U.S. Public Opinion In Line With Iraq Study Group's Proposals

December 5, 2006

**Americans Strongly Endorse Engaging Iran and Syria,
Holding International Conference on Iraq**

Majority Favors Timeline for U.S. Withdrawal of Two Years or Less

Questionnaire/Methodology
Iraq Study Group Report

Americans Believe U.S. International Strategy Has Backfired
A Majority of Americans Reject Military Threats in Favor of Diplomacy with Iran

A new poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org finds that three out of four Americans believe that in order to stabilize Iraq the United States should enter into talks with Iran and Syria, and eight in ten support an international conference on Iraq. A majority also opposes keeping U.S. forces in Iraq indefinitely and instead supports committing to a timetable for their withdrawal within two years or less.

Iraq Study Group Chairmen Lee Hamilton and James Baker (USIP).

The poll shows that the attitudes of the U.S. public are consistent with several key proposals endorsed by the Iraq Study Group, which released its recommendations Dec. 6. The bipartisan commission suggested opening negotiations with Iraq's neighbors and holding an international conference. It also recommended that the United States establish the goal of withdrawing most combat forces from Iraq by early 2008.

The poll of 1,326 Americans was developed in conjunction with the conference, "Leveraging U.S. Strength in an Uncertain World," to be held by the Stanley Foundation Dec. 7 at the Ronald Reagan Building, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave.,Washington, D.C. Results of the full survey, which covers a wide range of international security issues, will be released at the conference on Thursday.

Steven Kull, editor of WorldPublicOpinion.org and director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland, said that the findings showed broad public support for the Iraq Study Group's proposals.

"There is potential for finding some bipartisan consensus on the next steps for the U.S. to take in Iraq," Kull said.

Talking to Iran and Syria about Iraq

To try to address the problem of stabilizing Iraq, there is a debate about whether to work with Iraq's neighboring countries with whom we have other disputes. Do you think it is a good idea or bad idea for the US to have talks with Iran?
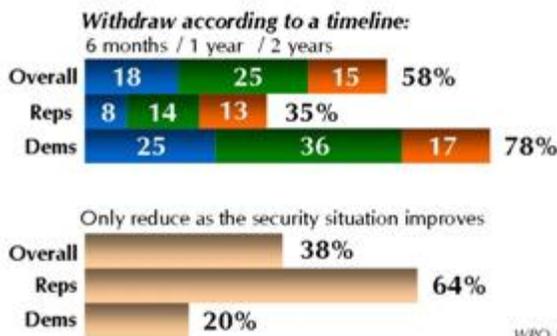
Good idea
Overall — 75%
Republicans — 72%
Democrats — 81%

Bad idea
Overall — 21%
Republicans — 25%
Dems — 17%

What about having such talks with Syria?

Good idea
Overall — 75%
Republicans — 72%
Democrats — 82%

Bad idea
Overall — 19%
Republicans — 23%
Dems — 15%

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Support for Timeline for Withdrawal

Which of the following do you think the US-led forces in Iraq should do?

Withdraw according to a timeline:
6 months / 1 year / 2 years

	6 months	1 year	2 years	Total
Overall	18	25	15	58%
Reps	8	14	13	35%
Dems	25	36	17	78%

Only reduce as the security situation improves

Overall	38%
Reps	64%
Dems	20%

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WorldPublicOpinion.org told respondents that there is "a debate about whether to work with Iraq's neighbors with whom we have other disputes." Nonetheless, 75 percent say that the United States should have talks with Iran and the exact same number say that the United States should have talks with Syria. This diplomatic approach is endorsed overwhelmingly by both parties: eight in ten Democrats and seven in ten Republicans endorse talking with both Iran and Syria.

There is also strong bipartisan support for calling a major international conference where diplomats from the United States, Europe, the United Nations and the Arab world could meet Iraqi leaders to discuss how to stabilize Iraq and encourage economic growth there. Seventy-nine percent (Republicans 79%, Democrats 80%) say they support such a conference; only 18 percent believe that instead foreign leaders should "stay out of Iraq's affairs."

On the issue of how long U.S. troops should remain in Iraq, a majority of Americans reject the current policy of keeping troops in the country indefinitely. Fifty-eight percent say troops should be withdrawn according to a timetable, while 38 percent say that U.S.-led forces should only be reduced "as the security situation improves." There is substantial variation in the length of the timetable preferred: 18 percent prefer six months, 25 percent one year and 15 percent two years.

There are partisan differences on this issue, however. While most Democrats (78%) think U.S. forces should be out within two-years or less, including 61 percent who favor a one-year or less, a majority of Republicans (64%) believe forces should be withdrawn only as security improves. Fifty-six percent of Independents also support withdrawal within two years.

Support for withdrawal according to a timetable becomes stronger "if the majority of the Iraqi people say they want the U.S. to commit to withdraw U.S. forces according to a timeline of no more than a year." Seventy-three percent say the United States should withdraw in a year or less if most Iraqis want them to, including 67 percent of Republicans and 82 percent of Democrats. Fifty-eight percent also believe that the majority of the Iraqi people want the US to commit to one-year timeline.

A poll of the Iraqi public conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org in September 2006 found that 71 percent want U.S.-led forces to commit to withdraw within a year.

Some Iraqi leaders have expressed a desire for the United States to remain for several years. When asked whether the United States should stay longer at the request of the Iraqi government, even if a large majority of the Iraqi people want the United States to leave within a year, a slim majority (52%) thinks that the United States should follow the preferences of the Iraqi people, not the government, and commit to withdrawing within a year.

This desire for a commitment to pull U.S. troops out within a year appears to arise from doubts about whether the U.S. presence helps or hurts stability in Iraq. Six in ten Americans (60%) believe that the United States' military presence in Iraq is provoking more conflict than it is preventing. Only 35 percent believe U.S. troops are stabilizing the country. The belief that U.S. forces are provoking conflict has risen 5 points since March 2006 and 9 points since October 2004.

The perception that the presence of U.S. forces provokes conflict is highly related to attitudes about when the United States should withdraw. Among those who believe the U.S. presence provokes conflict, 59 percent favor withdrawal in six months (26%) or a year (33%), and only 19% favor an open-ended commitment. However, among those who see the U.S. presence as a stabilizing force 68 percent favor an open-ended commitment and 16 percent favor withdrawal in six months (6%) or a year (10%).

Among Iraqis, 78 percent believe that the U.S. military presence is provoking more conflict than it is preventing according to the September 2006 WPO poll.

American perceptions (or misperceptions) of how Iraqis feel about the U.S. presence are also highly related to their attitudes toward a withdrawal timetable. Support for an open-ended commitment is much higher (49%) among those who believe (incorrectly) that only a minority of Iraqis approve of attacking foreign forces than among those who think that half or more of the Iraqi population approves of such attacks (27%).

The September WPO poll in Iraq found that six out of ten Iraqis (61%) approve of attacks on U.S.-led forces in their country, a 14-percent increase from such responses in another WPO poll conducted there in January.

The poll was fielded Nov. 21-29 with a nationwide sample of 1,326 Americans. The margin of error was +/- 2.7 to 3.9 percent depending on whether the question was asked to the whole sample or a half sample. Knowledge Networks conducted the interviews, 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.