

Americans on Iraq: Three Years On

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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.

WorldPublicOpinion.org is a webzine/website that presents the voice of publics around the world on international policy issues. It is designed to be a source of public opinion research for the policy community, the media and government in all countries. New polls are conducted and released; analyses of publicly available polling from organizations worldwide are gathered and analyzed. It is published by the staff of the Program on International Policy Attitudes.

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 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.

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Evan Lewis, Angela Stephens, and Stephen Weber designed the questionnaires and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Network's Joe Hadfield adapted the questionnaires and managed the fielding of the polls.

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INTRODUCTION

The approach of the third anniversary of the US entry into Iraq has prompted reflection on the original choice for the US to go to war. The steady flow of negative news reports from the region has prompted intense discussion about what direction the US should pursue, enhanced by a series of speeches by President Bush calling for the US to stay the course.

To bring the voice of the American public more fully into this discourse WorldPublicOpinion.org, together with Knowledge Networks, has undertaken an in-depth poll of the American public. Key questions that it has sought to explore are:

- How do Americans now view the decision to go to war? Was it a war of choice or a war of necessity? Was it the best use of US resources? How do Republicans and Democrats differ?
- What do Americans now assume about the original premises for going to war? How many still assume that Iraq had a major WMD program or provided substantial support to al Qaeda? How do these beliefs relate to attitudes about the war?
- How well or badly do Americans perceive the operation to be going? Do they think that it is likely to succeed?
- Are Americans feeling ready to stay the course as the President suggests they should or do they want the US to pull out like they did during the Vietnam War? What factors are related to these attitudes?
- Do Americans want the US to maintain permanent military bases in Iraq? Do they think that that is what the US is planning to do?
- Do they support ideas that have been developed by a number of pundits to make the operation more multilateral or to draw in the international community in other ways? Do they support non-military methods for helping Iraq?

To answer these and other questions, a poll of 851 Americans was conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org and Knowledge Networks over March 1-6, 2006. The margin of error was 3.4 percent for questions going to the full sample (4% for questions going to a three-quarters 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.

WorldPublicOpinion.org conducted an in-depth poll of the Iraqi public in January 2006. The current study also offered the opportunity to compare US and Iraqi attitudes as well as to examine the accuracy of Americans' assumptions about Iraqis.

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

Key findings of the study were:

1. The Decision to Go to War

By a two-to-one margin, Americans now say that the Iraq war was a war of choice, not a war of necessity—i.e., it was not necessary for the defense of the US—and that the war was not the best use of US resources. For the first time, a majority now believes that Iraq did not have a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, though the public is still divided on whether Iraq supported al-Qaeda. Such beliefs are highly correlated with support for the war. A large bipartisan majority says that if Iraq did not have WMD or did not support al-Qaeda, the US should not have gone to war. Majorities in both parties perceive the Bush administration as continuing to say that Iraq did have WMD or a major WMD program and provided substantial support to al-Qaeda.....3

2. Future of US Military Presence

A large majority of Americans want to begin drawing down US troops in Iraq, although only one in four favors a quick pullout. Two out of three perceive that the situation in Iraq is getting worse, and a clear majority expresses low confidence that the US intervention will succeed. A majority is not convinced that a US withdrawal would make the situation in Iraq worse than it is. Support for drawing down US troops does not appear to be related to the growing number of US troop fatalities. The strongest factor appears to be the perception that the presence of US troops provokes more attacks, followed by the lack of confidence that the operation will ultimately succeed... 10

3. The Issue of Permanent Military Bases Versus a Timeline for Withdrawal

A large bipartisan majority of Americans oppose permanent US military bases in Iraq and believe that most Iraqis are opposed as well, but a modest majority believes that the US nonetheless plans to have permanent bases. A large majority thinks that the US should be willing to accept a new Iraqi government setting a timeline for the withdrawal of US troops, and thinks that most Iraqis want such a timeline, but an overwhelming majority thinks that the US would refuse to agree to such a timeline 12

4. Multilateral and Non-Military Approaches

A number of leading political analysts have discussed the option of making the Iraq operation more multilateral. A large bipartisan majority of Americans would support doing so even if this would require the US to relinquish some control over the operation. While Americans are showing doubts about military forms of involvement in Iraq, there is strong support for non-military approaches. 14

5. Comparing American and Iraqi Public Opinion

A WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of Iraqis conducted in January of this year provides the opportunity to compare Iraqi views to American views. Overall, Americans and Iraqis show a surprising amount of agreement about the presence of US military forces in Iraq, in particular opposing a permanent US presence and assuming that the US may well be planning one. Both sides also favor a more multilateral military operation in Iraq. At the same time, Americans have numerous misperceptions about the attitudes of Iraqis on a number of key issues..... 15

FINDINGS

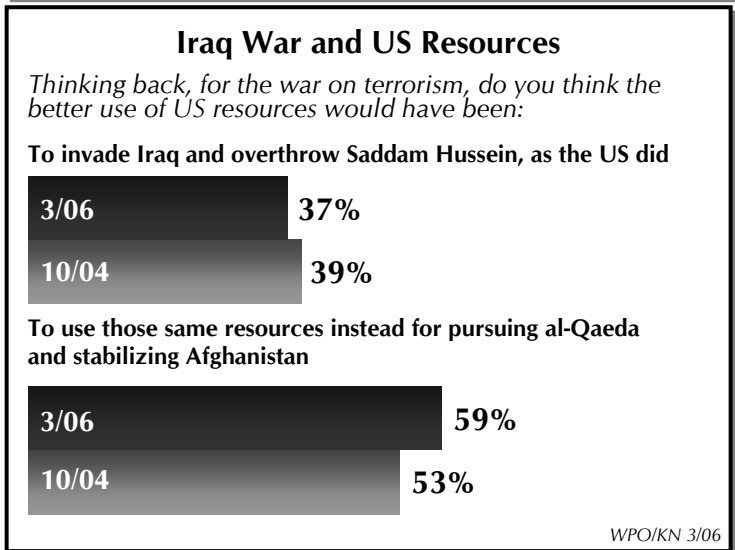
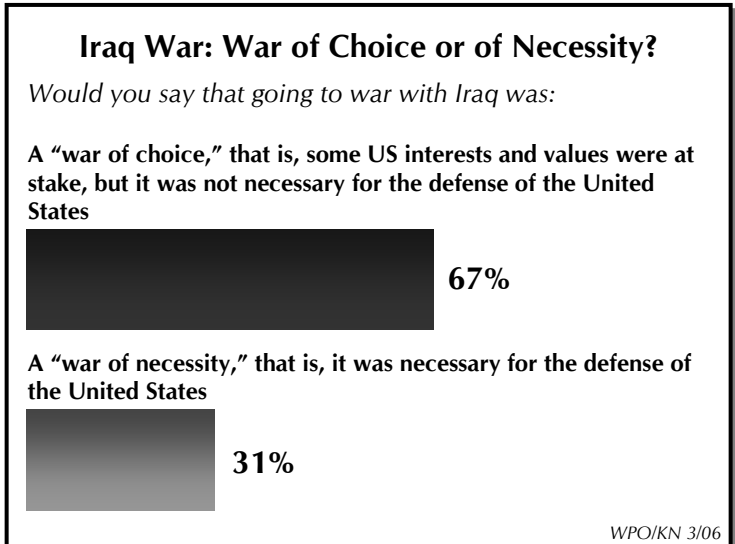
I. The Decision to Go to War

By a two-to-one margin, Americans now say that the Iraq war was a war of choice, not a war of necessity—i.e., it was not necessary for the defense of the US—and that the war was not the best use of US resources. For the first time, a majority now believes that Iraq did not have a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, though the public is still divided on whether Iraq supported al-Qaeda. Such beliefs are highly correlated with support for the war. A large bipartisan majority says that if Iraq did not have WMD or did not support al-Qaeda, the US should not have gone to war. Majorities in both parties perceive the Bush administration as continuing to say that Iraq did have WMD or a major WMD program and provided substantial support to al-Qaeda.

Respondents were presented two views of the war with Iraq. Just 31 percent said it was a “war of necessity, that is, it was necessary for the defense of the United States.” Sixty-seven percent held the view that it was a “war of choice, that is, some US interests and values were at stake, but it was not necessary for the defense of the United States.”

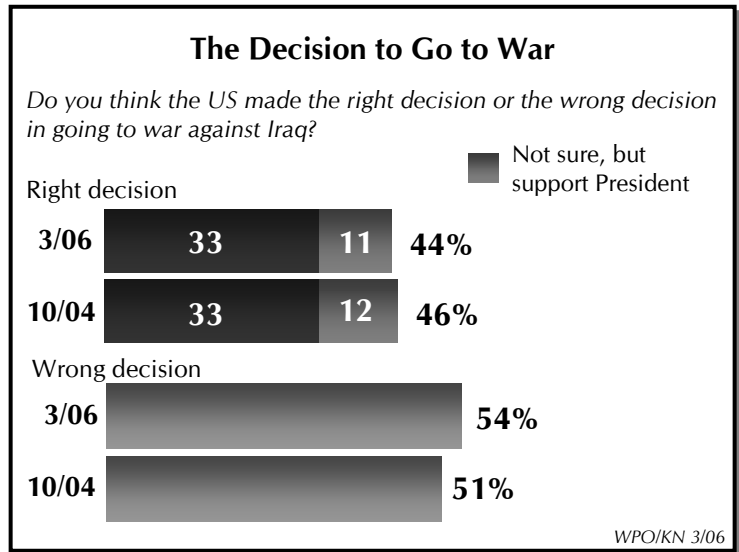
A growing majority perceives that the Iraq war was not the best use of resources in the war on terrorism. Asked, “for the war on terrorism” what would have been “the better use of US resources,” only 37 percent said “to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein, as the US did,” while 59 percent said that it would have been better “to use those same resources instead for pursuing al-Qaeda and stabilizing Afghanistan.” This majority is up from 53 percent in October 2004.

A majority of 54 percent now believe that the US made the “wrong decision” in going to war with Iraq. This is up from 51 percent in October 2004. Forty-four percent now say it was the right decision, down slightly from 46 percent in 2004. This is very similar to the findings of other organizations. In early March, Gallup found 55 percent saying “the United States made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq” (up from 47% in October 2004), while 43 percent say the US did not make a mistake (down from 52%). Also in March, CBS found 54 percent saying the US should “have stayed out” (up from 46% in October 2004), while 41 percent said the US “did the right thing in taking military action (down from 50%).



Of those who say it was the right decision, only 33 percent (of the full sample) said they “support having gone to war, because I think it was the best thing for the US to do” while 11 percent say “I am not sure if going to war was the best thing to do, but I support Bush’s decision, because he is the president.” The percentage fully endorsing the war has remained steady while the percentage saying that they are simply supporting the President has been migrating to the wrong decision position.

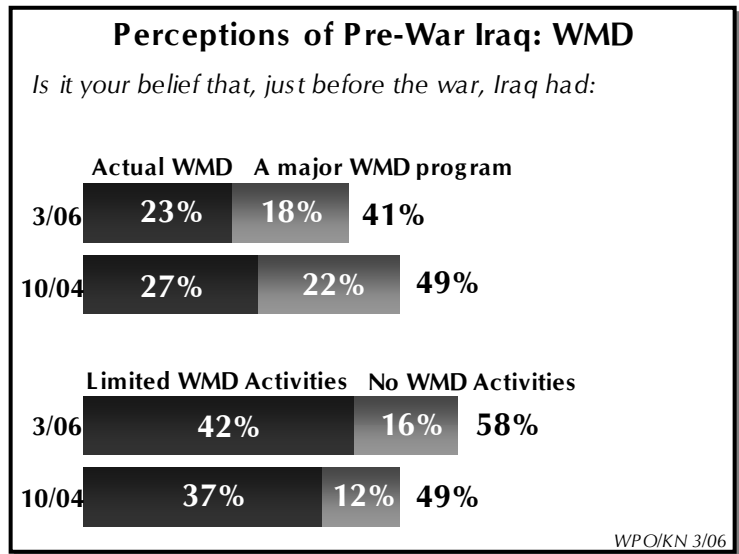
The percentage (33%) who take the firm position that the war was the best thing for the US to do is about the same as the percentage who take the position that the war was a war of necessity (31%) and who say that it was the best use of US resources (37%).



war was a war of necessity (31%) and who say that it was the best use of US resources (37%).

Whether Iraq Had WMD

For the first time since the question has been asked, a majority now says that before the war, Iraq did not have a significant WMD program. Offered four options to describe what Iraq had before the war, 58 percent now say that Iraq either “had some limited activities that could be used to help develop weapons of mass destruction, but not an active program” (42%) or no WMD activities at all (16%). This is up 9 points from 49 percent in October 2004. At this point, 41 percent still say that Iraq has actual WMD (23%) or a major program for developing them (18%), down from 49 percent in October 2004.



A substantial majority also believes that the UN and its agencies have been vindicated in their prewar insistence that there was no clear evidence that Iraq had a WMD program.

Respondents were asked:

“As you may recall, before the war with Iraq the UN agency that was inspecting Iraq said that there was no clear evidence that Iraq had a major program for developing weapons of mass destruction. Is it your impression that this UN agency has since been proven to be correct or incorrect about whether Iraq had a major program for developing weapons of mass destruction?”

Fifty-seven percent said that the UN agency has been proven correct, while 40 percent said it has been proven incorrect.

Those who said that the UN agency was correct were also asked whether “the US has admitted that it made a mistake when it said that Iraq had a major program for developing weapons of mass destruction.” Forty-one percent (of the total sample) said that it has not, while just 16 percent (of the total sample) said that it had. An even slightly larger percentage, 44 percent (of the total sample) said that it is a good idea “for the US to admit that it made a mistake when it said that Iraq had a major program for developing weapons of mass destruction.”

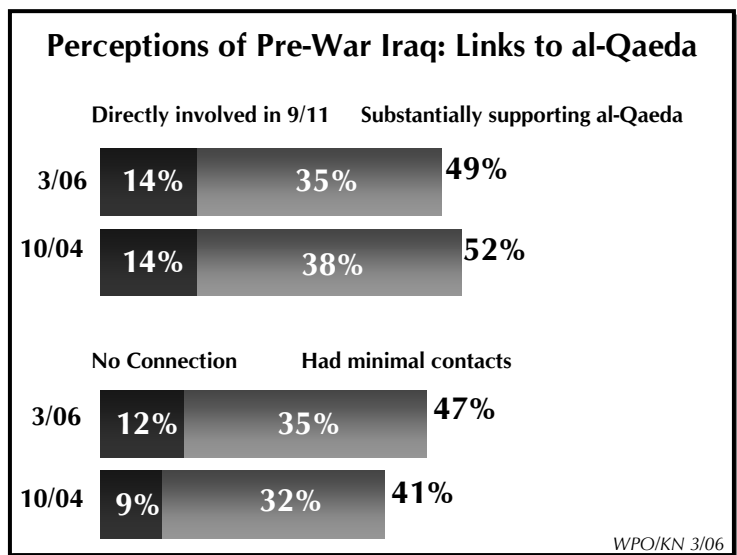
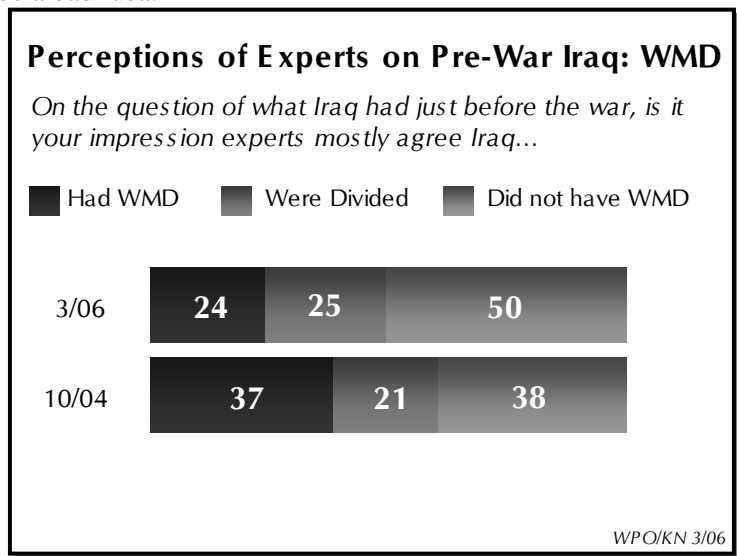
Those who said that the UN agency was incorrect (or did not know) were also asked, “If it is proven that the UN agency was correct, do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea for the US to admit that it made a mistake when it said that Iraq had a major program for developing weapons of mass destruction?” Among these respondents, 23 percent (of the total sample) said that it would be a good idea, while 17 percent (of the total sample) said it would be a bad idea.

Thus, a total 67 percent either believe that the US should now admit that it made a mistake or that it should admit it if it is proven the UN agency was correct.

A growing number of Americans perceive that experts mostly agree that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, though still only half (50%) believe that this is the case—up from 38 percent in October 2004. The percentage who say that most experts believe that Iraq did have WMD is now 24 percent—down from 37 percent. Twenty-five percent now believe that experts are divided.

Whether Iraq Supported Al-Qaeda

A growing percentage of Americans have come to the view that before the war, Iraq was not providing substantial support to al-Qaeda, such that views are now evenly divided on the issue. Forty-seven percent of respondents said that “A few al-Qaeda individuals visited Iraq or had contact with Iraqi officials but Iraq did not provide substantial support to al-Qaeda” (35%) or that there was no connection at all (12%). This is up 6 points from 41 percent in October 2004. Forty-nine percent believe that “Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the



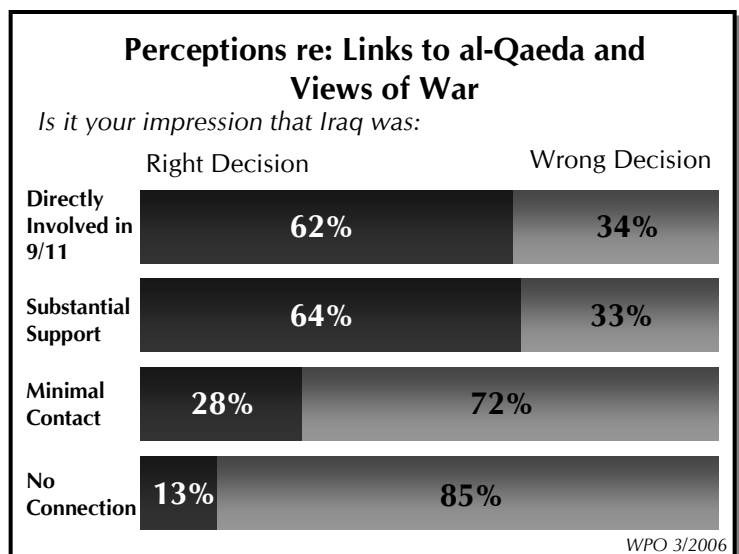
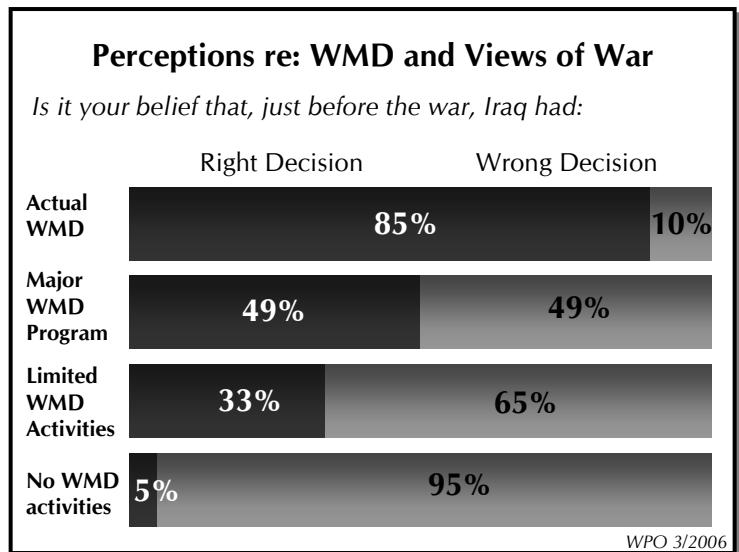
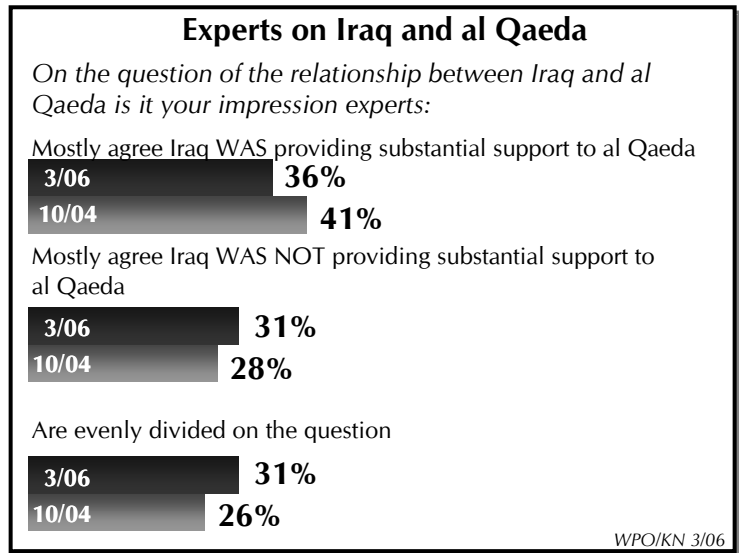
September 11th attacks” (14%) or that “Iraq gave substantial support to al-Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11th attacks (35%), down 3 points from 52 percent in October 2004.

The percentage who believe that Iraq experts mostly agree that Iraq was not providing substantial support to al-Qaeda has inched up a mere 3 points since 2004, and still only 31 percent have this perception. A larger number—36 percent—believe that experts agree that Iraq was providing substantial support, down 5 points from 2004. The perception that views are evenly divided is now 31 percent (26% in 2004).

Relation Between Beliefs About Pre-War Iraq and Views of War

Beliefs about prewar Iraq are highly related to attitudes about the decision to go to war. Among those who believe that Iraq had WMD prior to the war, 85 percent feel that the war was the right decision. Among people who believe that Iraq had no WMD activities, 95 percent feel that the war was the wrong decision. Among those who believe Iraq had limited WMD activities, 65 percent feel the war was the wrong decision.

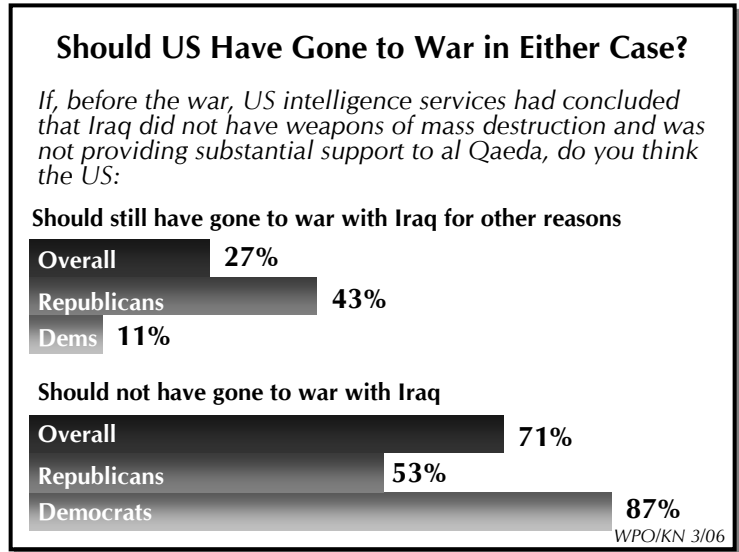
Similarly, among those who felt that Iraq was directly involved in the September 11th attacks, 62 percent said the war was the right decision as did 64 percent of those who believe Iraq gave support to al-Qaeda; whereas, of those who felt that there was no connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda a large majority (85%) felt the war was the wrong decision, as did 72 percent of those who believe that Iraq had only limited contacts with al-Qaeda.



Should the US Have Gone to War in Either Case?

Consistent with the finding that continuing approval of the decision to go to war is closely related to the belief that Iraq had a WMD program or supported al-Qaeda, a large bipartisan majority says that if Iraq did not have WMD or was not providing support to al-Qaeda, then the US should not have gone to war.

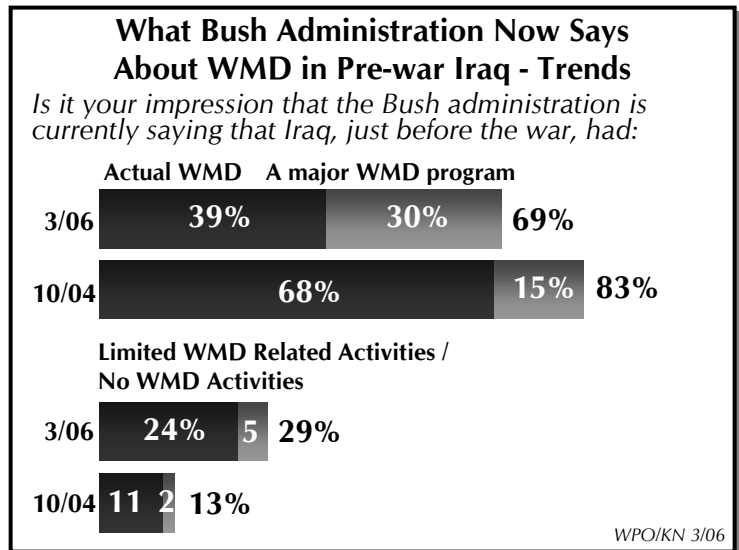
Asked, “If, before the war, US intelligence services had concluded that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction and was not providing substantial support to al-Qaeda,” a clear majority of 71 percent said that the US should not have gone to war, while just 27 percent said that the US should still have gone to war with Iraq for other reasons.” This is a bipartisan majority. Fifty-three percent of Republicans and 87 percent of Democrats think that in this case, the US should not have gone to war.



Perceptions of What Bush Administration is Saying About Pre-War Iraq

A large and bipartisan majority perceives that the Bush administration continues to say that Iraq had a major WMD program or actual WMD and that Iraq was providing substantial support to al-Qaeda. However, these majorities have diminished significantly over time.

Asked their impression of what “the Bush administration is currently saying” about pre-war Iraq, 69 percent thought it is saying that Iraq had actual WMD (39%) or a major program for developing them (30%). This is a bipartisan view, with 74 percent of Republicans and 70 percent of Democrats perceiving this (independents 63%).

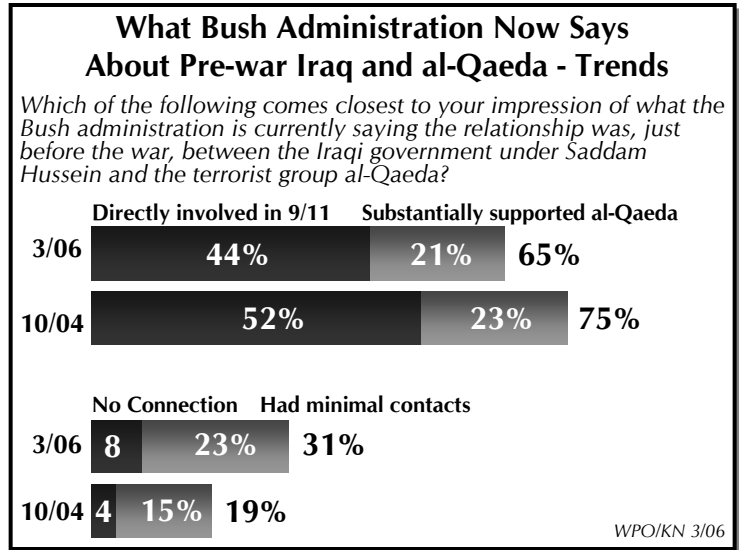


Since 2004, there has been a sharp 29-point drop in the percentage perceiving that the Bush administration was saying that Iraq had actual WMD (down from 68%), but an increase (from 15% to 30%) in those perceiving the administration saying that Iraq had a major program. The percentage perceiving the administration as taking one of these two positions is down 14 points.

A majority of 65 percent also perceives the Bush administration as saying that Iraq was providing significant support to al-Qaeda, with 21 percent perceiving the administration as saying that Iraq was directly involved in the September 11th attacks and 44 percent saying that Iraq provided substantial support to al-Qaeda but was not directly involved in the 9/11 attacks. Here again, this is a bipartisan

perception of the administration's statements, with 72 percent of Republicans and 62 percent of Democrats having one of these two perceptions (independents 58%).

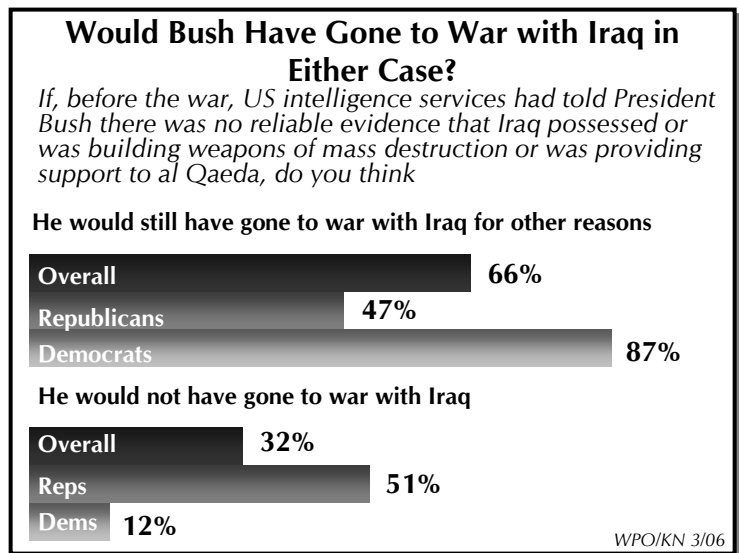
This perception of the administration has also been in some decline, though a more modest one. In October 2004, 75 percent perceived the administration as saying that Iraq was at least giving al-Qaeda substantial support—10 points higher than today. Interestingly, this change has come almost entirely from a decline among Democrats and independents, more of whom now think the administration is saying there were only a few contacts or no connection between al-Qaeda and Iraq. Republicans hear the administration in the same way as they did in 2004.



Perceptions of the Bush Administration's Process in Going to War

A large and growing majority believes that President Bush, unlike most Americans, was determined to go to war with Iraq independent of whether Iraq had WMD or was providing substantial support to al-Qaeda. A modest majority appears to perceive that the President was so intent on doing so that he did not give the country the most accurate information he had and thus misled people. However, only one in three go so far as to say that the President clearly knew that the assumptions that were the stated basis for going to war were incorrect. Three-quarters believe that the intelligence the Bush administration received concluded that Iraq was supporting al-Qaeda. At the same time, two out of three believe that some key people in the intelligence community knew that the President was acting on incorrect assumptions.

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," 66 percent said that "he would still have gone to war with Iraq for other reasons," including 47 percent of Republicans (51% of Republicans think he would not have).



This perception of the President as determined to go to war with Iraq may be related to a perception, held by a modest majority, that the President was not entirely forthcoming about the intelligence he had and in this sense misled people. A modest majority (53%) now believe that before the war, President Bush "deliberately misled people to make the case for

war with Iraq,” up from 49 percent in August 2004. Forty-six percent say that he “gave the country the most accurate information he had” (down slightly from 48%).

However, only one-third (34%) give the President the harshest judgment that he “decided to go to war on the basis of assumptions about Iraq that were ... incorrect, and the President knew they were incorrect” (up 10 points from 2004). The largest percentage (39%) continues to say that he acted on assumptions that were “incorrect, but the President believed they were correct” though this number is down 10 points from 2004. A steady one in four says the President’s assumptions were correct. Overall, 73 percent said that the President acted on incorrect assumptions.

At the same time, a large majority believes that some key people in the intelligence community knew that the assumptions that were prompting the war were incorrect. The 73 percent who said that the assumptions were incorrect were then asked: “Do you think that some key people in US intelligence agencies knew these assumptions were incorrect or do you think none of the key people knew?” Sixty-four percent (of the total sample) said that they thought that some key people knew, while 9 percent (of the total sample) said that they thought no one knew.

It is of course interesting that while 73 percent say that the President acted on incorrect assumptions, a large number (62%) believe in one or both of the two major assumptions for the war (Iraqi WMD or support for al-Qaeda). However, at the same time, a large majority is aware that at least one of these two assumptions was wrong—72 percent, about as many as answered that the President acted on incorrect assumptions.

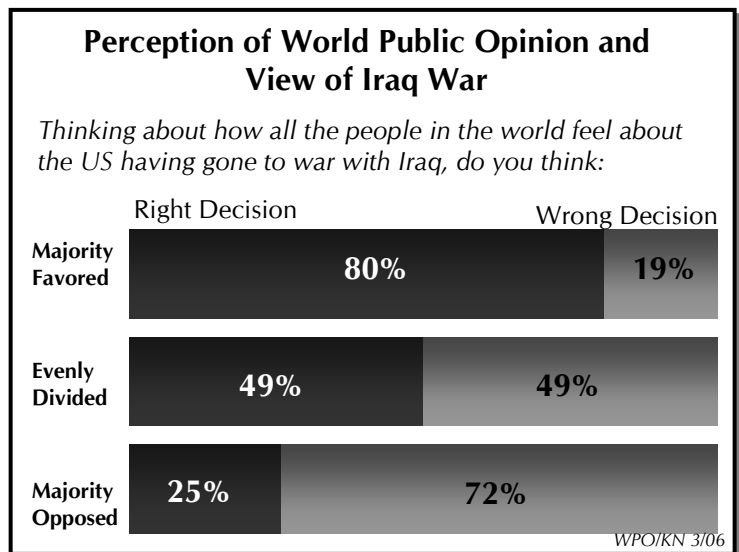
Perceptions of World Public Opinion

Respondents were asked “how all the people in the world felt about the US going to war with Iraq in 2003.” The largest percentage (49%) perceive that the majority of people opposed the US going to war, while an equal number are divided between the view that majority favored it (21%) and that views are evenly divided (28%).

Curiously, there has been a slight decline in the perception that a world majority opposed the war, from 53 percent in 2004 to 49 percent today. The percentage believing that the majority favored it has also risen from 14 percent to 21 percent. The biggest shifts were among Democrats, fewer of whom thought the majority opposed it (from 76% to 67%) and Republicans, more of whom thought that the majority favored it (from 22% to 34%).

Perceptions of world public opinion are highly related to attitudes about the decision to go to war. Among those who believed that the majority of people in the world favored the US going to war, 80 percent felt the war was the right decision; among people who believed world opinion opposed the war, 72 percent felt the war was the wrong decision.

When a regression analysis was performed, perception of world public opinion was one of the most powerful predictors of approval of the decision to



go to war. Indeed, it was even stronger than party identification and beliefs about whether Iraq had a WMD program or supported al-Qaeda.

2. Future of US Military Presence

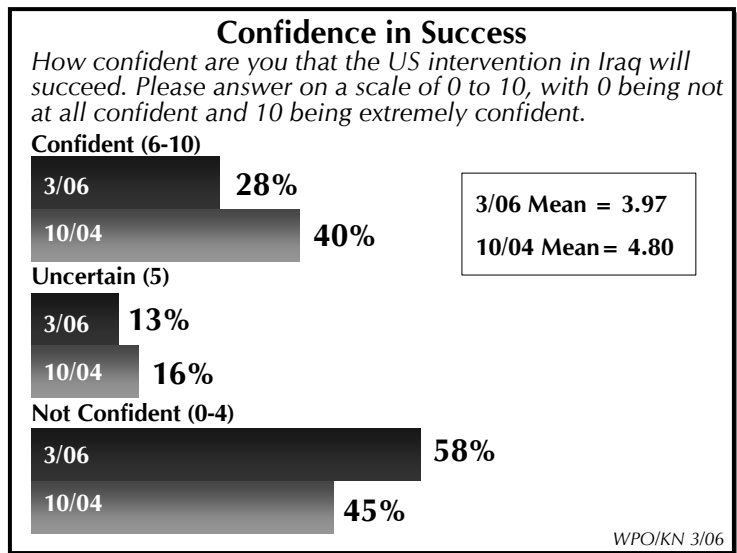
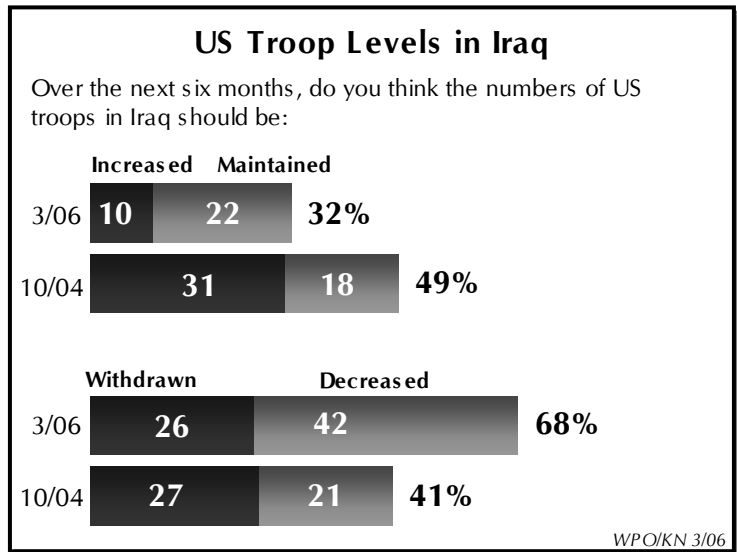
A large majority of Americans want to begin drawing down US troops in Iraq, although only one in four favors a quick pullout. Two out of three perceive that the situation in Iraq is getting worse, and a clear majority expresses low confidence that the US intervention will succeed. A majority is not convinced that a US withdrawal would make the situation in Iraq worse than it is. Support for drawing down US troops does not appear to be related to the growing number of US troop fatalities. The strongest factor appears to be the perception that the presence of US troops provokes more attacks, followed by the lack of confidence that the operation will ultimately succeed.

A large majority—68 percent—favors beginning to draw down US troops in Iraq. But only 26 percent think that all troops should be withdrawn within 6 months. The percentage favoring reductions is up sharply from December 2004, when just 48 percent favored them. Support for reduction is also now a bipartisan majority—favored by 52 percent of Republicans as well as 80 percent of Democrats.

This desire to begin disengaging is not derived from a sense that the mission is complete, but from a growing lack of confidence that it will succeed. Asked to assess the current situation in Iraq, 64 percent say the situation is getting worse, while just 36 percent say it is getting better. Asked to rate how confident they are that “that the US intervention in Iraq will succeed” on a 0-10 scale, 58 percent gave a low confidence rating (0-4), while just 28 percent give a high confidence rating (6-10). The mean score was 3.97.

These assessments show a marked downward trend. There has been an 11-point increase in those saying that the situation is getting worse as compared to October 2004, when 53 percent saw the situation getting worse and 46 percent saw it getting better. The percentage expressing low confidence that the mission will succeed has increased 13 points: in October 2004, the number expressing low confidence (45%) was only slightly lower than those expressing high confidence (40%). The mean score was also higher at a nearly-evenly balanced 4.80.

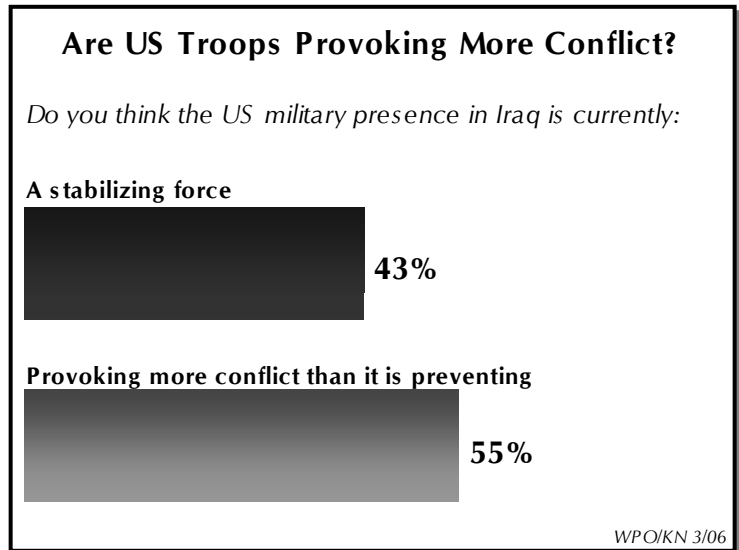
in October 2004, the number expressing low confidence (45%) was only slightly lower than those expressing high confidence (40%). The mean score was also higher at a nearly-evenly balanced 4.80.



This growing lack of confidence is not, however, prompting Americans to want to redouble US efforts. A mere 10 percent favors increasing US troop presence—down from 31 percent in December 2004.

Americans also show doubts about whether US military presence is even a positive factor for Iraq. Asked whether US military presence is a stabilizing force or whether it is “provoking more conflict than it is preventing,” 55 percent selected the latter position, while just 43 percent said it was a stabilizing force.

Asked about the likely consequences of US-led forces withdrawing in the next six months, there is not a clear majority expressing concern that it will make the situation in Iraq worse than it is—suggesting doubts about the necessity and value of maintaining US troops. Respondents were roughly divided between those who thought this would have a negative effect and those who thought it would either have no effect or a positive effect.



Only 46 percent said that the “presence of foreign fighters” would increase, while 51 percent said that it would either have no effect (31%) or decrease (20%). Thirty-nine percent said that day-to-day security for ordinary Iraqis would decrease (18% a lot), but 59 percent believe that it would have no effect (30%) or increase (29%). Asked how a withdrawal would affect the willingness of the factions in Parliament to cooperate, only 24 percent said it would decrease, while 73 percent said that it would increase (31%) or have no effect either way (42%). In just one case, a plurality said that the consequences would be negative—50 percent said that the amount of interethnic conflict would likely increase (23% said a lot).

The Role of US Troop Fatalities

A common view is that it is the rising number of US troop fatalities that is prompting the public’s desire to disengage. If so, it would follow that those who believe that the number of US troop fatalities is relatively high would be more eager to withdraw than those that have relatively low estimates. But this does not appear to be the case.

The public overall is fairly 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 about 2,300, with approximately 1,800 of these due to hostile fire. The median estimate was 2,000 fatalities due to hostile fire, and 45 percent gave a roughly accurate estimate—between 1,700 and 2,500.¹

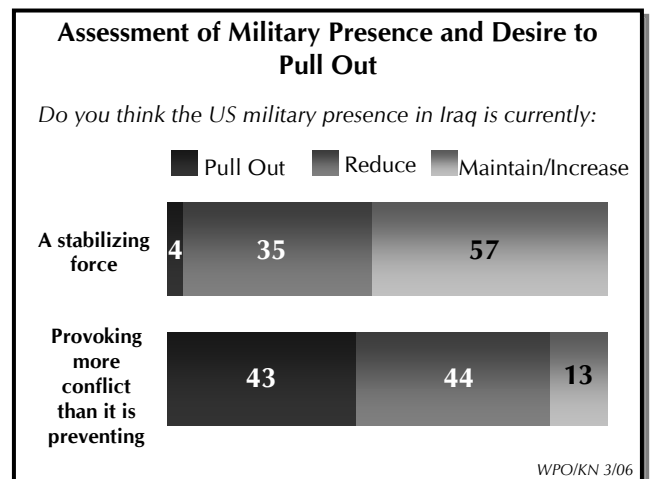
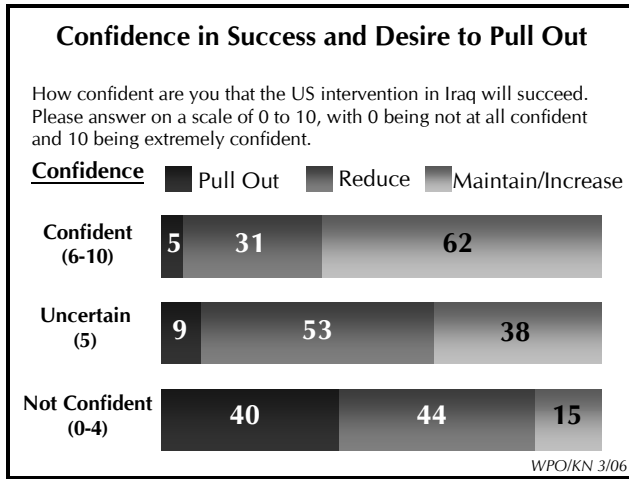
¹The accuracy of the American public on troop fatalities has been fairly consistent, although the number giving accurate estimates has dropped somewhat since October 2004. In June 2005, the median estimate was 1,600—just under the 1,663 reported at the time. In February 2005, the median estimate was 1,200—fairly close to the 1,438 reported at the time. In October 2004, the median estimate was 1,008—very close to the 1,027 reported at the time.

Comparing those who estimated below 1,700 fatalities and those who estimated above 2,500 fatalities, the numbers wanting to withdraw all US troops within six months were not significantly different. The numbers wanting to reduce US troops were also no different (though those who estimated high were more likely to say that the US made the wrong decision in going to war with Iraq—64%, compared to 49% for those estimating below 1,700 fatalities).

Factors Related to Desire to Draw Down Troops

A regression analysis reveals that the most powerful factors related to the desire to draw down US troops in Iraq is the perception that the US military presence is “provoking more conflict than it is preventing. Among those who believe that Iraq is provoking more conflict than it is preventing, 43 percent favor reducing and 44 percent want to withdraw completely within six months. Among those who believe that the US presence is a stabilizing force, only 4 percent want to reduce troops and only 36 percent want to withdraw completely within six months.

Another key factor is the level of confidence that the Iraq operation will succeed. Among those with low confidence that the operation will succeed, 44 percent want to reduce US troops and 40 percent want to withdraw completely within six months. Among those with high confidence, 31 percent want to reduce and just 5 percent want to withdraw completely within six months.



Other factors that have more mild effects are the perception that the situation in Iraq is getting worse, and beliefs that if the US withdraws that the security situation in Iraq will be no worse as a result.

3. The Issue of Permanent Military Bases Versus a Timeline for Withdrawal

A large bipartisan majority of Americans oppose permanent US military bases in Iraq and believe that most Iraqis are opposed as well, but a modest majority believes that the US nonetheless plans to have permanent bases. A large majority thinks that the US should be willing to accept a new Iraqi government setting a timeline for the withdrawal of US troops, and thinks that most Iraqis want such a timeline, but an overwhelming majority thinks that the US would refuse to agree to such a timeline.

Seventy-one percent of respondents said that the US should not have permanent military bases in Iraq, up slightly from 67 percent who had this view in 2004. This is a bipartisan position, with 60 percent of Republicans as well as 82 percent of Democrats holding this view. The majority rises to 86 percent “if the newly elected Iraqi government is opposed to the US having permanent military bases.”

However, a modest majority (51%) believes that “the US government plans to have permanent military bases in Iraq,” while only 45 percent believe that the US “plans to remove all its military forces once Iraq is stabilized.”

An overwhelming majority—77 percent—thinks that the majority of the Iraqi people are opposed to the US having permanent military bases in Iraq. In general, Americans tend to be fairly responsive to the wishes of public opinion in countries that are hosting US troops.

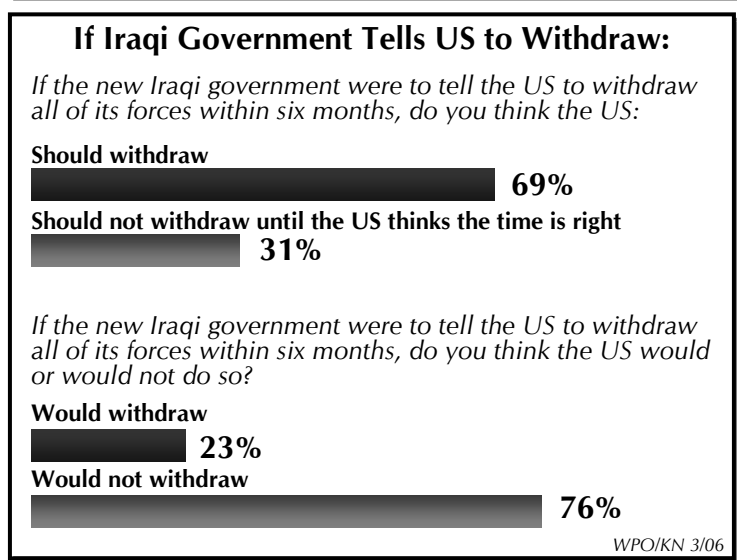
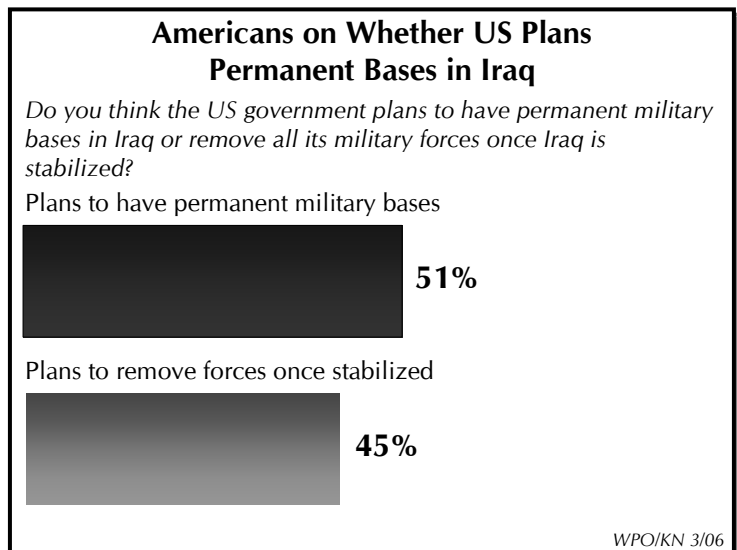
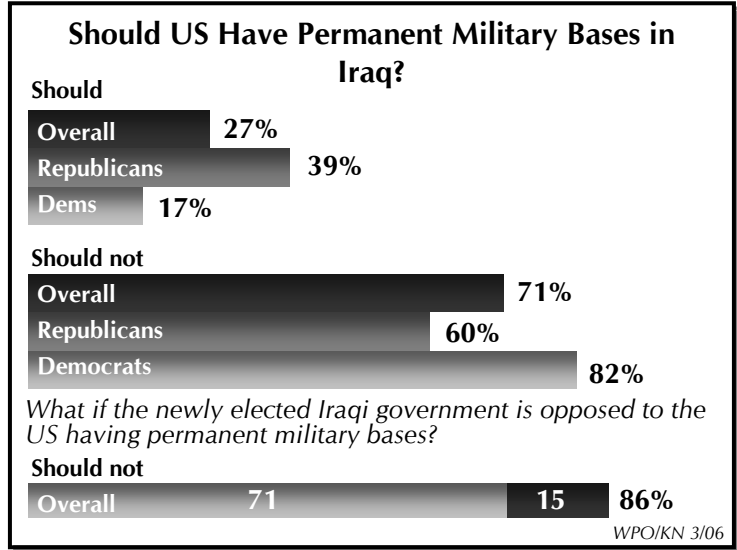
Timeline for Withdrawal of Troops

If the new Iraqi government were to set a timeline for the US to withdraw within six months or two years, a large majority believes that the US should agree to do so. However, most think the US would not comply with such a request. Most assume that the Iraqi people want such a timeline.

Asked “if the new Iraqi government were to tell the US to withdraw all of its forces within six months,” 69 percent said that it should, with only 31 percent saying the US “should not withdraw until the US thinks the time is right.” This is virtually unchanged from January 2005, when 73 percent said the US should follow the Iraqi government’s lead.

However, Americans do not assume that the US would be responsive to the direction of the new Iraqi government, at least not within a six-month timeframe. Asked, “if the new Iraqi government were to tell the US to withdraw all of its forces within six months do you think the US would or would not do so?” an overwhelming 76 percent said they thought the US would not comply.

When respondents were asked, “if the newly elected Iraqi government asks the US to establish a timeline for withdrawing its forces within the



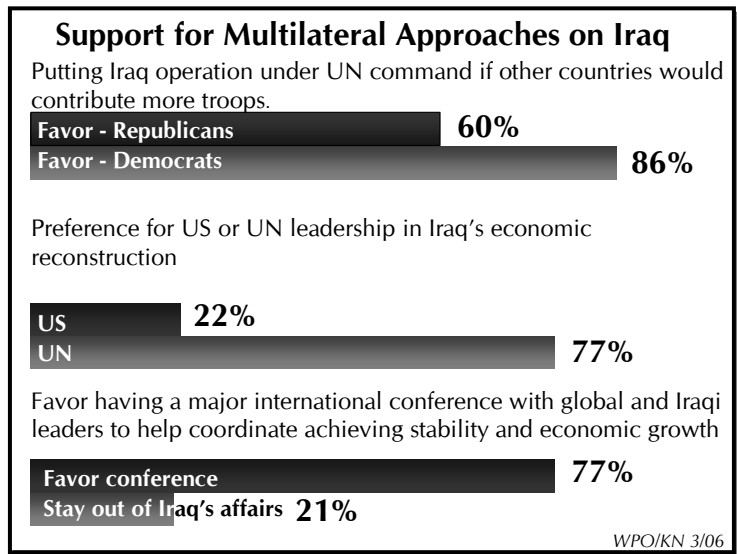
next two years” an even larger majority—71 percent—said that the US should agree to do so, while 28 percent said that the US should “only reduce US forces as the security situation improves in Iraq.”

Americans appear to assume that this is a significant likelihood, as they perceive most Iraqis favoring such a timeline. Sixty percent assume that the majority of the Iraqi people want the US to “commit to withdraw US forces according to a timeline of no more than two years” while 38 percent assume that the majority want the US to “only reduce US forces as the security situation improves in Iraq.”

4. Multilateral and Non-Military Approaches

A number of leading political analysts have discussed the option of making the Iraq operation more multilateral. A large bipartisan majority of Americans would support doing so even if this would require the US to relinquish some control over the operation. While Americans are showing doubts about military forms of involvement in Iraq, there is strong support for non-military approaches.

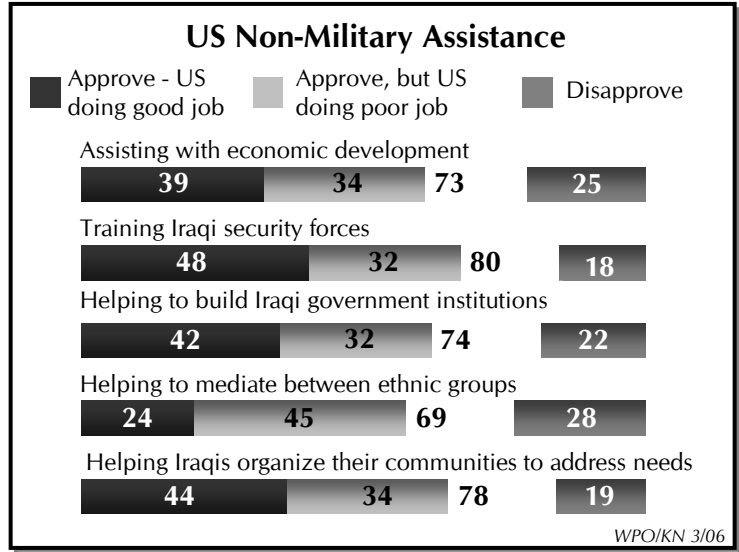
Americans show substantial interest in a number of more multilateral approaches to the Iraq operation. Perhaps most significant, a substantial majority is ready to put the operation under UN command as part of a process of including troops from other countries. Asked, “If other countries would be willing to contribute more troops if the operation in Iraq were to be put under UN command, would you then favor or oppose putting the Iraq operation under UN command?” 72 percent said that they would favor it. Support is bipartisan, with 60 percent of Republicans as well as 86 percent of Democrats favoring it. Support is also up a bit from 2004, when 68 percent overall favored the idea.



There is also strong support for a multilateral approach to economic reconstruction. Asked “Would you prefer to have the US or the UN take the lead in Iraq’s economic reconstruction?” 77 percent said they would favor the UN, while just 22 percent said the US. This is also a bipartisan majority, with 58 percent of Republicans as well as 92 percent of Democrats favoring the UN.

An equally large majority favored a multilateral conference for addressing Iraq’s economic challenges. Asked, “Would you favor having a major conference where leaders from the US, Europe, the UN, and various Arab countries would meet with leaders of the new Iraqi government to coordinate efforts to help Iraq achieve greater stability and economic growth or do you think it is best for other countries to stay out of Iraq’s affairs?” 77 percent favored such a conference. Once again, this was a bipartisan majority with 81 percent of Republicans and 78 percent of Democrats favoring it.

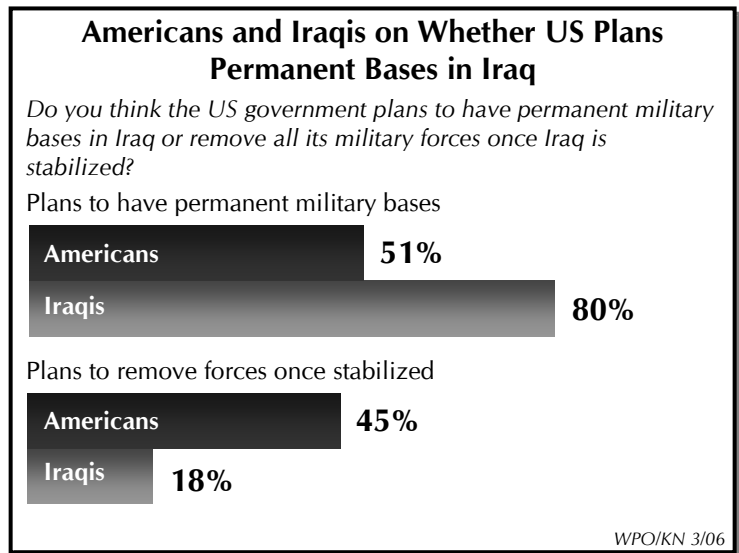
As discussed elsewhere, Americans are showing doubts about military forms of involvement in Iraq. Support for non-military approaches to dealing with the challenges in Iraq, though, is very strong. Respondents were presented a list of five activities by which “the US has been involved in Iraq in non-military ways.” In every case, a large majority approved of the effort. However, in each case a substantial number had doubts about whether the US was doing a good job. See chart to the right.



5. Comparing American and Iraqi Public Opinion

A WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of Iraqis conducted in January of this year provides the opportunity to compare Iraqi views to American views. Overall, Americans and Iraqis show a surprising amount of agreement about the presence of US military forces in Iraq, in particular opposing a permanent US presence and assuming that the US may well be planning one. Both sides also favor a more multilateral military operation in Iraq. At the same time, Americans and Iraqis have differing views of how things are going in Iraq and Americans have numerous misperceptions about the attitudes of Iraqis on a number of key issues.

Americans and Iraqis have a striking level of agreement in their perception that the US plans to keep US troops in Iraq permanently and in their opposition to this idea. Eighty percent of Iraqis believe the US plans to have permanent military bases in their country, as do 51 percent of Americans.



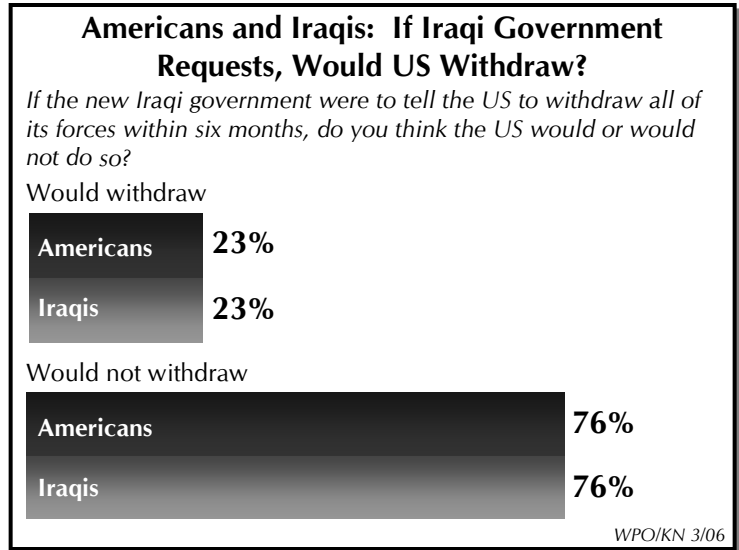
Americans strongly oppose such a permanent presence. Seventy-one percent said that the US should not have permanent military bases in Iraq. If the new Iraqi government were to oppose such bases, American opposition would rise even further, to 86 percent.

Iraqis hold similar views. Seventy percent said they would like the new Iraqi government to ask US-led forces to withdraw within two years (half of those said they would like the withdrawal to take place within six months).

If the new Iraqi government asks the US to establish a timeline for withdrawing forces within the next two years, seven out of 10 Americans (71%) said that the US should do so. Just 28 percent said the US should only reduce US forces as the security situation improves in Iraq.

Yet majorities on both sides perceive that the US would not be responsive to the requests of the Iraqi government. Respondents were asked how the US would respond if the new Iraqi government were to ask US forces to withdraw within six months. Notably, Iraqis and Americans had the exact same responses—76 percent of both groups said that the US would not do so, while 23 percent of both groups said the US would accommodate such a request.

It is not yet clear what the new Iraqi government, elected in December, may ask the US to do. Political tensions escalated after the bombing of the Golden Mosque last month and the violence that followed, with Sunnis and Kurds calling for Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a Shia, to be replaced, and Shia resisting the demand. The stalemate has prevented the selection of a new Cabinet and the first meeting of the new Parliament.



Americans and Iraqis differ in their anticipation of the probable outcome were US-led forces to withdraw within six months. Each was asked what effect a withdrawal of US-led forces would have on various aspects of Iraqi life.

Iraqis are largely optimistic. In the January poll, 61 percent said they believe inter-ethnic violence would decrease, 56 percent said the presence of foreign fighters would decrease and 67 percent said day-to-day security for ordinary Iraqis would increase if US-led forces were to withdraw in the next six months.

Americans' views are much less defined but lean negative. Few expect that things will get better in any dimension. Half (50%) believe the amount of inter-ethnic violence will increase, 46 percent believe the presence of foreign fighters will increase and 39 percent believe day-to-day security for ordinary Iraqis will decrease. Many also believe that such a withdrawal would have no effect.

Shared Desire for More Multilateral Approach in Iraq

Americans and Iraqis share a desire for a more multilateral approach to the situation in Iraq. Three-fourths of Americans (77%) said they prefer to have the UN take the lead in Iraq's economic reconstruction rather than the US, and 59 percent of Iraqis agreed. Just 22 percent of Americans and 21 percent of Iraqis want the US to take the lead.

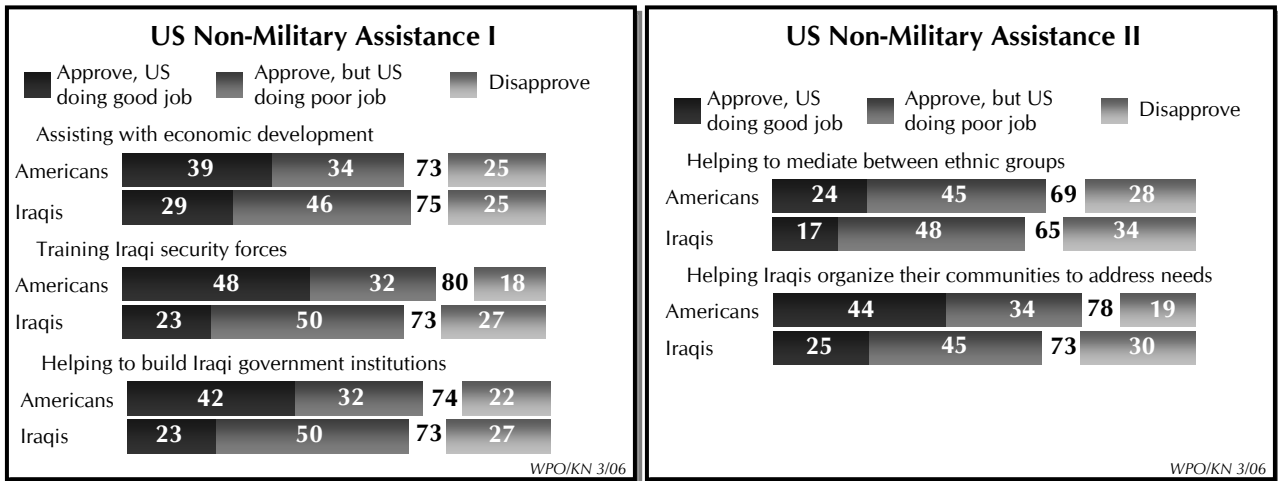
Majorities of Americans and Iraqis also favor having a major international conference on Iraq. Three-fourths of Americans (77%) and two-thirds of Iraqis (64%) said they would favor having a conference where leaders from the US, Europe, the UN and various Arab countries meet with leaders of the new Iraqi government to coordinate efforts to help Iraq achieve greater stability and economic growth. A third of Iraqis (34%) said it is best for other countries to stay out of Iraq's affairs, and 21 percent of Americans agreed.

Support for Non-Military US Assistance

Americans and Iraqis both approve of various forms of non-military US assistance. While neither side gives the US good grades in such efforts, Iraqis give somewhat worse marks.

Support for such efforts is robust. Eighty percent of Americans approve of the US involvement in training Iraqi security forces, as do 77 percent of Iraqis. Seventy-four percent of Americans approve of the US helping to build Iraqi government institutions as do 73 percent of Iraqis. Sixty-nine percent of Americans and 65 percent of Iraqis approve of US involvement in helping to mediate between ethnic groups.

But only minorities both approve of US involvement and think the US is doing a good job in these areas. On training Iraqi security forces, just 33 percent of Iraqis approve and think the US is doing a good job, compared to 48 percent of Americans. On helping to build Iraqi government institutions, 23 percent of Iraqis approve and feel the US is doing a good job compared to 42 percent of Americans. On helping to mediate between ethnic groups, only 17 percent of Iraqis and 24 percent of Americans approve and think the US is doing a good job.



How Things Are Going in Iraq

Americans also have a more negative outlook overall on the current situation in Iraq than most Iraqis themselves. Americans largely perceive the situation in Iraq is getting worse—a majority of Americans (64%) have this view, while only 1 in 3 Americans believes that the situation in Iraq is getting better. This contrasts sharply with Iraqi perceptions of how things are going in Iraq. When asked in January, 64 percent of Iraqis felt that Iraq was headed in the right direction, with only 36 percent saying Iraq was headed in the wrong direction, interestingly the reverse percentages of Americans’ views. However, it should be noted that dramatic distinctions occurred between ethnic groups, with Shia and Kurds largely positive (84% and 76% right direction) and Sunnis overwhelming negative about the direction Iraq was headed (93% wrong direction).

American Perceptions of Iraqis

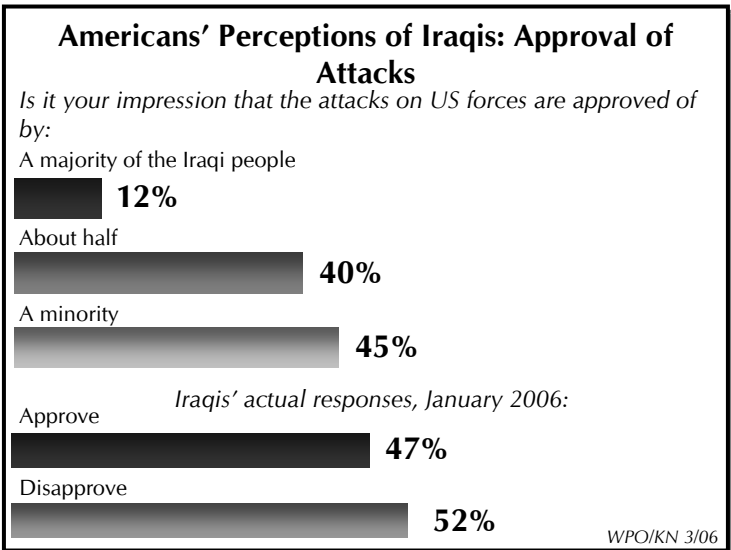
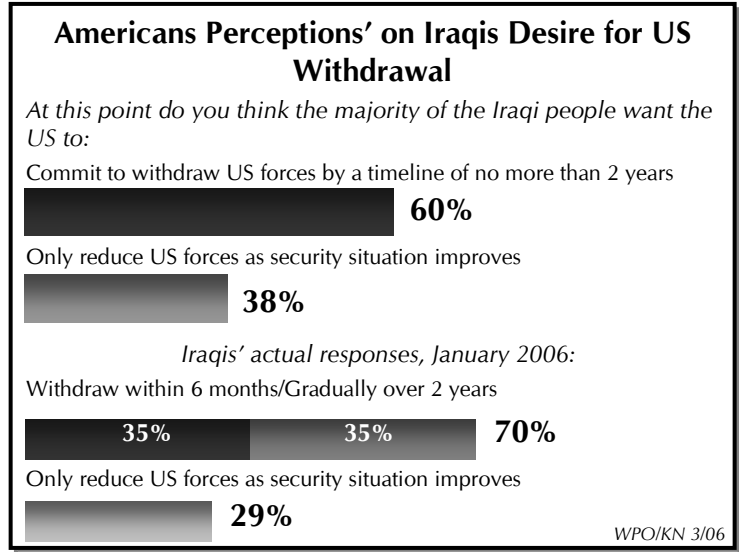
Americans vary in the accuracy of their understanding of Iraqi public opinion. A majority correctly estimates Iraqi public support for a timeline for US withdrawal. Majorities also correctly estimate Iraqi opposition to attacks on Iraqi security forces and Iraqi civilians, but on the whole underestimate support for attacks on US-led forces. They also underestimate Iraqi opposition to terrorism per se as well as support for the removal of Saddam Hussein.

The majority of Americans (60%) correctly perceive that most Iraqis want the US to commit to withdraw US forces according to a timeline of no more than two years, while 38 percent believe that most Iraqis want US forces to be reduced only as the security situation improves in Iraq. In the poll of Iraqis, 70 percent favored such a timeline.

A majority of 55 percent of Americans also perceive correctly that only a minority of Iraqis approve of attacks on Iraqi government security forces. Likewise, 72 percent correctly perceive that only a minority approve of attacks on Iraqi civilians. Only 7 percent of Iraqis polled support attacks on Iraqi security forces and only 1 percent on Iraqi civilians.

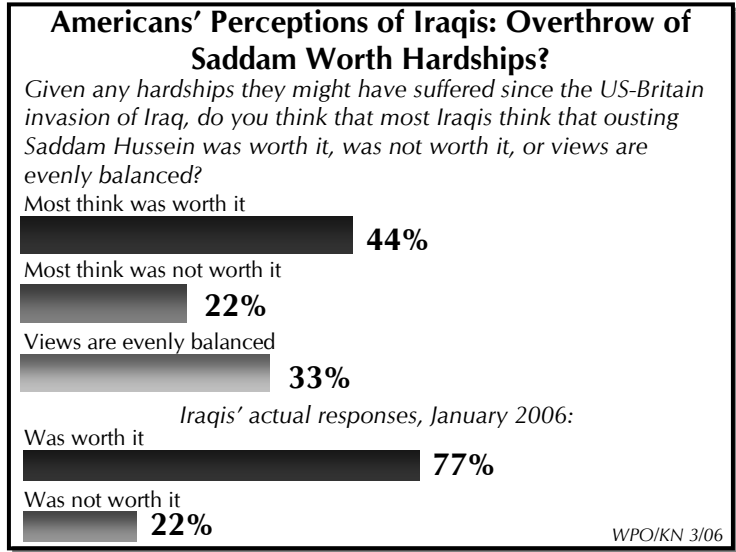
But Americans as a whole lean toward underestimating Iraqi support for attacks on US-led forces. Approximately half of Iraqis (47%) approve of attacks on US-led forces, according to the January poll. Only 40 percent of Americans correctly identified this in the new poll. Nearly half of Americans polled (45%) underestimated Iraqis' support for attacks on US-led forces, saying it is only a minority. Twelve percent overestimated Iraqi support for attacks on US-led forces, assuming that a majority of Iraqis approve.

Americans also underestimate the extent to which the Iraqi public soundly rejects terrorism as they define it. In the January poll—a virtually unanimous 99 percent of Iraqis said it was a good idea for Iraqi leaders to have agreed in a statement at an Arab League conference late last year that terrorism should be rejected. However, only 14 percent of Americans correctly identified a “large majority” as the proportion of the Iraqi public that approved of the statement. Another 35 percent estimated that it would be a majority. Forty-six percent of Americans thought that half or less of the Iraqi public approved of the statement rejecting terrorism.



Naturally some may be perplexed by the overwhelming rejection of terrorism coupled with support among nearly half of Iraqis for attacks on US-led forces. It is clear that many Iraqis do not define attacks on US-led forces as terrorism. According to most expert definitions of terrorism, this is valid—terrorism is generally defined as attacks on civilians, not an occupying military force.

Americans underestimate the extent to which Iraqis believe the overthrow of Saddam Hussein was worthwhile. Three-fourths of Iraqis (77%) said in January that ousting Saddam was worth it despite any hardships they may have suffered since the 2003 invasion, while 22 percent said it was not worth it.



Fifty-five percent of Americans underestimated this support, assuming that most Iraqis feel it was not worth it (22%) or that Iraqis are evenly split on the question (33%). Forty-four percent of Americans correctly assumed that most Iraqis say it was worth it. (It should be noted, though, that among Iraqi Arab Sunnis, large majorities regret the overthrow of Saddam, and that some Americans may have been influenced by that when they opted for the position that views are evenly split.)

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