

## Most Iraqis Want U.S. Troops Out Within a Year

September 27, 2006

### Say U.S. Presence Provoking More Conflict Than it is Preventing

### Approval of Attacks on U.S.-led Forces Rises to 6 in 10

*Published September 27, 2006*

[Full Report](#)

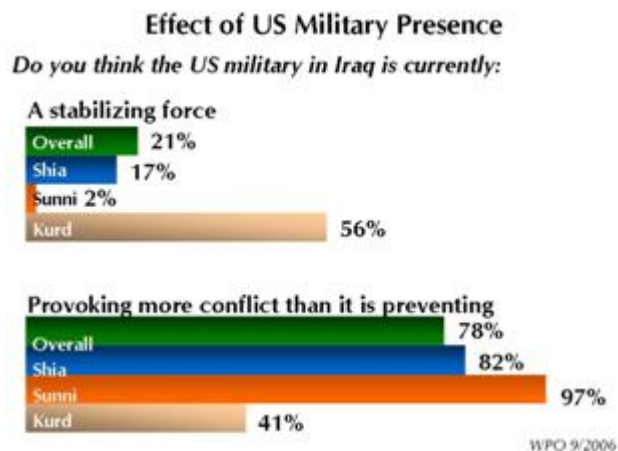
[Questionnaire/Methodology](#)

[Transcript of Brookings Saban Center Briefing](#)

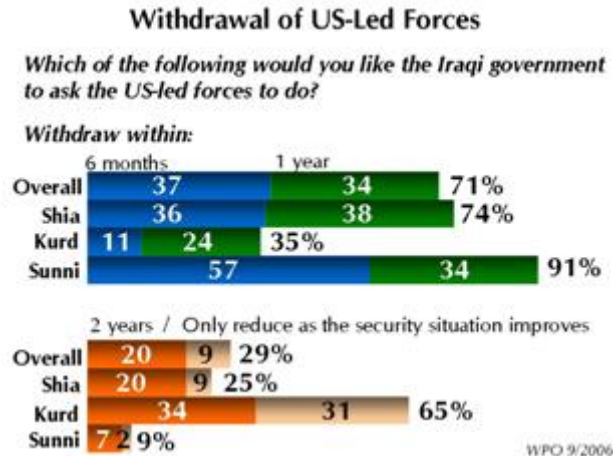
A new WPO poll of the Iraqi public finds that seven in ten Iraqis want U.S.-led forces to commit to withdraw within a year. An overwhelming majority believes that the U.S. military presence in Iraq is provoking more conflict than it is preventing and there is growing confidence in the Iraqi army. If the United States made a commitment to withdraw, a majority believes that this would strengthen the Iraqi government. Support for attacks on U.S.-led forces has grown to a majority position—now six in ten. Support appears to be related to a widespread perception, held by all ethnic groups, that the U.S. government plans to have permanent military bases 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 Ltd. / [D3 Systems, Inc.](#) Polling was carried out September 1-4 with a nationwide representative sample of 1,150 Iraqi adults, which included an oversample of 150 Arab Sunnis (hereafter simply called Sunnis).

A large majority of Iraqis—71%—say they would like the Iraqi government to ask for U.S.-led forces to be withdrawn from Iraq within a year or less. Given four options, 37 percent take the position that they would like U.S.-led forces withdrawn “within six months,” while another 34 percent opt for “gradually withdraw[ing] U.S.-led forces according to a one-year timeline.” Twenty percent favor a two-year timeline and just 9 percent favor “only reduc[ing] U.S.-led forces as the security situation improves in Iraq.”



There are significant variations between groups, though no group favors an open-ended commitment. Fifty-seven percent of Sunnis favor withdrawal in six months, with another 34 percent favoring it within a year. Shias are more evenly divided between six months (36%) and a year (38%). Few Shias favor two years (20%) or an open-ended commitment (5%). Only a third of Kurds favor withdrawal within a year or less, but two-thirds favor withdrawal within two years or less (11% six months, 24% one year, 34% two years). Thirty-one percent of Kurds favor an open-ended commitment.



As compared to January 2006, there has been, overall, a growing sense of urgency for withdrawal of U.S.-led forces. In January, respondents were only given three options—six months, two years, and an open-ended commitment. In September, the one-year option was added, since it had been nearly a year since the last time they were asked. While in January 70 percent favored withdrawal within two years (35% six months, 35% two years), now—approximately a year later—71 percent favor withdrawal within a year (37% six months, 34% one year). Support for an open-ended commitment has dropped from 29 percent to 9 percent.

Within ethnic groups there have been some shifts. Shias show a growing sense of urgency, with the numbers calling for withdrawal in six months rising from 22 percent to 36 percent. On the other hand, the Sunnis' earlier overwhelming eagerness for withdrawal has moderated, with the percentage calling for withdrawal within six months dropping from 83 percent to 57 percent. Among those living in Baghdad, support is even lower at 24 percent. The sample size for this subgroup, however, is quite small and thus should be interpreted with caution. Still, 91 percent of Sunnis now say that they want the United States to withdraw within a year, including 84 percent of those in Baghdad.

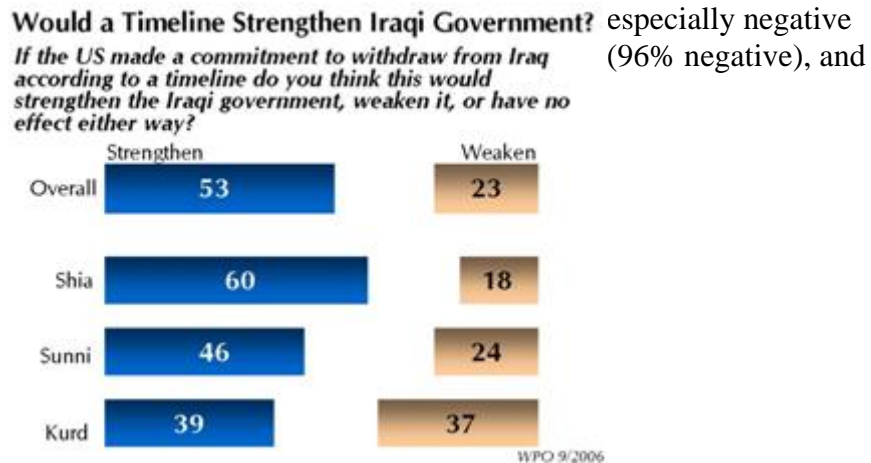
PIPA director Steven Kull comments, "What we are seeing is a growing desire for U.S.-led forces to withdraw in the near future, greater confidence that the Iraqi army can deal with the situation, and continuing concern that the United States has no plans to ever leave."

## US Presence Seen as Having a Net Negative Effect

Support for a U.S. withdrawal appears to be derived from a widespread perception that the presence of U.S.-led forces is having a net negative effect on the situation in Iraq. Large numbers say that the United States' military presence is “provoking more conflict than it is preventing.” This view is held by 78 percent overall, and by 82 percent of Shias and a near-unanimous 97 percent of Sunnis. The Kurds diverge, with 56 percent taking the opposing view that the United States' military presence is “a stabilizing force.”

Among those who believe that the U.S. presence is provoking more conflict, 82 percent favor withdrawal of U.S. forces within a year. Among those who believe that it is a stabilizing force, just 33 percent favor withdrawal in this time frame.

More broadly, 79 percent of Iraqis say that the United States is having a negative influence on the situation in Iraq, with just 14 percent saying that it is having a positive influence. Views are especially negative among the Sunnis (96% negative), and the Shias



(87% negative). However, a plurality of Kurds (48%) say that the United States is having a positive influence, while just 34 percent say its influence is negative.

Confidence in the U.S. military is quite low. Eighty-four percent say they have little (22%) or no (62%) confidence in the U.S. military. An extraordinary 98 percent of Sunnis take this view (no confidence 85%, a little 13%) as do 91 percent of Shias (no confidence 66%, a little 25%). However a majority of Kurds—55%—express confidence in the U.S. military (some 37%, a lot 18%), while 45 percent do not express confidence (no confidence 17%, a little 28%).

## Commitment to Withdraw Seen as Strengthening Government

While many commentators have expressed concern that the withdrawal of U.S. forces would weaken or undermine the nascent Iraqi government, a modest majority of Iraqis believes that a commitment to withdraw would strengthen it. Asked, “If the US made a

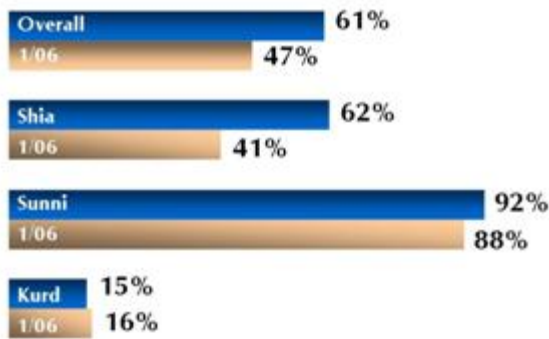
commitment to withdraw from Iraq according to a timetable, do you think this would strengthen the Iraqi government, weaken it, or have no effect either way?" 53 percent said that it would strengthen the government, while just 24 percent said it would weaken the government. Twenty-three percent believed that it would have no effect either way.

For all ethnic groups the belief that a commitment to withdraw would strengthen the government is the most common position, but it is more prevalent among the Shias (60%), than the Sunnis (46%) or Kurds (39%). The belief that it would weaken the government is held by just 18 percent of Shias, 24 percent of Sunnis and 37 percent of Kurds.

While it is not surprising that Iraqis may have enough confidence in the government to reject the idea that a U.S. commitment to withdraw militarily would weaken the government, it is not self-evident why the largest numbers would take the position that this would strengthen the government. It may be that the presence of U.S.-led forces—an ever-present reminder that the new Iraqi government does not exert full sovereignty—is perceived as undermining the government's authority and legitimacy.

### **Growing Confidence in Iraqi Security Forces**

### Approval of Attacks on US-Led Forces



WPO 9/2006

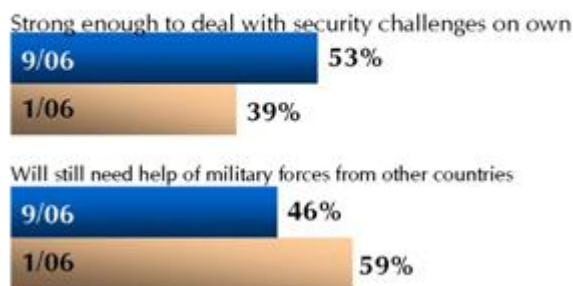
Another factor that may be contributing to Iraqis' readiness to have U.S.-led forces leave is a growing confidence in Iraqi security forces. Asked to assess the readiness of Iraqi security forces to stand on their own in six months, 53 percent "will be strong enough to deal with the security challenges Iraq will face" while 46 percent say they "will still need the help of other countries."

Asked to assess the security forces to stand on their own in six months, 53 percent "will be strong enough to deal with the security challenges Iraq will face" while 46 percent say they "will still need the help of other countries."

When those who thought Iraqi security forces would still need the help of foreign forces in six months were asked how much longer they would be needed, 9 percent (of the total sample) said one year, 21 percent two years, 16 percent three years. Thus 62 percent overall believe that Iraqi security forces will be able to stand on their own in one year.

### Perceived Strength of Iraqi Security Forces

Do you think that six months from now Iraqi security forces will be:



WPO 9/2006

thought Iraqi security forces would be needed, 9 percent (of the total sample) said one year and 16 percent two years. Thus 62 percent overall believe that Iraqi security forces will be able to stand on their own in one year.

This level of confidence is up from January, when only 39 percent thought Iraqi forces would be strong enough in six months and 59 percent said they would still need foreign help.

The biggest part of this increase in confidence has come from Shias, 68 percent of whom now believe in the abilities of Iraqi forces—up from 45 percent in January. Confidence has grown among Kurds as well—up to 40 percent, from 22 percent in January, though 57 percent of Kurds still think foreign forces will be necessary. Sunnis, in contrast, express declining confidence in Iraqi security forces. Confidence has dropped from 38 percent to 24 percent—reflecting perhaps their dissatisfaction with the ability of Iraqi

security forces to protect them from attacks, or their perception of infiltration by militia groups.

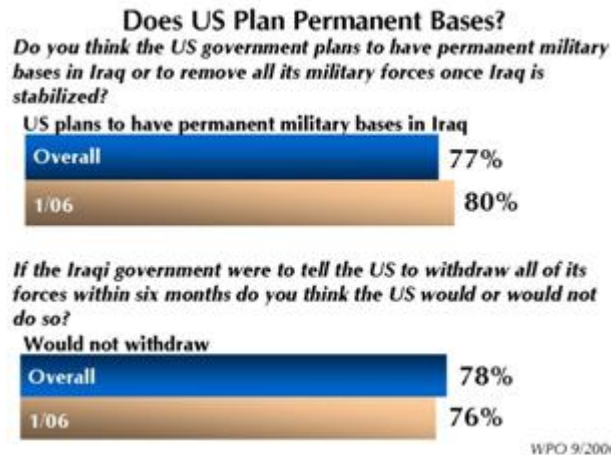
A large majority expresses confidence in the Iraqi army. Sixty-four percent say they have some (40%) or a lot (24%) of confidence in the army. Interestingly, Kurds express the most confidence with 79 percent saying they have some or a lot of confidence, followed by the Shias (65%). Even 46 percent of Sunnis express confidence, though more (54%) have little or no confidence.

### Attacks on U.S.-Led Forces

Support for attacks against U.S.-led forces has increased sharply to 61 percent (27% strongly, 34% somewhat). This represents a 14-point increase from January 2006, when only 47 percent of Iraqis supported attacks.

This change is due primarily to a dramatic 21-point increase among Shias, whose approval of attacks has risen from 41 percent in January to 62 percent in September. A very large majority (86%) of Kurds disapprove of attacks (59% strongly), with only 15 percent supporting them. Kurdish disapproval is up slightly from January, when it was 81 percent, but approval of attacks has held constant. Similarly, Sunni support for attacks has remained relatively constant with 92 percent approving (up only slightly from 88% in January).

Though Sunnis still approve of attacks, the support has moderated percentage saying that attacks strongly has



overwhelmingly intensity of their somewhat. The they approve of

dropped from 77 percent in January to 55 percent today. This may be related to the decline (mentioned above) in the size of the Sunni majority calling for withdrawal of U.S.-led forces in six months.

### Belief that the United States Plans Permanent Bases in Iraq

Naturally the question arises: If only one in three Iraqis favors a U.S. withdrawal in the shortest possible time frame of six months, why then is support for attacks on U.S.-led forces as high as 61 percent? Indeed, among those who approve of such attacks, only 50 percent favor withdrawal in six months—though another 37 percent favor it in a year.

It is always difficult to know why people have certain attitudes, but some findings are strongly suggestive. A large majority of Iraqis—and a majority in all ethnic groups—believes that the United States plans to maintain permanent military bases in Iraq and would not withdraw its forces if asked to by the Iraqi government. Among those who support attacks on U.S.-led forces this belief is especially high, while most of those who do not support such attacks believe the United States would withdraw if asked. This suggests that some Iraqis approve of such attacks, not because they want the U.S.-led forces to get out immediately, but because they want to put pressure on the United States to get out eventually.

Asked whether they think “the U.S. government plans to have permanent military bases in Iraq or to remove all its military forces once Iraq is stabilized,” 77 percent of respondents say that the United States plans to have permanent military bases. This view is held by a majority of Kurds (58%), as well as Shias (73%) and virtually all Sunnis (97%).

Perhaps more significant, approximately the same number—78%—believe that “If the new Iraqi government were to tell the United States to withdraw all of its forces within six months,” the United States would refuse to do so. Again, this view is held by a majority of all groups—64 percent of Kurds, 76 percent of Shias and 96 percent of Sunnis.

The belief that the United States plans to have permanent bases in Iraq is highly correlated with support for attacks on U.S.-led forces. Among those who believe this, 68 percent approve of attacks. Among those who believe that the United States plans to withdraw once Iraq is stabilized, only 34 percent approve of attacks. Beliefs about whether the United States would respond to an Iraqi government request to withdraw follow the same pattern.

There is also some evidence that if the United States were to make a commitment to withdraw according to a timetable, support for attacks would diminish. The 61 percent who said they approved of attacks were asked: “If the United States made a commitment to withdraw from Iraq according to a timetable, would you feel less supportive of attacks against US-led forces or would it make no difference?” Most of these—36% (of the full sample)—said that they would feel less supportive, while 23 percent said it would make no difference. Those saying they would feel less supportive included 43 percent of the Shias and 42 percent of the Sunnis.

## **Non-military Forms of US Involvement**

Majorities still approve of U.S. efforts to train Iraqi security forces and help with community development, though most feel the United States is doing a poor job. However, a modest majority now disapproves of the United States helping to mediate between ethnic groups. Were the United States to agree to a timetable for the withdrawal of its forces Iraqis say their support for nonmilitary forms of U.S. involvement in Iraq would increase.

Almost two-thirds (63%) continue to approve of the United States training Iraqi security forces, though most of these (41% of the full sample) think the United States is doing a poor job. Support is especially high among Shias (64%) and Kurds (93%) though only 19 percent of Shias say the United States is doing a good job, as compared to 50 percent of Kurds. Sixty-four percent of Sunnis are opposed to the United States being involved in this way.

Support has eroded somewhat from January, when 77 percent approved. The biggest change has come from Shias, whose support has dropped a sharp 25 points from 89 percent—perhaps part of a growing orientation to U.S. disengagement. Interestingly, opposition among Sunnis has dropped 10 points from 74 percent—consistent with a general softening of intense opposition to all things American. The Kurds' strong support is unchanged.

A larger majority (68%) approves of the United States “helping Iraqis organize their communities to address local needs such as building schools and health clinics.” But here again most of these—41% (of the full sample)—believes that the United States is doing a poor job. Here too support is strongest among Shias (71%) and Kurds (87%). Fifty-nine percent of Sunnis are opposed.

A striking shift has occurred in regard to the United States “helping to mediate between ethnic groups.” While in January 65 percent approved of such U.S. involvement, this has dropped sharply to 47 percent, with 52 percent disapproving. Furthermore, only 8 percent believe the United States is doing a good job.

The biggest change occurred among Shias, with support dropping from 76 percent to 43 percent and opposition rising from 24 percent to 57 percent. But here again, Sunni opposition has softened from 81 percent to 70 percent. Kurdish support has been largely stable, now at 83 percent.

It appears that if the United States were to make a commitment to withdraw, support for nonmilitary forms of U.S. involvement would increase. Those that expressed disapproval of any of the forms of nonmilitary involvement (65% of the sample) were asked, “If the United States were to agree to a timetable for withdrawing its forces, would that make you more likely to approve of the United States being involved in Iraq in these nonmilitary ways, or would it make no difference?” More than half of this group (37% of the full sample) said that it would make them more likely to approve of nonmilitary forms of U.S. involvement, while 27 percent said it would make no difference.



