

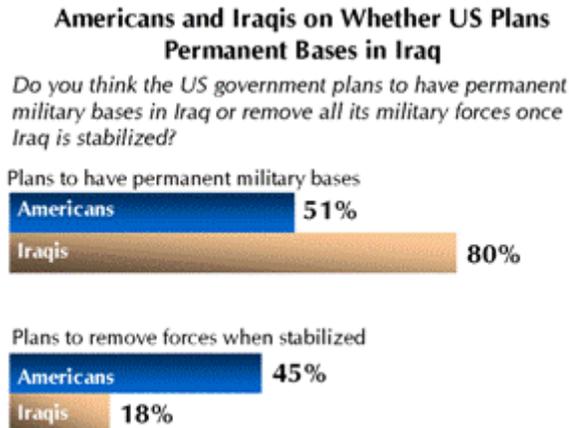
## Comparing Americans and Iraqis

March 24, 2006

### Surprising Agreement on US Military Presence, But Americans Have Numerous Misperceptions of Iraqis

A WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of Iraqis conducted in January of this year provides the opportunity to compare Iraqi views to American views found in a March 2006 WPO poll. [\[Click here for more complete presentation of the poll of Iraqis\]](#) Overall, Americans and Iraqis show a surprising amount of agreement about the presence of US military forces in Iraq, in particular opposing a permanent US presence and assuming that the US may well be planning one. Both sides also favor a more multilateral military operation in Iraq. At the same time, Americans and Iraqis have differing views of how things are going in Iraq and Americans have numerous misperceptions about the attitudes of Iraqis on a number of key issues.

The poll of 851 Americans was conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org and fielded by Knowledge Networks March 1-6, 2006. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.4 - 4 percent.

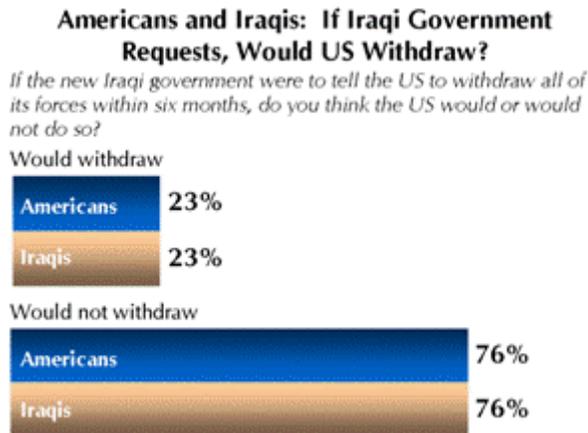


WPO/KN 3/06 Americans and Iraqis have a striking level of agreement in their perception that the US plans to keep US troops in Iraq permanently and in their opposition to this idea. Eighty percent of Iraqis believe the US plans to have permanent military bases in their country, as do 51 percent of Americans.

Americans strongly oppose such a permanent presence. Seventy-one percent said that the US should not have permanent military bases in Iraq. If the new Iraqi government were to oppose such bases, American opposition would rise even further, to 86 percent.

Iraqis hold similar views. Seventy percent said they would like the new Iraqi government to ask US-led forces to withdraw within two years (half of those said they would like the withdrawal to take place within six months).

If the new Iraqi government asks the US to establish a timeline for withdrawing forces within the next two years, seven out of 10 Americans (71%) said that the US should do so. Just 28 percent said the US should only reduce US forces as the security situation improves in Iraq.



WPO/KN 3/06 Yet majorities on both sides perceive that

the US would not be responsive to the requests of the Iraqi government. Respondents were asked how the US would respond if the new Iraqi government were to ask US forces to withdraw within six months. Notably, Iraqis and Americans had the exact same responses—76 percent of both groups said that the US would not do so, while 23 percent of both groups said the US would accommodate such a request.

It is not yet clear what the new Iraqi government, elected in December, may ask the US to do. Political tensions escalated after the bombing of the Golden Mosque last month and the violence that followed, with Sunnis and Kurds calling for Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a Shia, to be replaced, and Shia resisting the demand. The stalemate has prevented the selection of a new Cabinet and the first meeting of the new Parliament.

Americans and Iraqis differ in their anticipation of the probable outcome were US-led forces to withdraw within six months. Each was asked what effect a withdrawal of US-led forces would have on various aspects of Iraqi life.

Iraqis are largely optimistic. In the January poll, 61 percent said they believe inter-ethnic violence would decrease, 56 percent said the presence of foreign fighters would decrease and 67 percent said day-to-day security for ordinary Iraqis would increase if US-led forces were to withdraw in the next six months.

Americans' views are much less defined but lean negative. Few expect that things will get better in any dimension. Half (50%) believe the amount of inter-ethnic violence will increase, 46 percent believe the presence of foreign fighters will increase and 39 percent believe day-to-day security for ordinary Iraqis will decrease. Many also believe that such a withdrawal would have no effect.

### **Shared Desire for More Multilateral Approach in Iraq**

Americans and Iraqis share a desire for a more multilateral approach to the situation in Iraq. Three-fourths of Americans (77%) said they prefer to have the UN take the lead in Iraq's economic reconstruction rather than the US, and 59 percent of Iraqis agreed. Just 22 percent of Americans and 21 percent of Iraqis want the US to take the lead.

Majorities of Americans and Iraqis also favor having a major international conference on Iraq. Three-fourths of Americans (77%) and two-thirds of Iraqis (64%) said they would favor having a conference where leaders from the US, Europe, the UN and various Arab countries meet with leaders of the new Iraqi government to coordinate efforts to help Iraq achieve greater stability and economic growth. A third of Iraqis (34%) said it is best for other countries to stay out of Iraq's affairs, and 21 percent of Americans agreed.

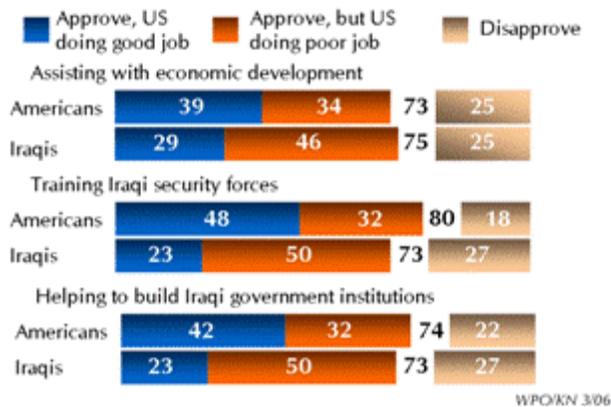
### **Support for Non-Military US Assistance**

Americans and Iraqis both approve of various forms of non-military US assistance. While neither side gives the US good grades in such efforts, Iraqis give somewhat worse marks.

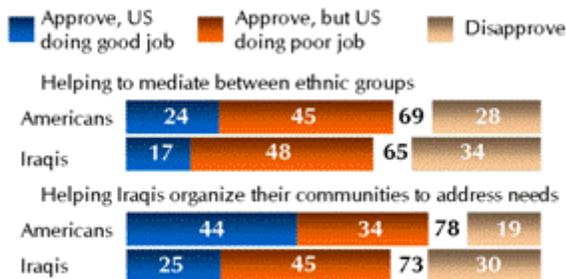
Support for such efforts is robust. Eighty percent of Americans approve of the US involvement in training Iraqi security forces, as do 77 percent of Iraqis. Seventy-four percent of Americans approve of the US helping to build Iraqi government institutions as do 73 percent of Iraqis. Sixty-nine percent of Americans and 65 percent of Iraqis approve of US involvement in helping to mediate between ethnic groups.

But only minorities both approve of US involvement and think the US is doing a good job in these areas. On training Iraqi security forces, just 33 percent of Iraqis approve and think the US is doing a good job, compared to 48 percent of Americans. On helping to build Iraqi government institutions, 23 percent of Iraqis approve and feel the US is doing a good job compared to 42 percent of Americans. On helping to mediate between ethnic groups, only 17 percent of Iraqis and 24 percent of Americans approve and think the US is doing a good job.

### US Non-Military Assistance I



### US Non-Military Assistance II



## How Things Are Going in Iraq

Americans also have a more negative outlook overall on the current situation in Iraq than most Iraqis themselves. Americans largely perceive the situation in Iraq is getting worse— a majority of Americans (64%) have this view, while only 1 in 3 Americans believes that the situation in Iraq is getting better. This contrasts sharply with Iraqi perceptions of how things are going in Iraq. When asked in January, 64 percent of Iraqis felt that Iraq was headed in the right direction, with only 36 percent saying Iraq was headed in the wrong direction, interestingly the reverse percentages of Americans’ views. However, it should be noted that dramatic distinctions occurred between ethnic groups, with Shia and Kurds largely positive (84% and 76% right direction) and Sunnis overwhelming negative about the direction Iraq was headed (93% wrong direction).

## American Perceptions of Iraqis

### Americans' Perceptions of Iraqis: Desire for US Withdrawal

At this point do you think the majority of the Iraqi people want the US to:

Commit to withdraw US forces by a timeline of no more than 2 years



Only reduce US forces as security situation improves



*Iraqis' actual responses, January 2006:*

Withdraw within 6 months/Gradually over 2 years



Only reduce US forces as security situation improves



WPO/KN 3/06 Americans vary in the accuracy of their understanding of Iraqi public opinion. A majority correctly estimates Iraqi public support for a timeline for US withdrawal. Majorities also correctly estimate Iraqi opposition to attacks on Iraqi security forces and Iraqi civilians, but on the whole underestimate support for attacks on US-led forces. They also underestimate Iraqi opposition to terrorism per se as well as support for the removal of Saddam Hussein.

The majority of Americans (60%) correctly perceive that most Iraqis want the US to commit to withdraw US forces according to a timeline of no more than two years, while 38 percent believe that most Iraqis want US forces to be reduced only as the security situation improves in Iraq. In the poll of Iraqis, 70 percent favored such a timeline.

A majority of 55 percent of Americans also perceive correctly that only a minority of Iraqis approve of attacks on Iraqi government security forces. Likewise, 72 percent correctly perceive that only a minority approve of attacks on Iraqi civilians. Only 7 percent of Iraqis polled support attacks on Iraqi security forces and only 1 percent on Iraqi civilians.

### Americans' Perceptions of Iraqis: Approval of Attacks

Is it your impression that the attacks on US forces are approved of by:

A majority of the Iraqi people



About half



A minority



*Iraqis' actual responses, January 2006:*



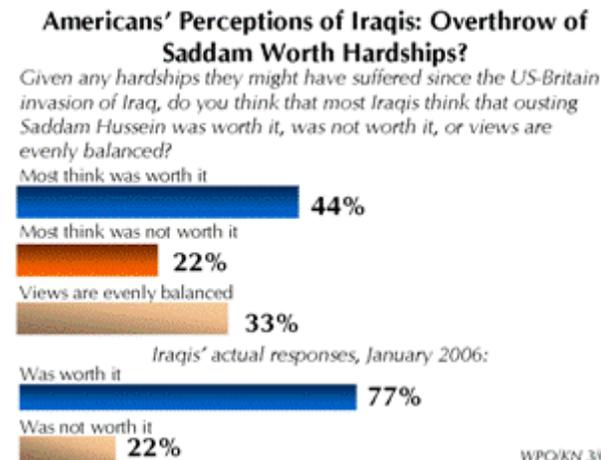
Disapprove



WPO/KN 3/06 But Americans as a whole lean toward underestimating Iraqi support for attacks on US-led forces. Approximately half of Iraqis (47%) approve of attacks on US-led forces, according to the January poll. Only 40 percent of Americans correctly identified this in the new poll. Nearly half of Americans polled (45%) underestimated Iraqis' support for attacks on US-led forces, saying it is

only a minority. Twelve percent overestimated Iraqi support for attacks on US-led forces, assuming that a majority of Iraqis approve.

Americans also underestimate the extent to which the Iraqi public soundly rejects terrorism as they define it. In the January poll—a virtually unanimous 99 percent of Iraqis said it was a good idea for Iraqi leaders to have agreed in a statement at an Arab League conference late last year that terrorism should be rejected. However, only 14 percent of Americans correctly identified a “large majority” as the proportion of the Iraqi public that approved of the statement. Another 35 percent estimated that it would be a majority. Forty-six percent of Americans thought that half or less of the Iraqi public approved of the statement rejecting terrorism.



WPO/KN 306 Naturally some may be perplexed by the overwhelming rejection of terrorism coupled with support among nearly half of Iraqis for attacks on US-led forces. It is clear that many Iraqis do not define attacks on US-led forces as terrorism. According to most expert definitions of terrorism, this is valid—terrorism is generally defined as attacks on civilians, not an occupying military force.

Americans underestimate the extent to which Iraqis believe the overthrow of Saddam Hussein was worthwhile. Three-fourths of Iraqis (77%) said in January that ousting Saddam was worth it despite any hardships they may have suffered since the 2003 invasion, while 22 percent said it was not worth it. Fifty-five percent of Americans underestimated this support, assuming that most Iraqis feel it was not worth it (22%) or that Iraqis are evenly split on the question (33%). Forty-four percent of Americans correctly assumed that most Iraqis say it was worth it. (It should be noted, though, that among Iraqi Arab Sunnis, large majorities regret the overthrow of Saddam, and that some Americans may have been influenced by that when they opted for the position that views are evenly split.)