

Precaution against Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

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PP and Terrorism

- Major safety risk
- Pres. Bush at West Point, 6/02: “If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long.”
- US National Security Strategy, 9/02: “America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed. ... The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction — and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains ...”
- “Preemptive” war vs. imminent threat (e.g. Afghanistan)
- “Preventive” war vs. potential, inchoate threat (e.g. Iraq)

Uncertainty and Preventive War

- Joschka Fischer, German Foreign Minister and Green Party leader, 9/02: "To what consequences would military intervention lead? ... Are there new and definite findings and facts? Does the threat assessment justify taking a very high risk? ... we are full of deep skepticism regarding military action ..."
- UN weapons inspector Hans Blix, 2003: "... for the Bush administration, 'unaccounted for' equaled 'existing.'"

Toward a Full Portfolio Evaluation

Reduce Target Risk (WMD)

- Low probability but high impact; classic case for precaution.
- Ex post finding: no WMD. False positive (so it now seems).
- Even if no WMD, war now may be better than bigger war later – waiting increases threat.

Ancillary Benefits

- Liberate Iraqi people
- Avoid 10k Iraqi deaths per year...
- Spread democracy
- Deter rogue states, e.g. Libya
- Avoid costs of containment of Saddam, ~\$15b/yr

Countervailing Risks

- Military deaths: US 1k, Iraqi ~6k
- Collateral damage: > 10k civilian deaths
- Blowback: increase al Qaeda recruitment & attacks
- Chaos: lose control of WMD, facilitate terrorist theft
- Divert pressure away from & embolden e.g. Iran, N. Korea
- Divide the western alliance
- Impair civil liberties
- Displacement externality from (observable) target-hardening

Costs: direct ~\$150b; indirect oil price effect ~\$200b or more

Comparing US and Europe

- Europe more precautionary than US in 1970s ??
 - Personal information
 - Border controls, Aviation security
- US more precautionary than Europe since 1990s ? and especially since 9/11/2001
 - USA Patriot Act
 - Border controls, Passenger Name Records
 - Registration of male aliens from Islamic countries
 - Detaining suspects indefinitely
 - Precautionary War in Iraq
- Fits “flip-flop” hypotheses -- but in opposite direction ?
- Variation within Europe: e.g., some EU member states oppose war in Iraq, some favor

Views on Military Counterterrorism across Countries

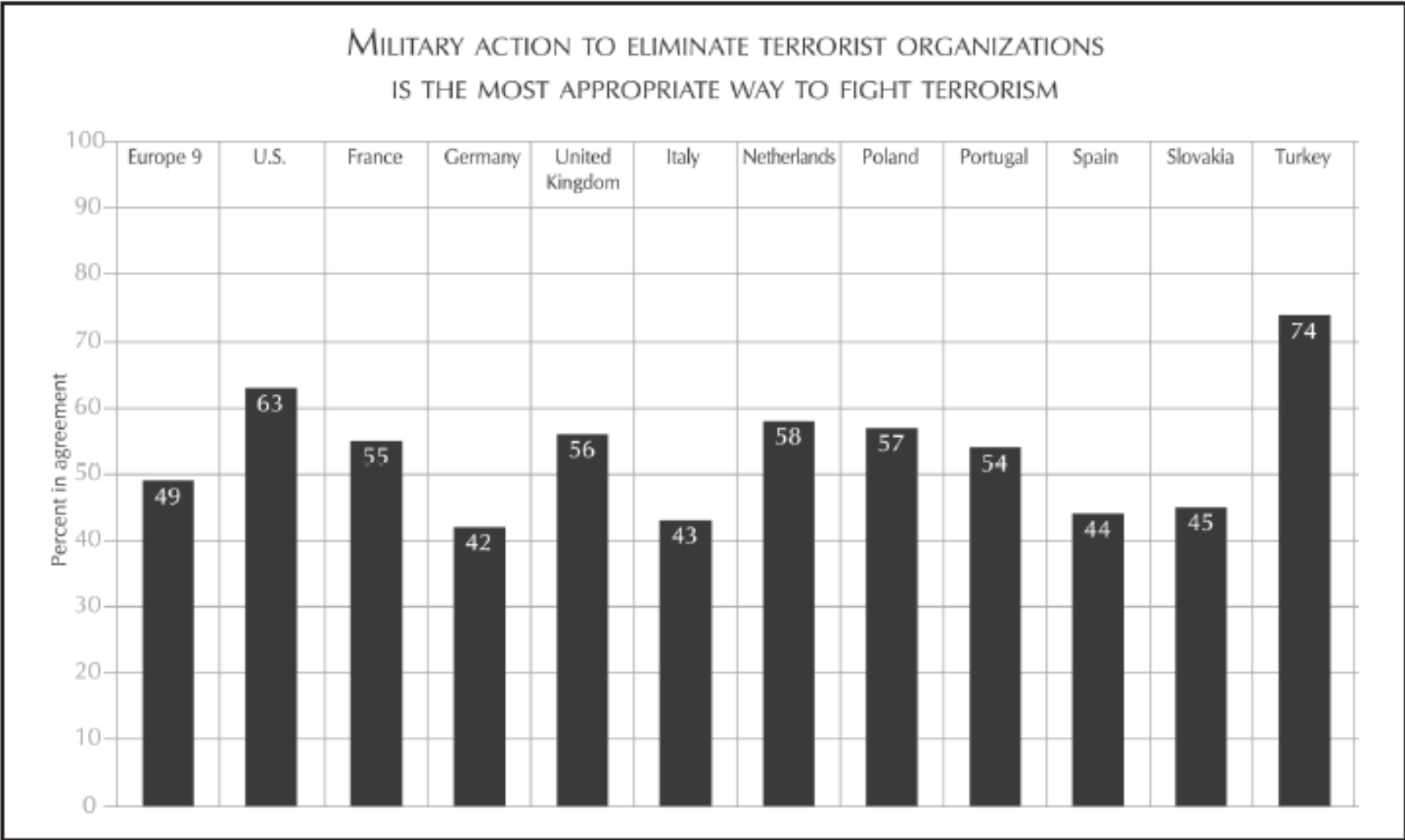


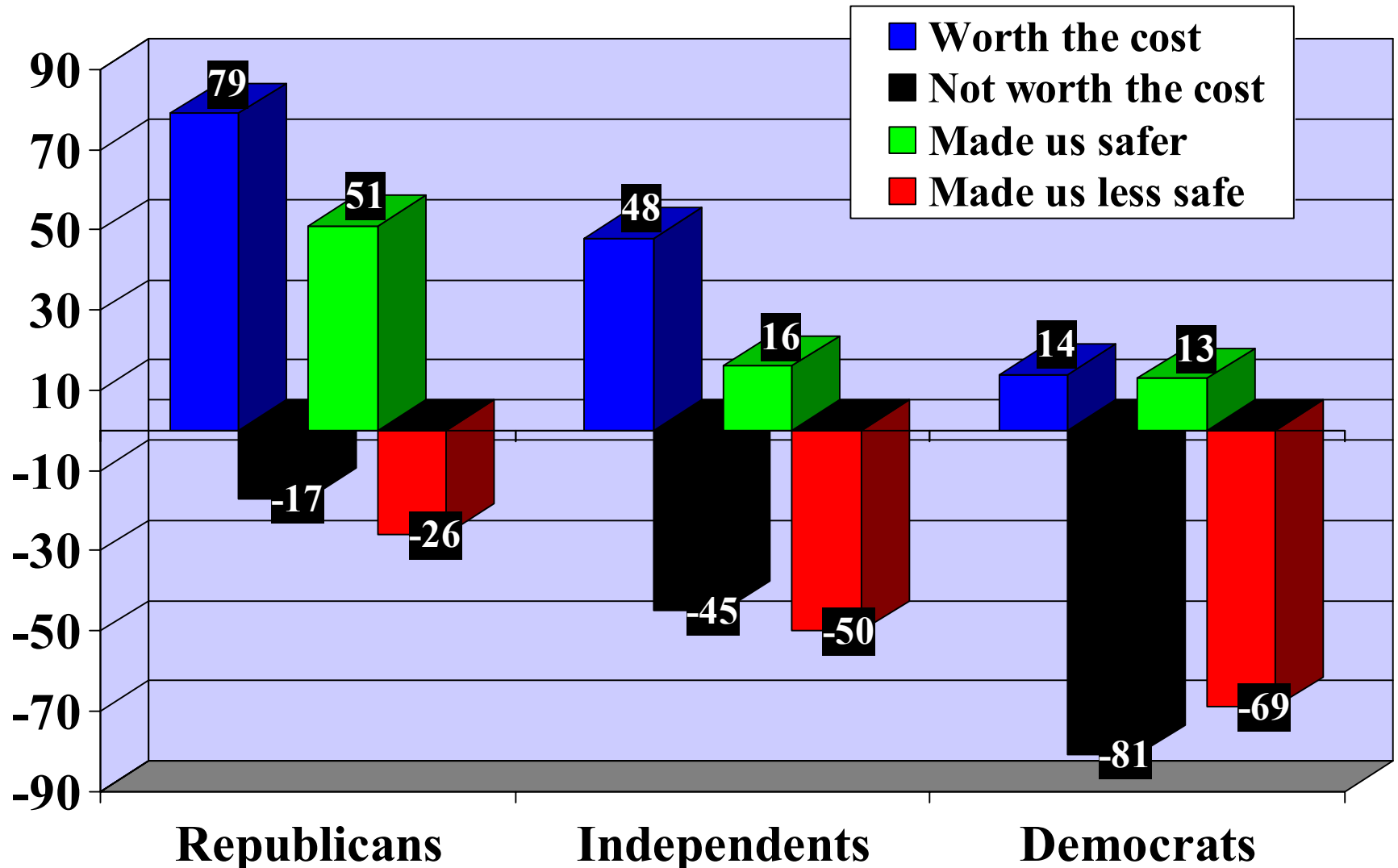
Chart 15

Source: German Marshall Fund-US, Transatlantic Trends 2004

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Views on the War in Iraq across Americans: Percent of each Party Holding each View

(Source: German Marshall Fund-US, Transatlantic Trends 2004, p.26.)



Explanations for the Observed Pattern of Precautionary Policies

- “Availability” Heuristic: visible crises
 - 9/11
 - Pre-9/11 false negative leads to false positive in Iraq?
- Dread of evil (Slovic; Stern)
 - Horror, evil of 9/11 attacks vs. civilians
 - Bush, 9/14/01: USA will “rid the world of evil”
 - Islamic extremists: USA is the “great Satan”
- Action bias (Zeckhauser)
- Failure to consider the full portfolio effects
 - “There is no evidence that the President and those closest to him ever talked systematically about the ‘opportunity costs’ and tradeoffs in their decision to invade Iraq.” (James Fallows, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Oct. 2004, p.73.)

Conclusions

- Observed Pattern of Relative Precaution
 - No trend toward greater EU precaution; indeed, the opposite trend: increasing US precaution
 - Politically: precautionary shoes on the other feet
 - Variation within Europe, within America
 - Precautionary “particularity,” not strict principle
- Explanations
 - Availability + Dread + Neglect of Risk-Risk Tradeoffs
= aggressive narrow precaution
- Consequences
 - Serious countervailing risks
 - All sides should learn & apply lesson in other domains:
consider full portfolio consequences