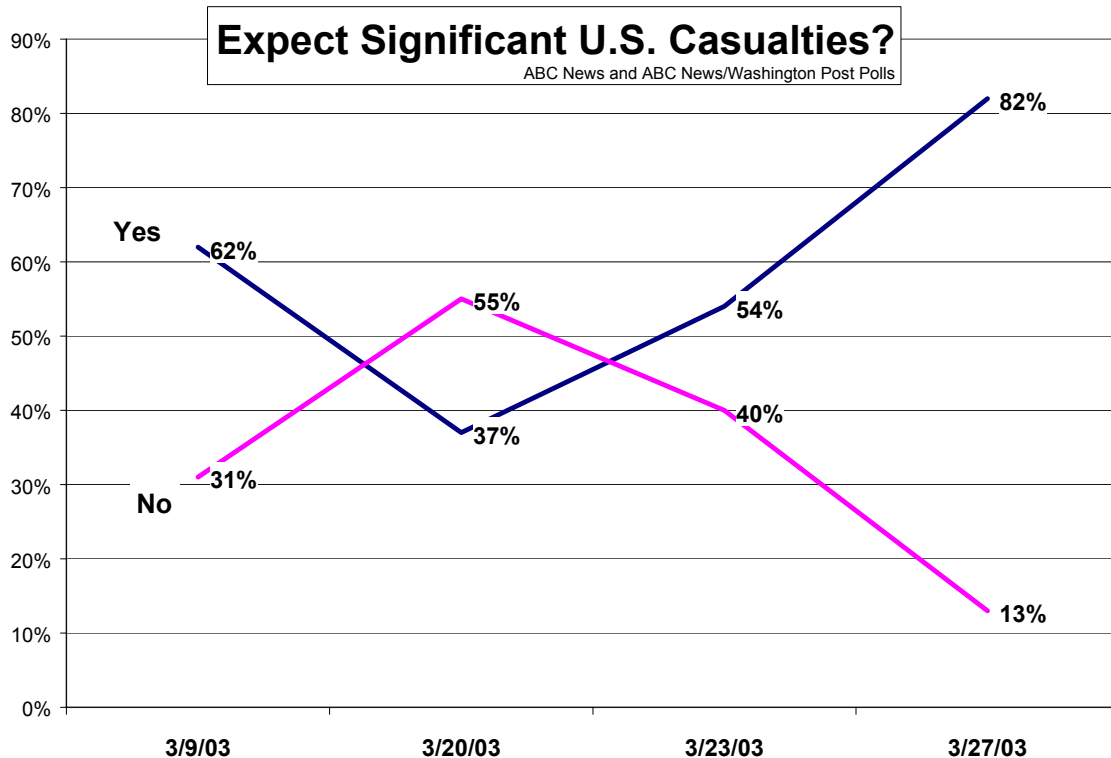


Support for War With Iraq Holds Fast Even as Expectations of Casualties Soar

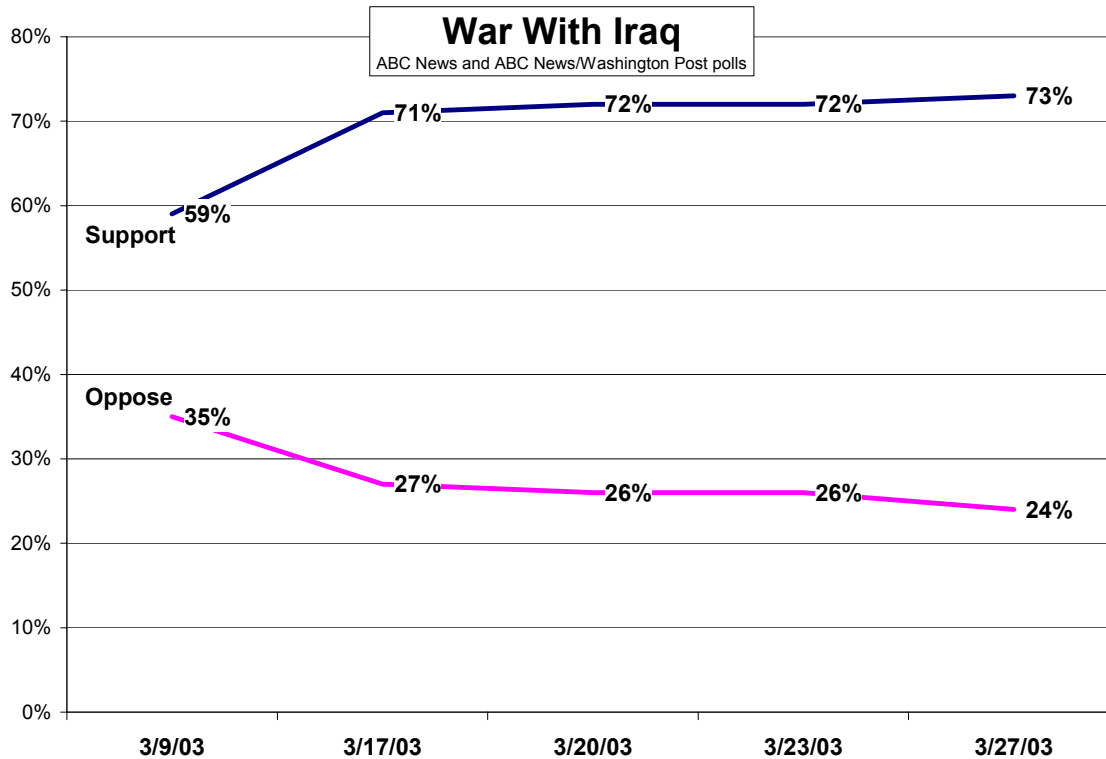
Expectations of high U.S. casualties have skyrocketed, and there's been a jump in the number of Americans who say Iraqi resistance is tougher than they expected. But in a display of resolve, public support for the war with Iraq remains strong and stable.

Eighty-two percent expect substantial U.S. military casualties in this war, a number that's shot up from 37 percent the night of March 20, when a burst of optimism marked the war's start. Expectations of casualties now exceed their pre-war levels.



Fewer Americans – 28 percent – say the Iraqi resistance is tougher than they expected, but this too is up, from 12 percent Sunday night. And 70 percent of Americans now expect the war to last for months or longer, up from 55 percent last week.

Nonetheless, 73 percent in this ABC News/Washington Post poll support the war, essentially unchanged since last week. And 58 percent support it strongly, well up from the pre-war levels of “strong” support, despite the re-evaluation of likely casualties.



Another result is worth watching as a gauge of the potential impact of casualties on public opinion. Thinking about the war's goals versus its costs, 58 percent of Americans call the number of U.S. casualties to date "acceptable." But 34 percent call them "unacceptable," and 9 percent are unsure.

It's an important measure because, among Americans who call the level of casualties "unacceptable," support for the war is nearly 30 points lower, and support for George W. Bush's handling of the situation is nearly 40 points lower.

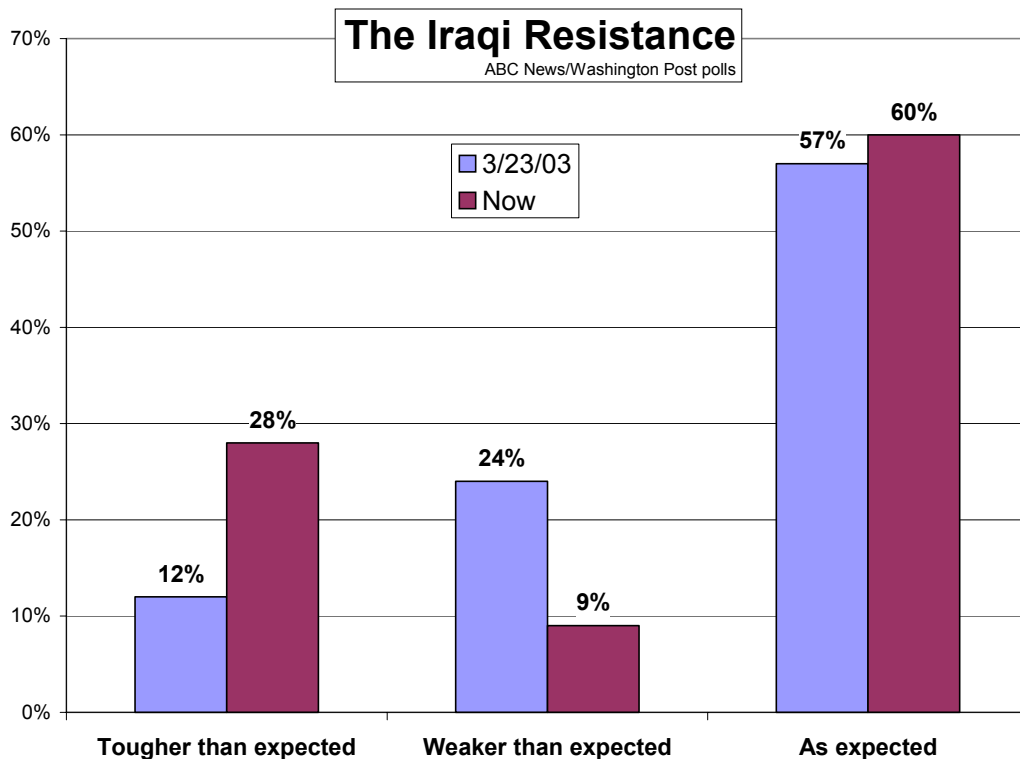
Support for the war

- ...among those who call current casualties "acceptable": 85%
- ...among those who call current casualties "unacceptable": 56%

Approval of Bush's handling of the Iraq situation

- ...among those who call current casualties "acceptable": 84%
- ...among those who call current casualties "unacceptable": 45%

In another revealing measure, 58 percent call it unlikely that the United States will get "bogged down in a drawn-out war," while 39 percent see some likelihood of this (including 14 percent who call it "very" likely). Again support for the war, and for Bush, are much lower among people who think a drawn-out entanglement is likely.



HOW IT'S GOING – All the same this poll finds little second-guessing. Eighty-two percent say the war is going well, 34 percent say it's going "very" well, and 69 percent approve of Bush's handling of the situation, all essentially unchanged from Sunday.

Sixty-nine percent also say that, considering everything, the United States "did the right thing" in going to war with Iraq, while 26 percent, instead, call it a mistake.

In comparable but not identical questions, the number of Americans saying war was "a mistake" has ranged as high as 61 percent during the Vietnam conflict, 51 percent during the Korean war and 43 percent during the war in Serbia, all in Gallup polls.

A Pew Center poll last Friday night had 71 percent saying the war was going "very well," another example of the short-lived burst of optimism that accompanied its start, when, among other factors, there was speculation Saddam Hussein had been killed or the Iraqi leadership decimated in a "decapitation" raid.

But that kind of assessment isn't the norm. In previous ABC/Post polls the number of Americans who said the war in Afghanistan was going "very" well ranged from just 23 to 42 percent. And on the war on terrorism it's ranged from 10 to 32 percent – both more in line with today's 34 percent.

LENGTH – Most Americans never have expected a very short war. Last Thursday 39 percent thought it would be over in days or weeks; that declined to 32 percent Sunday

and 26 percent now. Fifty-seven percent think it'll last for months; 13 percent, a year or more.

Support for the war is essentially stable among those who think it'll last days, weeks or months; it only declines among those who think it will last a year or longer.

ABOUT RIGHT – Majorities are not inclined to criticize either the administration or the military across a range of measures, from the aggressiveness of the campaign to efforts to avoid civilian casualties and distribute humanitarian aid.

About six in 10, for example, say the aggressiveness of U.S. efforts in both the air war and the ground war in Iraq is “about right,” though about three in 10 would prefer a more aggressive approach. About two-thirds also say the level of U.S. efforts to avoid civilian casualties and to distribute humanitarian aid are “about right,” with the rest roughly divided on whether the United States is doing too much, or too little, in these areas.

When it comes to rebuilding Iraq and helping its people establish a new government after the war, Americans look eager for help: by 2-1 the public says it would prefer to have the United Nations, not the United States, take the lead role. That fits with the public's basic view of the war as a means of self-defense, rather than an exercise in nation-building.

IRAQIS – As far as the Iraqi people go, more Americans are inclined to think they're on the United States' side in this war, but it's not an overwhelming perception. Forty-nine percent think most Iraqis are on the side of the United States; 34 percent think they take Saddam Hussein's side. A substantial 17 percent are unsure.

People who support the war are 35 points more likely than war opponents to think that most Iraqis take the United States' side.

PARTISANSHIP – Sharp partisanship remains in this poll. Democrats divide evenly on whether the war was the right thing to do, or a mistake, by 49-47 percent. Republicans by contrast call it the right thing by a nearly unanimous 90-6 percent. And 91 percent of Republicans support the war, compared to 59 percent of Democrats.

But there's less of a gender gap than in the past. Before the war, women were about 20 points less likely than men to support going to war. That eased to 10 or 12 points after the war began, and in this poll it's down to single digits.

Lastly, in a domestic issue, Americans by a broad 65-29 percent support the Senate vote to more than halve Bush's proposed tax cut, from \$726 billion to \$350 billion over 10 years, to help pay for the war, trim the deficit and shore up Social Security. But fewer than half as many – three in 10 – would eliminate the tax cut entirely.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 27, 2003, among a random national sample of 508 adults. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the situation with Iraq and Saddam Hussein?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
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

2. Do you support or oppose the United States having gone to war with Iraq? Do you support/oppose it strongly or only somewhat?

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	No op.
3/27/03	73	58	16	24	16	8	3
3/23/03	72	55	17	26	16	10	2
3/20/03	72	53	19	26	18	8	2
3/17/03*	71	54	16	27	19	8	3
3/9/03	59	40	19	35	21	14	6

*3/17/03 and previous: Would you support or oppose the United States going to war with Iraq?

3. How would you say the war is going for the United States and its allies: very well, fairly well, not too well or not well at all?

	-----Well-----			-----Not well-----			No opin.
	NET	Very	Fairly	NET	Not too	At all	
3/27/03	82	34	49	13	9	5	4
3/23/03	84	35	50	10	6	4	6
Afghanistan:							
3/10/02	85	24	61	14	10	3	1
11/27/01	93	42	51	5	3	2	2
11/6/01	85	23	62	12	8	4	3

Campaign against terrorism:

9/26/02	73	15	58	26	17	9	1
9/8/02	70	10	60	29	21	8	1
7/15/02	75	15	60	24	16	8	1
4/21/02	73	11	63	26	17	9	1
3/10/02	84	21	63	15	10	6	1
1/27/02	88	32	56	11	8	4	1

4. (HALF SAMPLE) In carrying out the ground war, do you think the United States military is being too aggressive, not aggressive enough, or about right?

	Too aggressive	Not aggressive enough	About right	No opinion
3/27/03	5	30	62	3

5. (HALF SAMPLE) In carrying out the air war, do you think the United States military is being too aggressive, not aggressive enough, or about right?

	Too aggressive	Not aggressive enough	About right	No opinion
3/27/03	4	28	61	8

6. Is the Iraqi resistance tougher than you expected, weaker than you expected, or about what you expected it to be?

	Tougher	Weaker	Expected	No opinion
3/27/03	28	9	60	3
3/23/03	12	24	57	6

7. Just your best guess, how much longer do you think the war with Iraq will last - days, weeks, months, about a year, or longer than that?

	Days	Weeks	Months	Year	Longer	No opin.
3/27/03	2	23	57	7	6	5
3/23/03*	3	29	45	11	7	5
3/20/03	8	31	37	8	10	5
3/23 and previous: "How long"						

8. Thinking about the goals versus the costs of this 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
3/27/03	58	34	9

9. Do you think there will or will not be a significant number of additional U.S. military casualties in the war with Iraq?

	Yes, will	No, will not	No opinion
3/27/03*	82	13	5
3/23/03	54	40	6
3/20/03	37	55	8
3/9/03**	62	31	7
2/1/03	65	31	4

*3/27: added word "additional"

**3/9/03 and previous: "would or would not be"

10. In its efforts to try to avoid civilian casualties in Iraq, do you think the United States is doing too much, too little, or about the right amount?

	Too much	Too little	Right amount	No opinion
3/27/03	16	12	68	4

11. In its efforts to provide humanitarian aid like food, water and medical supplies to the people of Iraq, do you think the United States is doing too much, too little, or about the right amount?

	Too much	Too little	Right amount	No opinion
3/27/03	12	16	67	5

12. (IF TOO LITTLE, Q11) Whose fault do you think that is - the United States', or the Iraqi military's?

	United States	Iraqi military	Neither (vol.)	Both (vol.)	No opinion
3/27/03	33	48	4	12	4

13. What do you think are the chances the United States will get bogged down in a drawn-out war in Iraq - do you think that's very likely, fairly likely, fairly unlikely or very unlikely?

	-----Likely-----			-----Unlikely-----			No
	NET	Very	Fairly	NET	Fairly	Very	opin.
3/27/03	39	14	25	58	31	27	3

14. Just your best guess, in this war do you think most of the people of Iraq are on Saddam Hussein's side, or the United States' side?

	Saddam Hussein	United States	No opinion
3/27/03	34	49	17

15. As you may know, Bush has proposed a 726 billion dollar tax cut over the next 10 years. The Senate has voted to reduce that to 350 billion dollars in order to help pay for the war, reduce the deficit and shore up the Social Security fund. Do you support or oppose this reduction in Bush's proposed tax cut?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
3/27/03	65	29	6

16. (IF SUPPORT, Q15) Would you support or oppose eliminating the tax cut entirely?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
3/27/03	45	50	5

17. Who do you think should take the leading role in rebuilding Iraq and helping its people set up a new government there after the war - the United States or the United Nations?

	United States	United Nations	Neither (vol.)	Both (vol.)	No opinion
3/27/03	31	61	3	3	2

18. 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.
3/27/03	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?

	Yes	No	No opin.
1/9/02*	6	93	1
11/11/01*	9	89	2

Yugoslavia*

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

Persian Gulf*

7/21/91	15	82	3
3/3/91	10	87	3
2/10/91	21	76	3
2/2/91	18	80	2
1/26/91	18	77	5
1/20/91	16	80	4
1/13/91	29	65	6
1/6/91	30	61	9
12/9/90	28	66	6
12/2/90	29	66	5
11/18/90	27	65	8
11/11/90	27	68	5
11/4/90	25	67	8
10/28/90	24	71	5
10/21/90	26	67	7
10/14/90	27	68	5
10/4/90	21	71	8
9/30/90	20	73	7
9/16/90	18	73	10
9/11/90	19	76	5
9/2/90	16	76	8
8/26/90	18	76	6
8/19/90	17	75	8

Vietnam*

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

12/12/67	45	46	9
10/11/67	47	44	9
7/18/67	41	48	11
4/24/67	37	50	13
1/31/67	32	52	16
11/15/66	31	52	17
9/13/66	35	48	17
5/10/66	36	49	15
3/8/66	26	59	15
9/1/65	24	60	16

Korea*

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

*Gallup; various wordings

END