

## Australians Support Prime Minister but Want Him to Bring Troops Home from Iraq

May 17, 2006

When President Bush toasted Australian Prime Minister John Howard at a White House State Dinner Tuesday, he paid tribute to an ally who remains a strong supporter of the war in Iraq.

Howard's support of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq has remained firm despite growing domestic opposition to Australia's military presence there.

*President George W. Bush and Prime Minister John Howard wave from the South Portico of the White House May 16, 2006. (White House photo/Paul Morse)*

Almost two-thirds of Australians believe their government should bring Australian forces home from Iraq, according to a Roy Morgan poll released in April. That represents an increase of 10 percent over those who wanted the troops to come home in March 2005.

Opposition to Australian participation in the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq contrasts with the continuing strength of Howard's Coalition of Liberals and Nationals. Howard won a decisive victory in Australia's 2004 federal elections. Recent surveys show that his coalition continues to outpoll the opposition Labor Party, which favors withdrawal of Australian troops from Iraq.

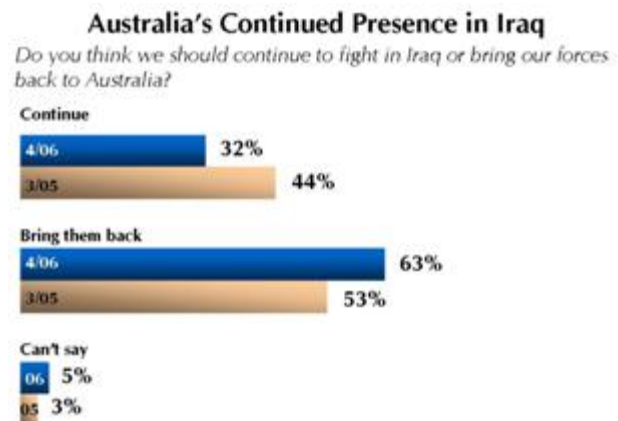
In contrast, another strong U.S. ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, has seen support for his Labor Party fall to 31 percent, behind the opposition conservatives, according to a YouGov poll published this week by the Daily Telegraph. Blair's continued support for the Bush administration's war in Iraq, which is deeply unpopular in Britain, has contributed to his declining popularity.

Like the Australians, a majority of British voters also favor withdrawing from Iraq, according to a YouGov poll conducted in March. Fifty-five percent said they favored the withdrawal of British forces. Of those respondents, 24 percent supported the immediate withdrawal of British troops and 31 percent said the troops should be withdrawn within the next year, regardless of conditions in Iraq. Only 39 percent of those polled in Britain said they supported keeping British troops in Iraq until Iraq's own police were able to take over security operations.

Two years ago, Australians were about evenly split on the question of whether their government should maintain a military presence in Iraq. In an April 2004 Morgan poll, 50 percent supported keeping Australian forces there, while 46 percent were opposed. But in the most recent poll, only 35 percent said they favored an Australian military presence in Iraq while 59 percent said they did not.

Sixty-three percent responded negatively to the question, "Do you think we should continue to fight in Iraq or bring our forces back to Australia?" Thirty-two percent said Australian troops should remain in Iraq.

Even among supporters of Howard's coalition, a higher percentage favored bringing Australian troops home. Forty-nine percent of Liberal/National coalition supporters favored bringing the troops back to Australia, while 45 percent thought they should stay in Iraq. Seventy-one percent of



Labor Party supporters favored the withdrawal of Australian troops.

The Australian military has sustained only one casualty in Iraq, a private who died in April after accidentally shooting himself while cleaning his rifle, according to military officials. In contrast, British forces have suffered 111 fatalities—including those who are missing and presumed dead—in Iraq since the 2003 invasion.