

U.S. Public Supports Putting Iraq Operation Under U.N.

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Operation Perceived As Not Going Well But Support for Staying Course Still Strong

[Questionnaire](#)

A strong majority of Americans would apparently support the president's September 7 proposal to get U.N. backing and more international participation for the Iraq operation. According to a new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll conducted August 26-September 3, 64 percent would even be willing to go further and put the operation under the United Nations, with joint decision-making, if other countries would contribute troops. An ABC poll conducted September 4-7 found 85 percent support for "supplementing U.S. troops in Iraq with troops from other countries to create a multilateral force," and 55 percent support "if it meant U.S. troops in Iraq would be placed under the command of the United Nations."

The support may be prompted in part by growing perceptions that the Iraq operation is not going well. The PIPA/KN poll found nearly two-thirds—64 percent—now think that the process of rebuilding Iraq is not going very well or not at all well (46% and 18% respectively). This is up from 57 percent in July and 53 percent in June. Thirty-four percent say rebuilding is going somewhat well or very well (30% and 4% respectively), down from 38 percent in July.

Nonetheless, there is no change in the overwhelming majority (74%) who say "the U.S. has the responsibility to remain in Iraq as long as necessary until there is a stable government" (72% in July). Only 12 percent said the United States should completely withdraw its troops from Iraq, while 31 percent said the number of troops should be increased—up from 24 percent in July—and 20 percent said it should be decreased. A third (33%) said the current troop level should be maintained.

Support is strong even though there is growing doubt about whether the majority of the Iraqi people want the United States there. The percentage assuming that the Iraqi people want the US to stay in Iraq has dropped from 53 percent in July to 47 percent, while 50 percent now believe that the Iraqi people want the US to leave.

Attention to news on Iraq is up. Sixty-two percent said they were following news from Iraq very (17%) or somewhat (45%) closely, up from 56% in July and 41 percent in June.

Iraq Not Helping Bush's Electoral Prospects

At this point it does not appear that the president's handling of Iraq is likely to be a net benefit for his reelection bid. Respondents were asked how the president's handling of Iraq will affect their likeliness to vote for him on a scale of +5 (meaning it would very much increase the likelihood) to -5 (meaning it would very much decrease the likelihood). The mean score was just a hair above completely neutral at +0.03. A larger percentage (35%) said it would increase the likelihood of voting for Bush than said it would decrease it (30%), but those saying it would decrease the likelihood felt that way more strongly. The net is essentially unchanged from a July poll (net response +0.09), but there is some sign of increasing polarization, as more respondents gave extreme responses at both ends of the spectrum.

Consistent with this overall balanced response, in ABC News' September 4-7 poll respondents were divided over "the way Bush is handling the situation in Iraq," with 49 percent approving and 47 percent disapproving. As recently as August 24, 56 percent approved and just 37 percent disapproved.

Also, PIPA/KN found 48 percent saying that they feel the president is handling the situation in Iraq well, 35 percent poorly, and 15 percent neither poorly nor well, statistically unchanged from July.

Attitudes toward President Bush may also be influenced by increasing concerns about whether the Iraq war has increased the risk of terrorist attacks. The September 4-7 ABC News poll found a 48% plurality thought that "having gone to war with Iraq would increase the risk of further terrorism in the United States"—up from 29 percent in mid-April.

Misperceptions Persist

Since June, PIPA/Knowledge Networks has asked respondents whether it is their "impression that the United States has or has not found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization." In fact, no such evidence has been found, and the consensus view in the intelligence community is that Saddam Hussein was not working closely with al-Qaeda. In the current poll, 49 percent said they thought the United States has found such evidence and 6 percent did not know, while 45 percent answered that the United States had not found such evidence. (In July, 45 percent said the United States had found clear evidence, and in June, 52 percent said this.)

The percentage mistakenly assuming that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction have been found has stayed steady at 24 percent, compared to 21 percent in July, but is down from 34 percent in May.

The PIPA/KN poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,217 respondents August 26-September 3. The margin of error was plus or minus 3-4%, depending on whether the question was administered to the whole sample, three quarters of the sample, or a half-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.

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