

## Among Key Iraq Partners, Weak Public Support for Troop Presence

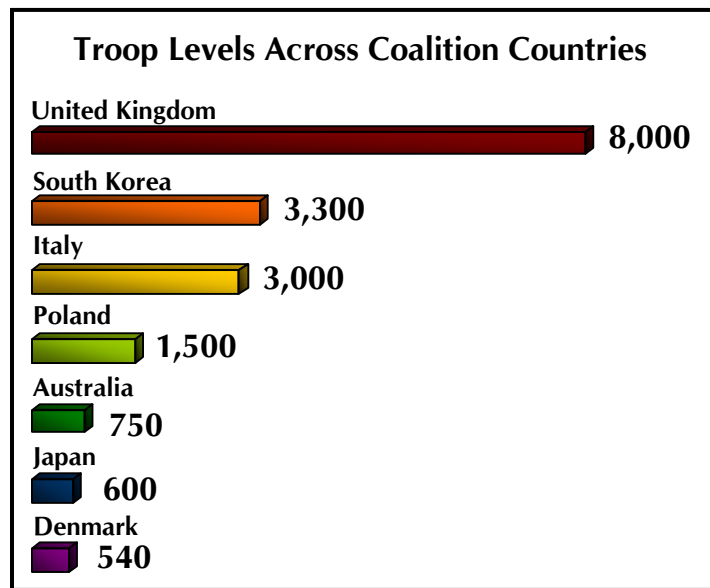
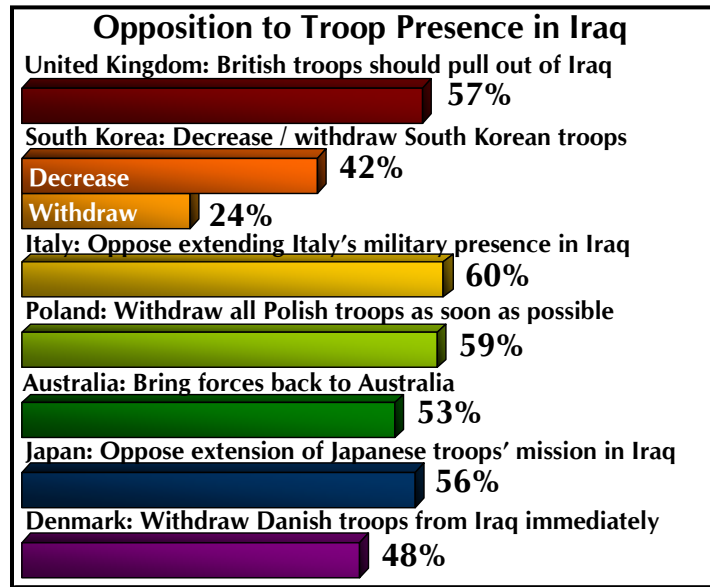
Clay Ramsay and Angela Stephens

Among the publics of the coalition partners in Iraq, support for their troops' presence in Iraq is quite weak. A majority of the public in the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Australia, and Japan call for withdrawing their troops, though in some cases this does not appear to be a demand for immediate withdrawal. A plurality of Danes call for withdrawal and a majority of South Koreans favor reduction but not withdrawal.

### United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, which has 8,000 troops in Iraq, a majority expresses a desire to pull British troops out of Iraq, but are more equivocal when asked whether this should occur immediately.

In some polls, the majority expressing a desire to withdraw is quite substantial. A Channel 5 poll in September 2005 asked "Should British troops pull out of Iraq?" A majority — 57% — said yes. That number is similar to a finding in a January 2005 poll by The Independent in which 59% said that British troops should be withdrawn quickly after the January election in Iraq.



Polls that ask more specifically about timing of withdrawing troops, however, show that most Britons do not favor withdrawing troops immediately. When a September 2005 Sunday Express poll asked about when British troops should be withdrawn from Iraq, only 38% said "now" while 52% said "when the situation has settled." In another poll in September 2005 conducted by the Daily Telegraph, just over half favored withdrawal but only 21% said "withdraw all British troops from Iraq immediately," while 33% said "withdraw all British troops within the next 12 months, regardless of conditions." Thirty-nine percent of Britons said "keep British troops in Iraq until Iraq's own police and troops are able to take over."

In an earlier poll on the topic by the Daily Telegraph, conducted in July 2005, only 14% said the troops “should be brought home immediately,” 15% said “they should be brought home within the next three months” and 16% said “they should be brought home within the next 12 months.” Nearly half (48%) of Britons said British troops “should remain in Iraq as long as they are needed.” Interestingly, the level of eagerness for withdrawal was relatively low even though the poll was conducted the day after London’s public transportation system was attacked by four suicide bombers and in the same poll, 72% said they believed the country’s role in Iraq has made it more vulnerable to attack by Islamic terrorists.

A slight majority does want a timetable for withdrawal. When asked in September 2005 by The Guardian to choose between retaining British troops in Iraq until security improves or setting a timetable for withdrawal of troops irrespective of the security situation, 51% chose to set a timetable for withdrawal, while 41% wanted to keep the troops in Iraq. This readiness to withdraw irrespective of the security situation is quite significant given that in the same poll, 64% said they believed the security situation in Iraq was getting worse, while only 12% said it was improving.

Britons express substantial doubt about the viability of the mission in Iraq. A plurality of Britons (46%) said in the September 2005 Sunday Express poll that the presence of British forces in Iraq is “doing more harm than good,” while only a third (32%) said their presence is “doing more good than harm.” In the same poll, 60% of Britons said Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Iraq policies have failed.

There is also substantial criticism of the original decision to go to war. In a Daily Telegraph poll in September 2005, 54% said the US and Britain were wrong to take military action against Iraq two years ago. Also asked: “Is it your impression that when the US and Britain took military action against Iraq two years ago they did, or did not, have a post-war ‘game plan,’ in the sense of clear ideas about what would happen in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein and about what future US and British policy in that country should be?” Two-thirds (68%) chose the answer “No, the US and Britain did not know what they were doing and did not have a worked-out ‘game plan.’”

### **South Korea**

Two-thirds of South Koreans would like to either draw down (42%) or withdraw (24%) their country’s 3,300-strong contingent in Iraq, according to a Korea Society Opinion Institute poll from September 2005. Thirty-one percent want to maintain the status quo.

South Korea initially sent more than 600 military engineers and medics to Iraq, and in October 2003 agreed to send 3,000 more troops to help with Iraq’s reconstruction.

A South Korean civilian captured in Iraq was beheaded in June 2004 after several tense days in which his captors released a video warning South Korea not to send more troops and showing the captive in extreme distress, pleading that the government not send the troops. His beheading spurred public protests against further involvement in Iraq. The government nevertheless proceeded with its plan, deploying the additional troops beginning in August 2004.

Despite negative public feeling toward the Iraq situation, a poll from July 2004 – the month after the beheading – showed that a majority of South Koreans felt the country was obliged to honor its promise of troop deployment. Fifty-six percent of Koreans agreed with the following statement: “Although I do not favor sending additional troops to Iraq, I believe South Korea should dispatch them because of its international commitment.” Thirty-seven percent wanted to reverse the decision to send the troops, and only 7% favored sending the troops.

## **Italy**

A solid majority of Italians (60%) said in a poll by SWG, the Italian partner of Harris Interactive, in July 2005 that they opposed “extending Italy’s military presence in Iraq.” A third (32%) supported extending Italy’s military presence in Iraq.

The poll was conducted the same day Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announced that 300 of Italy’s 3,000 soldiers in Iraq would be withdrawn by September 2005. He had already announced in March 2005 a gradual reduction of Italian troops beginning in September.

Support is stronger when the option of putting the troops under a UN or EU mandate is proposed. In a March 2005 Eurisko/La Repubblica poll that offered this option, only 47% favored withdrawal while 31% said they wanted the troops to remain under a UN or EU mandate and 9% favored keeping them under the US-led coalition.

The accidental killing by US forces of Italian agent Nicola Calipari in March 2005 increased Italian opposition to involvement in Iraq. The above-mentioned 47% calling for withdrawal in the March 2005 Eurisko/La Repubblica poll was up from 35% the month before.

## **Poland**

In July 2005, 59% of Poles surveyed by PBS Sopot said all Polish troops should be withdrawn from Iraq as soon as possible. Nearly a third (30%) said some troops should be withdrawn, and only 6% said Poland’s entire contingent in Iraq should remain. This followed Poland’s announcement in April 2005 that it would withdraw its contingent of 1,500 troops from Iraq at the end of 2005.

In March 2005, the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) offered the two options of removing troops as soon as possible or having “the soldiers carry on with their mission. In this case an even higher majority — 70% — called for withdrawal, while 26% favored continuing. These findings were statistically unchanged from when the question was asked in November and December of 2004.

Asked by the Pew Global Attitudes Project in May 2005 whether Poland had made the right decision or wrong decision in using military force against Iraq, 67% said it was the wrong decision.

## **Australia**

In February 2005, Australian Prime Minister John Howard announced that an additional 450 Australian troops would be sent to southern Iraq, primarily to provide more security for Japanese military construction brigades working there. That brought the Australian force in Iraq to approximately 750.

The following month, March 2005, a Roy Morgan poll found that 53% wanted to “bring our forces back to Australia” while 44% wanted to “continue to fight in Iraq.” In the same poll 51% said that Australia should not have a military presence in Iraq, up from 46% in April 2004. The March 2005 poll also found that 63% disapproved of the government’s decision to send more troops to Iraq.

These numbers coincide with a Lowy Institute poll in February 2005 in which 51% of Australians said their country should not continue to be involved militarily in Iraq.

In a December 2004 poll, conducted by Newspoll/The Australian that offered three response options, there was less of a demand for an immediate withdrawal. Fifty-one percent favored withdrawal but only 33% wanted the troops brought home immediately, while 18% wanted them brought home in the latter half of 2005. Forty-five percent said Australian troops should remain in Iraq as long as necessary.

In the same poll an even larger majority (58%) indicated that they felt it was not worth going to war in Iraq, up from 50% in May 2004. The percentage who thought it was worth going to war in Iraq decreased from 40% in May 2004 to 32% in December 2004.

## **Japan**

A majority of Japanese want their forces out of Iraq, according to a Kyodo News poll conducted in January 2005, which found that 56% opposed the government’s decision to extend the Japanese contingent’s mission in Iraq through 2005. This was down slightly from the 60% opposed in December 2004.

Japan decided in December 2004 to extend for another year the support activities of about 600 military construction personnel in southern Iraq. Since Japan has a pacifist constitution, a law passed to allow the troop deployment limits the placement of the Japanese personnel to “non-combat zones” in Iraq.

In a Tokyo Shimbun poll of nearly 13,000 Tokyo voters in September 2005, 50% said they do not want the government to extend the troops’ stay in Iraq to 2006. Twenty percent said they want the mission extended into 2006, while 19% said the troops should be withdrawn immediately.

An Associated Press-Kyodo poll in Japan in July 2005 found that 55% dislike their government’s handling of Iraq.

**Denmark**

Denmark's population has been among the most supportive in Europe of US policy on Iraq, but an August 2005 poll shows 48% supported withdrawing Denmark's 540 troops from Iraq immediately, with 39% opposed. Asked whether the "government's decision to join the campaign in Iraq" was right or wrong, Danes split down the middle, 46% to 46% (Catinèt Research/Ritzau).

This marks a shift from 2003. In a Gallup International poll conducted in April and May 2003 following the invasion of Iraq, Danes were one of the few publics in Europe with a majority that thought "military action by the US and its allies was justified," with 58% thinking so and only 30% disagreeing.