

# THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

## AMERICANS ON AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD AFTER THE IRAQ WAR

April 29, 2003

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**PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL  
POLICY ATTITUDES (PIPA)**

A joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland



**Knowledge  
NETWORKS**

A polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California

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**The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)** is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

**Knowledge Networks** is a polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California. Knowledge Networks uses a large-scale nationwide research panel which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and is subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access).

**The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM)**, at the University of Maryland's School for Public Affairs, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners.

**The Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA)** is an independent non-profit organization of social science researchers devoted to increasing understanding of public and elite attitudes shaping contemporary public policy. Using innovative research methods, COPA seeks not only to examine overt policy opinions or positions, but to reveal the underlying values, assumptions, and feelings that sustain opinions.

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay and Phil Warf designed the questionnaire and wrote the analysis.

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The search of existing poll data was done with the aid of the Roper POLL database.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The March PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll showed that, despite the public's reservations about going to war without UN approval, a strong majority rallied behind the President as hostilities began. Over the weeks of the war, in numerous polls support stayed constant, with approximately 7 in 10 backing it. Now that the war has come to its stunningly rapid conclusion, new questions have emerged about how the public views the consequences of the war and its implications for America's role in the world.

Past polling showed that, going in to the war, Americans had trepidations about how the war might impact the likelihood that North Korea or Iran would make weapons of mass destruction. They also showed some awareness that US foreign policy was being subject to substantial criticism by other countries. What has become of these concerns and perceptions in the wake of America's rapid victory in the war?

More fundamentally, questions arise about how the US victory in the Iraq war has impacted Americans' attitudes about America's role in the world. Do they now support a more unilateral and military approach? Do they feel more free to use force without UN approval? In the past Americans have complained that the US plays the role of world policeman more than it should: has this concern evaporated?

More specifically, how do Americans feel about what kind of presence the US should have in the Middle East and how it should deal with "problem countries," including Syria and Iran. Are Americans feeling a momentum that could carry them into supporting going to war with Syria, now that it has been identified by some US leaders as a threat to the US? How do Americans want to deal with Iran? Once the situation with Iraq is stabilized, do Americans want to continue to keep US troops in Saudi Arabia? Do they want to apply strong pressure on Arab countries to become more democratic?

The US has initiated an ambitious and expensive process of reconstructing Iraq. Are Americans willing to make the necessary commitments to this process, especially when reminded of pressing needs at home? How realistic are they about what these demands will be? What are their expectations of what will be achieved? Will they be satisfied for the US to go home once a rudimentary government is in place, or will they expect to see a real working democracy with protection of individual rights?

The US has been at loggerheads with allies and other countries on the question of what role the UN should play in Iraq reconstruction, with the US wanting to keep the UN in a marginal role. Historically the US public has liked the idea of working through the UN. Where does the public stand now?

Another key debate in the news lately has been over whether the US military should have direct operational control over humanitarian relief and economic reconstruction, with the Defense Department pressing for such control, and the State Department and international aid organizations seeking to keep such efforts more independent. What does the public think?

To answer these and other questions, PIPA and Knowledge Networks conducted a nationwide poll of 865 American adults over April 18-22, 2003. The margin of error for the full sample was plus or minus 3.5%. The poll was fielded using Knowledge Networks' nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology see page 9, or go to [www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation.

### **Key Findings:**

#### ***America's Role in the Post Iraq War World***

The public overwhelmingly endorses the war with Iraq. Assumptions about the consequences of the war and how other countries view US foreign policy have become sharply more positive. Nonetheless, the war has not led Americans to support the US playing a role in the world marked by unilateral and military

approaches. Majorities continue to believe the US plays the role of world policeman more than it should and that the US should emphasize a multilateral approach to world problems in general and to the problem of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

#### ***Next Steps With Arab Countries***

Americans prefer an approach to Arab countries that de-emphasizes military options and emphasizes a multilateral approach. Strong majorities favor the US withdrawing US troops from Saudi Arabia once Iraq is stabilized, and oppose taking military action against Syria. Majorities favor the UN, not the US, taking the lead in dealing with Syria and Iran. A majority opposes pressuring countries in the region to become more democratic.

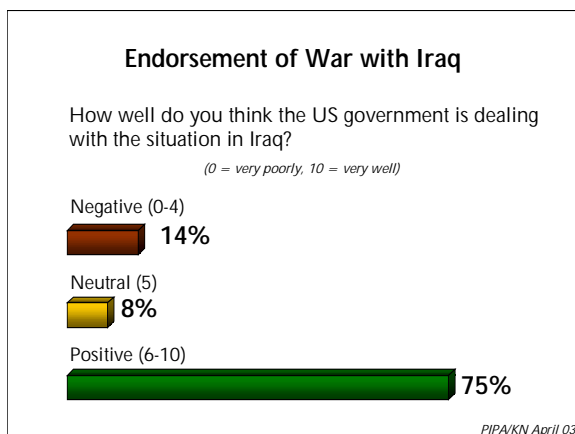
#### ***Iraq Reconstruction***

An overwhelming majority says that the US has the responsibility to remain in Iraq for an extended period and create a stable and democratic government that protects human rights. The public is divided on whether the UN or the US should take the primary responsibility for constructing the new Iraq government, while clear majorities favor the UN being responsible for civil order and economic reconstruction. The majority opposes the US military directing humanitarian relief and economic reconstruction. An overwhelming majority favors Congress retaining oversight over US funds for Iraqi relief and reconstruction.

*America's Role in the Post Iraq War World*

The public overwhelmingly endorses the war with Iraq. Assumptions about the consequences of the war and how other countries view US foreign policy have become sharply more positive. Nonetheless, the war has not led Americans to support the US playing a more unilateral or military role in the world. Majorities continue to believe the US plays the role of world policeman more than it should and that the US should emphasize a multilateral approach to world problems in general and to the problem of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Consistent with numerous other polls, this poll found an overwhelming majority endorsing the war with Iraq. Asked to rate how US policy was handling Iraq on a 0-10 scale, with 0 meaning "very poorly" and 10 meaning "very well," 75% gave it a rating above 5. The mean rating was 7.44.

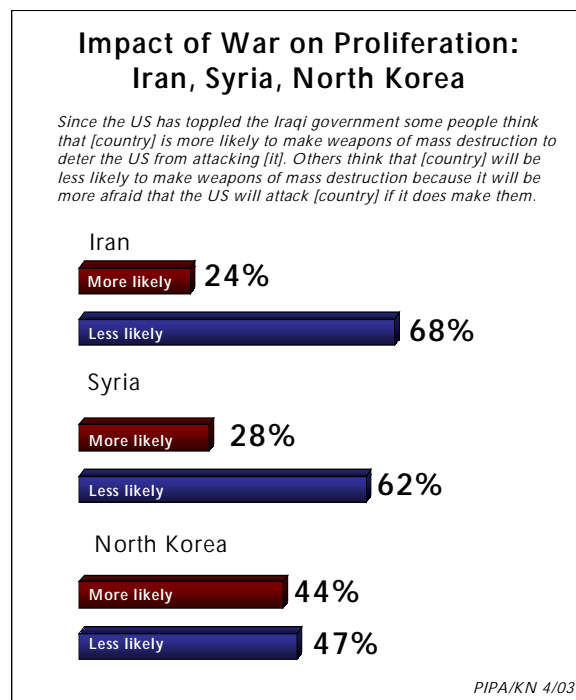


While the March PIPA/KN poll found more Americans assuming that various consequences of the war would be negative than assumed they would be positive, this view has shifted sharply. Now the public is more likely to assume that the war will have positive consequences.

Assumptions about the consequences of the war and how other countries view US foreign policy have suddenly become more positive. Asked "how things will be now that the US has toppled

the government of Iraq" in terms of "the chances that other countries will try to develop nuclear weapons," only 15% said these chances would be higher. Asked a similar question in March, about 45% assumed the chances would be higher that North Korea would make nuclear weapons and 41% assumed the chances that Iran would make them would be higher. In the current poll, 36% assumed that the chances would be lower; 47% thought they were unchanged.

In three questions about Iran, North Korea, and Syria, respondents were offered two arguments about results of the war: that such countries will be less likely to make weapons of mass destruction for fear that the US will attack, or that these countries are more likely to try to acquire them so as to deter a US attack. Strong majorities favored the more sanguine argument that Iran (68%) and Syria (62%) would be less inclined to make such weapons. For North Korea the response was divided, with 47% saying they would be less likely and 44% saying they would be more likely to make weapons of mass destruction.



Consistent with this optimistic view of the impact of the war, when asked "If as a result of

the Iraq war, the US were to become a more dominant force in the world," whether this would be a positive or negative thing, 66% said this would be something positive. Asked the same question about the possibility that "as a result of the Iraq war some governments around the world are more afraid of the US," 61% said this would be primarily a positive result.

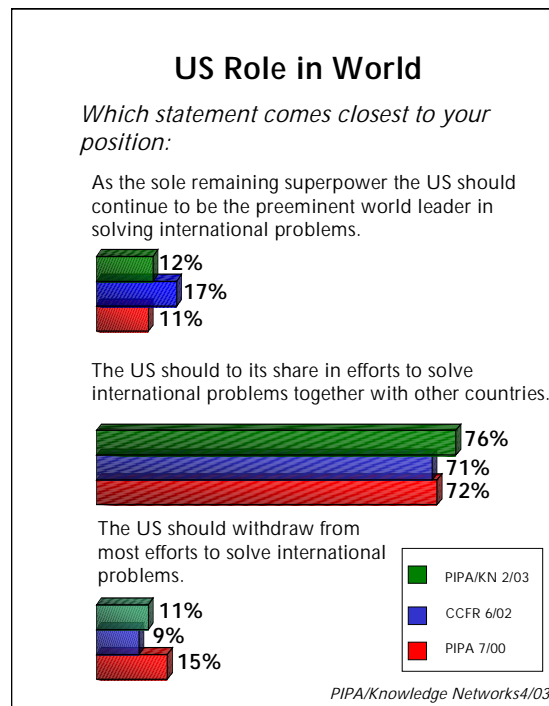
There was also a striking rise in the perception of whether people in other countries have a positive view of US foreign policy. PIPA/Knowledge Networks has been tracking this perception since November 2002, by asking respondents to give the rating they imagine people in other countries and European allies would give if they rated US foreign policy. The net rating (the percentage assuming a positive attitude minus the percentage assuming a negative attitude) went down sharply starting in January. In March the net ratings were minus 26% for the world as a whole and minus 21% for the European allies. In the current poll taken after the Iraq war, both these net numbers rose sharply--to plus 9% for the world and plus 1% for the European allies.

**No Support for New Role Based on Unilateral and Military Approaches**

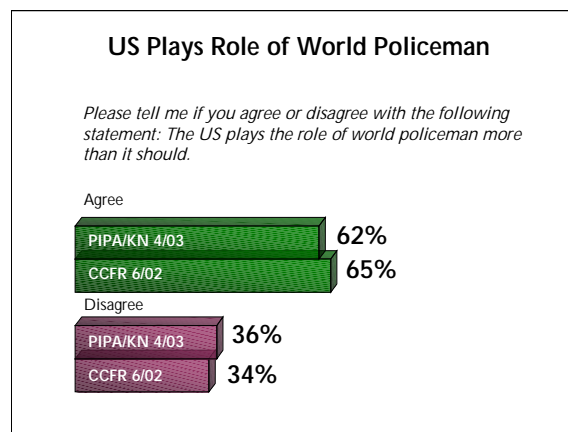
The public's approval of US military action without UN approval notwithstanding, the public is not showing signs of a change in its basic attitudes about the kind of role the US should play in the world. As before the war, the public overwhelmingly endorses a role for the US that emphasizes multilateralism and roundly rejects either a role based on the US playing the role of world hegemon, or an isolationist posture.

Presented a trend line question that offered three options for the US role in the world, only 12% chose the option, "As the sole remaining superpower, the US should continue to be the preeminent world leader in solving international problems." Likewise, only 11% chose the option that "the US should withdraw from most efforts to solve international problems." Rather, an overwhelming 76% chose the option that "The US should do its share in efforts to solve

international problems together with other countries." These responses are essentially unchanged from when the question was asked before the war, most recently in June 2002 by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.

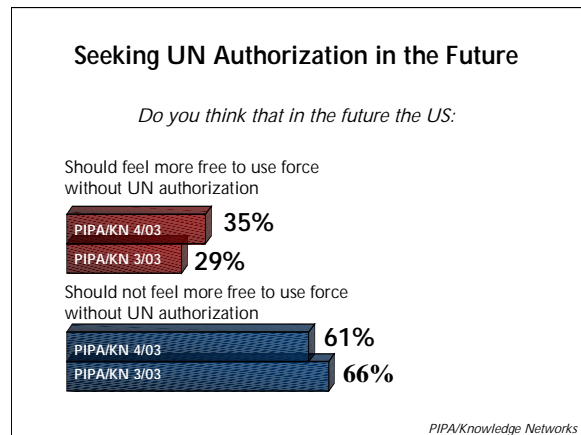


Even in the current circumstance, a majority (62%) continues to express the view that "the US plays the role of world policeman more than it should." This is essentially the same as the response to an almost identical question CCFR presented in June 2002.

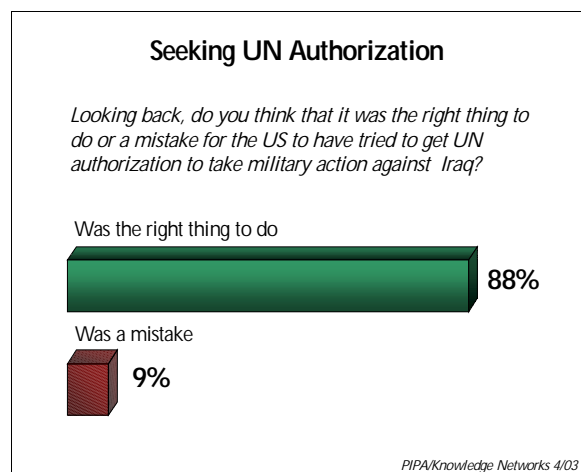


A majority does not feel that the fact that the US went to war with Iraq without UN approval sets

a precedent for the US to feel more free to do so in the future. In late March, just as the war was getting started, PIPA/KN asked whether “in the future the US should feel more free to use force without UN authorization.” Sixty-six percent said that it should not. In the current poll, this number was a slightly smaller majority, with 61% saying that it should not feel more free (this drop, however, is not statistically significant).

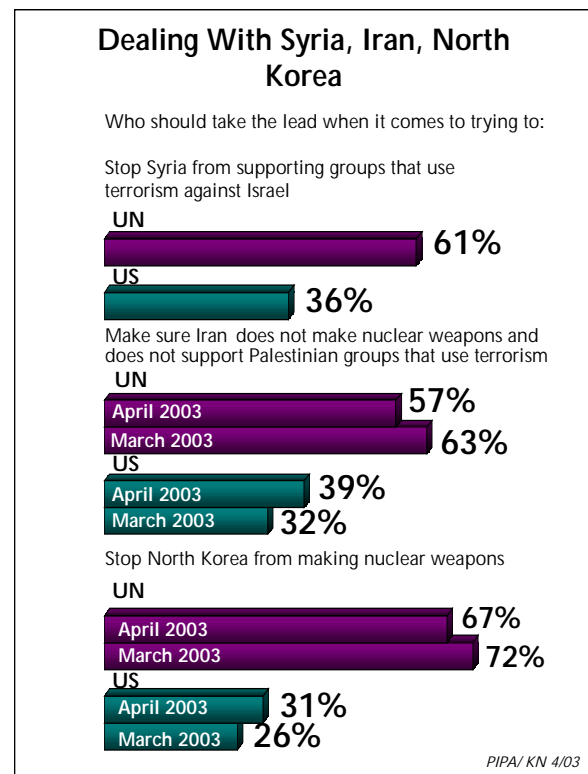


Perhaps it is even more meaningful that an overwhelming majority endorses the US effort to gain UN approval, even though it was unsuccessful. Asked, “Looking back, do you think that it was the right thing to do or a mistake for the US to have tried to get UN authorization to take military action against Iraq?” a remarkable 88% said that it was the right thing to do.



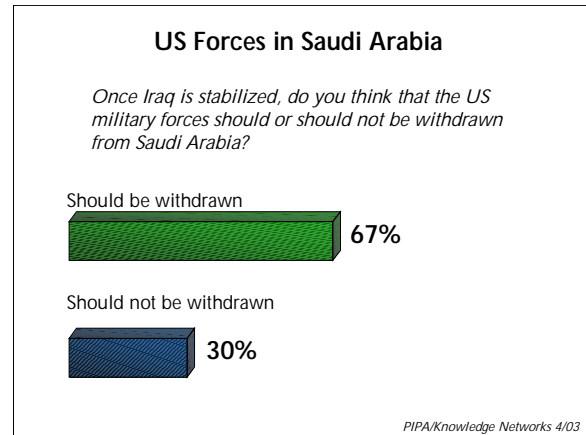
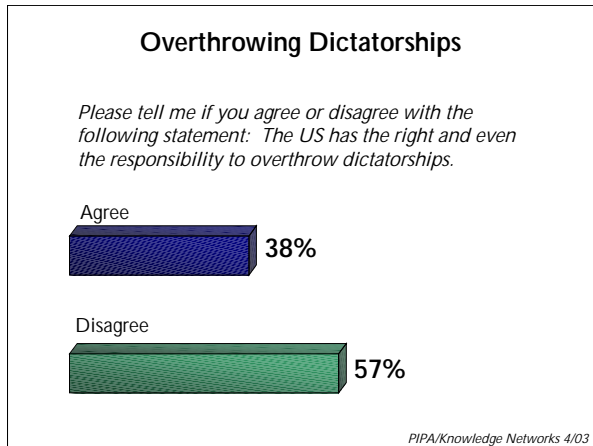
A majority feels that the UN, rather than the US, should take the lead in dealing with countries

that support terrorist groups or that may be building weapons of mass destruction. Asked who should take the lead in “trying to make sure that Iran does not make nuclear weapons and does not support Palestinian groups that use terrorism,” 57% preferred the UN to the US. Sixty-seven percent preferred the UN taking the lead in “trying to stop North Korea from making nuclear weapons,” and 61% preferred the UN taking the lead in “trying to stop Syria from supporting groups that use terrorism against Israel.”



Americans are showing no signs of greater readiness to use military force as an instrument of US foreign policy. Although removing the oppressive dictatorship of Saddam Hussein has emerged as a primary rationale for the invasion of Iraq (since weapons of mass destruction have not been found), there is not majority support for generalizing this as a precedent in US policy. Presented the argument, “The US has the right and even the responsibility to overthrow dictatorships,” only 38% agreed with it, while 57% disagreed.





Also (as discussed below), strong majorities want the US to withdraw US troops from Saudi Arabia once Iraq is stabilized and oppose going to war with Syria.

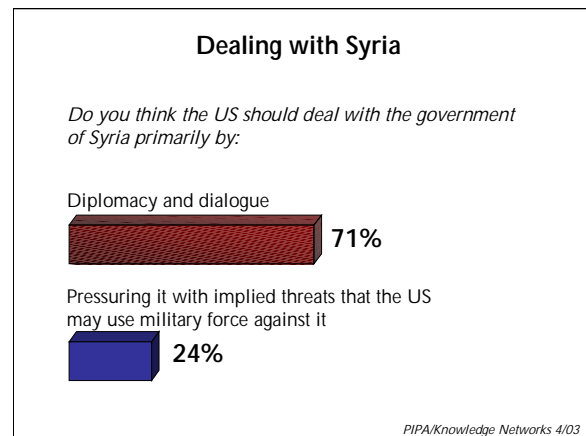
#### *Next Steps With Arab Countries*

**Americans prefer an approach to Arab countries that de-emphasizes military options and emphasizes a multilateral approach. Strong majorities favor the US withdrawing US troops from Saudi Arabia once Iraq is stabilized, and oppose taking military action against Syria. Majorities favor the UN, not the US, taking the lead in dealing with Syria and Iran. A majority opposes pressuring countries in the region to become more democratic.**

In dealing with Arab countries specifically, there is no sign of a readiness in the public to put a new emphasis on using military power in the region. Perhaps most striking is the finding that a strong majority of 67% said that ‘Once Iraq is stabilized...US military forces should...be withdrawn from Saudi Arabia.’

Even as the administration’s rhetoric toward Syria has heated up, and there has been much talk in the press about whether Syria is ‘next’ for military action, there is no sign of a general public willingness to use military force toward

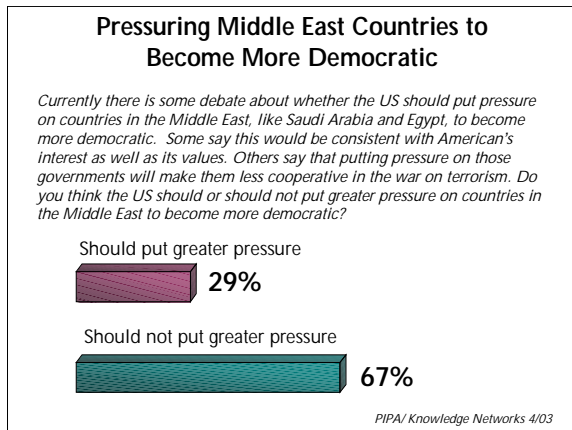
Syria. Asked directly, “Do you think, in the near future, the US should or should not go to war to overthrow the government of Syria?” only 21% said that it should, while 71% said it should not. Those who said that the US should do so were then asked a follow-on question about whether the US should go ahead if this were opposed by most members of the UN Security Council. In this case, the percentage willing to do so dropped to 17%.



Another frequently heard theme about the post-Iraq war period is that the way is now open for the US to pressure countries in the Middle East to become more democratic. The public greets this idea with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. PIPA/KN’s question offered arguments on both sides: that US pressure “on countries in the Middle East, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to become more democratic” “would be consistent with America’s interests as well as its values,” or that such pressure “on those governments will make them less cooperative in the war on



terrorism.” A full two-thirds (67%) rejected the idea of pressuring countries in the Middle East to become more democratic; only 29% were supportive of the idea.



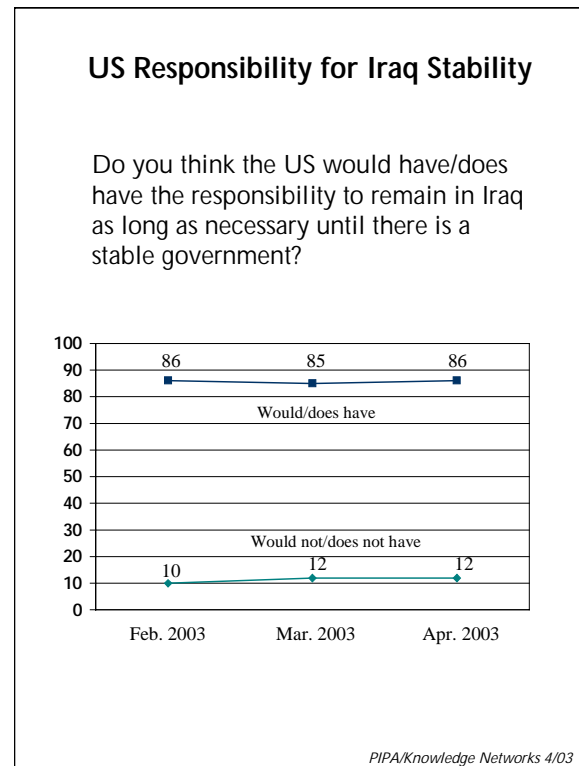
### Iraq Reconstruction

An overwhelming majority says that the US has the responsibility to remain in Iraq for an extended period and create a stable and democratic government that protects human rights. The public is divided on whether the UN or the US should take the primary responsibility for constructing the new Iraq government, while clear majorities favor the UN being responsible for civil order and economic reconstruction. The majority opposes the US military directing humanitarian relief and economic reconstruction. An overwhelming majority favors Congress retaining oversight over US funds for Iraqi relief and reconstruction.

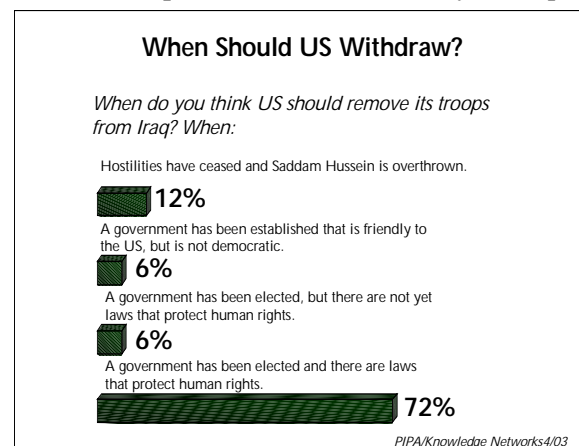
According to an overwhelming majority—86%--“now that Saddam Hussein’s government is toppled,” the US has “the responsibility to remain in Iraq as long as necessary until there is a stable government.” This near-unanimous figure is unchanged from early in the war (March 22-25) when a similar question found 85% saying the US has this responsibility and from February when 86% took this position.

Americans appear to assume that this will require a substantial commitment as well. Asked, “How long do you think it will take to establish a stable government in Iraq after the

end of hostilities?” the median estimate was 2 years—no different than the response in March to this question, when the war was in progress.



The public also seems to be holding up rather high standards for what this new government should be like. Asked: “When do you think the US should remove its troops from Iraq?” and offered four possible levels of stability in Iraq.



Surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of 72% chose the most rigorous standard: when “a government has been elected and there are laws that protect human rights.” The other three

options, taken together, were chosen by less than a quarter (24%) of respondents.

Support for such an effort proved to be resilient even when respondents were reminded of the financial costs. Respondents were offered a choice between two statements. One statement made a point that has often garnered large majorities in other contexts—that the country has many domestic problems that need these funds. The statement went: “We shouldn’t spend money on rebuilding Iraq when we have so many problems here at home.” Only 24% endorsed it, while 73% endorsed the other statement: “It would be unwise and immoral for the US to overthrow the government of Iraq and then just leave.”

Past research has shown that, behind an apparent reluctance to spend US funds on international issues, there is often a concern that the US is contributing more than its fair share. To test for this concern, respondents who said there were too many problems at home for the US to be spending money on rebuilding Iraq were asked: “What if other countries and the UN made contributions to rebuilding Iraq?” Out of this group, over half (53%) then said the US should join others in spending money to rebuild Iraq—bringing the total willing to do so under some conditions to 86%.

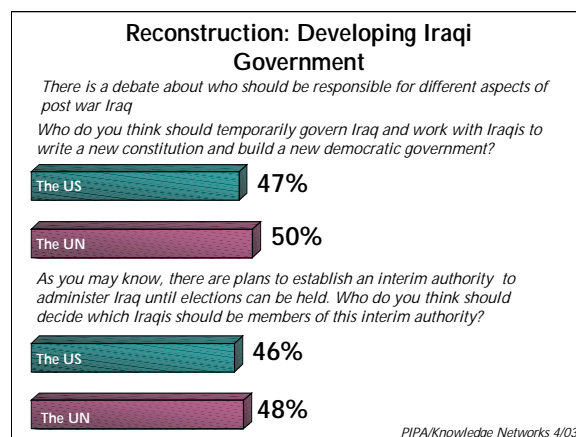
While Americans show a readiness to invest in a long-term effort, they also show optimism that Iraq will achieve stability before long and appear to have grown more optimistic with the end of the war. Asked to think six months ahead, 56% say it is more likely that Iraq will have a stable government; 40% say it will be “unstable and chaotic.” Asked to think five years ahead, the majority assuming stability is much larger—76%—up from 67% in the March 22-25 poll.

**Responsibility for Aspects of Reconstruction**

The public is divided on whether the UN or the US should take the primary responsibility for constructing the new Iraq government, while clear majorities favor the UN being responsible for security and economic reconstruction. Respondents were told, “There is a debate about

who should be responsible for different aspects of postwar Iraq,” and then presented a range of questions, allowing respondents to vary their positions.

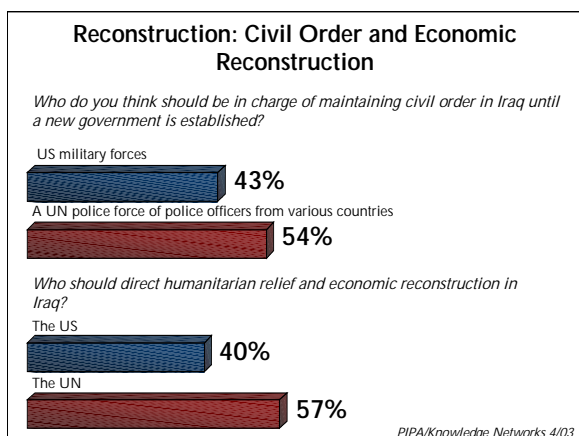
When asked about the governmental core of the new Iraqi state, the public divides over who should take primary responsibility. Fifty percent said the UN “should temporarily govern Iraq and work with Iraqis to write a new constitution and build a new democratic government,” while 47% said the US should do this. In a question that framed the problem in more immediate terms, respondents were told “there are plans to establish an interim authority to administer Iraq until elections can be held,” and were asked: “Who do you think should decide which Iraqis should be members of this interim authority?” Again the answer was divided, with 48% saying the UN and 46% saying the US.



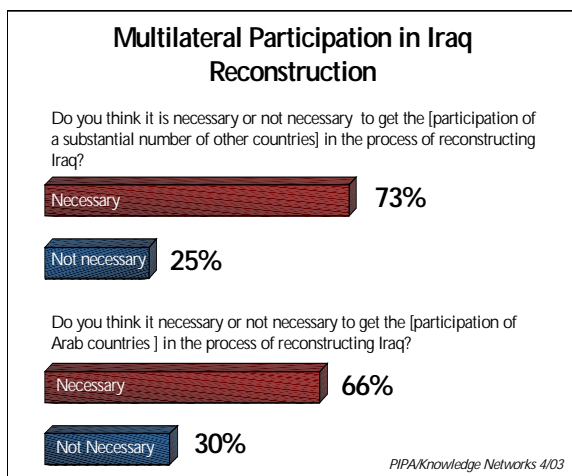
Apparently Americans are open-minded on this issue as a majority said it was ready to have the Iraqis decide. Asked “If it was practical, do you think it would be a good idea or a bad idea to have a referendum for the Iraqi people to vote whether the US or the UN should temporarily govern Iraq until a new government is established?” a strong majority—62%—thought such a referendum would be a good idea; 35% thought it would be a bad idea.

With other aspects of Iraq clear majorities would rather have the UN be responsible. A clear 57% said the UN “should direct humanitarian relief and reconstruction in Iraq”; only 40% wanted the US in this role. The proposal that the US

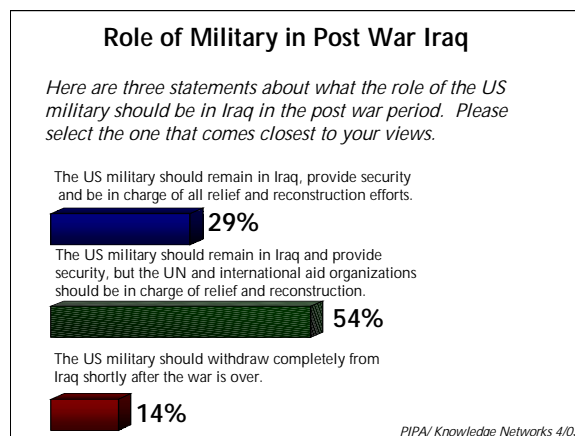
should now manage the oil-for-food program that the UN ran before the war was overwhelmingly rejected: just 28% thought the US should now manage the program, while 70% said the UN should continue until a new Iraqi government is established. And only 43% thought the US should be “in charge of maintaining civil order in Iraq until a new government is established”; a 54% majority wanted this to be the job of “a UN police force of police officers from various countries.”



Strong majorities also show support for multilateral participation in the reconstruction of Iraq. Seventy-three percent said it was “necessary to get the participation of a substantial number of other countries in the process of reconstructing Iraq” (not necessary, 25%). Sixty-six percent said it was necessary to get the participation of Arab countries (not necessary, 30%).



Currently there is a major controversy about whether the US military should play a directing role in relief and reconstruction as well as providing security in Iraq. Presented three options, only 29% took the position that in addition to security the military should be in charge of relief and reconstruction. A 54% majority preferred that the US military “remain in Iraq and provide security, but the UN and international aid organizations should be in charge of relief and reconstruction.” Just 14% wanted the military to withdraw “shortly after the war is over.”



Finally, an overwhelming majority favors Congress retaining oversight over US funds for Iraqi relief and reconstruction. Recently there has been some controversy over the White House's request that the use of \$2.5 billion in reconstruction funds for Iraq be at the discretion of the President through the Department of Defense. The current poll asked: “Do you think Congress should give the President full control over the way money is spent on Iraq assistance and reconstruction, or should Congress retain oversight over how the money is spent?” Seventy-seven percent said Congress should retain oversight; only 19% thought Congress should give the President full control.

## METHODOLOGY

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California, with a randomly selected sample of its large-scale nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access). The distribution of the sample in the web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc.

The panel is recruited using stratified random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a non-zero probability of selection for every US household having a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance, which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. In return, panel members participate in surveys three to four times a month. Survey responses are confidential, with identifying information never revealed without respondent approval. When a survey is fielded to a panel member, he or she receives an e-mail indicating that the survey is available for completion. Surveys are self-administered.

For more information about the methodology, please go to:

[www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp)