

## **Poll of Iraqis: Public Wants Timetable for US Withdrawal, but Thinks US Plans Permanent Bases in Iraq**

January 31, 2006

### **Half of Iraqis Approve of Attacks on US Forces, Including 9 Out of 10 Sunnis**

[Full Report](#)  
[Questionnaire/Methodology](#)

A new poll of the Iraqi public finds that a large majority of Iraqis think the US plans to maintain bases in Iraq permanently, even if the newly elected government asks the US to leave. A large majority favors setting a timeline for the withdrawal of US forces, though this majority divides over whether the timeline should be over a period of six months or two years. Nearly half of Iraqis approve of attacks on US-led forces—including nine out of 10 Sunnis. Most Iraqis believe that many aspects of their lives will improve once the US-led forces leave, but are nonetheless uncertain that Iraqi security forces are ready to stand on their own.

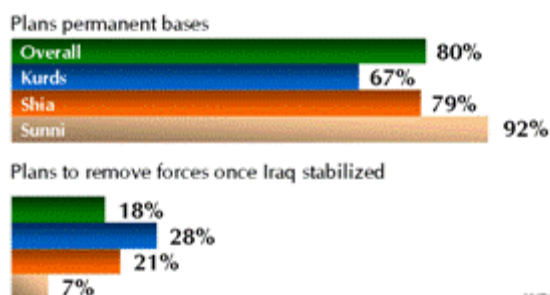
The poll was conducted for WorldPublicOpinion.org by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland and was fielded by KA Research Limited/[D3 Systems, Inc.](#) Polling was conducted January 2-5 with a nationwide sample of 1,150, which included an oversample of 150 Arab Sunnis (hereafter simply called Sunnis).

Asked whether “the US government plans to have permanent military bases in Iraq or to remove all its military forces once Iraq is stabilized,” 80% overall assume that the US plans to remain permanently, including 79% of Shia, 92% of Sunnis and 67% of Kurds. Only small minorities believe that the US plans “to remove all its military forces once Iraq is stabilized” (overall 18%, Shia 21%, Sunni 7%, Kurds 28%).

Iraqis of all ethnic groups also agree that the US is unlikely to take direction from the Iraqi government. Asked what they think the US would do if the new government were to ask the US to withdraw its forces within six months, 76% overall assume that the US would refuse to do so (Shia 67%, Sunni 94%, Kurds 77%).

## Permanence of US Military Bases

Do you think the US government plans to have permanent military bases in Iraq or to remove all its military once Iraq is stabilized?



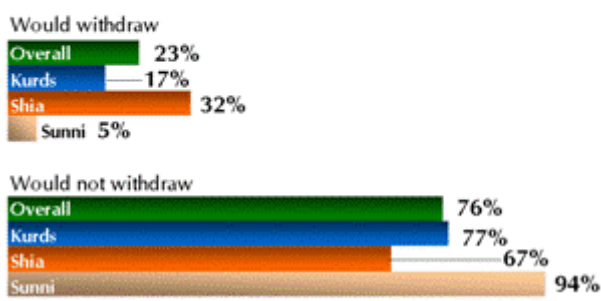
WPO 1/2006 **Support for Timetable**

Asked what they would like the newly elected Iraqi government to ask the US-led forces to do, 70% of Iraqis favor setting a timeline for the withdrawal of US forces. This number divides evenly between 35% who favor a short time frame of “within six months” and 35% who favor a gradual reduction over two years. Just 29% say it should “only reduce US-led forces as the security situation improves in Iraq.”

There are, however, variations along ethnic lines. Sunnis are the most unified, with 83% wanting US forces to leave within 6 months. Seventy percent of Shia agree on having a timeline, but divide between 22% who favor withdrawal in six months and 49% who favor two years. Among the Kurds, on the other hand, a majority of 57% favor reducing US-led forces only when the situation improves.

## Will US Withdraw if Asked?

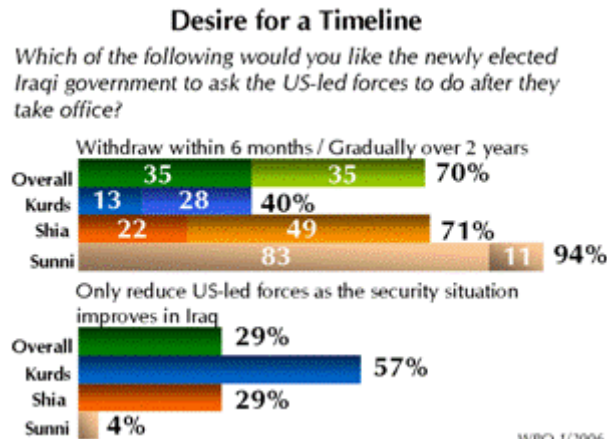
If the new Iraqi government were to tell the US to withdraw all of its forces within six months, do you think the US would or would not do so?



WPO 1/2006 Even larger majorities, including a majority of Kurds, indicate a readiness to follow the government’s lead should it choose to pursue a timetable. Asked if it was a good idea for Iraqi leaders to have agreed at the Arab League conference that there should be a timetable for the withdrawal of US-led forces from Iraq, 87% say that it was, including 64% of Kurds, 94% of Sunnis and 90% of Shia.

Despite the strong support for a timeline, there are differing expectations as to what the new government will in fact do. Overall, 61% assume that the newly elected government

will propose a timeline, with 17% assuming that it will be within six months and 44% over two years. However, there are sharp differences between the ethnic groups. While 76% of Shia assume that the new government will ask for withdrawal in six months (24%) or two years (52%), a majority of Kurds (57%) and Sunnis (54%) assume that the new government will ask US forces to withdraw only as the security situation improves.



conducted by the Oxford Research Institute for a consortium of media outlets including BBC, ABC News, NHK and others also found unhappiness with the presence of US troops. Sixty-five percent said they opposed “the presence of coalition forces in Iraq.” However, it was not asked specifically whether they wanted them to leave and when.

### Support for Attacks

A substantial portion of Iraqis support attacks on US led-forces, but not attacks on Iraqi government security forces or Iraqi civilians. Ethnic groups vary sharply on these questions.

Overall, 47% say they approve of “attacks on US-led forces” (23% strongly). There are huge differences between ethnic groups. An extraordinary 88% of Sunnis approve, with 77% approving strongly. Forty-one percent of Shia approve as well, but just 9% strongly. Even 16% of Kurds approve (8% strongly).

### Approve Government Endorsing Timeline for US Withdrawal



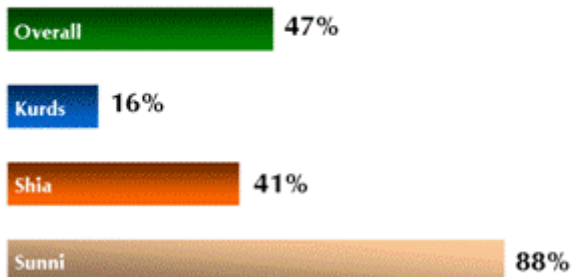
WPO 1/2006 Naturally the question arises why it is that only 35% want US troops to withdraw within six months while 47% approve of attacks on US-led forces. Interestingly, 41% of those who support attacks do not favor a near-term withdrawal. One possible explanation is that the attacks are not prompted by a desire to bring about an immediate withdrawal, but to put pressure on the US so that it will eventually leave. Indeed, among those who approve of such attacks, 90% believe that the US plans to have bases in Iraq permanently and 87% assume that the US would refuse to leave even if asked to by the new Iraqi government.

PIPA Director Steven Kull comments, “It appears that support for attacks on US-led forces may not always be prompted by a desire for the US to leave Iraq immediately but rather to put pressure on the US to leave eventually—something most Iraqis perceive the US as having no intention of doing.”

### Attacks on US-Led Forces

*Do you approve or disapprove (strongly or somewhat) of attacks on US-led forces in Iraq?*

Approve:

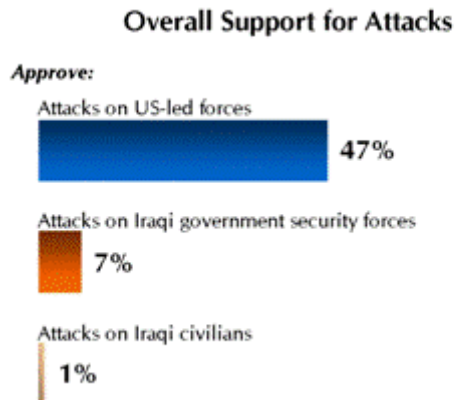


WPO 1/2006 Support for other types of attacks is sharply lower. An overwhelming 93% oppose attacks on Iraqi government security forces (66% strongly). This is true of all ethnic groups, including 76% of Sunnis, 97% of Shia and 99% of Kurds. Thus, it appears that support for attacks on US-led forces is truly aimed at US-led forces, not an indirect attempt to undermine the new Iraqi government.

Support for attacks on Iraqi civilians is nearly nonexistent. Only 1% approve, while 95% disapprove strongly.

## Sources of Urgency for Withdrawal

The major source of urgency for withdrawal is the feeling, especially among Sunnis, that it is offensive for their country to be occupied. A secondary reason is that US forces attract more attacks and make the violence worse.

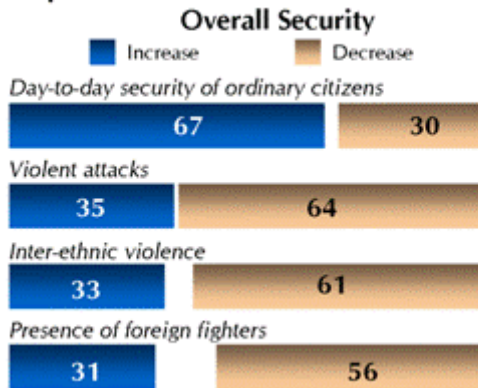


WFO 1/2006 The 35% of respondents who took the position in favor of the near-term exit of US forces from Iraq (six months) were asked: “Which of the following reasons for withdrawing US-led forces is the most important to you?” and given four options. The most commonly selected answer is: “It is offensive to me to have foreign forces in my country.” This was selected by 20% (of the total sample) overall, 52% of Sunnis, 11% of Shia and 7% of Kurds. The second most common answer is: “The presence of US forces attracts more violent attacks and makes things worse,” which was selected by 11% overall, 26% of Sunnis, 6% of Shia and 4% of Kurds. Far fewer chose the other two options: “It is no longer necessary to have US-led forces in Iraq: Iraq can take care of itself” (2%), and “I do not like the way US forces have treated Iraqi civilians” (2%).

## Effects of US Withdrawal

Iraqis believe that many aspects of their lives would improve were US-led forces to leave Iraq. Sunnis and Shia feel this way regarding every aspect asked about, while the Kurds have more mixed views. However, the majority is still not sure that Iraqi security forces are ready for US-led forces to leave within a short-term time frame.

### Expectations if US Withdraws in 6 Months:

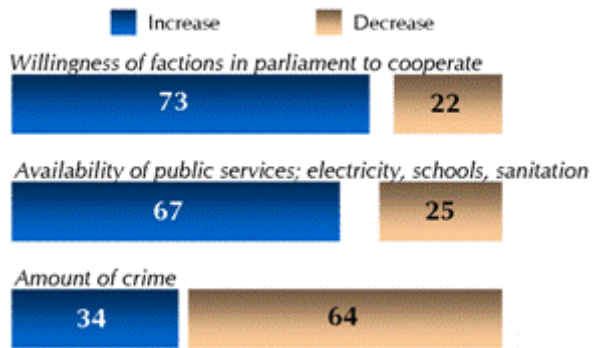


WPO 1/2008 Respondents were asked what would

happen in a variety of areas if US-led forces were to withdraw from Iraq in the next six months. Majorities of Iraqis express confidence that in many dimensions related to security, things would improve. Sixty-seven percent say that “day to day security for ordinary Iraqis” would increase, a consensus position among all ethnic groups—83% of Sunnis, 61% of Shia and 57% of Kurds. On other points, Sunnis and Shia agree, but the Kurds diverge. Overall, 64% believe that violent attacks would decrease, including a majority of Sunnis (86%) and Shia (66%), but 78% of Kurds think they will increase. Overall, 61% think that the amount of interethnic violence will decrease, including a majority of Sunnis (81%) and Shia (64%), but a majority of Kurds (68%) think it will increase. Similarly, 56% overall agree that the presence of foreign fighters in Iraq will decrease if US-led forces withdraw (Sunnis 74%, Shia 64%), but 74% of Kurds think they will increase.

Interestingly, there is a fair amount of consensus that if US-led troops were to withdraw, there would be substantial improvement in the performance of the Iraqi state. Overall, 73% think there will be an increase in the willingness of factions to cooperate in Parliament, including majorities of Kurds (62%), Sunnis (87%) and Shia (68%). Sixty-seven percent assume there will be an increase in the availability of public services such as electricity, schools and sanitation (Sunni 83%, Shia 63%, Kurds 54%). Sixty-four percent assume crime will go down (Sunnis 88%, Shia 66%), but here again the Kurds diverge, with 77% assuming crime will increase.

### Expectations if US Withdraws in 6 Months: Performance of Iraqi State



WPO 1/2008

Naturally the question arises, “Why do only 35% favor the US withdrawing within six months if there would be so many assumed benefits?” The answer may lie in the response to another question that asked whether in six months Iraqi security forces will be “strong enough to deal with the security challenges Iraq will face” or will still “need the help of military forces from other countries.” Overall, 59% feel that Iraqi security forces will not be strong enough, including 55% of Shia, 58% of Sunnis and 73% of Kurds. Thus, the presence of US troops may be perceived as an unwelcome presence that produces many undesirable side effects, but is still necessary for a period.