	44	9	45	3

23. Before the war, do you think Iraq did or did not provide direct support to the Al Qaeda terrorist group? IF YES: (Is that your suspicion only), or (do you think there's been solid evidence of that)?

	-----Provided Support-----			Iraq did not provide support	No op.
	NET	Suspicion only	Solid evidence		
3/13/05	61	39	21	30	10
6/20/04	62	38	23	33	6

Compare to: Do you think Iraq has or has not provided direct support to the Al Qaeda terrorist group?

	Provided support	Not provided support	No opinion
1/28/03	68	17	15

24. Shortly before the war, do you think Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction that have not been found, or do you think Iraq did not have any weapons of mass destruction?

	Did have weapons	Did not have weapons	No opinion
3/13/05	56	40	4
2/11/04*	61	33	5

*"Shortly before the war" not included

25. In making its case for war with Iraq, do you think the Bush administration (told the American public what it believed to be true), or (intentionally misled the American public)?

	Told the American public what it believed to be true	Intentionally misled the American public	No opin.
3/13/05	55	43	2
8/29/04 RV	57	40	3
7/25/04	55	42	3

26. Do you think the U.S. experience in Iraq will make the Bush administration more likely or less likely to use military force to resolve disputes with other countries, or don't you think it has made a difference? If more/less: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

	---More likely---			---Less likely---			No diff.	Depends (vol.)	No op.
	NET	Good	Bad	NET	Bad	Good			
3/13/05	34	12	22	20	5	15	42	1	3

27. Considering everything, do you think the United States did the right thing in going to war with Iraq or do you think it was a mistake?

	Right thing	Mistake	No opin.
3/13/05	48	51	1
4/18/04	52	46	1
4/9/03	81	16	3
3/27/03	69	26	5

Serbia:

6/10/99	55	41	4
6/6/99*	48	47	5
5/16/99	54	42	3
4/26/99	56	41	2
4/6/99	58	40	2

*Washington Post

Compare to: Do you think the United States made a mistake in sending military forces to Afghanistan, or not?

	Not a mistake	Mistake	No opin.
1/9/02*	93	6	1
11/11/01*	89	9	2

Yugoslavia*

6/5/99	53	43	4
4/21/99	51	42	7

Persian Gulf*

7/21/91	82	15	3
3/3/91	87	10	3
2/10/91	76	21	3
2/2/91	80	18	2
1/26/91	77	18	5
1/20/91	80	16	4
1/13/91	65	29	6
1/6/91	61	30	9
12/9/90	66	28	6
12/2/90	66	29	5
11/18/90	65	27	8

11/11/90	68	27	5
11/4/90	67	25	8
10/28/90	71	24	5
10/21/90	67	26	7
10/14/90	68	27	5
10/4/90	71	21	8
9/30/90	73	20	7
9/16/90	73	18	10
9/11/90	76	19	5
9/2/90	76	16	8
8/26/90	76	18	6
8/19/90	75	17	8

Vietnam*

11/15/00	24	69	7
4/24/95	23	71	6
3/18/90	22	74	4
1/15/73	29	60	11
5/17/71	28	61	11
1/11/71	31	60	9
5/26/70	36	56	8
4/7/70	34	51	15
1/20/70	32	57	11
9/22/69	32	58	10
1/28/69	39	52	9
10/1/68	37	54	9
8/12/68	35	53	12
4/9/68	40	48	12
2/27/68	42	49	9
2/6/68	42	46	12
12/12/67	46	45	9
10/11/67	44	47	9
7/18/67	48	41	11
4/24/67	50	37	13
1/31/67	52	32	16
11/15/66	52	31	17
9/13/66	48	35	17
5/10/66	49	36	15
3/8/66	59	26	15
9/1/65	60	24	16

Korea*

6/7/00	47	34	19
1/16/53	50	36	14
10/22/52	37	43	19
10/14/52	37	43	20
3/5/52	35	51	14
8/8/51	48	42	11
6/21/51	40	43	17
4/21/51	45	37	18
3/31/51	43	45	12
2/9/51	41	49	9
1/5/51	38	49	13
8/25/50	65	20	15

*Gallup; various wordings

28. On another subject: For each country I name, please tell me whether you think it does or does not pose a threat to the United States. IF YES: Would you say it's a serious threat, or not serious?

	-----Yes-----			No threat	No opinion
	NET	Serious	Not		
a. Syria	43	22	21	48	9
b. North Korea	74	54	20	23	3
c. Iran	62	39	23	35	3

Trend:

a. Syria

	-----Yes-----			No threat	No opinion
	NET	Serious	Not		
3/13/05	43	22	21	48	9
4/16/03	65	36	29	31	4

b. North Korea

	-----Yes-----			No threat	No opinion
	NET	Serious	Not		
3/13/05	74	54	20	23	3
4/16/03	79	55	24	18	3

c. No trend.

Compare to: Do you think Iraq does or does not pose a threat to the United States?

	Does	Does not	No opin.
3/9/03	79	19	2
1/27/03	81	16	3
12/15/02	81	17	2
8/11/02	79	16	5

29a. (HALF SAMPLE) To prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, would you support or oppose:

3/13/05 - Summary Table

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
a. Offering it financial incentives such as aid money, or more trade	44	53	3
b. Bombing Iranian military targets	30	64	6
c. Invading with U.S. forces to remove the Iranian government from power	26	69	5

29b. (HALF SAMPLE) To get North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons, would you support or oppose:

3/13/05 - Summary Table

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
a. Offering it financial incentives such as aid money, or more trade	51	47	2
b. Bombing North Korean military targets	20	77	3
c. Invading with U.S. forces to remove the North Korean government from power	18	78	4

30-34 Held for release.

35 Previously released.

36-42 Held for release.

*****END*****