

THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Americans and Iraq on the Eve of the Presidential Election

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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
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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.

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The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), at the University of Maryland's School for Public Policy, 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.

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INTRODUCTION

The final report of the Iraq Survey Group, presented to Congress by Charles Duelfer concluded that just before the war Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction or a significant program for developing them. This came on the heels of the Senate Intelligence Committee report, and the earlier report of the Iraq Survey Group presented by David Kay, both of which came to basically the same conclusion. In addition, the 9/11 Commission concluded that Iraq was providing no significant support to al Qaeda.

Naturally, this raises the question of whether the US should have gone to war with Iraq, since the assumption that Iraq had WMD and supported al Qaeda were central to the rationale for going to war. Some, including representatives of the Bush administration, have argued that indications that Saddam had the intent to acquire WMD at some point in the future provide adequate justification for going to war. Given that lives have been lost and the US has expended significant political and economic capital going to war, it would not be surprising for Americans to adopt alternative rationales for going to war. But have they?

While the Duelfer report has received significant press it is not clear that Americans have fully absorbed its message. Earlier PIPA/KN polls have found that half or more Americans believe that Iraq did have WMD or a major program for developing them, and believe that Iraq was providing substantial support for al Qaeda. Have Americans begun to absorb the views put forward by these official commissions? What do they assume the Duelfer report concluded, and how do the conclusions of the 9/11 Commission now stand in their minds? Finally, how has all this come to bear on the public's view of whether the US made the right decision in going to war with Iraq?

At the time of the transfer of sovereignty to the new Iraq government, there was some anticipation that the insurgency might abate. Attacks, however, have only increased. How do Americans now view the situation in Iraq? Do they perceive the situation getting better or worse? How much confidence do they have that the operation will ultimately succeed?

More significantly, how do Americans feel about maintaining the US presence in Iraq? Are these attitudes affected by perceptions of US troop fatalities or Iraqi civilian casualties?

The US is in the process of constructing a substantial number of military bases in Iraq classified by the military as "enduring." The administration, however, has said the US will only remain in Iraq long enough to achieve stability there. How do Americans feel about the possibility of having permanent bases, and what do they perceive the US is planning for Iraq?

To answer these and other questions, PIPA/KN conducted a nationwide poll over October 12-18, 2004, with a sample of 968 respondents. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.2-4%, depending on whether the question was administered to all or part of the sample.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

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

In light of the upcoming presidential election, special attention was paid to differences in attitudes and perceptions among those who favor President Bush, who favor Senator Kerry, or who are uncommitted.

Key findings of the study were:

1. Decision to Go to War

Three in four say that if Iraq did not have WMD and did not provide substantial support to al Qaeda, the US should not have gone to war. Saddam’s intent to build WMD is not seen as a good enough reason. A bare majority now believes that going to war was the wrong decision and that going after al Qaeda would have been a better use of resources; this attitude is highly correlated with beliefs about whether Iraq had WMD or supported al Qaeda. A large majority thinks that the US should have taken more time to determine if Iraq had WMD and to build international support.3

1a. Beliefs About Iraq and WMD

Beliefs that Iraq had WMD or a major WMD program have eroded a bit, but half continue to hold these beliefs. Views are highly polarized, with large majorities of Bush supporters holding these beliefs and large majorities of Kerry supporters rejecting them. A slight majority recognizes that the Duelfer report concluded that Iraq did not have WMD or a major program, though 6 in 10 Bush supporters believe the opposite. Views are highly polarized as to what most experts are saying about Iraq and WMD. There is, however, a strong consensus that the Bush administration is saying that Iraq had WMD or a major program.6

1b. Beliefs About Iraq and al Qaeda

Americans are divided as to whether Iraq provided significant support to al Qaeda. However, only a small minority believes Iraq was directly involved in 9/11, and a majority rejects the idea that clear evidence of Iraqi support for al Qaeda has been found. Beliefs are highly polarized, with large majorities of Bush supporters believing that Iraq was providing support and large majorities of Kerry supporters saying the opposite.9

1c. What the President Knew and What He Would Have Done If He Knew

A large majority agrees that the president went to war based on incorrect assumptions, but most assume he did not know they were incorrect. A majority of Bush supporters are confident that if Bush knew Iraq did not have WMD and was not providing support for al Qaeda, he would not have gone to war, while a large majority of Kerry supporters believe he still would still have gone to war.....10

2. The Current Operation

A modest majority believes that the situation in Iraq is getting worse and that the US presence is provoking more military conflict. The public is divided about whether the operation will ultimately succeed and about whether the Iraqi people want the US to remain in Iraq. Nonetheless only one in five think the US should completely withdraw from Iraq and the percentage thinking the US should withdraw or decrease its forces has declined to four in ten.11

2a. Putting Operation Under UN Command

If other countries would be more willing to contribute troops if the operation were put under UN command, a large majority would be willing to do so.13

2b. Troop and Civilian Fatalities

The public overall accurately estimates the number of US troop fatalities. Americans underestimate the number of Iraqi civilian fatalities, but their estimate is rising. Those who have higher estimates of US

troop fatalities are no more likely to want to withdraw or decrease US troops, but they are slightly more likely to say that the US made the wrong decision in going to war with Iraq. Similarly, those who estimate higher levels of Iraqi civilian casualties are more likely to say that the decision to go to war was wrong, but not to want to withdraw..... 14

3. US Military Presence in Iraq and the Middle East

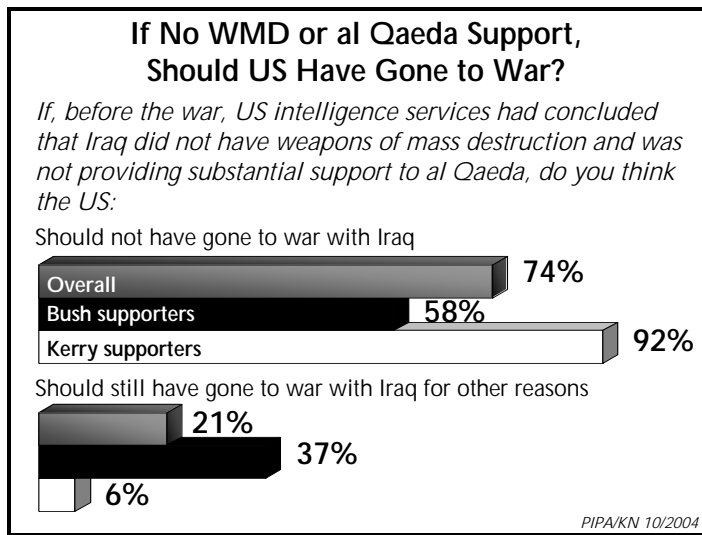
Two out of three oppose the US having a permanent military presence in Iraq and even more assume that the Iraqi people are opposed to the idea. However, a modest majority thinks the US is building such a presence. More broadly, three in four assume that most people in the Middle East want the US to reduce its military presence there, and a growing majority says that if this is the case the US should reduce its presence. Six in ten assume—correctly, according to polling in the region—that most people in the Middle East oppose US-led efforts to fight terrorism, and a clear majority favors putting greater emphasis on diplomatic over military methods for fighting terrorism..... 15

FINDINGS

1. Decision to Go to War

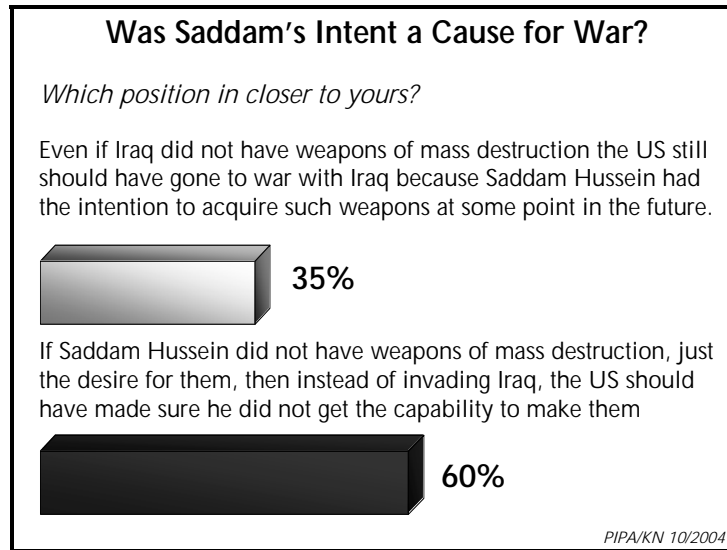
Three in four say that if Iraq did not have WMD and did not provide substantial support to al Qaeda, the US should not have gone to war. Saddam’s intent to build WMD is not seen as a good enough reason. A bare majority now believes that going to war was the wrong decision and that going after al Qaeda would have been a better use of resources; this attitude is highly correlated with beliefs about whether Iraq had WMD or supported al Qaeda. A large majority thinks that the US should have taken more time to determine if Iraq had WMD and to build international support.

While Americans are divided on numerous questions related to the Iraq war, there is a consensus that if, before the war, Iraq did not have WMD and was not providing substantial support to al Qaeda, the US should not have gone to war with Iraq. Seventy-four percent overall have this view. Even a majority of Bush supporters (58%) agree, as do nearly all Kerry supporters (92%) and 77% of the uncommitted.¹

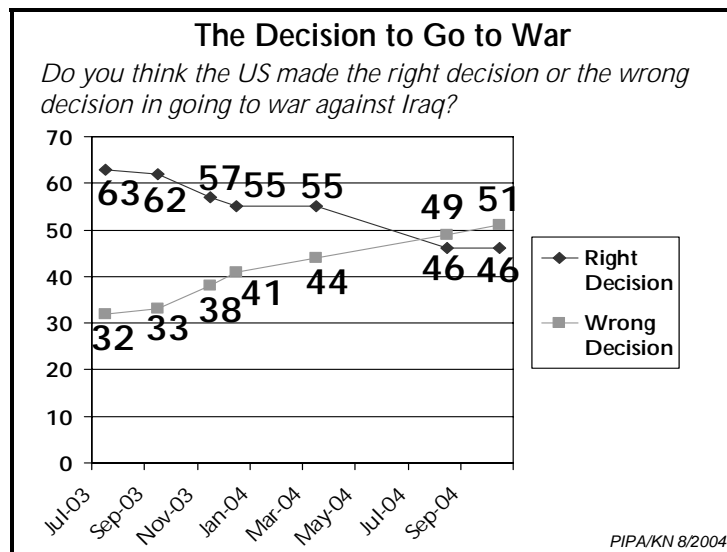


¹ The uncommitted were defined as those Americans who did not choose a preference for President, or were not “very sure” they would vote for either Bush or Kerry. They constituted 25% of the sample. “Bush supporters” and “Kerry supporters” were defined as those who expressed a preference for either Bush or Kerry, apart from whether they were “very sure,” “somewhat sure,” or “not very sure” that they would vote that way.

A majority rejects the argument that the US should have gone to war with Iraq because Saddam Hussein had the intention to acquire WMD. Presented two arguments, only 35% endorsed the one that said, “Even if Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, the US still should have gone to war with Iraq, because Saddam Hussein had the intention to acquire such weapons at some point in the future.” Rather, 60% preferred the argument that “If Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction, just the desire for them, then instead of invading Iraq, the US should have made sure he did not get the capability to make them.”

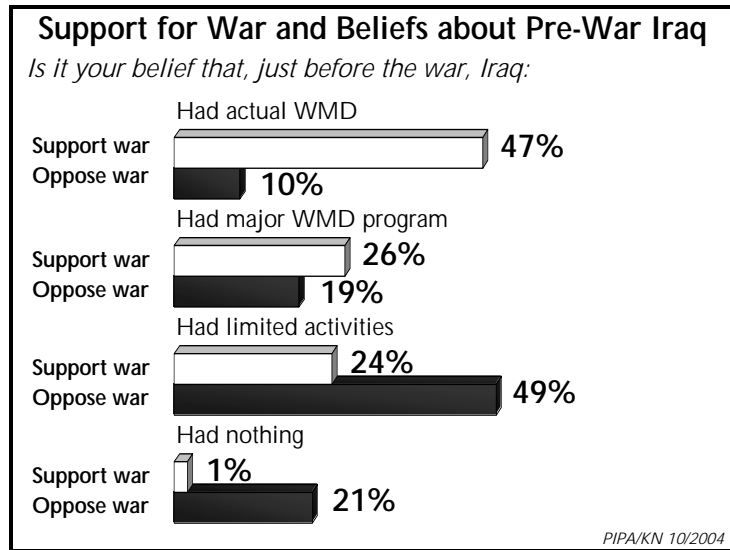


Overall, support for the decision to go to war has eroded slightly, with a bare majority of 51% now saying that it was the wrong decision and 46% saying it was the right decision (as compared to August when 49% said it was the wrong decision and 46% the right decision).



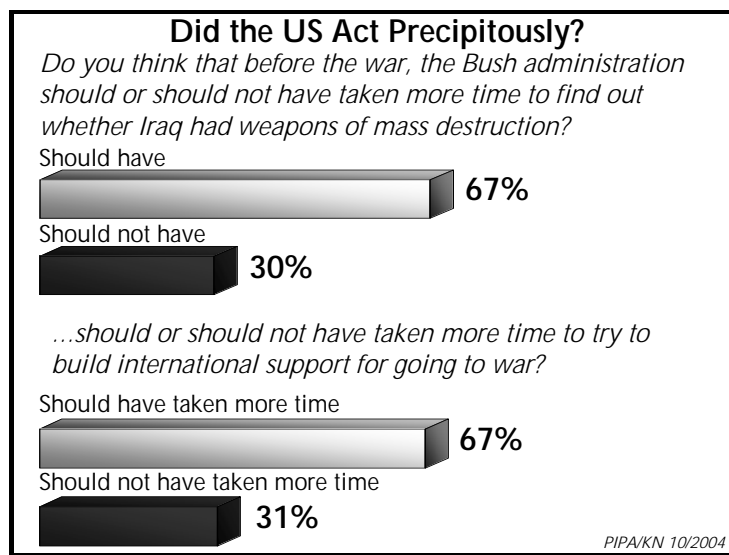
Consistent with the consensus view that the US should not have gone to war if the US did not have WMD or links to al Qaeda, views about the decision to go to war are highly correlated with beliefs about prewar Iraq. Among those who say that going to war was the right decision, 73% believe that Iraq had WMD (47%) or a major program for developing them (26%), and 75% believe that Iraq was providing

substantial support to al Qaeda. Among those who say it was the wrong decision, 29% believe that Iraq had WMD (10%) or a major program for developing them (19%), and 33% believe that Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda.



A large majority (67%) now thinks that the Bush administration should have taken more time to find out whether Iraq had WMD, while 30% say they should not have. However, despite the size of the majority, this is not a consensus position. While nearly all Kerry supporters (97%) hold this position, only 37% of Bush supporters do, while 59% of Bush supporters do not. Among the uncommitted, 79% say the US should have taken more time.

Very similarly, 67% say the Bush administration should have taken more time to try to build international support for going to war, with just 31% saying the opposite. Here again, nearly all Kerry supporters (96%) hold this position, while only 38% of Bush supporters do and 60% do not. Among the uncommitted, 78% say the administration should have taken more time and 16% say it should not have.

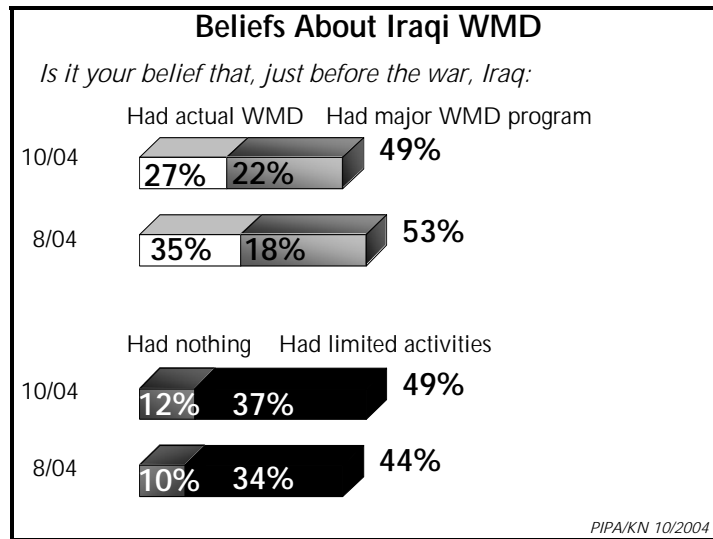


1a. Beliefs About Iraq and WMD

Beliefs that Iraq had WMD or a major WMD program have eroded a bit, but half continue to hold these beliefs. Views are highly polarized, with large majorities of Bush supporters holding these beliefs and large majorities of Kerry supporters rejecting them. A slight majority recognizes that the Duelfer report concluded that Iraq did not have WMD or a major program, though 6 in 10 Bush supporters believe the opposite. Views are highly polarized as to what most experts are saying about Iraq and WMD. There is, however, a strong consensus that the Bush administration is saying that Iraq had WMD or a major program.

There are some indications that the Duelfer report has made some impact on Americans thinking about pre-war Iraq and WMD. In response to a question that gave them four options, the percentage saying Iraq had actual WMD (27%) or a major WMD program (22%) has declined from 53% in August to 49%. Views are highly polarized, with 72% of Bush supporters continuing to hold to the view that Iraq had actual WMD (47%) or a major program for developing them (25%), while only 26% of Kerry supporters hold believe Iraq had WMD (8%) or a major program (18%).. Among the uncommitted, 53% believe that Iraq had actual WMD (22%) or a major WMD program (31%).

As compared to August, the overall percentage believing that Iraq had actual WMD declined from 35% to 27%. The sharpest movement was among Bush supporters, who dropped sharply from 63% believing this in August to 47% in October. Among Kerry supporters, the drop was from 13% to 8%.



However, it appears that many of those abandoning the belief Iraq had WMD have migrated to the view that Iraq had a major WMD program--as the percentage having this belief increased from 18% in August to 22%, and among Bush supporters from 18% to 25%.

The percentage believing that Iraq “had some limited activities that could be used to help develop weapons of mass destruction, but not an active program” (a reasonable summary of the Duelfer report, as well as of the Senate Intelligence Committee report) rose slightly from 34% in August to 37% in October. This view rose from 16% to 25% among Bush supporters and from 50% to 51% among Kerry supporters. The view that Iraq “did not have any activities related to weapons of mass destruction” went from 10% to 12%, due to a rise among Kerry supporters from 18 to 22%. Overall, in October 49% had one or the other of these views, leaving the public evenly divided between the views that Iraq did or did not have a significant WMD program.

Perceptions of the Duelfer Report

Given that the Duelfer report received high-profile press attention just days before the poll was conducted, it was an intriguing question what respondents assumed the report concluded. Respondents were told, "As you may know, Charles Duelfer, the chief weapons inspector selected by the Bush administration to investigate whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, has just presented his final report to Congress" and were asked what he concluded, giving the same four response options used in questions on WMD above. The most common response (39%) was the approximately correct one that Duelfer concluded Iraq "had some limited activities that could be used to help develop weapons of mass destruction, but not an active program." However, 39% overall assumed that he concluded Iraq had actual WMD (12%) or a major program (27%).

Views were highly polarized along political lines. Among Bush supporters, a majority (57%) assumed that he concluded that Iraq had WMD (19%) or a major program (38%). Among Kerry supporters, 23% assumed that Duelfer concluded Iraq had WMD (7%) or a major program (16%). Among the uncommitted, 37% assumed Duelfer concluded Iraq had WMD (12%) or a major program (25%).

Interestingly, not all Bush supporters who know what the Duelfer report said believe it. Eighteen percent of Bush supporters still believe Iraq had WMD or a major WMD program, even though they know that the Duelfer report concluded otherwise.

Perceptions of the Duelfer report are a bit changed from the perceptions of the conclusions of the Senate Intelligence Committee PIPA found in August. Perceptions of a conclusion that Iraq had WMD dropped from 22% to 12%, with some migration to the perception of a conclusion was that Iraq had a major WMD program--rising from 22% to 27%. Those who held one or the other belief dropped from 44% to 39%. The sharpest change was among Bush supporters who believed the conclusion was that Iraq had WMD—from 36% to 19%.

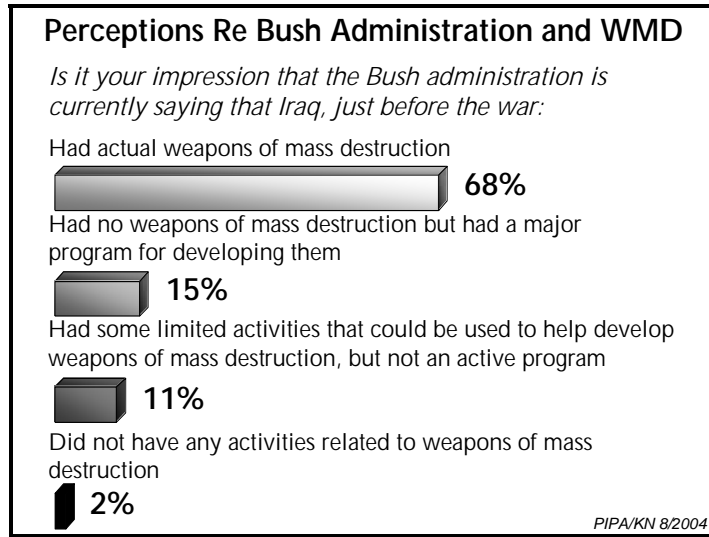
Perceptions of What Experts Say: The WMD Issue

On perceptions of what most experts are saying about whether Iraq had actual WMD, views are evenly divided, with 37% assuming that experts mostly agree that Iraq did have WMD, 38% that Iraq did not, and 21% saying that views are evenly divided. Compared with August (and contrary to other trends), the perceptions that most experts are saying Iraq did have WMD is up from 31%, while the perception that experts mostly say they did not is down from 43%.

Views are highly polarized. Fifty-six percent of Bush supporters (as compared to 18% of Kerry supporters) believe that experts mostly agree that Iraq did have actual WMD, and another 18% say that the experts' views are evenly divided on the subject. Symmetrically, 56% of Kerry supporters believe that most experts agree that Iraq did not have WMD (23% of Bush supporters). The uncommitted are in between: 36% think experts mostly agree Iraq did not have WMD, 31% think the opposite, and 24% assume experts are evenly divided.

Perceptions of What the Bush Administration Is Saying on WMD

In contrast to the divisions on so many other perceptions, there is an overwhelming consensus (83%) that the Bush administration is saying that Iraq had WMD (68%) or a major WMD program (15%). Only 13% perceive the administration as saying that Iraq had some limited activities, but not an active program (11%) or had nothing (2%).



There is virtually no difference between Bush and Kerry supporters on this point. Among Bush supporters, 82% perceive the Bush administration as saying that Iraq had WMD (63%) or a major WMD program (19%). Among Kerry supporters, 84% perceive the Bush administration as saying Iraq had WMD (73%) or a major program (11%). Among the uncommitted, 78% perceive the administration as saying Iraq had WMD (61%) or a major program (17%).

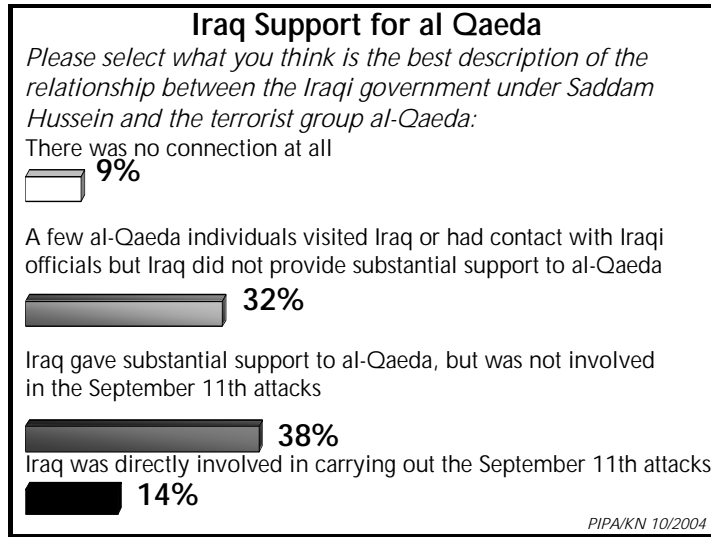
Interestingly, the perception that the Bush administration is saying that Iraq has actual WMD is up since August. In August 60% had this view, while now 68% have this view.

1b. Beliefs About Iraq and al Qaeda

Americans are divided as to whether Iraq provided significant support to al Qaeda. However, only a small minority believes Iraq was directly involved in 9/11, and a majority rejects the idea that clear evidence of Iraqi support for al Qaeda has been found. Beliefs are highly polarized, with large majorities of Bush supporters believing that Iraq was providing support and large majorities of Kerry supporters saying the opposite.

Despite the report of the 9/11 Commission saying there is no evidence Iraq was providing significant support to al Qaeda, overall 52% believe that Iraq was providing significant support to al Qaeda, with 38% saying that Iraq was providing substantial support though it was not involved in 9/11 and 14% even believing that Iraq was directly involved in 9/11.² This view is up slightly, but not significantly, from August.

² When other polling organizations have asked about whether Iraq was involved in the September 11th attacks they have often found a higher percentage than PIPA/KN has found. For example in September, Newsweek asked, "Do you think Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq was DIRECTLY involved in planning, financing, or carrying out the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, or not?" and 42% said that it was while 44% said it was not. In the PIPA/KN question respondents were given four response options including the option of saying that Iraq was not directly involved in 9/11 but was providing substantial support (overall 38% chose this option) as well as the option of saying they were directly involved in 9/11 (14% chose this option). Thus it appears that when offered only two response options, as in the Newsweek poll, some that answered that Iraq was involved in 9/11 were likely to trying to express their belief that Iraq was providing some kind of significant support to al Qaeda.



Views are highly polarized. Seventy-five of Bush supporters believe Iraq was providing significant support to al Qaeda, including 20% who believe that Iraq was directly involved in 9/11. Only 30% of Kerry supporters concur, while 64% believe that there were some minor contacts or no connection at all. Among the uncommitted, 52% believe Iraq gave substantial support, including 15% who think Iraq was directly involved in 9/11; 28% say there were only a few contacts with al Qaeda individuals, and 6% say there was nothing.

Overall, a majority (57%) rejects the idea that the US has found “clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization.” However, 63% of Bush supporters believe such evidence has been found, while 85% of Kerry supporters believe the opposite. Among the uncommitted, 57% reject the idea that the US has found clear evidence.

Perceptions of What Experts Say: al Qaeda

Asked what most experts believe to be the case, overall, a slight plurality (41%) assumes “experts mostly agree Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda”; 28% assume experts mostly agree Iraq was not doing this; and 26% say experts are evenly divided. This is virtually unchanged from August.

Views are highly polarized. Sixty percent of Bush supporters assume that most experts believe Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda. Only 21% of Kerry supporters believe this to be the case. Among the uncommitted, 42% believe most experts agree Iraq was providing substantial support; 23% think most experts agree on the opposite; and 23% assume experts are evenly divided.

Perceptions of What the Bush Administration Is Saying on al Qaeda

There is overwhelming consensus in the public that the Bush administration is currently saying Iraq gave substantial support to al Qaeda before the war. Seventy-five percent perceive the administration as saying this, including 23% who perceive it saying Iraq was directly involved in the 9/11 attacks. Only 19% perceive the administration as saying that there were only a few contacts with individuals (15%) or that there was nothing at all (4%).

As with the consensus over what the administration is saying regarding WMD, there is strong agreement here between Bush supporters and Kerry supporters. Seventy-five percent of Bush supporters think the Bush administration is currently saying Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda (56%) or even

that it was directly involved in 9/11 (19%). Further, 55% of Bush supporters say it is their impression the Bush administration is currently saying the US has found clear evidence Saddam Hussein was working closely with al Qaeda (not saying clear evidence found: 37%). Among Kerry supporters, 74% perceive the Bush administration as saying Iraq gave al Qaeda substantial support (49%) or was directly involved in 9/11 (25%). And 52% of Kerry supporters say the administration is saying clear evidence of a close collaboration has been found (not saying clear evidence found: 43%).

Among the uncommitted, 68% perceive the Bush administration as currently saying Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda (46%) or was directly involved in 9/11 (22%). Half (50%) of this group hear the administration saying the US has found clear evidence Saddam was working closely with al Qaeda.

Since August, the number that perceive the administration saying “Iraq gave substantial support to al Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11th attacks” has grown by nine points—from 43% to 52%. Those that perceive the administration as saying Iraq was directly involved in 9/11 have gone down, from 27% to 23%; those perceiving it saying there were only a few contacts have also gone down, from 18% to 15%.

1C. What the President Knew and What He Would Have Done If He Knew

A large majority agrees that the president went to war based on incorrect assumptions, but most assume he did not know they were incorrect. A majority of Bush supporters are confident that if Bush knew Iraq did not have WMD and was not providing support for al Qaeda, he would not have gone to war, while a large majority of Kerry supporters believe he still would have gone to war.

A large majority (73%) believes that President Bush decided to go to war on the basis of incorrect assumptions. This is a view shared by Bush supporters (60%) and Kerry supporters (89%).

However, a large majority that believes Bush acted on incorrect assumptions divides between 49% (of the whole sample) who think Bush believed these assumptions were correct, and 24% who think he knew they were incorrect. This varies by presidential preference. Among Bush supporters, 58% assume Bush believed the assumptions were correct (knew they were incorrect, 2%), while among Kerry supporters only 41% assume he believed the assumptions were correct, and 48% assume he knew they were incorrect.

Asked what the president would have done “if, before the war, US intelligence services had told President Bush there was no reliable evidence that Iraq possessed or was building weapons of mass destruction, or was providing substantial support to al Qaeda,” overall 59% say he would still have gone to war for other reasons, while 37% assume that he would not have gone to war.

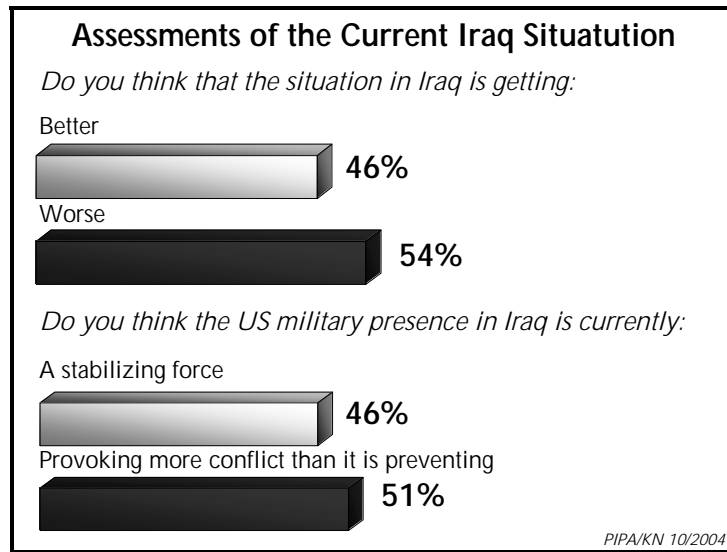
This view divides sharply by presidential preference. Among Bush supporters, a majority (61%) says that if he had been told, then he would not have gone to war. (This is consistent with the view of the majority of Bush supporters that if Iraq did not have WMD and was not providing support to al Qaeda then the US should not have gone to war.) While Kerry supporters agree by an even larger margin that in that case the US should not have gone to war, they overwhelmingly (83%) believe that if Bush knew, he would still have gone to war.

2. The Current Operation

A modest majority believes that the situation in Iraq is getting worse and that the US presence is provoking more military conflict. The public is divided about whether the operation will ultimately succeed and about whether the Iraqi people want the US to remain in Iraq. Nonetheless only one in five think the US should completely withdraw from Iraq and the percentage thinking the US should withdraw or decrease its forces has declined to four in ten.

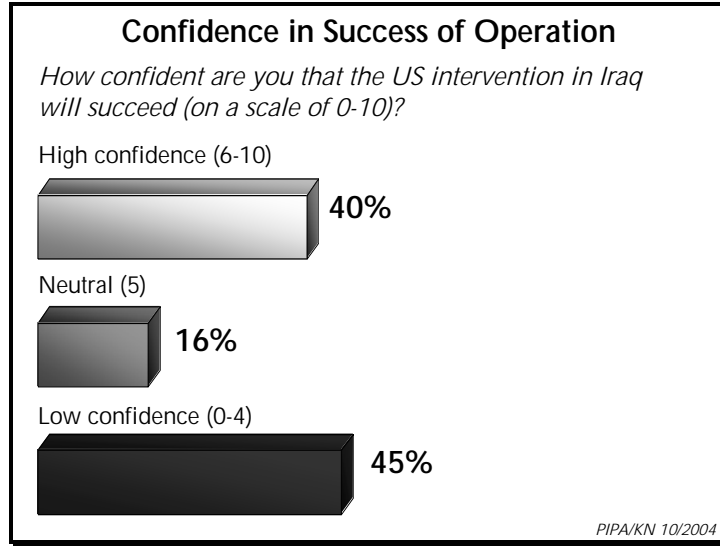
A modest majority believes that the situation in Iraq is getting worse and that the US presence is provoking more military conflict. Asked whether “the situation in Iraq is getting” better or worse, 54% said it was getting worse (18% a little, 18% somewhat, 18% much) while 46% said it is getting better (28% a little, 14% somewhat, 4% much).

Respondents were asked to assess whether the presence of US forces in Iraq were in fact tending to help stabilize the situation there. A slight majority of 51% said instead that “the US military presence in Iraq is currently provoking more conflict than it is preventing”; 46% said it is “a stabilizing force.”



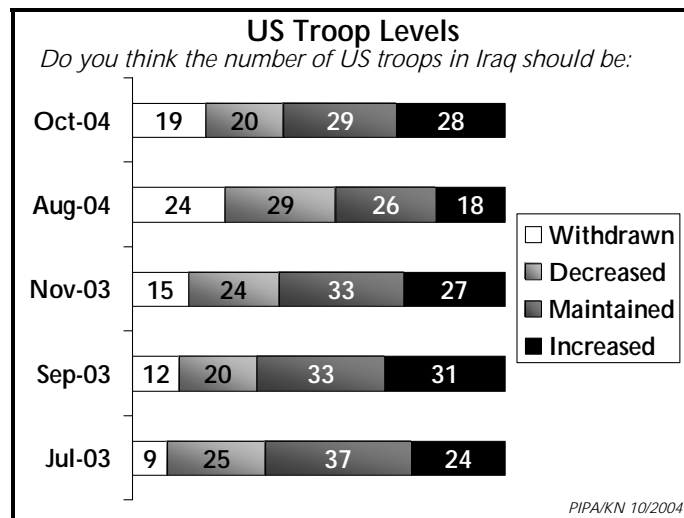
Opinion on both these questions is highly polarized according to respondents’ preferences in the presidential election. Thus 79% of Bush supporters said the Iraq situation was getting better, while 85% of Kerry supporters said it was getting worse. Similarly, 79% of Bush supporters said US military presence in Iraq was a stabilizing force, while 80% of Kerry supporters said it was provoking more conflict than it was preventing; However, among the uncommitted—those who said they didn’t know or were not very certain how they would vote—a 60% majority said the situation was worsening (getting better: 38%) and 60% said US military presence was, on balance, provoking more conflict (a stabilizing force: 36%).

The public is divided about whether the operation will ultimately succeed and about whether the Iraqi people want the US to remain in Iraq. Respondents were asked to rate “How confident are you that the US intervention in Iraq will succeed” on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning “not at all confident” and 10 meaning “extremely confident.” The mean rating was 4.80, very slightly up from August’s 4.63. Forty percent expressed high confidence (6-10); 45% expressed low confidence (0-4); and 16% were neutral (5). These proportions are not significantly different from those in August.

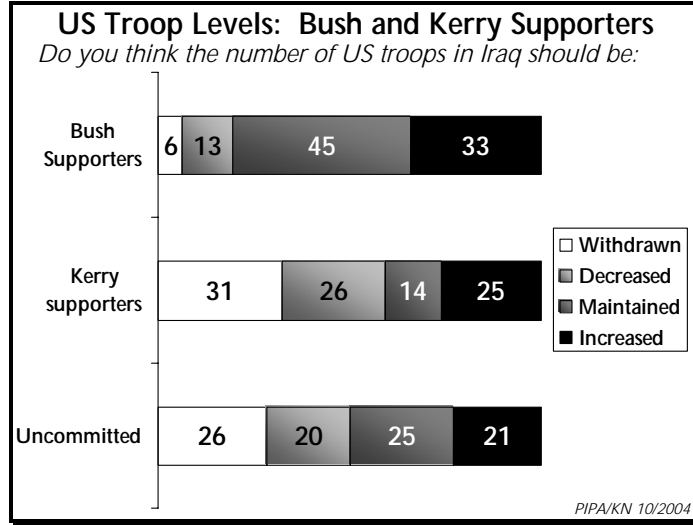


Currently, a bare majority of 52% think “the majority of the Iraqi people want the US to stay for now,” while 45% think a majority of Iraqis “want the US to leave.” Since July 2003 responses to this question have shifted in a narrow range, with 45% to 58% saying Iraqis want the US to stay for now, and 39% to 52% saying Iraqis want the US to leave. (These views are highly polarized, with 76% of Bush supporters assuming that most Iraqis want the US to stay, 67% of Kerry supporters assuming that most Iraqis want the US to leave, and 53% of uncommitted assuming Iraqis want the US to leave).

Nonetheless, only one in five think the US should completely withdraw from Iraq, and the percentage thinking the US should withdraw or decrease its forces has declined to four in ten. When asked whether the number of US troops in Iraq should be increased, maintained, decreased or withdrawn completely, only 19% wanted to withdraw—down from 24% in August. Another 20% wanted to decrease troop strength (down from 29% in August). Three in ten (29%) said the number of troops should be kept steady (up from 26%) and 28% said it should be increased (up from 18%).



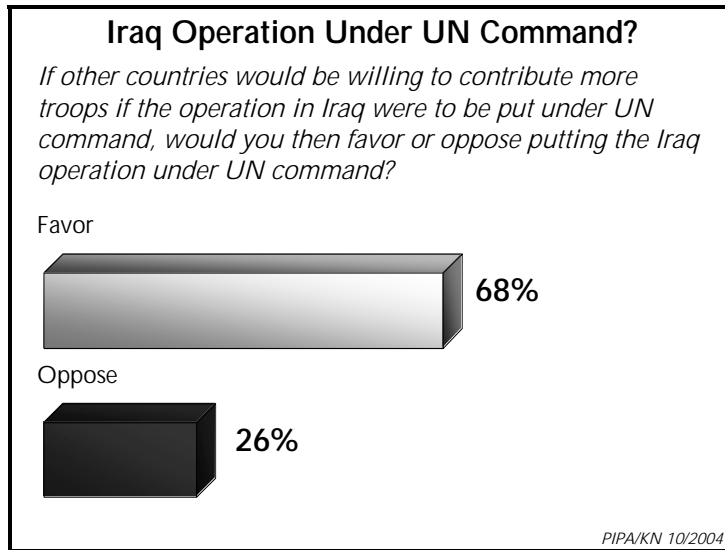
Responses here did show some variation according to presidential preference, but not as much as on many questions. Among Bush supporters, more wanted to maintain (45%) than to increase (33%) troop strength; but among Kerry supporters, more wanted to increase (25%) than wanted to maintain (14%), while 57% wanted to either decrease (26%) or withdraw (31%). (Among the uncommitted, 21% wanted to increase, 25% to maintain, 20% to decrease and 26% to withdraw.)



2a. Putting Operation Under UN Command

If other countries would be more willing to contribute troops if the operation were put under UN command, a large majority would be willing to do so.

Two out of three Americans (68%) said that “If other countries would be willing to contribute more troops if the operation in Iraq were to be put under UN command,” they “would then favor putting the Iraq operation under UN command.” This is a consensus position, favored by 57% of Bush supporters and 80% of Kerry supporters (uncommitted: 69%).



The public is divided, though, as to whether other countries would be willing. If the operation were to be put under UN command, 49% assumed other countries would be more willing to contribute troops and resources, while 47% said it would make no difference. Attitudes on this question are fairly polarized politically, with Bush supporters saying by two to one that it would make no difference, and Kerry supporters saying exactly the opposite by the same margin. The uncommitted were split on the question, 49% to 42%.

It is difficult to know how foreign governments would react to such a proposal. However, where publics are concerned, recent polling in Europe by the German Marshall Fund's Transatlantic Trends project found that majorities in Germany, France and Spain (57%, 63%, and 66% respectively) would approve "sending troops to Iraq if the United Nations approves a multinational force to assist with security and reconstruction." When the same question was asked specifying that this UN-authorized force would be under US command, support for the idea dropped to 43% in Germany and Spain and 45% in France.

2b. Troop and Civilian Fatalities

The public overall accurately estimates the number of US troop fatalities. Americans underestimate the number of Iraqi civilian fatalities, but their estimate is rising. Those who have higher estimates of US troop fatalities are no more likely to want to withdraw or decrease US troops, but they are slightly more likely to say that the US made the wrong decision in going to war with Iraq. Similarly, those who estimate higher levels of Iraqi civilian casualties are more likely to say that the decision to go to war was wrong, but not to want to withdraw.

As in previous months, the public overall is accurate in its estimate of American troop fatalities to date. During the week the poll was in the field, the number of fatalities most commonly disseminated in the media was approximately 1,027, with approximately 811 of these due to hostile fire. The median estimate was 1,008 fatalities, and a majority of 53% gave a roughly accurate estimate--between 800 and 1,100. There was no notable difference between Bush and Kerry supporters—not in their average estimates, and not even in their distribution across low, accurate, and high estimates. Such uniformity strongly suggests that when an item of information is not itself an object of controversy and is delivered clearly and consistently by the media, the public can retain it accurately, despite partisan feelings.

Those who have higher estimates of US troop fatalities are no more likely to want to withdraw or decrease US troops. Of those who estimated below 800 fatalities and those who estimated above 1,100 fatalities, the numbers wanting to withdraw were less than one point apart. However, in this poll those who estimated high were slightly more likely to say that the US made the wrong decision in going to war with Iraq—56%, compared to 49% for those estimating below 800 fatalities. This effect was not observable in the August poll.

Americans continue to underestimate the number of Iraqi civilian casualties, but they are revising their estimates upward. In August the average estimate was 2,000; in the current poll it is up to 3,000. This is still well below the estimates of experts, which during the fielding period were in the range of 13,000 to 15,000 deaths.

Those who estimate higher levels of Iraqi civilian casualties are more likely to say that the decision to go to war was wrong, but not to want to withdraw. Among those who estimated over 6,000 fatalities, 63% thought the decision was wrong; among those who estimated under 6,000 fatalities, 48% thought so. However, preferences on withdrawing troops (and on troop strength in general) showed no reliable differences.

3. US Military Presence in Iraq and the Middle East

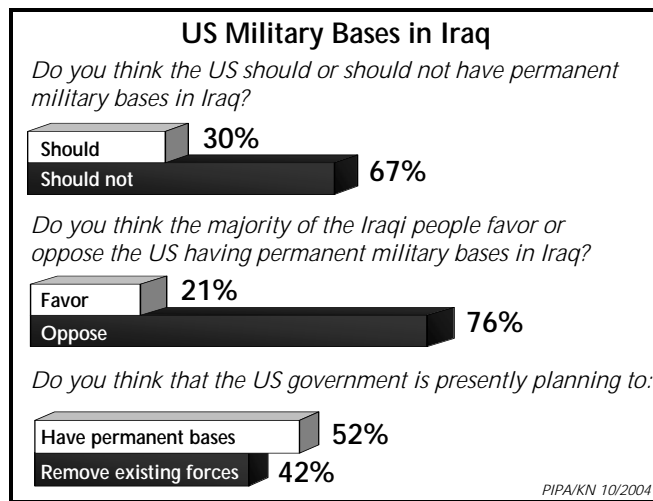
Two out of three oppose the US having a permanent military presence in Iraq and even more assume that the Iraqi people are opposed to the idea. However, a modest majority thinks the US is building such a presence. More broadly, three in four assume that most people in the Middle East want the US to reduce its military presence there, and a growing majority says that if this is the case the US should reduce its presence. Six in ten assume—correctly, according to polling in the region--that most people in the Middle East oppose US-led efforts to fight terrorism, and a clear majority favors putting greater emphasis on diplomatic over military methods for fighting terrorism.

A key point of contention in the ongoing debate among policy experts about how to best conduct the Iraq operation revolves around the US’s high-profile construction of military bases and other infrastructure. Some critics argue that such a “footprint” tends to make Iraqis believe the US is planning a permanent presence, which feeds opposition. Others argue that it may be important to show Iraqis that we are committed to them for the long haul, and that such construction may well send a positive signal, but at least does not hurt. This argument was aired in the recent presidential debates.

PIPA/KN asked respondents, first of all, whether they thought a permanent presence was a good idea: “Do you think the US should or should not have a permanent military presence in Iraq?” Two out of three (67%) opposed this, with 30% in favor. This was a consensus position, including clear majorities of both Bush and Kerry supporters (56% and 78% respectively) and the uncommitted (64%).

Respondents were then asked whether they thought “the majority of the Iraqi people favor or oppose a permanent US military presence in Iraq.” An overwhelming 76% thought the Iraqi people opposed such a presence; only 21% thought they favored it.

Finally, PIPA/KN asked respondents whether they thought “the US government is presently planning to have permanent military bases in Iraq, or to remove all of its military forces once Iraq is stabilized.” A modest majority—52%--thought the US was building such a presence, while 42% thought the US was planning to remove all of its forces after stabilization of the country.

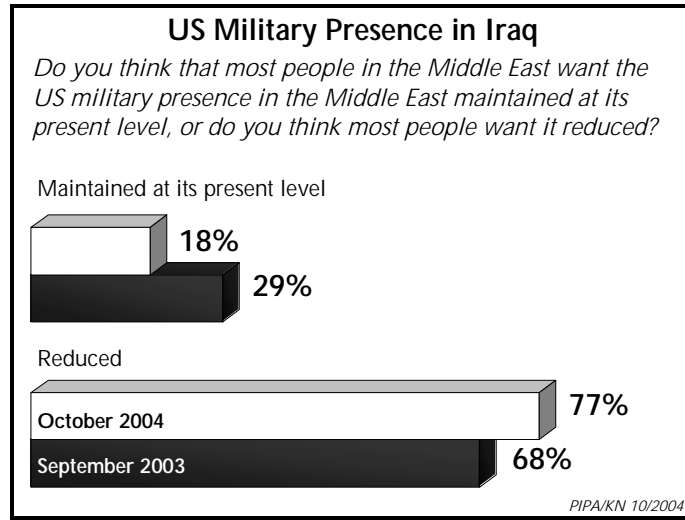


These perceptions were polarized according to presidential preference, with 72% of Kerry supporters thinking the US was planning a permanent presence and 61% of Bush supporters thinking the US was planning an eventual full removal. Among the uncommitted, 52% thought the US was planning a permanent presence and 40% thought it was not.

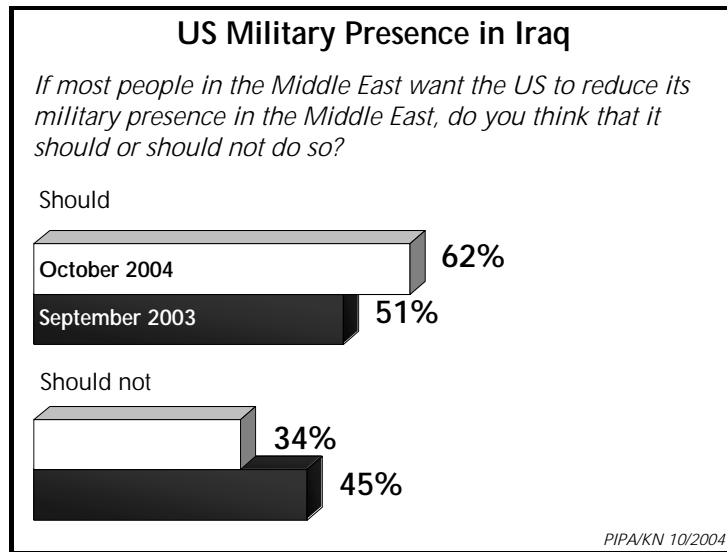
Broader US Military Presence in the Middle East

More broadly, three in four assume that most people in the Middle East want the US to reduce its military presence there, and a growing majority says that if this is the case the US should reduce its presence.

When asked, “Do you think that most people in the Middle East want the US military presence in the Middle East maintained at its present level, or do you think most people want it reduced?” 77% said they thought most people in the region wanted US military presence reduced.



PIPA/KN then asked, “If most people in the Middle East want the US to reduce its military presence in the Middle East, do you think that it should or should not do so?” Sixty-two percent said the US should, in that event, reduce its military presence.

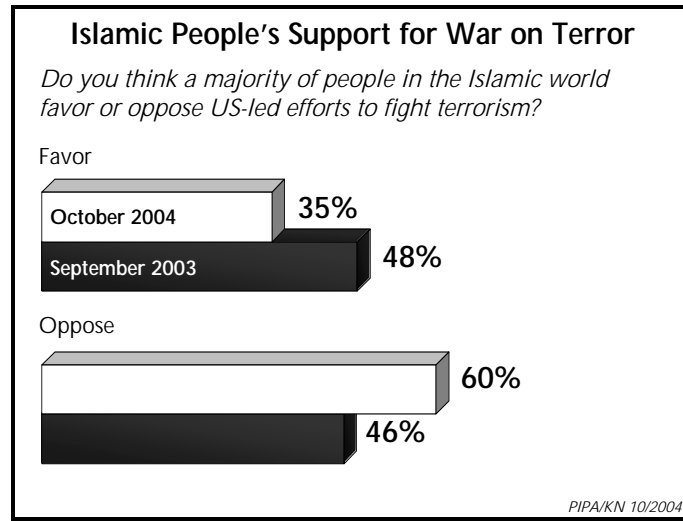


These majority views have grown notably over the past year. In September 2003 PIPA/KN asked the same questions, and then 68% thought most people in the Middle East wanted US military presence reduced; if most people there did want this, only 51% of Americans then thought the US should do so,

while 45% thought the US should not. Thus these majority views have grown by about ten points over the course of the last twelve months.

At the same time, a modest majority—53%--of Bush supporters disagree with the idea that if the people of the Middle East want US military presence reduced, the US should do so (agree: 44%). Among Kerry supporters, 79% think the US should do so, and only 18% think the US should not. But among the uncommitted, 65% think the US should do so and 29% think the US should not.

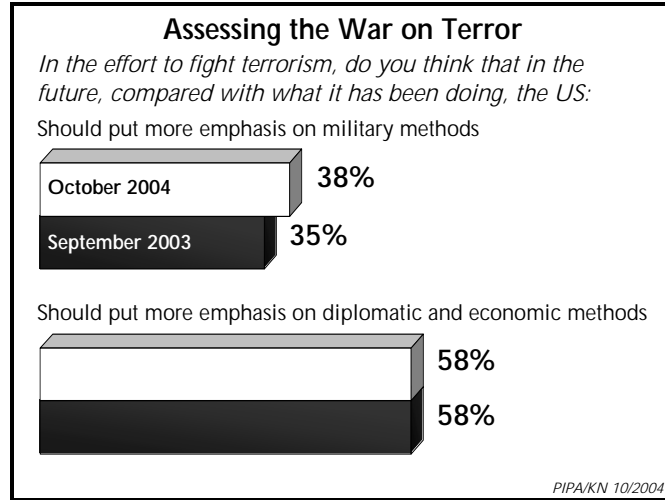
Six in ten assume--correctly according to polling in the region³-- that most people in the Middle East oppose US-led efforts to fight terrorism, and a clear majority favors putting greater emphasis on diplomatic over military methods for fighting terrorism. Sixty percent thought US-led anti-terrorism efforts were opposed by most people in the region—up sharply from September 2003, when 46% thought this.



Perceptions differed here by political preference, with 75% of Kerry supporters, but only 44% of Bush supporters, seeing such opposition in the region (the uncommitted: 64%).

A clear majority of 58% said that “In the effort to fight terrorism... in the future, compared with what it has been doing, the US should put more emphasis on diplomatic and economic methods,” while 38% thought it should put more emphasis on military methods. (These results are virtually identical to those of September 2003, when the question was asked about future efforts by the Bush administration.)

³ Between summer 2002 and February 2004, the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Survey polled a number of countries with large Islamic populations—some of them three times—asking whether people favor or oppose “the US led efforts to fight terrorism.” The four countries asked in 2004 (Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, and Morocco) all had majorities in opposition. Of the nine countries asked in 2003, seven showed majorities opposed to US-led efforts; the exceptions were Kuwait and Nigeria. The results in summer 2002 were quite similar; for details see www.people-press.org.



However, sharp political polarization underlies this majority, with 61% of Bush supporters preferring more emphasis on military methods (diplomatic and economic: 33%), and 82% of Kerry supporters preferring more emphasis on diplomatic and economic methods (military: 16%). Among the uncommitted, 66% want more emphasis on diplomatic and economic methods (military: 28%).

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.