

THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

AMERICANS REEVALUATE GOING TO WAR WITH IRAQ

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

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



**Knowledge
NETWORKS**

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

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

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

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

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis designed the questionnaires and wrote the analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

During the run-up to the war with Iraq the American public expressed substantial doubts about going to war with Iraq. While most assumed that Iraq probably had or was developing weapons of mass destruction, most did not think the threat was imminent and favored taking more time to look for the weapons through the UN inspection process. Americans showed substantial concern about whether the US had the right to take action against Iraq without UN approval and wanted to take more time to build international support.

As it became clear that the president had determined to go to war, even without UN approval, the public rallied behind the president, just as they had previously said they would in various polls. Though Americans had reservations about going to war, they clearly expected that when US troops arrived in Iraq they would find evidence that Iraq had been providing support to al-Qaeda, as well as weapons of mass destruction or at least evidence of such programs. Given the ease with which the US prevailed in the war, if the US had found such evidence, the decision to go to war would surely have been vindicated as an act of self-defense, and mitigated residual concerns Americans had about the propriety of the US overthrowing a government on its own initiative.

When the US failed to find such evidence, this created substantial tension among Americans. Some avoided this information and simply came to believe that the US had indeed found such evidence. Others focused on the value of the US freeing the Iraqi people from violations of their human rights.

As the costs of the occupation and reconstruction have mounted in terms of dollars and lives, and the prospects have become clearer that the operation will likely be long and difficult, questions about the decision to go to war have resurfaced. Did the US act precipitously? Did the US act on incorrect assumptions? Was the threat imminent? Did the administration say that it was? Did the US have the right to take the action that it did? Even if

the US did not find evidence of an imminent threat, was the operation justified by freeing the Iraqi people? How has the outcome affected Americans' views of the president and how he has handled the operation? Was the Bush administration well prepared for the aftermath of the war? The administration has complained that the media has overplayed the bad news from Iraq: do Americans have an exaggeratedly negative view of how the operation is going in Iraq?

To answer these and other questions, PIPA and Knowledge Networks conducted a nationwide poll of 1,008 American adults from October 29 through November 9. The margin of error was plus or minus 3-4.5%, depending on whether the question was administered to the whole sample, three-quarters, or half 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 and the Ford Foundation.

Key findings were:

- A majority of Americans believes that the Bush administration went to war precipitously on the basis of incorrect assumptions. An overwhelming majority believes that the administration portrayed Iraq as an imminent threat, while a majority believes that the administration did not have evidence for this and that it was not in fact the case.
- A majority of Americans believe that the evidence that the US had on Iraq did not meet the proper international standards for going to war without UN approval. While a strong majority believes countries have a

right to overthrow a hostile government if they have strong evidence that they are in imminent danger of being attacked with WMD, or that the government is providing substantial support to a terrorist group that has attacked them, only a minority also believes that the US had, or now has, such evidence on Iraq. A strong majority believes countries have the right to overthrow a government if it is committing human rights violations that are large-scale, extreme and equivalent to genocide, but only a minority believes this and thinks Iraq was committing this level of human rights violations.

- A strong majority believes President Bush was determined to go to war irrespective of whether he had intelligence that Iraq had WMD or had provided support to al-Qaeda. A growing majority expresses doubts about the president's candor. However, only a minority believes he knowingly acted on incorrect assumptions. Rather, it appears that many perceive the president as ready to ignore evidence out of his determination to go to war. The president's handling of Iraq has shifted from being a net positive to being a net negative for his electoral prospects. This may be related to increased doubts about the president's candor--which may in turn be related to a sharp decline in the misperception that WMD have been found in Iraq.

- While there is not a majority saying that the decision to go to war with Iraq was the best decision, only a minority, albeit a growing one, says that it was the wrong decision. Factors that contribute to the support for the decision to go to war include a desire to support the president, beliefs that WMD or evidence of links to al-Qaeda have been found or will still be found, and widespread beliefs that Iraq did have some program for developing WMD and some links to al-Qaeda. Thus, while it appears the majority believes there were legitimate concerns that prompted the decision, at the same time it believes the threat was not imminent and the decision was taken precipitously without proper international support.

- An overwhelming majority continues to think the US has the responsibility to remain in Iraq

until there is a stable government—even though two-thirds say the administration did not do a good job of planning for postwar Iraq. When asked to imagine Iraq six months from now—in scenarios that posed an influx of foreign terrorists, but no further help from other countries--three in five still said the US should remain in Iraq.

- Americans do not appear to be overestimating the troubles in Iraq. Americans greatly underestimate the average number of attacks per day on US forces and the median estimate of US troop deaths from hostile fire is strikingly close to the true figure. Despite recurrent attacks, most Americans do not perceive the majority of the Iraqi people as hostile toward the US. However, only a quarter of Americans think that fewer terrorists are based in Iraq now, compared to before the war.

FINDINGS

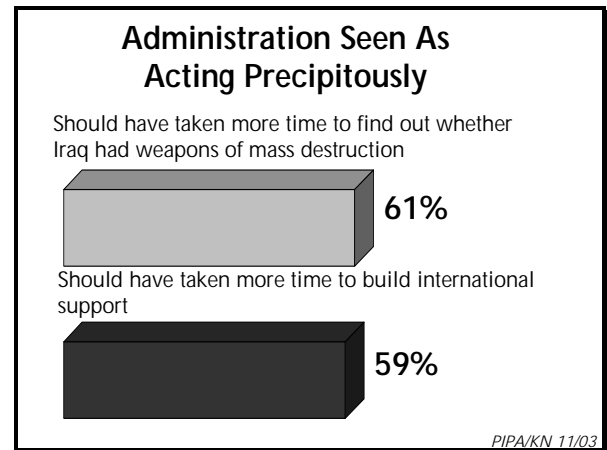
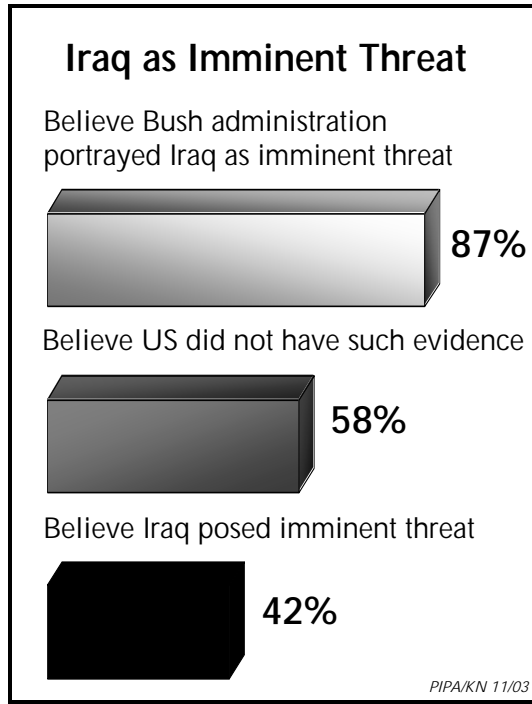
1 Assumptions Leading to War

A majority of Americans believes that the Bush administration went to war precipitously on the basis of incorrect assumptions. An overwhelming majority believes that the administration portrayed Iraq as an imminent threat, while a majority believes that the administration did not have evidence for this and that it was not in fact the case.

Respondents were asked to think back about the assumptions that went into the Bush administration's decision to go to war with Iraq. A majority of 55% said "President Bush decided to go to war on the basis of assumptions that were...incorrect," with just 40% saying they were correct.

An overwhelming 87% said "the Bush administration, before the war, did... portray Iraq as an imminent threat to the US." However, 58% said that the US did not "have strong evidence that the US was in

imminent danger of being attacked by Iraq with weapons of mass destruction,” and only 42% thought the US was in fact in imminent danger then.



Once the war started, the public rallied around the president and did not say that in retrospect the US should have waited. In an April 2-3 Los Angeles Times poll, 67% said that President Bush “gave international diplomacy enough time” and 73% said he “gave United Nations weapons inspectors enough time.”

The responses in the current poll suggest that the preference for taking more time has resurfaced. This may be due in part to doubts about whether the action was necessary in light of the absence of weapons of mass destruction, second thoughts about the operation in light of the persisting difficulties, fading of the rally-round-the-president effect, or a combination of all of these factors.

Consistent with the view that administration should have taken more time before the war, 66% said the administration did not do a good job of planning for postwar Iraq. Only 31% thought the administration had done a good job.

A majority believes that the US went to war precipitously. A majority of 61% said that “before the war, the Bush administration should... have taken more time to find out whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction,” with only 36% saying that it should not have. Also, 59% said that “Before the war, the Bush administration should have taken more time to try to build international support for going to war” (should not, 38%).

Before the war, majorities also favored taking more time. In a February 24-25 CBS News poll, only 31% agreed that “Iraq presents such a clear danger to American interests that the United States needs to act now,” while 64% agreed that “the US needs to wait for approval of the United Nations before taking action against Iraq,” and 62% said that “the United States should wait and give the United Nations inspectors more time.” For this latter question, the percentage advocating taking more time diminished in the days immediately before the war, but always remained at least a plurality.

2 International Norms and the Decision to Go to War

A majority of Americans believe that the evidence that the US had on Iraq did not meet the proper international standards for going to war without UN approval. While a strong majority believes countries have a right to overthrow a hostile government if they have strong evidence that they are in imminent danger of being attacked with WMD, or that the government is providing substantial support to a terrorist group that has attacked them, only a minority also believes that the US had, or now has, such evidence on Iraq. A strong majority believes countries have the right to overthrow a government if it is committing human rights violations that are large-scale, extreme and equivalent to genocide, but only a minority believes this and thinks Iraq was committing this level of human rights violations.

To find out if Americans feel the US met the proper standards for going to war, respondents were first presented a series of general statements about the conditions under which countries generally have the right to overthrow a government that may be developing weapons of mass destruction, may be providing support to terrorist groups, or is violating the human rights of its citizens. Later in the poll respondents were asked a series of questions on their beliefs about Iraq before the war, to determine if they thought the US had met the necessary conditions.

WMD

During the run-up to the war, as it became clear that the US was unlikely to get UN approval, there was a major discussion about whether the US had the right to attack Iraq without UN approval. Some argued in favor of this on the basis of a broad principle that Iraq's WMD program gave the US the right to act in self-defense, even if the threat may not exist until sometime in the future. Others argued that the US had the right on the narrower (and legally

stronger) basis that Iraq's WMD posed an imminent danger of attack.

Respondents were asked their position on what conditions would give a country the right to overthrow another government, without mentioning the issue of UN approval. Given four positions, only a quarter chose the two most restrictive positions--that "countries have the right to overthrow another government only if the other country attacks them first" (9%) or "countries have the right to use military force to stop another country from invading, but this does not give them the right to overthrow the invading country's government" (15%).

However, only 31% chose the least restrictive option, consistent with the view that the US had the right to attack Iraq because it was building WMD. It read: "Countries have the right to overthrow another government if they have strong evidence that the other country is acquiring weapons of mass destruction that could be used to attack them at some point in the future." Furthermore, only 22% said both that countries have such a right *and* that the US met this condition by having strong evidence that Iraq was developing WMD.

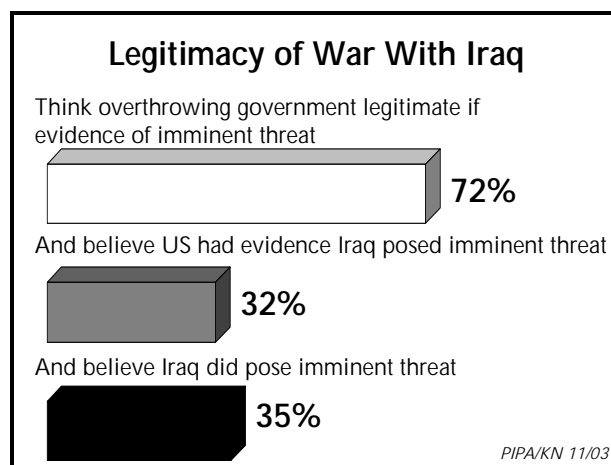
The largest percentage (41%) chose the option that "Countries have the right to overthrow another government only if they have strong evidence that they are in imminent danger of being attacked with weapons of mass destruction by the other country." Combined with the 31% who embraced the least restrictive option, it appears that a very strong majority of 72% would embrace the idea that the US would have the right to overthrow a government if they had strong evidence that it posed an imminent threat of attack with weapons of mass destruction.

However, most Americans do not believe that the US had the necessary evidence. Only 40% said the US had strong evidence that Iraq posed such an imminent danger,

and only 32% believed the US had such evidence and also believed that it would give the US the right to attack. An additional 2% saw intervention as justified on the basis that the country was acquiring weapons of mass destruction, though they believed the US was not in imminent danger.

Conditions under which countries have the right to overthrow another government	Percent choosing	And believe US had evidence of imminent danger of WMD attack
If they have strong evidence that the other country is acquiring weapons of mass destruction that could be used to attack them at some point in the future	31%	17%
Only if they have strong evidence that they are in imminent danger of being attacked with weapons of mass destruction by the other country	41	15
Only if the other country attacks them first	9	3
Countries have the right to use military force to stop another country from invading, but this does not give them the right to overthrow the invading country's government	15	4

Perhaps more importantly, given what they know now, only 42% said they believe that Iraq did in fact pose such an imminent danger. If, after the war, the US had found evidence that Iraq did pose an imminent danger, the Bush administration would have been vindicated, given that 72% believe that this would legitimate military action. But most Americans do not perceive that this has occurred.



In response to a separate question, it became clear that with UN approval, meeting the higher standard of an imminent threat might not be necessary. Respondents were asked under what conditions countries have the right to overthrow a government if they “have evidence” that it “is acquiring weapons of mass destruction that could be used to attack them at some point in the future.” Thirty-nine percent said that countries have the right “even if they do not have UN approval,” while 48% said that they only have the right “if they first present their evidence to the UN and the UN determines that such an action is necessary.” Thus, with UN approval, 87% believe that countries would have such a right. This is consistent with pre-war poll results showing a very high readiness to support war against Iraq with UN approval.

However, given current knowledge of the level of evidence as to whether Iraq was in the process of developing such a future threat, it appears there is no longer a consensus that even UN approval would have given legitimacy to overthrowing the Iraq government. Asked, “Do you think that before the war, the US did...have strong evidence that Iraq had an active program for developing weapons of mass destruction that could be used to attack the US at some point in the future?” only 53% of the whole sample said that the US did, and only 49% also believed that, with UN approval, this would give a country the right to go to war.

When countries have evidence that another government is acquiring WMD that could be used against them:	Percent choosing	And believe US had evidence Iraq was developing WMD
They have the right to overthrow the other government, even if they do not have UN approval	39%	28%
They only have the right to overthrow the other government if they first present their evidence to the UN and the UN determines that such an action is necessary	48	21
They never have the right to overthrow the other government	8	2

Conditions under which countries have the right to overthrow a government providing substantial support to a terrorist group	Percent choosing	And believe US had evidence of substantial support to al Qaeda
Whenever they deem it necessary, even without UN approval	23%	16%
As a general rule, only with UN approval, but if the terrorist group has attacked them, UN approval may not be necessary	44	22
Only when they first present their evidence to the UN and the UN determines that such an action is necessary	23	11
Under no circumstances	6	2

Support for Al-Qaeda

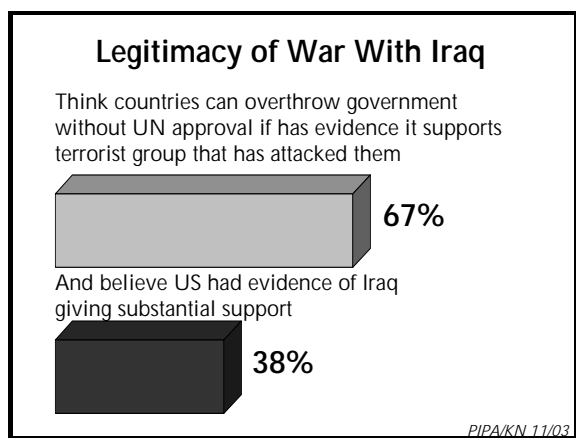
Another normative argument for the US going to war with Iraq without UN approval was that Iraq was providing substantial support to the terrorist group al-Qaeda. Most broadly, this argument was simply that support for a terrorist group justifies unilateral action. More narrowly, the argument was based on the principle of self-defense: because al-Qaeda attacked the US and Iraq was providing substantial support to al-Qaeda, overthrowing Saddam Hussein to remove part of al-Qaeda’s support system was an act of self-defense.

Respondents were asked to say “under what conditions you think countries have the right to overthrow another government when they have evidence that it is providing substantial support to a terrorist group.” Only 29% chose the two most restrictive options: “only when they first present their evidence to the UN and the UN determines that such an action is necessary” (23%), or “under no circumstances” (6%).

Only 23% chose the least restrictive option: “whenever they deem it necessary, even without UN approval.” Furthermore, only 16% believed that countries have such a right and also believed that the US had “strong evidence that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was providing substantial support to al-Qaeda.”

A plurality (44%) chose the more nuanced position: “as a general rule, only with UN approval, but if the terrorist group has attacked them, UN approval may not be necessary.” Thus, combined with the 23% who chose the least restrictive option, 67% would say countries have the right to overthrow a government when they have evidence that it is providing substantial support to a terrorist group that has attacked them.

However, many of those who believed that countries do have such a right did not believe that “before the war, the US did... have strong evidence that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was providing substantial support to al-Qaeda.” Thus only 38% of the whole sample believed both that countries have the right to overthrow a government that is providing substantial support to a terrorist group that has attacked them, and that the US had found evidence Iraq was providing such support to al-Qaeda.



Human Rights Violations

Another normative argument used to justify US action against Iraq has been that the US was freeing the Iraqi people from a government that was violating its human rights. Respondents were asked “under what conditions you think countries have the right to overthrow another government that is committing violations of the human rights of its citizens.” Once again, only a quarter endorsed the most restrictive conditions: “only when they first present their evidence to the UN and the UN determines that such an action is necessary” (23%) or “under no circumstances” (5%).

Only 27% chose the least restrictive option: “whenever a government is committing substantial violations of the human rights of its citizens.” In a separate question, most of this group (25% of the full sample) also said that they thought Iraq was committing substantial violations or worse.

Once again the plurality (41%) chose the more nuanced option, saying that countries can overthrow another government, “as a general rule, only with UN approval, but when the violations are large-scale, extreme and equivalent to genocide, UN approval may not be necessary.” Thus combined with those who chose the least restrictive option, it appears that 68% would endorse the idea that countries have the right to overthrow a government that is conducting extreme human rights violations.

However, only 47% of the 68% mentioned above also believed that before the war Iraq “was committing violations of the human rights of its citizens that were large-scale, extreme and equivalent to genocide.” Thus only 32% of all respondents both believed that human rights violations equivalent to genocide justified intervention, and that such extreme violations were occurring under Saddam Hussein.

There was, however, an additional 12% that believed that intervention was justified on human rights grounds. This group had the less restrictive standard for intervention—committing “substantial” violations—and, while they did not think that Iraq’s violations were extreme enough to be equivalent to genocide, they did think the violations met the standard of being substantial.

Conditions under which countries have the right to overthrow a government that is committing violations of the human rights of its citizens	Percent choosing	And believe Iraq was committing human rights violations that were large scale, extreme and equivalent to genocide
Whenever a government is committing substantial violations of the human rights of its citizens	27%	13%
As a general rule, only with UN approval, but when the violations are large-scale, extreme and equivalent to genocide, UN approval may not be necessary	41	19
Only when the UN reviews the evidence of such violations and approves military action	23	6
Under no conditions	5	2

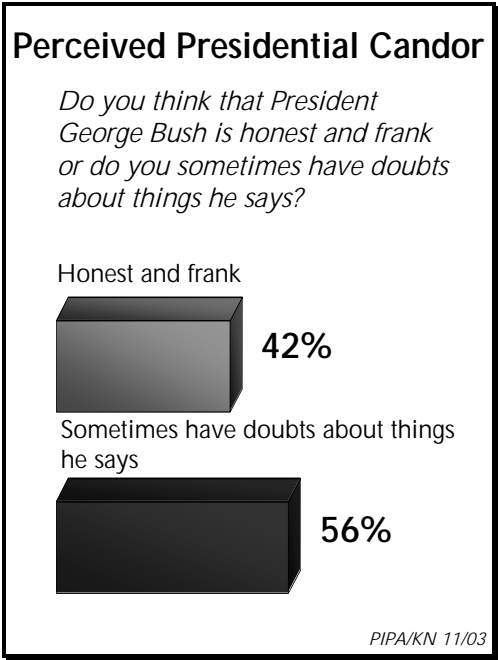
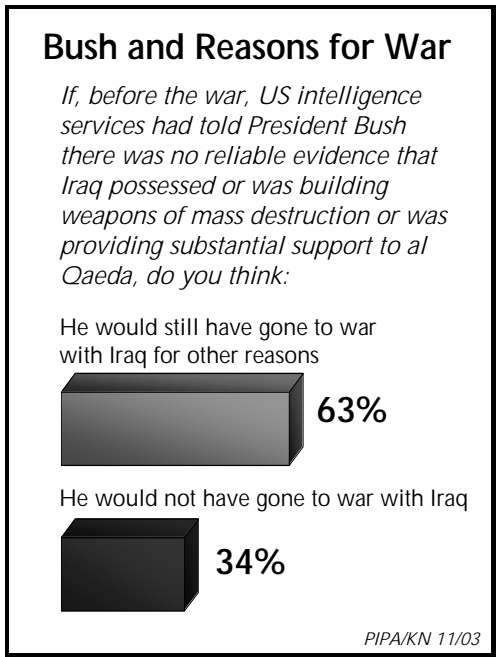
Apparently most Americans do not believe that Saddam Hussein’s human rights record stood out among others as the most egregious and thus particularly requiring attention. Asked, “Do you think that there are other governments existing today that have human rights records as bad as that of Iraq under Saddam Hussein?” an overwhelming 88% said there are.

3 President Bush and Decision to Go to War

A strong majority believes President Bush was determined to go to war irrespective of whether he had intelligence that Iraq had WMD or had provided support to al-Qaeda. A growing majority expresses doubts about the president’s candor. However, only a minority believes he knowingly acted on incorrect assumptions. Rather, it appears that many perceive the president as ready to ignore evidence out of his determination to go to war. The president’s handling of Iraq has shifted from being a net positive to being a net negative for his electoral prospects. This may be related to increased doubts about the president’s candor—which may in turn be related to a sharp decline in the misperception that WMD have been found in Iraq.

Most Americans believe President Bush was determined to go to war irrespective of the evidence that Iraq posed a threat. Asked whether they thought the president would have gone to war if US intelligence services had told him there was no reliable evidence that Iraq possessed or was building weapons of mass destruction or was providing substantial support to al Qaeda, 63% say he would still have gone to war with Iraq.

This perception of the president as determined to go to war irrespective of the evidence may help explain why the majority believes the president went to war without taking enough time to make sure that Iraq did in fact have weapons of mass destruction, and believes that he portrayed the Iraqi threat as imminent, but that it was not (discussed above). It may also help explain why the public is showing some doubts about the president’s candor. Only 42% said that the president is honest and frank, while 56% say they have doubts about things he says.



A growing majority said that the administration was being less than truthful when presenting evidence on WMD. Asked about when the administration presented evidence of Iraq having weapons of mass destruction to justify going to war with Iraq, only 25% said it was being fully truthful. Rather, 72% said the administration was either presenting evidence it knew was false (21%) or was “stretching the truth, but not making false statements” (51%). This is up nine percentage points from July, when 63% said the administration was presenting

evidence it knew was false (16%) or stretching the truth (47%).

Interestingly, this shift may be related to a sharp drop in the misperception that the US has found WMD in Iraq. While in the August-September poll 24% thought WMD have been found, in the current poll this dropped to 15%. This shift may be related to media coverage of David Kay’s interim progress report on the activities of the Iraq Survey Group, which did not find clear evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

A smaller majority questions the administration’s veracity on links to al-Qaeda. When asked the administration’s presentation of “evidence of links between Saddam Hussein’s government and al-Qaeda to justify going to war with Iraq,” 35% said it was being fully truthful and 60% said it was knowingly presenting false evidence (17%) or stretching the truth (43%). Interestingly, this percentage has not changed significantly since it was last asked, and the percentage incorrectly believing that US has found evidence of close links between Iraq and al-Qaeda has also not changed significantly—currently at 52%.

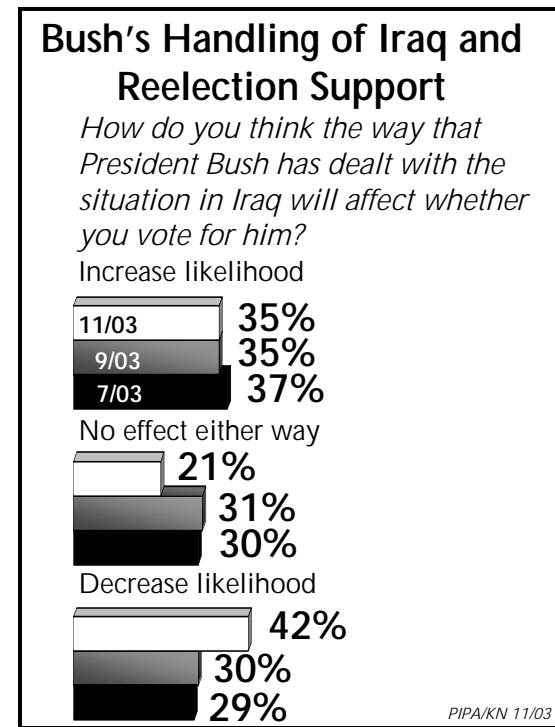
If respondents are only given the options of saying that the president knowingly acted on incorrect assumptions or did not, only a minority will say that he did. The 55% that said the US went to war based on incorrect assumptions were also asked whether they thought “the president believed they were correct” or “knew they were incorrect.” Only 25% assumed the president knew they were incorrect, while 30% assumed that he believed they were correct.

But a follow-on question reveals that many do not see him as having been simply mistaken. Those who said the US went to war based on false assumptions were 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?” A remarkable 87% of this group said that some key people did know.

This view of the president as having the intelligence available to him that the

assumptions were incorrect, and yet not availing himself of it, is consistent with the view of the president as determined to go to war irrespective of the evidence and pushing ahead without first taking the time to find out if the assumptions were in fact correct.

The president’s handling of Iraq has shifted from a net positive to a net negative for his electoral prospects. Respondents were asked, “How do you think the way that President Bush has dealt with the situation in Iraq will affect whether you vote for him?” In PIPA/KN’s August-September poll, those saying that it would increase the likelihood (35%) were a bit greater than the percentage saying that it would decrease the likelihood (30%), with the mean score being 0.03 (on a scale of -5 to +5). This has shifted, with the percentage saying that the president’s handling of Iraq would decrease their likelihood of voting for him jumping 12 percentage points to 42%—now higher than the percentage saying that it would increase the likelihood (35%). The mean score has dropped to -0.50.



This shift in attitudes toward the president may be related to changes in perceptions of the president's veracity. As mentioned above, there has been a nine-point increase in those who believe the administration has been less than fully truthful, and also a nine-point drop among those who incorrectly believe that the US has found WMD in Iraq—perhaps in response to the media coverage of David Kay's interim progress report on the activities of the Iraq Survey Group, which did not find clear evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

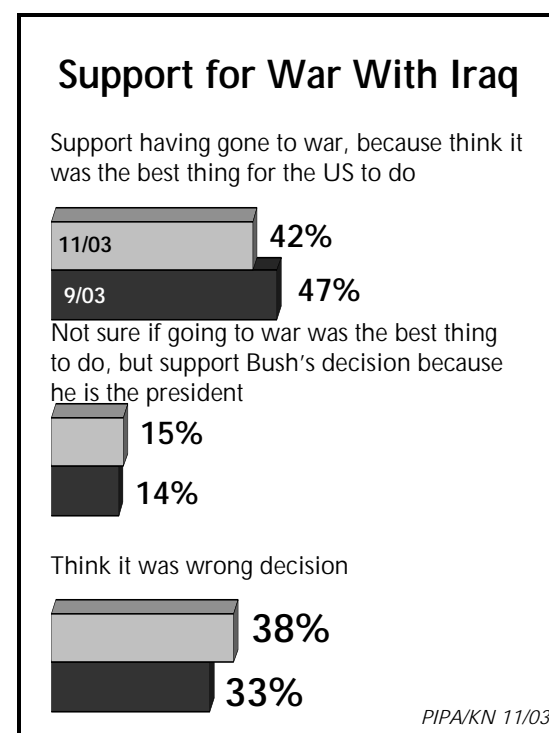
Overall, perceptions of honesty are a powerful predictor of the likelihood to vote for the president. Those who said the president is honest and frank are 11 times more likely to say that they plan to vote for him than people who have doubts about things he says. Perceptions of the president's honesty were the most powerful predictor of the likelihood to vote for the president of all factors analyzed in a binary logistic regression, including party identification.

4 Sources of Continuing Support for Decision to Go to War

While there is not a majority saying that the decision to go to war with Iraq was the best decision, only a minority, albeit a growing one, says that it was the wrong decision. Factors that contribute to the support for the decision to go to war include a desire to support the president, beliefs that WMD or evidence of links to al-Qaeda have been found or will still be found, and widespread beliefs that Iraq did have some program for developing WMD and some links to al-Qaeda. Thus, while it appears the majority believes there were legitimate concerns that prompted the decision, at the same time it believes the threat was not imminent and the decision was taken precipitously without proper international support.

For some months now PIPA/KN and other polling organizations have been asking respondents whether they think the US made "the right decision or the wrong decision in going to war against Iraq." Despite the doubts

explored above, only a minority in the current poll—38%—said that it was the wrong decision, though this represents a rise from 33% in the August-September poll and 22% in the May poll. Presented these two options, a majority of 57% said that the US made the right decision. However, a follow-on question that has been regularly asked reveals that this is not really a solid majority. Asked whether they "support having gone to war" because they "think it was the best thing for the US to do," or if they are "not sure if going to war was the best thing to do, but support Bush's decision, because he is the president," only 42% said that they think that going to war was the best thing to do (down from 47% in August-September), while 15% say they simply support the president.

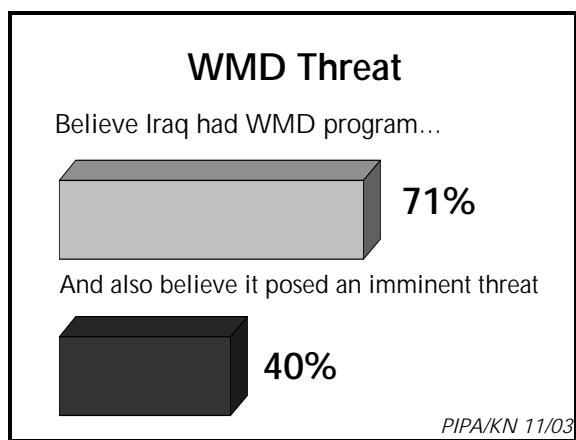


Besides the desire to support the president, there are other factors contributing to support for the war. One of these is misperceptions. Fifteen percent said that they believe the US has actually found WMD in Iraq and 52% think the US has found "clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam

Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist group.” Among those who say the decision to go to war was the best thing 21% believed that WMD have been found and 71% believed that evidence of close links to al-Qaeda have been found. Among those who simply want to support the president, the percentages are 20% and 60% respectively. Among those who said it was the wrong decision, the percentages were 5% and 29% respectively.

Another factor is the belief that the US will eventually find evidence. In addition to the 15% who believe that WMD have been found, 37% believe that it is more likely that “US inspectors will eventually find clear evidence that Iraq had an active program for developing weapons of mass destruction.” In addition to the 52% who believe that evidence of links to al-Qaeda have been found, 11% believe it is more likely that “US inspectors will eventually find clear evidence that Iraq was working closely with al-Qaeda.”

Another key factor is beliefs about what was in fact occurring in Iraq before the war. Seventy-one percent believe that before the war, Iraq did have “an active program for developing weapons of mass destruction,” and 67% believe that Iraq was “providing substantial support to al-Qaeda.” But this does not mean that all of these people saw these conditions as necessarily posing a critical threat to the US. Only 40% both believed that Iraq had a WMD program and that US was in imminent danger of being attacked.

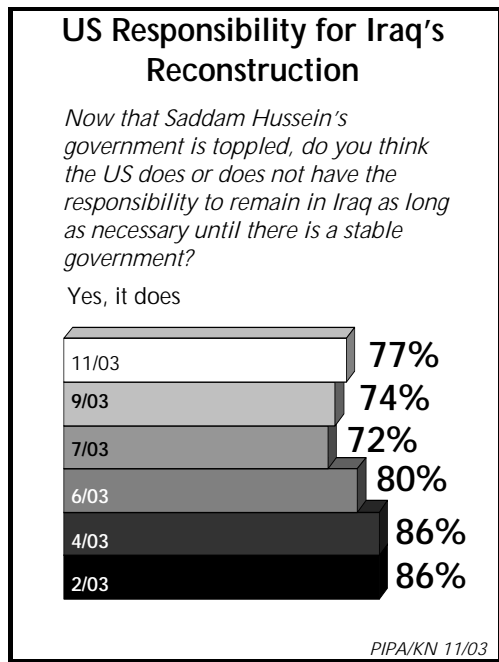


So how can all of these various views be put together? Is the public simply split, or is there something that could be called a coherent majority position? Clearly the majority does think that there was cause for substantial concern, as evidenced by its belief that Iraq had some type of WMD program and some links to al-Qaeda. Thus they reject the charge that going to war with Iraq was simply the wrong decision. At the same time, the majority shows many doubts about the decision. The majority says that the US went to war on the basis of incorrect assumptions, does not think that Iraq posed an imminent threat, does not think that the existing evidence gave the US the right to act without UN approval, and that the US should have taken more time to search for WMD and to build international support. Thus they do not endorse the decision as the optimal one for the US to have taken.

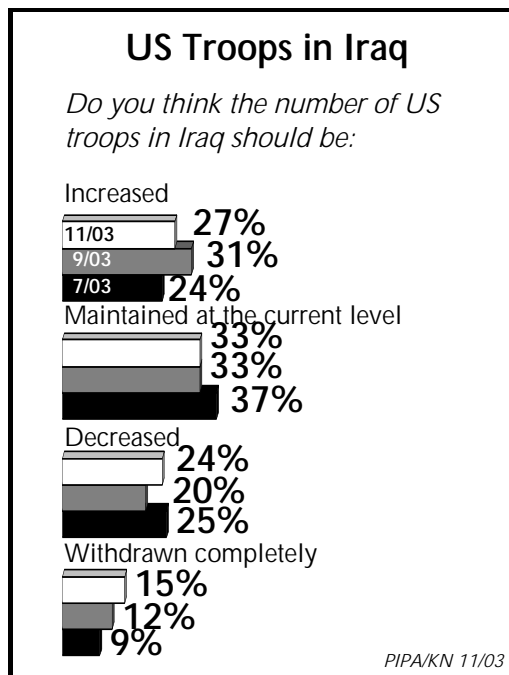
5 Support for Reconstruction

An overwhelming majority continues to think the US has the responsibility to remain in Iraq until there is a stable government—even though two-thirds say the administration did not do a good job of planning for postwar Iraq. When asked to imagine Iraq six months from now—in scenarios that posed an influx of foreign terrorists, but no further help from other countries—three in five still said the US should remain in Iraq.

Whatever doubts Americans may have about the decision to go to war, an overwhelming majority continues to think the US has the responsibility to remain in Iraq until there is a stable government. Asked, “Now that Saddam Hussein’s government is toppled, do you think the US does or does not have the responsibility to remain in Iraq as long as necessary until there is a stable government?” 77% said the US does have this responsibility. PIPA/KN has asked forms of this question since February, and responses have been consistently high.



Only a small minority (15%) favors completely withdrawing US troops from Iraq. An additional 24% favors decreasing the number of troops, but a majority (60%) favors either maintaining the current level (33%) or increasing the number (27%).



Support is robust, even though an overwhelming 85% say that “the effort to reconstruct Iraq” has “more difficult” than they expected. This is in contrast to the “effort to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein,” which 54% found “less difficult” than they expected.

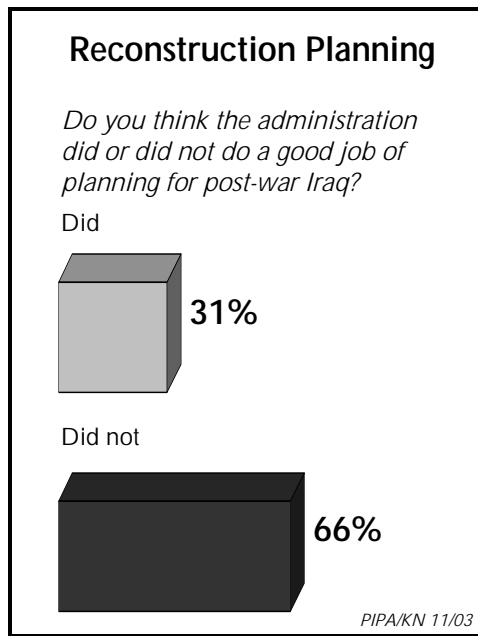
The median respondent estimates that the US will need to keep US troops in Iraq for another three years. This is sharply up from a median estimate of two years that PIPA/KN had consistently found when asking this question on numerous occasions since June.

When asked to imagine a number of scenarios for Iraq six months in the future, in all cases only a minority wanted to withdraw US troops. Four subsamples were presented a differing scenario with two variables: (1) whether the opposition to US troops was being fed by an influx of foreign terrorists, or whether it was almost entirely Iraqi; and (2) whether the US was going it mostly alone, or whether participation by other countries had greatly increased. All respondents were then asked whether, in this situation, they thought they would want for the US to increase US forces in Iraq, stay the course, or withdraw US forces. In all four scenarios, only 29-37% said they would want to withdraw. In the most severe scenario (influx of foreign terrorists, US still providing most troops), 21% said they would want to increase US forces and 38% said they would want to stay the course. In the least severe scenario (very few foreign terrorists, US providing only half the troops) only 13% said they would want to increase US forces while 53% said they would want to stay the course—presumably because the demands would be lower. This suggests that a majority of Americans are not likely to want the US to withdraw simply due to a growing presence of foreign terrorists or a lack of added international participation in the operation.

The solidity of the readiness to stay the course may arise in part from the

administration having clarified the need for a substantial commitment in advance. Asked, “Do you think that before the war, the Bush administration did or did not say that, after the war, the US would make a long-term commitment to bring a stable and democratic government to Iraq?” an overwhelming 80% said that he did.

While an overwhelming majority thinks the US has a responsibility to remain in Iraq, this is accompanied by a majority feeling that administration planning was inadequate. Two-thirds (66%) said the administration did not do a good job of planning for postwar Iraq. Only 31% thought the administration did a good job.



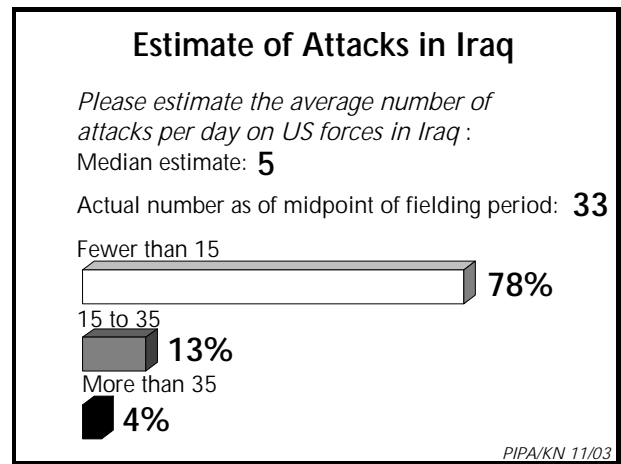
6 Assessing Conditions in Iraq

Americans do not appear to be overestimating the troubles in Iraq. Americans greatly underestimate the average number of attacks per day on US forces, and the median estimate of US troop deaths from hostile fire is strikingly close to the true figure. Despite recurrent attacks, most Americans do not perceive the majority of the Iraqi people as hostile toward the US. However, only a quarter of Americans think that fewer

terrorists are based in Iraq now, compared to before the war.

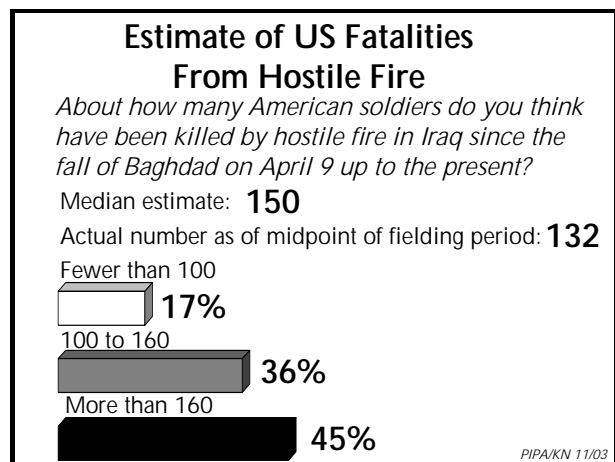
The poll did not find evidence to support the Bush administration’s complaint that the media is overplaying the bad news on Iraq and negatively affecting public perceptions. In several questions that asked respondents for their picture of conditions in Iraq, the median respondent either underestimated the troubles there or was roughly accurate.

Respondents were asked to “estimate the average number of attacks per day on US forces in Iraq.” The median estimate was 5—much lower than the actual number of 26 to 33 during the period of the poll. Seventy-eight percent estimated 15 attacks or fewer. Only 13% could be described as roughly accurate, giving a figure between 15 and 35 attacks. Just 4% gave a response above 35, overestimating the number of attacks.



The public’s current median estimate of US troop deaths from hostile fire since the fall of Baghdad is strikingly close to the true figure. Asked “About how many American soldiers do you think have been killed by hostile fire in Iraq since the fall of Baghdad on April 9 up to the present?” the median estimate was 150—quite close to the actual number of US deaths in postwar Iraq from the fall of Baghdad to the midpoint of this poll’s fielding period, which was 132. (When the same question was asked in June,

the median estimate was 40, close to the then-actual number of 46.)



Another key dimension of the Iraq military operation is the question of international participation. An overwhelming majority—75%—knew that “other countries have contributed troops to the current operation in Iraq.” Twenty-three percent had the misperception that no other country has contributed troops. The median respondent only slightly underestimated the percentage of troops from other countries. The median estimate on “what percentage of troops currently in Iraq is from countries other than the US” was 10%—slightly low today, though more accurate for mid-summer. (The current level of troops from other countries in the Iraq operation is 15%, according to figures given by the Secretary of Defense on October 21.)

Despite the recurrent news stories of attacks on American troops, Americans do not appear to be overestimating the negative attitudes of the Iraqi people. An overwhelming 75% said they thought the majority of Iraqis is glad that the US overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein; only 22% think the majority resents it. Nearly three in five Americans (58%) think a majority of Iraqis want the US to stay for now, while 39% think a majority of Iraqis want the US to leave. This is a bit more positive view of the Iraqi public’s attitudes than PIPA/KN found in early September, when just 47% said that thought a majority of Iraqis want the US to stay for now. Asked how the attacks on US forces reflect

attitudes among Iraqis, 50% thought they reflect only minority attitudes among Iraqis, while just 17% thought they reflected majority attitudes. Thirty-one percent thought views were evenly balanced.

While it is not possible to compare these perceptions with actual Iraqi public opinion, because full-scale polling of Iraq as a nation is not yet operational, a suggestive comparison can be made with a summer Gallup poll of residents of greater Baghdad. It does appear that the American public’s image accords with the views in this limited urban poll. As to whether the US should stay or leave, Baghdad respondents were asked whether they would prefer “for the US and British forces to leave immediately, say in the next few months, or do you think they should stay in Iraq for a longer period of time?” A very strong 72% opted for a longer period of time; only 26% wanted occupying forces to leave in the next few months. On the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, when asked to think “about any hardships you might have suffered since the US and Britain invasion,” a strong 62% majority said they “personally think that ousting Saddam Hussein was worth it”; 30% said it was not. As to whether attacks on US forces reflected attitudes of Iraqis generally, Baghdad respondents were asked “to which extent you can personally justify...morally” “current attacks against the US forces in Iraq.” Sixty-four percent said they could not justify these attacks; when asked whether they meant “not at all” or “somewhat,” 42% (of the whole sample) said “not at all” and 22% said “somewhat.” Another 36% said the attacks could be justified at least sometimes (17% sometimes, 11% somewhat, 8% completely).

Americans also think that the operation in Iraq has not decreased the number of terrorists in Iraq. Asked for their impression “thinking about how many terrorists are based in Iraq today,” 35% thought there were “more terrorists than before the war”; 35% thought there were “about the same

number”; and just 27% thought there were fewer terrorists than before the war.

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.