

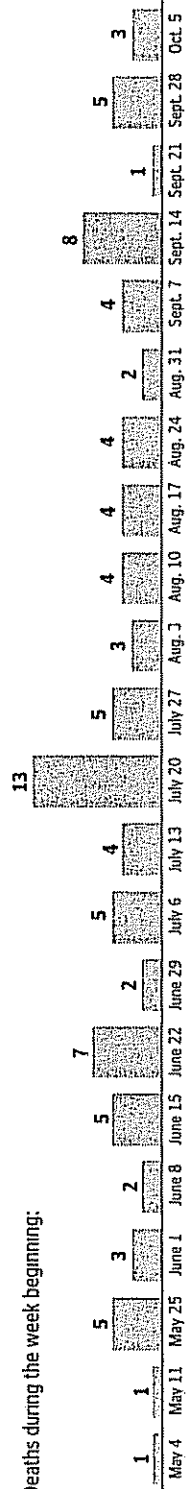
WORLD NEWS

THE WASHINGTON POST

## Deaths in Iraq

*The deaths of three U.S. soldiers in Iraq on Monday brought to a total of 91 the number of military personnel killed in hostile action there since President Bush declared on May 1 that major combat was over.*

Deaths during the week beginning:



SOURCE: Defense Department

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# CASUALTIES AND CONSENSUS

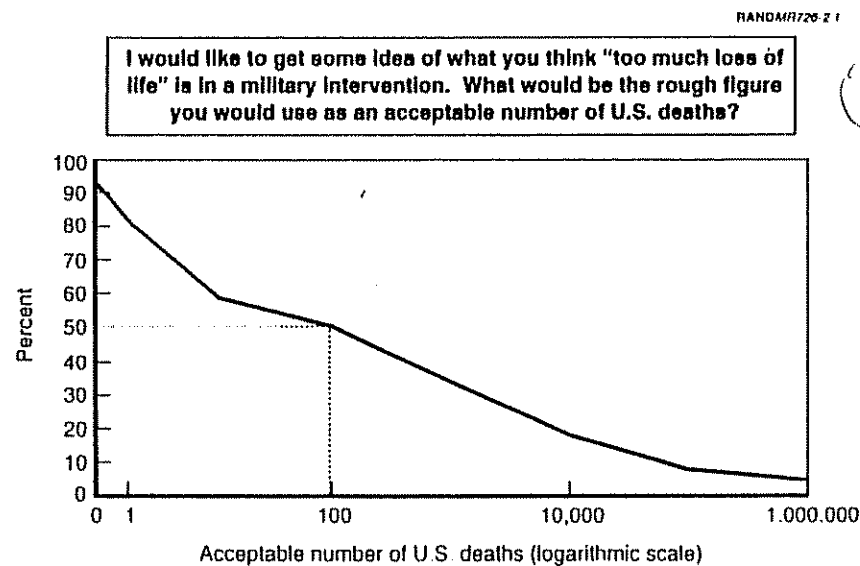
*The Historical Role of  
Casualties in Domestic Support for  
U.S. Military Operations*

ERIC V. LARSON

RAND

cal generic U.S. military intervention.<sup>3</sup> It shows that, as the hypothetical costs in lives increase, fewer respondents find the number of deaths in the intervention to be acceptable. The median respondent (at the 50th percentile) found 100 U.S. deaths due to hostile action to be the acceptable limit in casualties.

The figure is of questionable use to us, however: It offers no context whatsoever in terms of the intervention's objectives or prospects for



SOURCE: Americans Talk Issues, June 23–July 1, 1991.

NOTE: See Table A 1 in the appendix for the data from this question

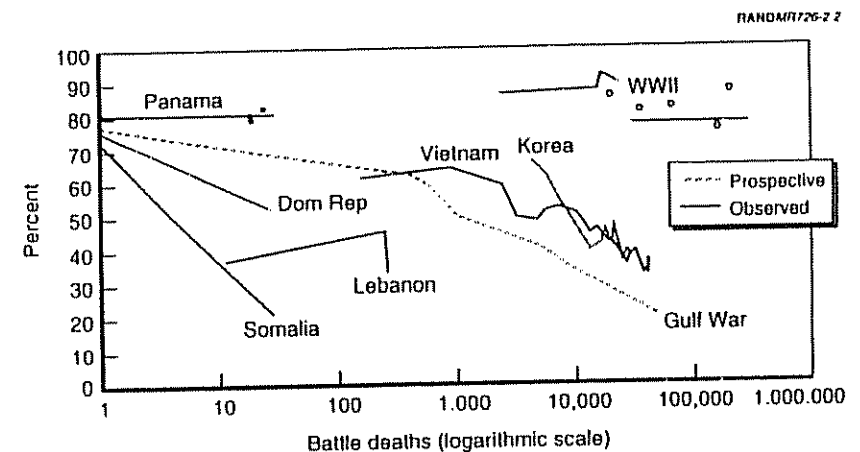
Figure 2.1—Support as a Function of U.S. Battle Deaths

<sup>3</sup>The reader should note that the figure, the first of many such figures, uses a logarithmic scale for the x-axis, which suggests more sensitivity to early casualties than later ones. Mueller (1973) found that the logarithms of casualties in the Korean and Vietnam wars were better predictors of support than the raw casualties because the decline in support was steeper in the earlier part of the wars and slower toward the end, and speculated that this was typical of support for such limited and distant wars. As will be seen in the case studies, it appears that this intuition was well-founded; the log of the casualties seems to explain rather well the declining support for many other operations. See Mueller (1973), pp. 35–37 and 266.

success or of any other characteristic that describes the U.S. stakes that are engaged. In fact, there have been many U.S. military interventions, some of which were found to be unacceptable with far fewer than 100 deaths, and some of which were found to be acceptable with far more—what are the patterns in the data for actual U.S. military interventions?

Figure 2.2 plots observed support for a number of actual military conflicts—and prospective support for one other (the Gulf War)—as a function of casualties.<sup>4</sup>

The figure leads to two important insights. First, the rate of decline as a function of casualties varies dramatically from operation to operation. For example, judged by the two time series and the other data for the war, support hardly declined in the Second World War,



NOTE: The wording of the questions and the data for the figure are documented in the appendix.

Figure 2.2—Support as a Function of U.S. Battle Deaths for the Cases Analyzed

<sup>4</sup>The reader will note that the casualty data are presented on a log scale to facilitate comparison of the cases; this understates the differences in the slopes of the low- and high-casualty operations.

while support declined rather precipitously in Somalia, losing about 30 percentage points for each increase by a factor of ten in deaths due to hostile action.

Second, the figure does not suggest a high tolerance for casualties in the past and a low tolerance in the present. For example, the curve for the Gulf War, representing prospective support given various hypothesized casualty levels, does not look terribly different from observed support as a function of casualties in Korea (1950–1953) or Vietnam (1965–1973).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the intervention in Somalia (1992–1994) does not look all that different from the Dominican intervention (1965)—both showed rather steeper rates of decline as casualties grew. Lebanon (1982–1984) is an interesting case in which only a hard-core minority ever supported the operation.<sup>6</sup> There is clearly something at work here that bears closer examination.

### A SIMPLE WEIGHING OF ENDS AND MEANS

The relationship between support and casualties can perhaps best be understood by thinking in terms of a simple model of ends and means in which leaders and members of the public determine their support on the basis of a few simple considerations:<sup>7</sup>

- *The perceived benefits of the intervention.* The greater the perceived stakes or interests and the more important the principles being promoted or the objectives being sought are, the higher the probability is that the intervention will be supported.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Those concerned about the comparison of data on prospective and observed support will be relieved to learn that not only were questions on prospective support as a function of casualties in the Vietnam War fairly good predictors of observed support, but the data for the Gulf War on prospective support as a function of casualties may actually have *underestimated* the public's tolerance for casualties in that war. This will be described in much greater detail later in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> The slight increase in support is a temporary "rally" following President Reagan's defense of Lebanon policy in the wake of the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut.

<sup>7</sup> Milstein (1974), Jentleson (1992), Kagay (1992), Mueller (1973 and 1994), Klarevas and O'Connor (1995), and Richman (1995) reach broadly compatible findings.

<sup>8</sup> The clarity of the stakes, interests, or objectives can often be an important determinant of support, although this is in fact somewhat more complicated than most realize. To be sure, clarity in the objectives of a military operation has become something

Furthermore, under certain circumstances, changes in objective or mission can, in theory, either decrease or increase the perceived benefits.<sup>9</sup>

- *The prospects for success.* The higher the probability that the intervention will successfully achieve its objectives, the higher the probability is that the intervention will be supported.
- *Prospective and actual costs.* The higher the prospective and actual costs, the lower the probability is that the intervention will be supported. This is because of the increasing costs themselves and the fact that higher-than-expected costs can signal that an operation is going worse than expected.<sup>10</sup>
- *Changing expectations.* Initial expectations provide an anchor or frame for evaluating subsequent developments, and events that shatter this frame in a dramatic fashion (e.g., the Chinese entry into Korea, the Tet offensive of early 1968) can lead to a revision of the ends-means calculus.<sup>11</sup> Initial expectations—about benefits, prospects for success, costs, and support from leaders—may prove to have been unrealistic or overly sanguine. In such a case, the situation can diverge from the initial expecta-

of a litmus test for support from political leaders. A failure to articulate clear objectives or a disconnection between the declaratory (or original) and perceived objectives (as in Somalia) can result in high levels of criticism from political leaders and in confusion and declining support in the public. Thus, uncertainty about the stakes, interests, or objectives *may* lead to a lack of clarity about the benefits of an intervention; to the extent that this uncertainty results in a discounting or undervaluation of the expected benefits, support will usually fall. But such a lack of precision about the stakes may also *increase* support, if that ambiguity results in drawing in supporters who expect either greater or different benefits. Criticisms that President Bush should have clarified whether the United States was going to war for the oil, the nuclear weapons, or the atrocities are apposite: The apparent credibility of each justification probably contributed to the overall high levels of support by drawing support from among different groups. Had the president settled on just one justification, support would likely have been lower.

<sup>9</sup> In the Korean War, for example, reunification of the Korean peninsula offered more benefits than a return to the status quo ante.

<sup>10</sup> I agree with Mueller (1973, pp. 62–63) that casualties are a good composite indicator of the intensity and costs of an operation and that, in many cases, the public may remain unaware of the precise number of battle deaths. As will be seen, however, the public opinion data that are available often show a public that has a reasonably accurate grasp of the number of deaths that have been incurred.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Kagay (1992, pp. 111–112) describes the importance of expectations—in his word, *contingencies*—in the Gulf War.

tions, and cognitive dissonance, anxiety, or an urge to reevaluate the balancing of ends and means may result. When events turn out better than expected, of course, there is little reason for anxiety and much reason to applaud the outcome.<sup>12</sup>

- *The nature and depth of support for the intervention among the other actors.* Political leaders and members of the public are mutually influencing and constraining, and the broader and deeper the support of the other actors, the higher the probability is that an actor (e.g., member of the public, Congress) will support the intervention.<sup>13</sup>

In short, support can be thought of as a constant rebalancing of the benefits and prospects for success against the likely and actual costs—and a determination of whether the outcome is judged worth the costs—all informed by leaders and experts.<sup>14</sup> As new events occur or objective conditions change, they are interpreted by political leaders and experts, and the ends and means are reevaluated. Such a model, engendering both normative and pragmatic considerations, clearly has a great deal of intuitive appeal, but why should we believe that this is what is at work?

First, as a practical matter, U.S. military operations are typically explained and justified both in normative terms—stressing the importance of the principles and interests that are at stake—and pragmatic terms—stressing the good prospects and reasonable costs of the intervention. Such a framework captures both the “operational code” of political leaders and the enduring concerns of the public.

<sup>12</sup>Brody (1991)

<sup>13</sup>For example, members of the public rely extensively upon opinion leaders (the president, congressional and other leaders, and experts) to interpret and clarify events and choices and to inform their own opinions on the intervention. The president, on the other hand, gauges the attitudes of the public and Congress to determine what policies are politically feasible. Members of Congress (and the media) may gauge the receptiveness of the public to opposition arguments. The role of leadership and consensus or dissensus among leaders will be examined in Chapter Four.

<sup>14</sup>Documentation of other efforts to relate support for U.S. military operations to other factors can be found in Russett and Nincic (1976), Jentleson (1992), Klarevas and O'Connor (1995), and Richman (1995).

Second, a focus on the particular objectives of the operation and the perceptions of the principles and interests that are engaged establishes a connection between the objectives of a given operation and the larger purposes it is promoting.<sup>15</sup> A focus on principles (the mantra of the idealist school of American foreign policy) and interests (the mantra of the realists) offers a degree of simplification without unduly sacrificing analytic power. Because each school is more closely associated with a particular ideology and party (idealism with liberalism and the Democratic party, realism with conservatism and the Republican party), this focus also offers a sensible framework for examining subgroups that are likely to differ in their evaluations of a military operation.<sup>16</sup>

Third, such a framework is convenient for the simple reason that public opinion data are usually available. For example, a wealth of available data that describes elite and public views on foreign policy goals and vital interests evidences a high degree of stability over time in public and leadership perceptions, a high degree of consistency between opinion leaders and members of the mass public, and an observed relationship between benefits and support for military operations.<sup>17</sup>

What follows then describes the cases through the lens of this simple metaphor of an ends-means calculus. As will be seen, the factors

<sup>15</sup>Jentleson (1992), for example, notes typically lower levels of support for efforts to “remake” the governments of other countries than to “restrain” undesirable external aggression. This is consistent with data from the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) surveys that show that, typically, only about one in three views the foreign-policy goal of promoting democracy as very important.

<sup>16</sup>The above framework in no way suggests that all members of the public evaluate benefits, prospects, and costs—or follow leaders—in an identical fashion. Indeed, as will be seen, a great deal of evidence suggests that they do not.

<sup>17</sup>A simple correlation analysis of the quadrennial surveys of the 1970–1994 CCFR revealed high survey-to-survey correlations for both the public and the leaders. Nincic (1992) makes a somewhat similar observation regarding the continuity over time in these data. Similarly high correlations were found between the public and the leaders in any given survey year. While members of the public are *less inclined* than leaders to see many countries as vital interests or foreign-policy goals as being very important, both groups' overall *structures* or *rankings* of vital interests and foreign policy goals were highly correlated. See Russett and Nincic (1976) and Rielly (1995). Richman (1995) also includes benefits in his “calculus” of support; Klarevas and O'Connor (1994) find that the “justifications” offered and the expected and actual costs are important in support.

that can affect support for wars and military operations have changed little in many important respects in the last 50 years.

## WORLD WAR II

Following Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declaration of war, public support for the Second World War remained high over the course of the war, as can be seen in Figure 2.3.<sup>18</sup>

### Perceived Stakes and Benefits

In the Second World War—the “good war”—the public had an excellent cause. Of course, Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and Germany’s declaration of war on the United States contributed greatly to support for U.S. entry into the war. But support also derived from the shared perception of important stakes and vast benefits of eliminating a grave threat to U.S. security and from optimism that the outcome would be a decisive victory and punishment of the Axis powers. For many, the aims of defeating fascism and constructing international organizations to better assure peace meant the war also promoted a number of important liberal internationalist principles.<sup>19</sup>

Although the importance of the stakes had become clear to most of the public even before the war, it may actually have increased over

<sup>18</sup>Data on the Second World War are from Cantril and Strunk (1951), Campbell and Cain (1965), Erskine (1970), and Gallup (1972). Good analyses of public opinion data on the war can be found in Cantril (1947), Page and Shapiro (1992), and O’Neill (1993). One of the reviewers of this report suggested that comparisons of the Second World War with more recent operations must rest on a fragile foundation because of the thinness of the data on World War II, and because the war represented a transitional period in the country’s international role. While both points are well taken, I have decided to leave this case study in the report, to show that even these public opinion data from an earlier era are *entirely consistent with* a model of ends and means, as just described. Page and Shapiro (1992) also examine the Second World War and the Korean and Vietnam wars and find “a rational public” responding to objective conditions and events, and leadership.

<sup>19</sup>Seventy-four percent had heard the phrase “United Nations” in July 1942, and 64 percent approved of the creation of a new league of nations after the war. NORC, July 1, 1942.

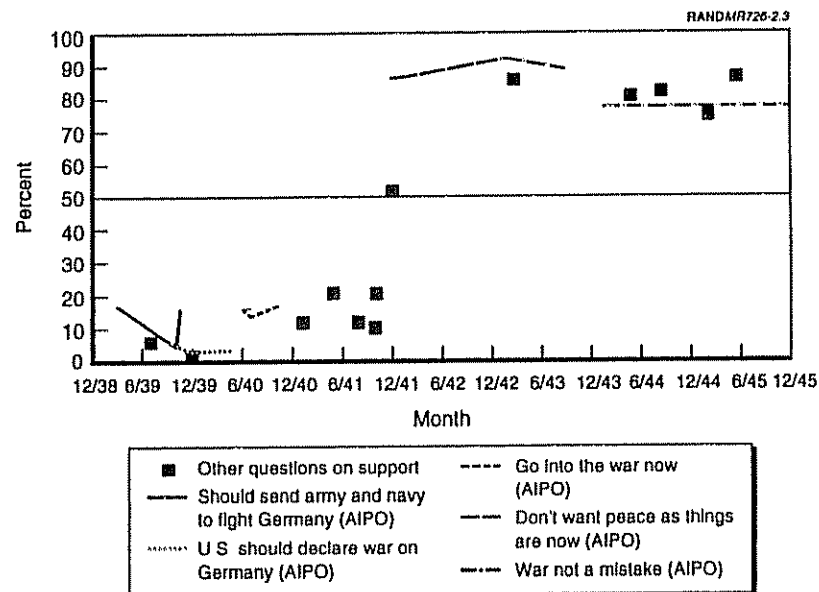


Figure 2.3—Support for the Second World War

the course of the war. By March 1942, the Office of Public Opinion Research (OPOR) found that 70 percent thought that, if Germany and Japan won the war, they would “keep their armies over here to police the United States”; by July 1942, OPOR found that 88 percent thought this outcome likely. Eighty-seven percent thought that if Germany won the war, it “would kill some of our business and political leaders,” and 91 percent thought that “most of us would have to work for the Nazis instead of ourselves.”<sup>20</sup>

Further contributing to support for the war was a desire for punishment as a consequence of the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor; such atrocities as the Bataan death march, reports of the Japanese torture of U.S. prisoners of war, and Germany’s holocaust; and the ferocious fighting in such battles as Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan,

<sup>20</sup>OPOR, March 26, 1942, and July 15, 1942. See Cantril and Strunk (1947).

Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the Allies' determination to seek an unconditional surrender rather than settling for a negotiated settlement offered the sort of victory most wanted: Support for unconditional surrender ranged from about 75 to 84 percent, and majorities favored severe punishment of the malefactors.<sup>22</sup> Finally, for many the prospects of a postwar world organization of United Nations promised a more effective collective security system than had prevailed in the pre-war years. In short, a host of strategic and moral arguments lay behind the U.S. prosecution of the war.<sup>23</sup>

### Prospects for Success

Also important in sustaining support, however, were the good (and improving) prospects for success. While victory may not have been in much doubt, expectations regarding the likely duration of the war were somewhat unstable and seemed to respond to events on the battlefield.<sup>24</sup> For example, those expecting a war of a year or less increased over the summer of 1943 (following successes in Tunisia and Sicily), fell over the winter of 1943, and then picked up again following Anzio in the spring and summer of 1944. By the fall of 1944—after the fall of Rome, the invasion of Normandy, and the liberation of Paris—fully 90 percent of those polled expected war with Germany to last a year or less.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>All of these factors contributed to the demonization of the Japanese and to a belief in their treachery and savagery. Dower (1987), p. 33.

<sup>22</sup>NORC, February 1944; AIPO, January 31, 1945, and February 20, 1945; and *Fortune*, June 1945. Nevertheless, Mueller (1973, p. 63) reports that 20 percent in early 1944 (when Hitler still held France) responded in the affirmative when asked: "If Hitler offered peace now to all countries on the basis of not going any further but leaving matters as they now are, would you favor or oppose such a peace?" By late 1944, 88 percent felt that Japanese leaders should be punished, with torture and death the preferred punishment. AIPO, November 17–22, 1944. In mid-1945, 45 percent thought Gestapo agents and storm troopers should meet a similar fate. AIPO, May 18–23, 1945.

<sup>23</sup>Nevertheless, Mueller (1973, pp. 63–64) reports that only 53 percent in June 1942 felt they had a clear idea of what the war was about, although this percentage increased.

<sup>24</sup>In July 1942, AIPO found that 87 percent of those polled thought that the Allies would win the war, and 66 percent expected a decisive victory. AIPO, July 29, 1942.

<sup>25</sup>AIPO and NORC.

### Expected and Actual Costs

Most expected a more costly war than the Great War had been, although in the first two years of the war, losses generally accumulated at a slow, but steady rate: A little over 50,000 of the 294,000 battle deaths that the United States suffered in the war were incurred before 1944.<sup>26</sup> The public opinion data from the Second World War furthermore show early evidence of public concern about U.S. casualties, with most wanting more information about the toll of the war.<sup>27</sup>

The Allied reliance on strategic bombing was in part an attempt to avoid the massive casualties experienced during the First World War. In fact, the public seemed cross-pressured between support for an airpower-dominant strategy and a desire to put U.S. ground forces on the European continent because of doubts that airpower alone would yield success.<sup>28</sup> By the late spring of 1945, a majority of the public thought that a deliberative approach to concluding the war in the Pacific would result in fewer casualties and expressed a prefer-

<sup>26</sup>Forty-five percent of those AIPO polled in June 1941 expected more soldiers and sailors killed in another world war than in the first, while 31 percent expected fewer. AIPO, June 26–July 1, 1941, in Gallup (1972), p. 289. The greatest losses of the Second World War in fact occurred in the European theater in 1944, a year that included operations in Anzio, Normandy, northern France, and the Battle of the Bulge.

<sup>27</sup>For example, when asked how they wanted the government to handle news of U.S. losses, 73 percent of those NORC polled in December 1941 said that they wanted the government to "release news about such losses as soon as they are confirmed, so long as the news doesn't actually help the enemy." NORC, December 24, 1941. Fifty-three percent of those NORC polled in October 1943 gave at least qualified approval for publishing "even stories and pictures showing how American soldiers are suffering and dying." NORC, October 2, 1943. And 56 percent of those AIPO polled in January 1944 said newspapers and newsreels "with men dead or wounded on battlefields" should be shown. AIPO, January 6–11, 1944. Nevertheless, the October 2, 1943 NORC poll revealed that only about 10 percent said that they had actually seen pictures of G.I.s suffering.

<sup>28</sup>NORC's August 13, 1942 poll asked respondents "[d]uring the next two or three months, do you think the Allies should concentrate on increasing their bombing attacks on Germany, or do you think they should try to land troops somewhere in Europe to attack Germany?" Forty-one percent wanted to increase bombing, while 39 percent wanted to land troops. The rather low support for an airpower-dominant strategy may have been due to doubts that airpower alone would result in the defeat of Germany. NORC's October 6, 1942 poll found that 60 percent believed that the Allies would have to invade the continent to defeat Germany, while 28 percent thought Germany could be defeated by increasing air attacks alone.

ence for such a casualty-minimizing strategy.<sup>29</sup> Viewing it as a tool for quickly concluding the war without an invasion of Japan, thereby saving U.S. lives, majorities also supported the use of the new atomic bomb.<sup>30</sup> A majority of the public also generally was aware of the final toll of the war: In October 1945, 87 percent correctly stated that the war had been more costly than the First World War, and the median respondent AIPO polled correctly estimated that the United States had suffered between 300,000 and 500,000 deaths in the war.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

While not entirely free of domestic discord, the Second World War was "good" in very many senses of the word—it involved a bipartisan consensus about vital interests, a moral cause, and the benefits of defeating Germany and Japan—and the consequences of failing to defeat them.<sup>32</sup> It also evidenced continued optimism about victory. There was demonstrable concern about casualties in the war, leading to support for casualty-minimizing strategies.<sup>33</sup> However, other factors mediated or tempered this concern, leading to rather robust

<sup>29</sup>Forty-three percent of those *Fortune* polled in June 1945 thought that "taking more time" would result in fewer casualties than "conquering in a hurry." *Fortune*, June 1945. Seventy-nine percent of those Gallup polled in May 1945 preferred "taking time and saving lives" over "ending the war quickly despite casualties" or "ending the war quickly and saving lives." AIPO, May 15, 1945. And 58 percent said that the United States should wait until the navy and air force "had beaten them down and starved them out" before invading the main Japanese homeland. AIPO, June 27, 1945.

<sup>30</sup>When *Fortune* asked how they felt about the use of the atomic bomb in September 1945, 54 percent said "we should have used two bombs on cities, just as we did," while another 23 percent said "we should have quickly used many more of them before Japan had a chance to surrender." Only 5 percent said that the United States should not have used them at all, while 14 percent thought that a demonstration should have been conducted before dropping such a bomb on a city. Mueller (1973), p. 172.

<sup>31</sup>AIPO, October 17, 1945 and U.S. Department of Defense data. In fact, the latter was a reasonably accurate estimate—the actual number was about 407,000, including about 292,000 battle-related deaths and about 115,000 other deaths. While 38 percent said that the number of killed and wounded had been more than what they had expected when the war was started, another 42 percent said that the war had been less costly than had been expected.

<sup>32</sup>See Mueller (1973), pp. 63, 65; and Stein (1980), pp. 40–47.

<sup>33</sup>It also led to occasional criticism when the death toll did not seem to be justified by a particular gain in territory (e.g., Tarawa).

support in the face of the increasing toll in war dead.<sup>34</sup> For most, the ends and means remained in balance.<sup>35</sup>

## THE KOREAN WAR

John Mueller's *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (Mueller, 1973) provides the definitive analysis of public opinion data for the Korean and Vietnam wars.<sup>36</sup> His analysis emphasized close attention to differences in question wording and to the importance of the context and timing of public opinion polling questions.<sup>37</sup> Figure 2.4 presents data on trends in support for the war.<sup>38</sup> It shows a rally in support following Inchon in September 1950, a sharp decline following the entry of the Chinese into the war in November of that year, and a slight recovery over the spring of 1951, where it bottomed out, declining more gradually thereafter.<sup>39</sup> Once the front lines were restabilized at the 38th parallel and truce talks had begun, a drawn-out stalemate punctuated by occasional combat characterized the situation on the ground.

<sup>34</sup>One estimate of the decline in support as a function of casualties was about two percentage points for each increase by a factor of ten in battle deaths.

<sup>35</sup>Indeed, to the extent that there were disagreements among political leaders over the war, they seem mostly to have been over mobilization, treatment of labor, and other domestic aspects of the war. See O'Neill (1993).

<sup>36</sup>In addition to Mueller (1973), good sources of public opinion data for the war are Gallup (1972), NORC, and the Roper Center's POLL database. Good analyses of the public opinion data on Korea are found in Mueller (1973), Belknap and Campbell (1951–1952), and Page and Shapiro (1992).

<sup>37</sup>For example, in terms of the presidential policy at the time or of dramatic developments on the battlefield or in political circles.

<sup>38</sup>The labels refer to the percentage taking a "pro" position on the public opinion questions found in Table 3.1 of Mueller (1973), pp. 45–47. Question wordings for the four series are as follows: Series A (AIPO): "Do you think the United States made a mistake in going into the war in Korea, or not?" Series B (NORC): "Do you think the United States was right or wrong in sending American troops to stop the Communist invasion of South Korea?" Series C (NORC): "As things stand now, do you feel that the war in Korea has been (was) worth fighting, or not?" Series D (Minnesota poll): "Looking back over the Korean War since it started last June (in June last year, last year, two years ago, in June of 1950) would you say now that you feel the United States (we) did the right thing in sending American forces to Korea?"

<sup>39</sup>The increase in support in late 1952 may have been due to President Eisenhower's election and his visit to Korea in December of that year; Eisenhower had promised to bring the war to an end.

Table 2.3  
Prospective Casualty Tolerance in Vietnam

Asked of a sample of leaders from San Jose, Calif., in Summer 1965: At what point do you believe the U.S. objectives are not worth the cost in casualties?

	Responding (percent)
Not worth the loss or injury of a single American	32
Last year's casualty rate—100/month	10
Last year's casualty rate adjusted to increased troop strength—250/month	22
The Korean War rate—4,300/month	20
World War II rate for the U.S.—24,230/month	8

SOURCE: Voth (1965).

Asked of a national sample: Would you approve of continuing the fighting if it meant several hundred American soldiers would be killed every week?

	Responding (percent)
Approve	38
Disapprove	54
Don't know	7

SOURCE: NORC No. 876-S (February 1966)

NOTE: Percentages are of categorizable responses.

like rates that fewer than four in ten had earlier indicated a willingness to accept—an overall casualty rate in the thousands, with several hundred dying each week. It is striking that, by some measures of support, only four in ten of those polled counted themselves as supporters of the war by the time the costs reached these levels.<sup>62</sup>

Lorell et al. (1985) provide confirmatory evidence that the war's costs had become too high for all but a minority. After reviewing a number of other studies that associated casualties with declining support for the Vietnam War, they reported public opinion data from the Harris organization that showed that casualties, especially war dead, had increasingly become the single most troubling aspect of the Vietnam

War.<sup>63</sup> By March 1969, the number of battle-related deaths had risen to over 34,000—the final toll of the Korean War—and nearly two out of three said they would have opposed the U.S. entry into the war if they had known the costs of that conflict.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

In Vietnam, the increasing costs came to be judged by majorities as being incommensurate with the expected benefits of the war and its prospects for success.<sup>65</sup> As in World War II and Korea, however, the role of casualties in eroding support appears to have been mediated or regulated by changing perceptions of the stakes or interests, progress in the war, and divisions among leaders.<sup>66</sup> Like Korea, in spite of growing misgivings on the part of leaders and the public about the growing costs of the war, presidents Johnson and Nixon were able to maintain grudging support for continuing the war until

<sup>63</sup>In July 1967, 31 percent volunteered "loss of our young men," "casualties," "loss of lives," or "killing" as the most troubling aspect of the war, and by March 1968—just after the Tet offensive—that percentage had risen to 44 percent. By comparison, only 12 percent in the July 1967 poll were most troubled that not enough progress was being made. By March 1968, 2 percent found the limitations on the war to be the most troubling aspect of the war, and 10 percent were most troubled by "too much politics," "no progress," "it's not a declared war," "why are we fighting?," or "all other responses." See also Mueller (1973), Milstein (1974), and Kernell (1978).

<sup>64</sup>In March 1969, Harris Survey No. 1926 asked: "If we had known the Vietnam war was going to involve the costs, the American casualties, and would last so long, would you have favored or opposed the U.S. going into the war back in 1961?" Twenty-six percent said they would have favored U.S. entry into the war, while 63 percent were opposed, and 11 percent were not sure.

<sup>65</sup>Lorell et al. (1985, p. 28) concluded:

The evidence presented above shows a strong link in both the Korean and Vietnam wars between casualties and the course of public opinion regarding the war. Although there is no altogether satisfactory way to disentangle the effects of casualties from the effects of other factors with which casualties may be associated, the link is not surprising. Common sense tells us that Americans don't like to see their fathers and sons dying, especially in long wars fought over unclear or limited objectives in distant corners of the world.

<sup>66</sup>The slope of the decline in support as a function of battle deaths ranged from -18.6 to -19.5, depending on the question used. Although he estimated the relationship between support and total casualties (killed, hospitalized, wounded, and missing), Mueller (1973) found a comparable result—support declined by about 15 points for each increase by a factor of ten in casualties.

<sup>62</sup>AIPO, March and April 1968 polls.



a negotiated settlement could be achieved, so long as the costs were minimized. This outcome will be explained in the next chapter.

## THE GULF WAR

There are many parallels between the Gulf War and the Korean War. The Gulf War began dramatically like Korea, with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.<sup>67</sup> The war involved important stakes, although none nearly as compelling as the containment of global communism. It also resulted in bipartisan support for the initial deployment of U.S. troops, in spite of the potential for combat. Unlike Korea, however, the Gulf War was a remarkable and swift success, achieving its objectives at costs far lower than most had expected. As can be seen in the Figure 2.6, it enjoyed high levels of support from the public.

### Perceived Stakes and Benefits

Zaller (1992) has noted that the mobilization of mass support in the Gulf crisis was impressive in that it was accomplished without reference to a communist threat—the standard justification for the use of troops for the preceding 40 years—and that most people expected the war to be costly in American lives.<sup>68</sup>

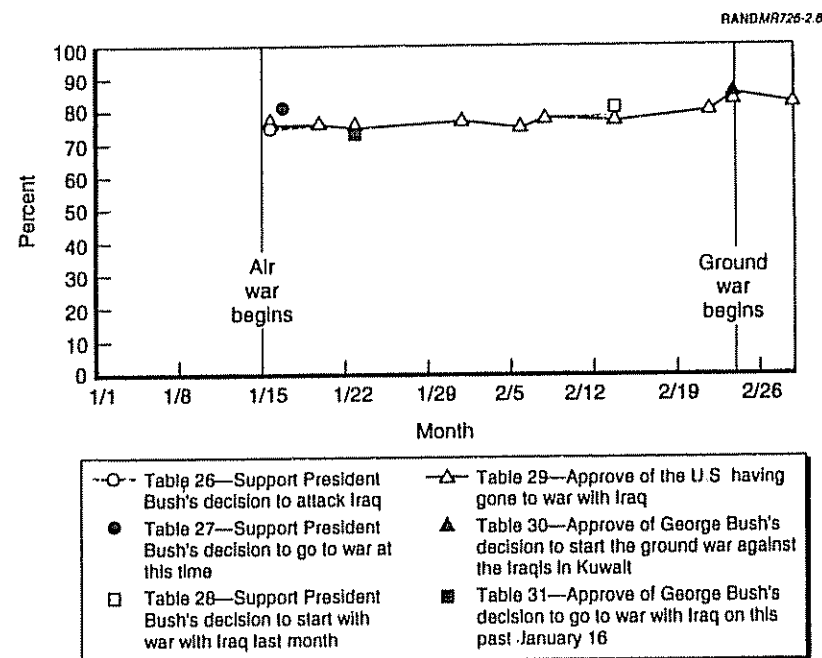
There was, however, broad agreement that the United States had important interests in the Gulf.<sup>69</sup> The United States was also

<sup>67</sup>John Mueller's *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (1994) provides a compilation and careful analysis of public opinion data on the Gulf War. As he did in his 1973 book, Mueller examines the impact of question wording, the options that were offered to the respondent, the timing of the poll, and other factors on public attitudes toward the Gulf War. The analysis presented here is broadly consistent with Mueller's analysis, but expands on the question of the willingness of the public to tolerate casualties. Most of the public opinion data on the Gulf War used here can be found in the appendixes of Mueller (1994).

<sup>68</sup>Zaller (1992), p. 269

<sup>69</sup>The question CCFR asked was:

Many people believe that the United States has a vital interest in certain areas of the world and not in other areas. That is, certain countries of the world are important to the U.S. for political, economic or security reasons. I am going to read a list of countries. For each, tell me whether you feel the U.S. does or does not have a vital interest in that country . . .



SOURCES: Black, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, Gallup, and AP, as taken from Mueller (1994), Tables 26–31.

Figure 2.6—Approval for Starting War or Ground War, January–February 1991

arguably promoting a number of foreign policy goals or principles in the Gulf that majorities of the public generally thought were very important.<sup>70</sup> Majorities of the public accordingly found a number of

The November 1990 CCFR survey found that 83 percent of those polled believed that the United States had a vital interest in Saudi Arabia, while 77 percent believed the United States had such an interest in Kuwait. There is a high degree of consistency in these data over time: 77 percent of those polled in 1986 and 1982 indicated that the United States had a vital interest in Saudi Arabia. The equivalent percentages for the leaders were somewhat higher: 88 and 93 percent, respectively.

<sup>70</sup>The question CCFR asked was:

I am going to read a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please say whether you think that it should be a very

good reasons for U.S. involvement in the Gulf, as can be seen from the illustrative polling results presented in Table 2.4.

Although there was support for a defensive deployment, support for going to war was somewhat more complex and ultimately devolved into two questions. The first was what policy to pursue to force Iraq to quit Kuwait: whether sanctions were likely to be effective at forcing an Iraqi withdrawal or whether force would ultimately be required to achieve this objective. The second was whether sanctions were likely to work and, if not, whether the situation was important enough to warrant the risks and costs of war.

Growing support for a prospective war in the Gulf seems in part to have been the result of a declining belief that sanctions alone would achieve an Iraqi withdrawal, which precipitated both declining support for continued reliance on sanctions, and an increasing belief that war was likely.<sup>71</sup> That is, the leadership debate had legitimated only one alternative policy option to war—sanctions—and as the

important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all. How about . . .

The fall 1990 CCFR study found the following percentages believing that each goal was very important: "defending our allies' security" (61 percent); "preventing the spread of nuclear weapons" (59 percent); "protecting weaker nations against foreign aggression" (57 percent); and "promoting and defending human rights in other countries" (58 percent).

<sup>71</sup> Mueller (1994, p. 58) argues that there is little evidence of a rise in support for war during the debate period:

Overall, then, Bush did not get war because he was able to swing public (or Congressional) opinion toward war—though, conceivably, he was able to arrest a deterioration of support for war.

While the evidence is not unequivocal, an examination of the tables in Mueller (1994) that contain time series for the period suggests an average six-point increase in support for war from late November to the days prior to the war. Five of the seven series examined showed an increase of more than three points over this period, while one increased by three points. Public opinion data showing a declining belief in the efficacy of sanctions is found in Mueller (1994), Tables 67, 68, and 71. Declining support for reliance on sanctions is found in Tables 72–74, 76, 78–86, 88, and 90. Increasing belief that war was likely can be seen in Tables 229–233 and 235.

Table 2.4

Percentage Saying Each Reason is a Good Reason for Getting Involved in Middle East Conflict

Please tell me if each of the following are good reasons or poor reasons for getting involved in this (Middle East) conflict.

	Agree (percent)
To deter further aggression by Iraq	78
To protect the oil supply in the Middle East	78
To force Iraq to remove its troops from Kuwait	73
To protect Saudi Arabia from Iraq	67
To remove Saddam Hussein from power	63

SOURCE: *Time/CNN* (August 23, 1990).

prospects and support for that policy declined, the public was only left with the option of war.<sup>72</sup>

Table 2.5 presents data on the various reasons that justified offensive action for majorities of the public—and those that did not.<sup>73</sup> As can be seen, the prevention of an Iraqi chemical, biological, and nuclear capability figured quite prominently in the public's willingness to use force.<sup>74</sup> Also believed by majorities to be good reasons for going to war, however, were restoring the Kuwaiti government, preventing an Iraqi economic threat to the United States, and preventing an Iraqi

<sup>72</sup> Relying on a cross-tabulation of data from a December 6–9, 1990 Gallup poll, Kagay (1992) found that 37 percent of Americans took a consistently hard line, favoring war over no war and force over continued sanctions, while another 30 percent took a consistently nonmilitary line over war and continued sanctions over force. This seems to have left the remaining one-third ultimately basing their judgment on the credibility of the arguments that were offered by political leaders, which would have been evaluated in part on the basis of partisan and ideological leanings. As was noted earlier, much of the rally ultimately came from the movement of those who supported sanctions to support for war. See Kagay (1992), p. 108.

<sup>73</sup> The result of this poll is illustrative only, but reasonably representative of the vast array of public opinion data on the subject, although other polls offered different options with different wording, which resulted in somewhat different results.

<sup>74</sup> The fall 1990 CCFR survey found that 59 percent considered "preventing the spread of nuclear weapons" to be a very important U.S. foreign policy goal; by 1994, the percentage was up to 82 percent.

Table 2.5  
Good Reasons for Going to War, December 1990

I'm going to read you some reasons people give for going to war against Iraq. Please tell me whether you think each is a good reason for the U.S. to go to war against Iraq or whether it is not a good reason to go to war.

	Agree (percent)
To prevent Saddam Hussein from threatening the area with chemical and biological weapons	78
To prevent Saddam Hussein from developing nuclear weapons	70
To restore the former government of Kuwait to power	60
To prevent Iraq from controlling a larger share of Mideast oil and threatening the U.S. economy	60
To prevent Iraq from ultimately attacking Israel	57
To lower oil prices	31

SOURCE: Gallup (December 6-7, 1990).

attack on Israel. By contrast, only three in ten saw going to war to lower oil prices as a good reason—few justified going to the war in crass economic terms.<sup>75</sup>

Support for military action was also associated with a growing litany of grievances against Iraq: taking western hostages, atrocities in Kuwait, development of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and so on. For many, Saddam's self-demonizing behavior gave some credibility to President Bush's comparison of the Iraqi leader with Hitler. In fact, once the war began, the overthrow of Saddam came to be the preferred objective, an outcome that seemed all but inevitable by the end of the war.

In the event, once the air campaign began, there was a large rally in public support for the war, with nearly eight out of ten consistently

<sup>75</sup>Such a finding is not unusual—different levels of support are often offered for different justifications or when different objectives for an operation are proposed. The picture that emerges is that there are highly differentiated views in the public regarding the circumstances in which force is justified and the aims that are sufficiently important to justify the costs and risks.

supporting the war.<sup>76</sup> By the end of the war, few expected Saddam to remain in power, and fewer still were opposed to the war—it had been concluded more quickly and at lower cost than most had expected.

## The Question of Costs

There seemed to be little doubt among members of the public that the United States would beat Iraq; the major questions were about the costs and risks of the operation and whether they were worth bearing. Few would argue that the Gulf War engaged the sorts of stakes that either the Korean or the Vietnam wars did, and fewer still would argue that the benefits of the war justified Korea- or Vietnam-like costs. With prewar predictions ranging as high as 30,000 battle deaths, the potential costs were clearly approaching Korea- or Vietnam-like numbers.<sup>77</sup> Was the accomplishment of the objectives seen as worth such high costs?

The willingness to accept casualties in the Gulf War was higher than most understood, but as Mueller (1994) has shown, willingness varied based upon question wording, timing, and the justifications that were offered. As in the willingness to go to war that was discussed earlier, some arguments that were offered seemed to majorities to be worth risking American lives, while others did not. Table 2.6 again shows an aversion to "blood for oil" but a willingness to accept the risk of losses to uphold the principle that countries should not get away with aggression.

<sup>76</sup>See Brody (1991, pp. 45-70) and Burbach (1995) for recent excellent treatments of the "rally 'round the flag" effect. Support for the war probably increased in part as a result of the rally effect that often follows high-visibility military actions. Panel data show that the rally was largely due to the movement of those who supported continued reliance on sanctions to active support for the war. Kagay (1992) examined panel data from the 1990-1991 National Election Studies (NES) of the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Michigan and found that 44 percent of those polled had supported military action both before and after the war had begun, while 29 percent of those who wanted to rely on sanctions before the war had moved to support for the war once it had begun. Only 2 percent moved from supporting the war to preferring sanctions. NES, January 5-7, 1991 and January 17-19, 1991.

<sup>77</sup>A January 30-February 3, 1991, poll by ICRI/Operation Real Security and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation found that 67 percent were aware of a Pentagon estimate that had predicted that 30,000 Americans would be killed if a ground war were started.

Table 2.6  
Worth the Loss of Lives? August 1990

There are times when it is worth the country making sacrifices in blood and money to achieve a more important return. Do you feel it is worth the loss of American lives and billions of dollars in this present (Mideast) crisis to

—make sure American oil supplies in the Middle East are not cut off by a military power such as Iraq—or not?

	Responding (percent)
Worth it	44
Not worth it	52
Don't know	4

—serve notice on Iraq and other aggressor nations that they cannot militarily invade and take over other nations and get away with it—or not?

	Responding (percent)
Worth it	62
Not worth it	35
Don't know	3

SOURCE: Harris (August 17–21, 1990)

There are two simple ways of understanding the relationship between casualty expectations and support, each of which leads to somewhat different insights.<sup>78</sup> The first is to look at questions that asked respondents whether they would support the war if it would result in a certain number of casualties.

Figure 2.7 traces the results of a number of questions in which respondents were asked whether they would support the war if certain numbers of battle deaths resulted.<sup>79</sup> The figure shows a decline in prospective support as the number of hypothetical casualties increases but that the rate at which prospective support declined as a

<sup>78</sup>While there is some ambiguity in these data, those presented here are representative of most of the polling data on the question.

<sup>79</sup>The wording of the questions can be found in Mueller (1994).

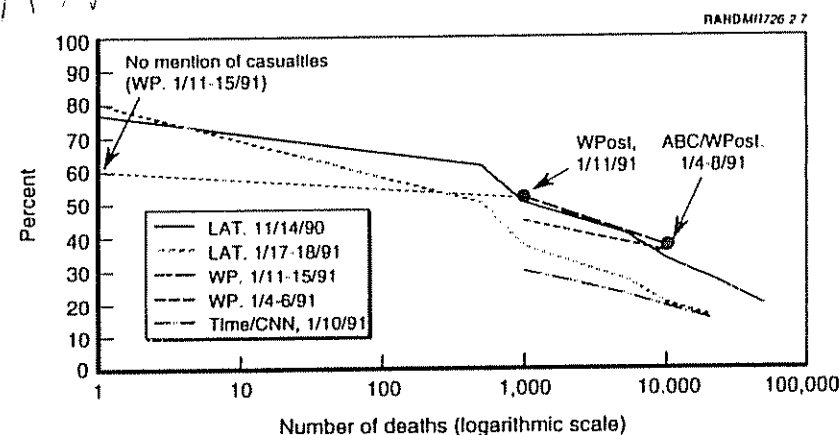


Figure 2.7—Uncertainty in the Public's Prospective Casualty Tolerance

function of casualties was roughly constant across different polling questions—although the y-intercept varies, the slopes are roughly the same.<sup>80</sup> Three of the prewar polls suggest that, at about 1,000 U.S. battle deaths, half of the respondents would have continued supporting the war; three polls suggest that, at 10,000 battle deaths, perhaps nearly four in ten might have remained as supporters.

The second approach to understanding the public's willingness to accept casualties is examining cross-tabulations of questions on casualty expectations and support to see whether those who supported the war expected low or high casualties; if a plurality or majority supported the war even at high prospective casualty levels, that would suggest that low casualties were not a determining factor in support. The next two tables do just this.

<sup>80</sup>The estimated slopes ranged from  $-9.25$  to  $-15.0$ . We can of course never know whether these curves would have been good predictors of support if casualties in the Gulf War had continued to mount into the thousands or tens of thousands, but the rather consistent slopes are suggestive. The reader will recall, furthermore, that polling questions from the Vietnam War that asked about prospective willingness to tolerate Korea-like casualty rates roughly corresponded to the levels of support when Vietnam casualty rates approximated those in Korea.

Table 2.7 shows that a plurality of those polled believed that the Gulf situation was worth going to war and that, at every level of expected war dead from 3,000 to 40,000, those believing the situation was worth going to war outnumbered those who did not. Even among the 45 percent of those who were unable or unwilling to estimate the likely casualties, a plurality thought the situation was worth going to war.

Table 2.8 shows similar data collected shortly after the air war began. Eighty percent of respondents approved of the decision to go to war with Iraq, and supporters outnumbered opponents at every level of expected casualties into the tens of thousands by a margin of three to one or better. In neither case does support for the war seem to have been conditional on very low casualties.<sup>81</sup>

Table 2.7

## Casualty Expectations by Whether Situation Was Worth War

All in all, is the current situation in the Mideast worth going to war over, or not?			
		Yes	No
Percentage of total sample		47	44
How many Americans do you think would be killed before the war was over?			
	Percentage of Total Sample	Yes (percent)	No (percent)
<1,000	6.1	45	51
≥1,000 but <3,000	6.9	44	49
≥3,000 but <5,000	2.8	64	31
≥5,000 but <10,000	4.1	64	33
≥10,000 but <15,000	4.6	51	43
≥15,000 but <20,000	2.3	55	39
≥20,000 but <30,000	6.5	48	44
≥30,000 but <40,000	3.7	51	42
≥40,000 but <50,000	2.8	40	53
≥50,000	15.4	41	53
Don't know or refused to answer	44.9	46	41

SOURCE: Gallup (January 3-6, 1991)

<sup>81</sup> This appears to be a robust finding, also turning up in other polls.

Table 2.8

## Casualty Expectations by Approval of Decision to Go to War

Do you approve or disapprove of the United States' decision to go to war with Iraq in order to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait?			
		Approve	Disapprove
Percentage of total sample		80	15
Now that the U.S. has taken military action against Iraq, do you think that the number of Americans killed and injured will be...			
	Percentage of Total Sample	Agree (percent)	Disagree (percent)
Less than 100	11.7	86	5
Several hundred	24.3	90	7
Up to a thousand	16.0	92	7
Several thousand	28.7	86	12
Tens of thousands	4.7	70	21
Don't know or refused to answer	14.7	79	12

SOURCE: Gallup (January 17-20) 1991).

In spite of this apparent willingness to accept more than what most would consider to be "low" casualties, majorities of the public supported a host of efforts to minimize casualties. For example, majorities supported the use of diplomacy, economic sanctions (until their success came into doubt), the use of force if U.S. hostages were being killed, and a prolonged air war.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Harris/NPR's December 10-13, 1990 poll found that 61 percent believed that "a diplomatic settlement providing Saddam Hussein some face-saving way to get out of Kuwait, such as giving him a small part of Kuwait with access to the Persian Gulf" would be an "honorable way to avoid American casualties." When the question was asked again in their January 10-14, 1991 poll, 53 percent thought it would be an honorable conclusion. Nevertheless, when Harris/NPR's February 21-24, 1991 poll showed that 75 percent preferred a ground invasion to get rid of Saddam Hussein "even if that involved heavy U.S. casualties" over the Russian proposal, in which Iraq would have left Kuwait but Saddam would have remained in power. While 85 percent of those *Time/CNN* polled on August 23, 1990 favored military action if Iraq started killing hostages, only 54 percent favored military action to release the hostages. Harris/NPR's February 8-10, 1991 poll found that 87 percent thought that "heavy bombings of Kuwait and Iraq will be capable of weakening the Iraqi ground forces so that your casualties in a ground invasion will be much lower" and 74 percent were willing to risk a longer war if it would result in lower casualties. Nevertheless, Gallup's

was quickly given tangible evidence of success.<sup>89</sup> It was not until January, however, that General Noriega was finally taken into custody.

### Costs

The bulk of U.S. combat deaths—21 of the 23 deaths that were incurred—were incurred in the first day of combat. Judging from the data in Figure 2.8, if casualties had mounted and Noriega had *not* been captured, majorities might not have felt the operation to have been worth its costs in U.S. lives. As it was, of course, Noriega was captured without substantially higher casualties, and rather than the 55–65 percent support the intervention might have received if Noriega had been captured with higher losses, Panama was consistently supported by eight out of ten.

### Conclusion

The invasion of Panama ultimately enjoyed very high levels of support, of course, because it achieved quickly and at low cost objectives that were considered to be reasonably important by most political leaders and a majority of the public.

### SOMALIA

Somalia was an intervention that promised vast humanitarian benefits and high prospects for success at little or no cost in U.S. lives and, accordingly, benefited from bipartisan congressional support. It was also an intervention in which U.S. combat and other forces were engaged for over a year.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup>Sixty-four percent of those ABC News polled on December 21, 1989 thought that the action had been more of a success than a failure. The relatively low percentage is probably due to the fact that many were withholding judgment until it was clear whether Noriega would be captured.

<sup>90</sup>Other cases where U.S. ground combat forces were engaged for a few months or longer include the Dominican Republic (1965) and Lebanon (1982–1984). U.S. forces were in the Dominican Republic from late April 1965 to late September 1966 and in Lebanon from August 1982 to February 1984. See OASD (FM&P) (1993), p. E-1, and Clodfelter (1992, pp. 1075–1077).

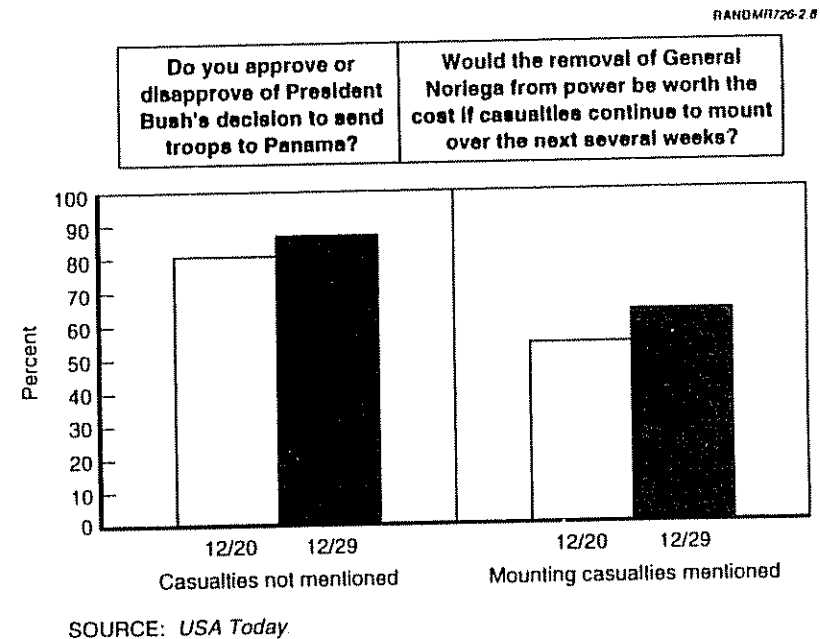


Figure 2.8—Support for Panama With and Without Casualties Mentioned

### Perceived Benefits and Prospects

Although very few perceived a vital interest in Somalia, three out of four initially supported the operation because of the vast humanitarian benefits of saving hundreds of thousands of Somali lives.<sup>91</sup> In fact, until the disintegration of the security situation over the summer and early fall of 1993, the operation generally lived up to expectations, and bipartisan support—or permissiveness—held.

<sup>91</sup>CCFR surveys have found that combating world hunger is typically viewed as a very important foreign policy goal by majorities of those polled: 63 percent in 1986 and 56 percent in 1994.

The initial objectives had essentially been accomplished by the time of the transition to United Nations control in May 1993, probably yielding most of the benefits that were expected from the operation. At that time, a broader mission of supporting political reconciliation among warring factions—dubbed “nation building”—was pursued, and Aidid resisted the disarmament of his clan, evidently in the belief that he was being isolated from the political reconciliation process. The result was increasing violence over the summer, beginning with an attack in June 1993 that killed more than twenty Pakistani peacekeepers. By late June 1993, public support had fallen to about 50 percent.<sup>92</sup>

The mission subsequently seemed to shift to what came to be called “warlord hunting”—attempts to capture the warlord Aidid—and U.S. Army Rangers undertook a series of unsuccessful raids. Between late June and September, then, support seems to have fallen from about 50 to about 40 percent. With the failure either to maintain a stable environment in Mogadishu or to seize Aidid, the prospects for success had fallen. By September, only 36 percent of those polled thought that the U.S. efforts in Somalia were “under control.”<sup>93</sup> By October 5, only 25 percent thought that the U.S. operation in Somalia had been successful.<sup>94</sup>

### Costs

The four additional U.S. deaths in August and three more at the end of September meant the cost in deaths due to hostile action had nearly tripled in the space of less than two months.<sup>95</sup> With the 18 deaths in Mogadishu in early October, the costs had more than doubled again, resulting in high levels of congressional and media criticism and further declines in public support.

<sup>92</sup>In their June 21–24, 1993 poll, CBS/*New York Times* found that 51 percent approved of the president’s handling of Somalia.

<sup>93</sup>By comparison, 52 percent thought the United States was too deeply involved. NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, September 10–13, 1993.

<sup>94</sup>Gallup/CNN/*USA Today*, October 5, 1993.

<sup>95</sup>There were four deaths due to hostile action through March 1993, but between August and September the toll had climbed to eleven.

Figure 2.2 showed that declining support for Somalia was associated with cumulative casualties, but this figure masked the important role of changing objectives and increasingly elusive prospects for success.<sup>96</sup> In short, the incremental benefits of the operation appear to have declined for most; the prospects had also declined; and the costs had risen above those that most had initially expected or been willing to support.

### Somalia and the Myth of the “CNN Effect”

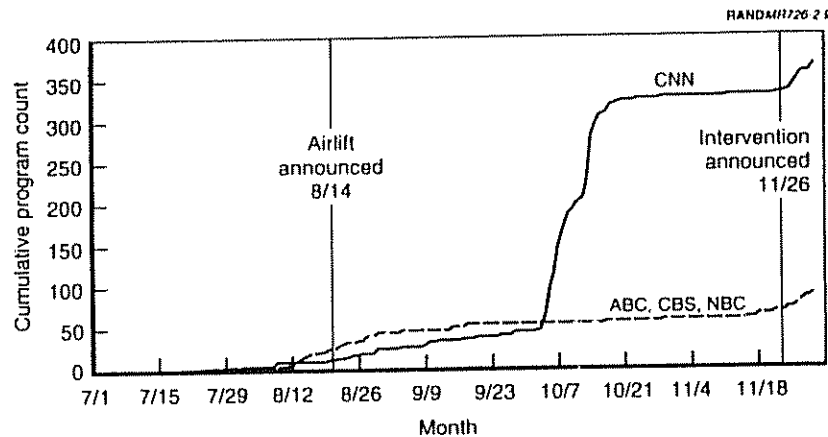
The conventional wisdom has it that media reporting on Somalia drove both foreign policy decisionmaking and public opinion. To better gauge the relationship between media reporting and presidential decisionmaking, I performed a quantitative analysis of media reporting on Somalia and examined the sequencing between presidential decision announcements regarding Somalia and increases in media reporting levels. The analysis suggested that the frequently heard argument that “the CNN effect”—i.e., that high levels of media reporting on the human misery in Somalia prior to the presidential decisions drove presidential decisionmaking—does not appear to be supported by the data.

The White House announced its decision to begin emergency airlift of famine relief to Somalia on August 14 (see Figure 2.9).<sup>97</sup> In all of July 1992, there were a total of only three news reports on Somalia on ABC, CBS, and NBC news combined and only one report on CNN. During the two-week period prior to the announcement (August 1–14), ABC, CBS, and NBC together carried a total of only ten reports—or about three apiece on average; CNN carried a total of only nine reports in their round-the-clock programming for the period. In short, there does not appear to be a large increase in reporting prior to the airlift decision. In fact, the figure shows the greatest increases in media reporting levels after the White House announcement.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup>It also neglects the increasingly vocal bipartisan congressional opposition to the intervention, a subject that will be discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>97</sup>“Statement by Press Secretary Filtzwater on Additional Humanitarian Aid for Somalia, August 14, 1992.”

<sup>98</sup>Indeed, in a conference held at George Washington University in the spring of 1995, Andrew Natsios, formerly of the United States Agency for International Development



SOURCES: LEXIS/NEXIS; Center for Media and Public Affairs. The author is grateful to Dan Amundson of the Center for Media and Public Affairs for data on ABC, CBS, and NBC news reporting.

Figure 2.9—Cumulative Television Reporting on Somalia

Regarding the period prior to the November 26 announcement that U.S. troops would be deployed to Somalia, the figure shows a dramatic increase in CNN reporting on Somalia (but not in commercial television reporting) in October 1992, the period when clan fighting prevented United Nations efforts to deliver relief. But this increased reporting on CNN had tapered off by about the third week of October and did not pick up again for more than a month, until after the November 26 announcement. In short, in neither case do the data confirm the conventional wisdom of a CNN effect; media reporting levels increased after, not before, the presidential decisions on Somalia.<sup>99</sup>

(USAID), noted that USAID was unsuccessful in its efforts to draw media attention to Somalia in the spring of 1992, well before the issue became salient to the media

<sup>99</sup>There was, however, an increase in reporting levels in October 1992

## Conclusion

The story of Somalia can perhaps best be understood by recognizing that the premises upon which support had been built—near-certain accomplishment of a limited humanitarian objective at low to no cost—were eroded by subsequent events, and this loss of support was compounded by a failure on the part of U.S. leaders to understand and attend to the eroding bases of support. The consequence was a situation in which few believed that what might be accomplished was worth additional losses—the benefits were never perceived by most to have warranted much loss of life.<sup>100</sup> In short, Somalia provides us with another case in which other factors were important in affecting the importance of casualties in declining support. As will be seen in the next chapter, however, the data do not support the view that majorities of the public wished to withdraw immediately, but neither do they support the contention that the public favored an increased or escalated commitment. The evidence suggests a far more subtle set of attitudes.

## Some Other Comparisons

There are two other cases in which the public's tolerance for casualties might be productively compared to the experience in Somalia: the U.S. interventions in the Dominican Republic (1965) and in Lebanon (1982–1984).<sup>101</sup>

**The Dominican Republic (1965)** Over the course of the intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, support fell from around 75 percent to between 36 and 52 percent, depending on question wording. As with the other cases, a number of factors other than casualties

<sup>100</sup>While about four in ten in October 1993 consistently said that, "Given the loss of American life, the financial costs, and other risks involved . . . sending U.S. troops to make sure food got through to the people of Somalia was worth the cost" (CBS News, October 6, 1993, October 6–7, 1993, October 18–19, 1993), 60 percent of those *Time/CNN* polled on October 7, 1993 agreed with the statement that "Nothing the U.S. could accomplish in Somalia is worth the death of even one more soldier."

<sup>101</sup>At the time research for this report was completed, Haiti was still an ongoing operation, and the United States had just begun deploying ground troops to Bosnia. Preliminary public opinion data suggest that both of these cases are also in the class of small, low-benefit operations: neither is perceived by a majority to engage U.S. vital interests or moral obligations, and less-than-majority support for each has resulted



also contributed to the declining support. Most importantly perhaps, the U.S. objective soon changed from rescuing Americans to intervening against leftist forces in the civil war, which resulted in high levels of congressional criticism of the Johnson administration, especially during the hearings chaired by Senator Fulbright.<sup>102</sup> In short, while the data points in the figure show a rather strong decline in support as a function of casualties, the paucity of the data and the greater importance of leadership criticism suggest that the role of casualties was modest in comparison to other factors.<sup>103</sup>

**Lebanon (1982–1984).** The U.S. objective in Lebanon changed over the course of the operation: the rescue of the Palestine Liberation Organization, assistance in an Israeli withdrawal, and, ultimately, support for the beleaguered Gemayel government while keeping the Syrians from consolidating a grip on Lebanon. Page and Shapiro (1992, pp. 259–260) report that 57 percent of the public in September 1982 told Gallup/*Newsweek* they approved of President Reagan's decision to send U.S. Marines to Beirut to "help keep the peace" and to "encourage a withdrawal of Israeli, Syrian and PLO forces." The public opinion data suggest that, following the U.S. evacuation of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Lebanon was never supported by a majority of the public—typically only about 40 percent were supporters.<sup>104</sup> In spite of this low level of public support, the Reagan administration was able to continue the operation largely on the basis of conditional support from the Congress.<sup>105</sup> While there is

<sup>102</sup>The hearings Senator Fulbright held on the Dominican intervention in September 1965 were highly critical of the intervention.

<sup>103</sup>The slope of  $-78.8$  in Figure 2.2 suggests that support declines by about 79 points for each increase by a factor of ten in the number of deaths due to hostile action.

<sup>104</sup>The appearance in Figure 2.2 that support for Lebanon was insensitive to casualties is an artifact of there not being much room left for support to fall when U.S. deaths climbed; from the very beginning, support appears to have come only from hard-core supporters, and even before the bombing of the Marine Barracks, public support for Lebanon was a partisan affair. While only 37 percent of those Gallup polled October 7–10, 1983, felt that the United States had not made a mistake in sending the Marines to Lebanon, this percentage was 53 percent among Republicans, 29 percent among Democrats, and 36 percent among independents. The slight increase in support for Lebanon is associated with a very modest "rally" following President Reagan's speech and congressional acquiescence to a continued presence following the Marine barracks bombing.

<sup>105</sup>In a sequence of events that the Somalia intervention paralleled ten years later, the Congress had taken action to limit the operation in Lebanon in the month prior to the

some evidence that the leaders and the public thought that the United States had a vital interest in Lebanon, there is less evidence that they thought the objectives being promoted in Lebanon were either very important or likely to be achieved.<sup>106</sup> Following the deaths in the bombing of the Marine barracks, support rallied slightly and then declined.

## CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

The conventional wisdom of a recent decline in the willingness of the American public to accept casualties is inadequate. There is nothing new in this concern: A majority of the public have historically considered the potential and actual casualties in U.S. wars and military operations to be an important factor in their support. Less well understood, however, is the fact that the importance of casualties to support has varied greatly across operations; when important interests and principles have been at stake, the public has been willing to tolerate rather high casualties.

In short, when we take into account the importance of the perceived benefits, the evidence of a recent decline in the willingness of the public to tolerate casualties appears rather thin. The Gulf War was a recent military operation where majorities viewed important principles and interests to be at stake and showed a commensurably higher willingness to tolerate casualties than most realize. By the same token, the unwillingness of the public to tolerate very high casualties in some other recent U.S. military operations (e.g., Somalia, Haiti) has had to do with the fact that majorities—and their

Marine barracks bombing in October 1983. In the case of Lebanon, the Congress gave the Reagan administration 18 months to finish the operation, and that agreement held until the spring of 1984.

<sup>106</sup>In CCFR's October 1982 survey, 55 percent of respondents from the public and 74 percent of the leaders said that they thought the United States had a vital interest in Lebanon, while 36 percent of the public sample and 46 percent of the leaders said they thought the United States had a vital interest in Syria. Only 34 percent of the public thought that "protecting weaker nations against foreign aggression" should be a very important foreign policy goal. Twenty-six percent thought "helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations" should be a very important goal, and 43 percent said "promoting and defending human rights in other countries" should be a very important goal.

leaders—did not perceive the benefits or prospects to justify much loss of life.

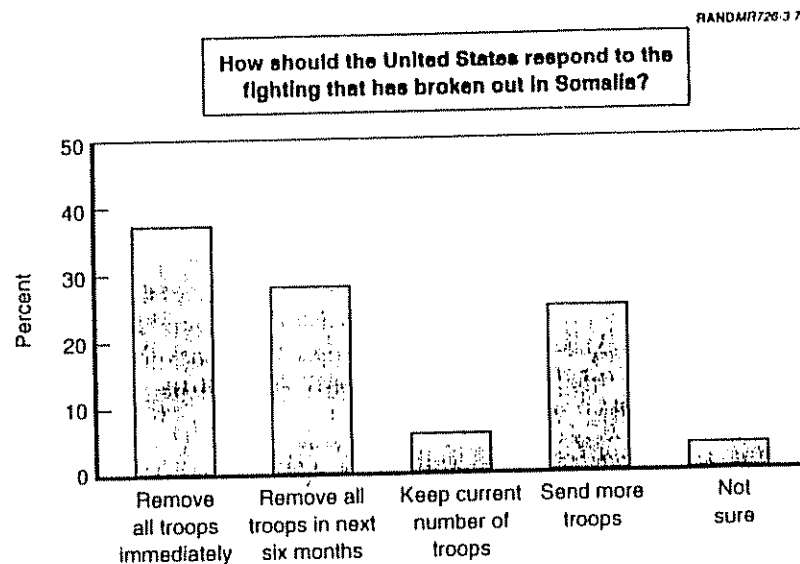
The public's aversion to losses of U.S. life in recent U.S. military interventions thus has less to do with a recent decline in the public's willingness to accept casualties than the debatable (and debated) merits of the cases themselves. In fact, the public shows a highly differentiated view of recent U.S. military operations that argues against the simplistic view that the public is unwilling to accept casualties under any circumstances:

- The recent U.S. historical experience provides a clear example of a U.S. military operation (the Gulf War) in which the interests and principles engaged were judged important enough for a majority to be willing to accept rather high costs, and this willingness was not terribly different from the public's prospective willingness to accept costs in the early days of Korea and Vietnam.
- In another recent case (Panama), majorities perceived important U.S. interests and principles at stake, and a majority accordingly were willing to accept greater losses if they proved necessary to capture Noriega.
- By contrast, the United States has recently undertaken (in Somalia, Haiti, and now Bosnia) precisely the sort of operations that have historically suffered from a low willingness to accept costs—prolonged interventions in complex political situations in failed states characterized by civil conflict, in which U.S. interests and principles are typically much less compelling, or clear, and in which success is often elusive at best. Past examples of this type include interventions in the Dominican Republic (1965) and in Lebanon (1982–1984).

This chapter has also presented evidence showing that support for U.S. wars and military operations is dynamic and subject to a number of factors in addition to U.S. casualties. Specifically, it suggests that the perceived benefits and prospects may often be just as—or more—important than casualties in determining support and that these factors affect the importance of casualties in eroding support. There is strong evidence that declining perceived benefits or

prospects erode public support. In short, Americans do not want to sacrifice lives for causes they do not consider compelling.

In the next chapter, I will turn to the implications of falling support for policy preferences, and in Chapter Four, I will discuss the key role of leadership consensus or dissensus in both support and policy preferences.



SOURCE: *Time* CNN/Yankelovich (10/7/93)

Figure 3.7—Policy Preferences on Somalia, October 7, 1993

ported if negotiations failed to release the U.S. servicemen.<sup>44</sup> The principle that any attack on U.S. troops required a stronger U.S. military response from the United States also won support.<sup>45</sup> Support for capturing Aidid ranged from 51 to 71 percent, depending on timing and question wording.<sup>46</sup> But when questions implied that efforts to capture and punish Aidid might delay a U.S. withdrawal, support for the option evaporated.<sup>47</sup> In short, a rather consistent

<sup>44</sup>ABC News, October 5, 1993 and October 7, 1993

<sup>45</sup>*Time*/CNN, October 7, 1993

<sup>46</sup>Gallup/CNN/*USA Today*, October 5, 1993; ABC News, October 5, 1993, and *Time*/CNN, October 7, 1993

<sup>47</sup>CBS News, October 6, 1993 and October 6–7, 1993; Gallup, October 8–10, 1993. A conjecture is that majorities were willing to capture or punish Aidid so long as it did not delay an orderly withdrawal—two out of three were concerned that sending more troops would just get the United States more deeply involved in Somalia. CBS News, October 7, 1993 and October 18–19, 1993. This interpretation is consistent with cross-tabulated results of Gallup's October 5, 1993 poll, that show that 63 percent of those

majority found the benefits of an increasing commitment to Somalia not worth the additional costs.<sup>48</sup> Majorities supported actions that were instrumental to an orderly withdrawal but were more than happy to punish Aidid if it would not hinder withdrawal or result in additional U.S. casualties.

### Revisiting the Myth of the “CNN Effect”

The reader will recall that the data fail to support the argument that heightened media reporting on Somalia preceded, much less drove, presidential decisionmaking. There is also no evidence supporting another bit of conventional wisdom on Somalia: that media images of the mistreatment of dead U.S. servicemen were responsible for the public's desire to withdraw from Somalia (see Table 3.2).<sup>49</sup>

A tabular and statistical analysis of public opinion data reveals that a majority of both those who saw the images and those who did not favored withdrawal from Somalia. While the images did not affect the *direction* of the public's preferences, they do however appear to have affected the *degree* of these preferences: Those who saw the images were somewhat more inclined to support immediate withdrawal than those who did not, although the largest percentage among both groups favored immediate withdrawal.

In short, there is again cause to be skeptical of arguments about the impact of the media on public opinion on Somalia: The media appear to have followed objective events, conditions, and presidential decisionmaking, and “effects” were at best modest, apparently reinforcing preexisting preferences.

who wanted to withdraw immediately supported capturing and punishing Aidid, as did 71 percent of those who wanted to withdraw gradually. Gallup's October 8–10, 1993 poll shows that only 18 percent of those who wanted to withdraw immediately and 24 percent of those who wanted to withdraw over six months supported keeping troops in Somalia until Aidid was captured and punished.

<sup>48</sup>Thus, the hypothesis that casualties led to a desire for an *increased* commitment to Somalia is not substantiated.

<sup>49</sup>The reader will recall that only about four in ten in September 1993 approved of the Somalia operation; support fell a further ten points after the firefight in Mogadishu.

**Table 3.2**  
**Viewership of Televised Images and Policy Preferences**

Next, I'd like you to think back to the news you may have seen over the last days. By any chance have you, yourself, happened to see the actual news photo of either a U.S. soldier's corpse being dragged through the streets of Somalia, or the television footage of a captured U.S. pilot being interviewed?

	Yes	No
Percentage of total sample	58	39

In your view, what should the United States do now in Somalia:

	Yes (percent)	No (percent)
One: Withdraw U.S. troops right away	50	33
Two: Gradually withdraw U.S. troops	23	30
Three: Keep U.S. involvement the same	6	10
Four: Increase U.S. military commitment	18	20

SOURCE: Gallup/CNN/USA Today (October 5, 1993)

## Conclusions

The evidence on Somalia does not suggest that the public and the government responded largely to televised imagery, that the majority of the public had desired that the United States "escalate to victory" as a result of casualties, or that a majority "demanded" an immediate withdrawal. In fact, Somalia represents another case in which the historical record suggests a more sensible and subtle response to increasing casualties and declining support: A plurality or majority has typically rejected both extreme options of escalation and immediate withdrawal and has remained unwilling to withdraw until a negotiated settlement and orderly withdrawal—including the return of U.S. servicemen—could be concluded.

## CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

Opposition to a war or military operation can come either from members of the public who prefer a decreased commitment (de-escalation or withdrawal) or from those who believe that more

should be done to achieve a successful outcome, i.e., those who desire an increased commitment (or escalation). In its most extreme form, some have argued that casualties and declining support have typically led to increasing demands for immediate withdrawal, while others have argued that casualties and declining support have led to inexorable demands for escalation to victory.

The data appear to contradict both extreme positions, while being broadly consistent both with other past RAND work and with work by other scholars that demonstrates the importance of leadership, and objective events and conditions, in public support. More specifically, because of the importance of the interests, pluralities or majorities of the public during Korea and Vietnam grudgingly supported continuation of each war until a settlement and an orderly withdrawal could be achieved and supported temporary escalation to break diplomatic deadlocks, if the costs were reasonable. In Somalia, majorities of the public in October 1993 were also unwilling to be forced out of Somalia in a precipitous fashion (i.e., without recovering U.S. servicemen held hostage). However, they were also unwilling to stay longer than the six months the president negotiated with the Congress for accomplishment of an orderly withdrawal; the stakes simply did not warrant such a commitment.

When the perceived benefits are low or success is particularly elusive, the settlement that Americans prefer is often entirely bound up with the rather limited issue of getting prisoners or hostages back; once accomplished, there may be little to warrant a continued presence. The case of Somalia shows, however, that, even when majorities prefer withdrawal, they may often be willing to support punitive strikes, as long as an orderly withdrawal is not delayed.

Individuals clearly may differ greatly in their evaluations of the benefits of an operation, expectations of success and failure, and willingness to make trade-offs between benefits and costs. We might also expect them to differ in their optimism about the prospects that escalation will lead to success at low cost, which would figure in support for escalation. But why might individuals differ on these questions?

As will be seen in the next chapter, there is good reason to believe that differences in beliefs and preferences among the public have

followed from and paralleled differences among political and other

And if Korea and Vietnam are good guides to how events might have played out in the Gulf War, even if the war had gone on longer and mainstream politicians had turned against it, there would have been little support for quitting the intervention before an orderly conclusion—most importantly including the safe return of U.S. POWs—could be achieved.

## SOMALIA

Somalia is an interesting case in which bipartisan support for the initial intervention turned to bipartisan opposition by the early fall of 1993. Rather than being partisan, however, support for the Clinton administration's Somalia policy seems to have been associated with positive evaluations of the president.

### Support

Political leaders gave strong bipartisan support to the U.S. intervention in Somalia. This support seems generally to have held until the summer of 1993, by which time the initial objectives had been achieved and the mission had changed. By September 1993, congressional opposition to the operation in Somalia had also become bipartisan. Both houses of Congress had passed a nonbinding resolution calling on the Clinton administration to seek approval by October 15 for keeping U.S. forces in Somalia and threatening a cutoff in funds if such action was not taken.<sup>49</sup> Public support had also declined to about four in ten by this time.

With the deaths in Mogadishu in early October 1993, members of Congress on both sides of the aisle opposed continuation of the operation, although the president ultimately prevailed upon the Congress to approve an orderly withdrawal by the end of March 1994. By this time, there were only minor partisan differences among the public in evaluations of Somalia policy, with only about one in three supporting.

<sup>49</sup>Hirsch and Oakley (1995), p. 127

Although support for the president may be somewhat conflated with support for his policies, hard-core support for the president seems to have been more important than partisanship in evaluations of President Clinton's handling of Somalia in October 1993. Thirty-eight percent of Democrats (as opposed to 25 percent of Republicans) approved of the president's handling of Somalia, while 50 percent of those who approved of the president's job handling (as opposed to 13 percent who did not) and 65 percent who approved of his handling of foreign affairs (as opposed to 28 percent who did not) approved of his handling of the situation in Somalia.<sup>50</sup>

### Policy Preferences

Support for the president, not partisanship, may also have been associated with policy preferences. According to Gallup's October 8–10 poll, only 33 percent of Democrats and 32 percent of Republicans wanted to complete the humanitarian mission in Somalia.<sup>51</sup> Larger differences emerge when the contrast is by evaluations of presidential performance: only 35 percent of those who approved of the president's job handling supported keeping U.S. troops in Somalia until the humanitarian mission was accomplished (as opposed to 26 percent who did not), and 43 percent who approved of his foreign-affairs handling supported keeping troops in Somalia until the mission could be accomplished (as opposed to 23 percent who did not approve).<sup>52</sup>

In the case of Somalia, then, bipartisan support from leaders turned to bipartisan opposition, and this decline in support was closely associated with a parallel decline in public support. In the end, the president's supporters were following his lead, while opponents were following his congressional opponents.

<sup>50</sup>Gallup, October 8–10, 1993.

<sup>51</sup>The corresponding percentages supporting withdrawal were 65 and 62 percent.

<sup>52</sup>The corresponding percentages supporting withdrawal were 62 and 56 percent.

## CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has provided substantial evidence supporting the propositions that leadership consensus or dissensus is an essential element in the character of public support for U.S. military interventions and that leadership divisions tend to cue divisions among the public in a predictable way. In short, when there is bipartisan consensus among leaders in support of an intervention, divisions within the public are generally muted; when there are partisan divisions among the leaders, the public tends to become divided along the same lines.

The analysis also suggests that beliefs about benefits, prospects, acceptable costs, support, and policy preferences can differ across partisan or ideological groups, leading to different levels of support and policy preferences.<sup>53</sup> In the Korean War, for example, isolationist Republicans did not consider Korea to be important enough to be worth the lives of U.S. servicemen, and they were accordingly less likely to prefer escalation. Internationalist Republicans, on the other hand, believed it important enough to widen the war to include attacks on Manchuria, even at the risk of a larger war. Most Democrats and independents thought the stakes important enough to reject withdrawal and continue the war until peace could be achieved but not important enough to risk a wider war. In Vietnam, growing polarization among leaders affected support and policy preferences in a similar way. In Somalia, by contrast, bipartisan leadership support turned to bipartisan opposition and a desire for an orderly withdrawal, and these preferences were mirrored in the public.

The stylized argument presented in this chapter suggests that support—and the evaluation of benefits, prospects, and costs that was described in the last chapters—is socially constructed. The media report debates among leaders and experts to members of the public, who consider and discuss them. The media subsequently poll these same members of the public, informing leaders of the success of their persuasive arguments. While something of a simplification, this

characterization captures some of the most important features of how the democratic conversation works.

The next chapter will draw together the various threads of this analysis and provide conclusions.

<sup>53</sup>In Kagay's (1992) words "leadership and events matter."

## Chapter Five

**CONCLUSIONS**

When asked to support a military operation, the American public ultimately must weigh the intangible benefits of achieving foreign policy objectives against the most tangible costs imaginable—the lives of U.S. service personnel. The metaphor of an ends-means calculus can be used to understand the factors that are associated with support for military operations and a willingness to ask others to sacrifice their lives. This metaphor characterizes support as being the result of a series of tests or questions that political leaders and the public answer collectively:

- Do the benefits seem to be great enough?
- Are the prospects for success good enough?
- Are the expected or actual costs low enough?
- Taken together, does the probable outcome seem (or still seem) to be worth the costs?

Assessed in light of these questions, the historical record suggests that the role of casualties in domestic support for U.S. wars and military operations is somewhat different from the conventional wisdom.

When we take into account the perceived benefits of the operation, broadly conceived as the importance of the interests at stake and the principles being promoted, the evidence of a recent decline in the willingness of the public to tolerate casualties appears rather thin. The historical record in fact suggests a rather high degree of differ-

entiation in the public's willingness to tolerate casualties, based upon the merits of each case.

Whenever the reasons for introducing U.S. forces lack either moral force or broadly recognized national interests, support may be very thin indeed, and even small numbers of casualties may often be sufficient to erode public support for the intervention. For in the end, most Americans do not want lives to be sacrificed for any but the most compelling and promising causes, and they look to their leaders to illuminate just how compelling and promising the causes are.

The Gulf War, for example, was a recent military operation in which a majority viewed important principles and interests to be at stake and showed a rather higher willingness to tolerate casualties than most realize, in many ways much closer to Korea and Vietnam than other cases. By the same token, the unwillingness of the public to tolerate very high casualties in some recent U.S. military operations has had to do with the fact that majorities—and their leaders—did not perceive the interests and principles at stake to be particularly important.

When they approve of a military operation, members of the public typically grant the president wide latitude to conclude the operation in the fashion he chooses. This permissive environment can be lost, however, if the operation does not live up to the expectations upon which initial support was premised. This often leads to polarization among leaders (and within the public) over the best policy for concluding the operation. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, increasing casualties and declining support do not necessarily lead to majority support for immediate withdrawal. Contrary to the counter-conventional wisdom, casualties do not necessarily lead to majority demands for "escalation to victory."

Instead, the preferences of individual members of the public—whether escalatory or de-escalatory—seem most closely associated with an assessment of the U.S. equities in the situation and the credibility of the alternatives that leaders and experts offer. Credibility is often judged on the basis of partisan or ideological cues. In Korea and Vietnam, despite the polarization and some support for the extreme options of immediate withdrawal and escalation of the war, the ultimate result was a grudging willingness to continue

each war until an orderly withdrawal—including the return of U.S. prisoners of war—could be accomplished. In Somalia, a majority also preferred an orderly withdrawal following the return of U.S. servicemen that Aidid held hostage and rejected both immediate withdrawal and an increased—or extended—commitment. For most, the U.S. equities did not justify additional efforts to save Somalia from itself.

As a result of the Gulf War, the public does not expect—and is unlikely to demand—that all future U.S. military operations be bloodless. Indeed, it is more accurate to say that the public hopes for low-to-no casualty operations but fears a very different outcome. A majority of the public will accordingly continue to support a range of measures to minimize American casualties in wars and military operations: diplomacy to foster a more benign environment for U.S. forces; cost- and risk-sharing with allies; strategies, tactics, doctrine, and training; and force structures and technologies that can minimize U.S. casualties. Nevertheless, the linkage of these pieces is not very well understood.

In an era of limited resourcing for defense, the implications for strategy, research and development, and force planning are also not particularly well understood. The historical record suggests that a majority of the American public will be more willing to accept casualties when important interests and principles are at stake—most likely including the current major planning contingencies centered on Iraqi and North Korean aggression—and is least willing to accept losses in the sorts of operations that the nation has most recently undertaken—armed interventions in failed states. Put simply, is the ability to conduct a low-to-no casualty peace operation in Somalia, Haiti, or Bosnia more desirable than a similar capability for a war in the Gulf or Northeast Asia, where casualties could easily be much higher?

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

One of the key findings of this research is the central role of leadership in determining domestic support for U.S. military involvements. The calculus described above masks a much richer social process linking public support or disaffection to leadership consensus or

conflict, although leadership needs to be viewed in a broader sense than it is typically conceived.

Large segments of the public rely upon political leaders to vet the often complex issues involved in prospective and ongoing military interventions. These groups respond predictably when the leaders they find most credible begin to question—or decide to oppose—an intervention. When support for the preferred strategies for concluding the operation fall prey to partisan divisions among leaders, the public will typically also become divided. In short, when political and other opinion leaders fail to agree with the president that much (or any) good is likely to come of an intervention, there should be little surprise that the public also becomes divided.

There have been many disagreements among leaders about whether the merits of recent U.S. military actions in the Gulf War, Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia have justified their possible costs. While it is entirely unhealthy for a democracy to weigh carefully its decisions about the use of force, the potential consequences of these recurring disagreements among leaders are quite sobering. They can lead to enduring divisions in the public and to support that is brittle and easy for adversaries to exploit, thereby leading both to failed interventions and incorrect lessons for the future. Ultimately, such disagreements may erode the credibility of threats of force to protect important U.S. interests. The irony, of course, is that when deterrence and coercive diplomacy fail, the costs to the nation may turn out to be even higher.

Policymakers who are mindful of the premises under which support has been given for a particular U.S. military operation will often be able to build and sustain a permissive environment for concluding the operation. They are also most likely to understand the constraints on—and opportunities for—presidential leadership when a dramatic change occurs and initial support has eroded. But until U.S. leaders arrive at a new bipartisan consensus on the role of military force in the post-Cold War world, we should expect disagreements among leaders whenever the U.S. deploys its forces, and these disagreements will continue to foster divisions among the public. The absence of a larger foreign policy consensus will contribute to support that is often shallow and highly responsive to the cost