

Iraqi Public Favors International Assistance

January 31, 2006

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

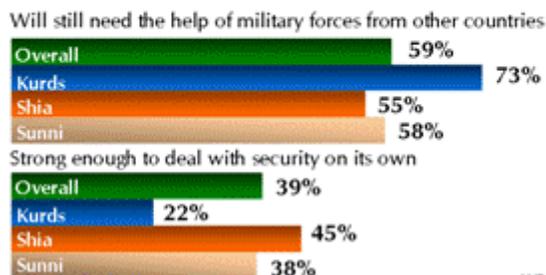
Though many Iraqis are unhappy with the presence of US-led forces, most express strong support for various forms of international assistance, including the presence of foreign security forces, UN (rather than US) leadership on reconstruction, an international conference of global and regional players to address Iraq's needs, engagement by the Arab League and a variety of forms of nonmilitary US assistance. In some cases, international forms of assistance are even endorsed by Sunnis, who tend to strongly oppose all US-led efforts in Iraq.

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).

A majority of Iraqis (59%) feel that in six months it will be necessary for Iraq to have "military forces from other countries." Just 39% say that "six months from now Iraqi security forces will be strong enough to deal with the security challenges Iraq will face." Not surprisingly, 55% of Shia and 73% of Kurds endorse the need for foreign forces.

Will Iraqi Security Forces Be Strong Enough?

Do you think that six months from now Iraqi security forces will be strong enough to deal with the security challenges that Iraq will face, or do you think that Iraq will still need the help of military forces from other countries?



WPO 1/2006 What is surprising is that 59% of Sunnis

also endorse the need for "military force from other countries" six months from now. In the case of the Sunnis, this support for help from military forces from unspecified "other countries" is in sharp contrast to attitudes about the presence of "US-led forces." An overwhelming 83% of Sunnis favor the withdrawal of "US-led forces" within six months.

Those who say Iraq still needs the help of foreign forces were also asked how much longer such forces would be needed. Twenty-one percent (of the whole sample) say one year, 26% two years and 12% three years or more. Kurds' estimates of how much longer

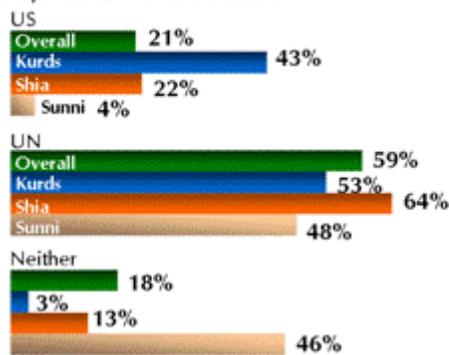
foreign forces would be needed are a bit longer (33% three years or more, 31% two years), while Sunni and Shia estimates are similar.

A poll of Iraqis conducted in Baghdad governorate by Gallup in September 2003 also found strong support for an international military presence. Sixty-four percent said they would favor "installing an international peacekeeping force in Iraq." Only 32% were opposed.

UN Leadership

Iraqis also express support for the UN, not the US, to take the lead in the economic reconstruction of Iraq. Overall, 59% express such a preference, with just 21% favoring the US taking the lead. Kurds have the highest percentage favoring the US taking the lead (43%), but the majority (53%) of Kurds favor the UN. Shia express the strongest support for the UN (64%). Only 22% of Shia support the US taking the lead in reconstruction.

US or UN Lead Economic Reconstruction?
Would you prefer to have the US or the UN take the lead in Iraq's economic reconstruction?



WPO 1/2006 Sunni support for the US taking the lead

is almost nonexistent (4%). But approximately half of Sunnis (48%) express support for the UN, while 46% says they would prefer to have neither involved.

When asked whether the UN is having a positive or negative influence in Iraq now, this produces a divided response, with 38% saying mostly positive and 38% saying mostly negative. Shia are mixed, with 39% saying the UN is having a mostly positive influence and 38% saying it is having a mostly negative influence. Given their strong desire for a larger UN role, this suggests that there is unhappiness with the UN for not taking a more active role in Iraq. Among those who say the UN is playing a mostly negative role in Iraq, 59% prefer the UN to take the lead in economic reconstruction.

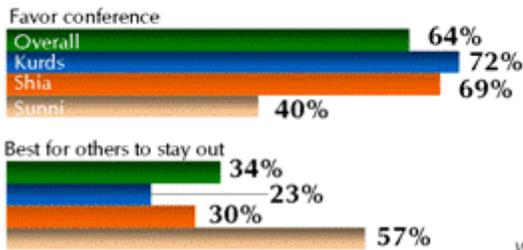
Kurds are the most satisfied with the UN, with 60% saying it is having a mostly positive influence on the situation in the country. Sunnis are the least satisfied with the UN's influence on the situation in Iraq--57% say it is mostly negative.

International Conference

Respondents were asked about the prospect of holding 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. Overall nearly two-thirds of Iraqis--64%--support the idea, including 72% of Kurds and 69% of Shia.

International Conference on Iraq

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?



WPO 1/2006 Sunnis are decidedly less enthusiastic.

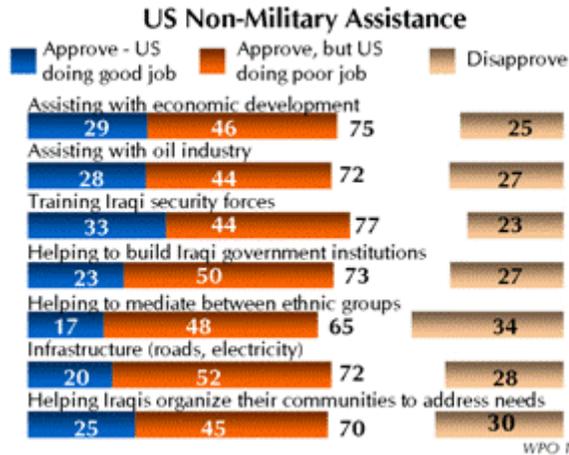
Still, 40% favor the idea, while 57% say it is best for other countries to stay out of Iraq's affairs.

This majority openness to some forms of international involvement recalls a Gallup finding in its Baghdad poll of September 2003. Respondents were told: "Some people have called for internationalizing the reconstruction effort by having nations in addition to the US and Britain help in the reconstruction of Iraq." Eighty-three percent favored this idea (55% strongly).

US Nonmilitary Involvement

Two-thirds of Iraqis approve of US involvement in nonmilitary activities--including training Iraqi security forces, developing Iraq's oil industry, building government institutions, mediating between ethnic groups, assisting with infrastructure and economic development and helping organize local communities. Yet a majority or plurality says the US is doing a poor job in each of these areas.

Of the seven nonmilitary activities Iraqis were asked about, approval is highest for training Iraqi security forces (77% overall) and lowest for US efforts to help mediate between ethnic groups (65% overall).

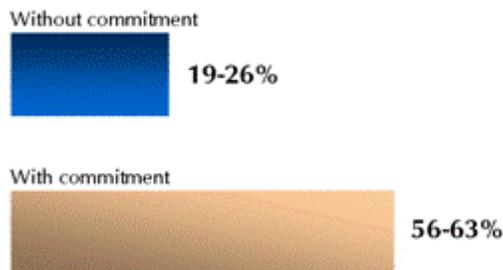


Sunnis, however, disapprove of US involvement in these activities by a large majority. Sunnis are the only group that disagrees in principle with US involvement in nonmilitary activities. Between 74% and 81% percent of Sunnis disapprove of US involvement in each of these activities (19-26% approve), while 76% to 96% percent of Kurds and Shia approve.

However, even among Kurds and Shia most feel the US is doing a poor job. The only case in which a majority of any group says the US is doing a good job is Kurdish approval of US training of Iraqi security forces--54% of Kurds say the US is doing a good job in this area.

The low level of approval for US performance was also found recently in a more general question in a November 2005 poll conducted by the Oxford Research Institute for a consortium of media outlets including BBC, ABC News, NHK and others. Fifty-nine percent thought "the United States and other coalition forces" have done a bad job (40% very bad job) in "the way [they] have carried out their responsibilities in Iraq." Only 36% said the US-led coalition has done a good job.

Change in Sunni Support for US Non-Military Assistance if US Commits to Timeline?



In the current poll, those who disapprove of US involvement in any of these nonmilitary activities were asked whether it would make any difference in their opinion about US involvement if the US were to agree to a timetable for withdrawing forces. A significant number say it would. Ten percent of Kurds and 9% of Shia say it would make them more supportive. Most significantly, 37%

of Sunnis say it would make them more likely to approve. Combined with the 19-26% of Sunnis who support various forms of nonmilitary US involvement, this could lift Sunni support to a solid majority.

Role of Neighboring Muslim Countries

A large majority of Iraqis approve of recent efforts by the Arab League to facilitate reconciliation in Iraq. However, more broadly Iraqis seem to be somewhat unenthusiastic about the Arab League and are largely negative about the role of Iran and Syria.

Asked how they feel about recent efforts of the Arab League to help Iraqi leaders achieve national reconciliation, 73% say they approve. The number includes majority support from every group (74% of Sunnis, 73% of Shia, 67% of Kurds).

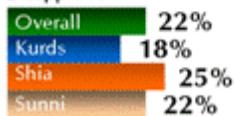
Arab League Conference with Iraqi Leaders

Do you approve of the recent efforts of the Arab League to help Iraqi leaders achieve national reconciliation?

Approve



Disapprove



WFO 1/2006 Positive opinions about the Arab

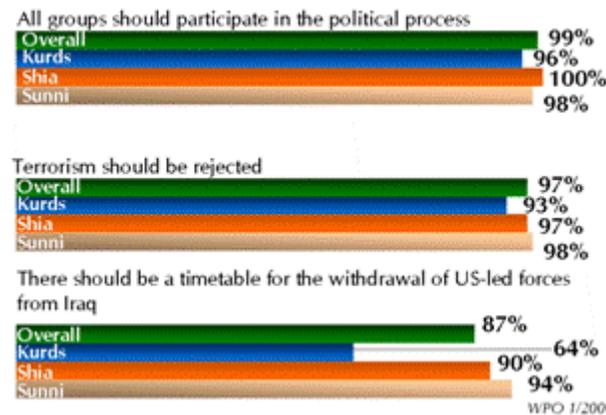
League's efforts to assist with Iraq's reconciliation are likely connected to what was seen as a concrete outcome of the Arab League's summit on Iraq in November--a statement that there should be a timetable for the withdrawal of US-led forces from Iraq, terrorism should be rejected and all groups should participate in the political process.

Large majorities of Iraqis from all ethnic groups concur that it was a good idea for Iraqi leaders to agree to each of these points:

- Rejection of terrorism--99% overall (100% of Shia, 98% of Sunnis, 96% of Kurds)
- All groups should participate in the political process--97% overall (98% of Sunnis, 97% of Shia, 93% of Kurds)
- A timetable for withdrawal of US-led forces--87% overall (94% of Sunnis, 90% of Shia, 64% of Kurds).

Of the 28% of Kurds who say that having such a timetable is a bad idea, 90% say it is too soon to talk about withdrawing US-led forces from Iraq.

Approval of Key Points in Arab League Declaration



Yet when asked about the influence of the Arab League on the situation in Iraq in general, only 30% say it was mostly positive. Opinions are divided in every group on the Arab League's influence. Fifty percent of Sunnis give a neutral answer, that the Arab League had neither a positive nor negative effect, while Shia and Kurds are divided among those who feel it had a negative effect, those who feel it had a positive effect and those who feel it had neither or no effect.

This apparent contradiction between support for Arab League recent efforts on reconciliation and skepticism about the effect of the league's influence in Iraq may be a reaction that this effort is too little, too late. Among those who view the Arab League as mostly negative, 68% still support the organization's recent efforts regarding Iraq. Negative attitudes about the Arab League's influence in Iraq may also indicate longstanding suspicion among Iraqi Shia and Kurds about the organization. The Arab League, whose member states are predominantly Sunni Arabs, did not speak out against Saddam Hussein's oppression of Shia and Kurds during his long domination of Iraq.

Majorities of Iraqis have negative views about the influence of neighboring Muslim countries on Iraq, although differences are evident by ethnic group depending on whether it is Iran or Syria that is being considered.

A slight majority of Iraqis--52%--believe Iran is having a mostly negative influence on Iraq, but the number reaches 93% among Sunni Arabs, who belong to a different branch of Islam than the vast majority of Iranians. Among Iraq's Shia, who share the same religious tradition as most Iranians, a plurality (43%) says Iran is having a mostly positive influence on Iraq, yet nearly a third of Iraqi Shia (30%) say Iran is having a mostly negative influence. A majority of Kurds (63%), who mainly belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, say Iran is having a mostly negative influence on Iraq.

A majority of Iraqis, 61%, believe Syria is also having a mostly negative effect on Iraq. Syria, a mostly Sunni Arab country, has long been ruled by the minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Islam. Iraqi Shia are the most vociferous group in calling influence from Damascus mostly negative (80%). A slight majority of Kurds (55%) say Syria is having a mostly negative influence, while slight majorities of Sunnis (54%) say Syria is having neither a mostly positive nor mostly negative effect, or no effect.

