

# **THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL**

## **THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

### **Public Believes Bush Administration Stretched Truth on Iraq's WMD and Links to al-Qaeda**

**Though 52% Believe Evidence of Close Links to al-Qaeda Have Been Found**

**Majority Now Feels Iraq Reconstruction Not Going Well,  
Support Rises to Strong Majority for UN to Take Lead**

**Despite Fatalities, Overwhelming Majority Says  
US Should Remain in Iraq Until Stable**

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College Park, MD: A new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll finds a majority of 62% saying that “when the US government presented evidence of Iraq having weapons of mass destruction to justify going to war with Iraq” it was either “stretching the truth, but not making false statements” or was “presenting evidence they knew was false” (52% and 10% respectively). Just 32% said they thought the government was “being fully truthful.” Sixty-three percent said that Congress should “investigate the intelligence agencies’ performance in providing intelligence on whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.”

Similarly, 56% said that “when the US government presented evidence of links between Saddam Hussein’s government and al-Qaeda to justify going to war with Iraq,” it was either “stretching the truth, but not making false statements” or was “presenting evidence they knew was false” (46% and 10% respectively). Just 39% said they thought the government was “being fully truthful.”

Asked, “Do you think that the Bush administration did or did not imply that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks?” a very strong 71% said that it did. However, only 25% of the whole sample said they thought “Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.”

At the same time 52% believe, incorrectly, that the US has “found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the Al Qaeda terrorist organization.”

Also, 23% believe, incorrectly, that the US has “found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction”—down from 34% in May.

Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes, notes, “Despite doubts about the administration’s candor there has been only a slight erosion of the

public's support for the decision to go to war with Iraq." Sixty-five percent support the decision, with 46% saying going to war was the best thing to do and 18% saying they are not sure if it was the best thing, but they support the president. This compares to 68%, 53% and 15% respectively in the May PIPA/KN poll.

"Also the percentage saying that they believe that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction before the war is staying steady at 58%, and is likely to help sustain support as long as this perception holds," Kull comments.

While various polls conducted in May found majorities believing that the post war operation in Iraq was going well, a modest majority now has a negative perception. Fifty-three percent described the process as going "not very well" or "not at all well" (40% and 13% respectively), while just 40% described it as going "somewhat well" (39%) or "very well" (1%).

Perhaps in response to these difficulties, the last two months has seen sharp growth in the numbers of Americans wanting to see the UN take a leadership role in Iraq. The percentage saying that the UN should "take the lead to work with Iraqis to write a new constitution and build a new democratic government" has jumped 14%--from 50% in April to 64% today. Those choosing the US to take the lead dropped to just 31%, from 47% in April. Similarly, those saying the UN should direct economic reconstruction in Iraq are now a very strong 69%—up from 57% in April. Those saying the US should do so is down to 27% from 40% in April.

Americans show a fairly accurate perception of the level of US troop fatalities. Asked to give their impression of "about how many American soldiers... have been killed by hostile fire in Iraq since the fall of Baghdad on April 9 up to the present" the median estimate was 40. This is quite close to the actual number of US deaths in postwar Iraq from hostile fire since Baghdad's fall—46. Likewise, the public's median estimate of combat deaths from the beginning of the war to the fall of Baghdad—100 deaths—is fairly correct. The Pentagon's official figure is 87. (Source: Reuters, according to official Pentagon figures.)

Despite this awareness of troop fatalities and the perception that Iraq reconstruction is not going very well, the public is showing overwhelming support for the operation. An overwhelming 80% said the US has "the responsibility to remain in Iraq as long as necessary until there is a stable government." This is down only slightly from the 86% that answered this way in April. The public is also not assuming that the operation will be short lived. Asked to estimate how long US troops will have to remain in Iraq, the median estimate was two years.

Given the government's failure to find weapons of mass destruction or significant links to al-Qaeda, there has been much recent discussion about whether ending the severe violations of Iraqis' human rights committed by Saddam Hussein's regime constitutes an appropriate justification for invading Iraq. As a general principle, 75% endorse the idea that the US should be willing to intervene when a government is committing large-scale

violations of human rights, even when US security interests are not threatened, but only 23% supports doing so without broad international approval.

Though the UN was sidelined in the Iraq war and post-war reconstruction, only 23% of respondents thought that the UN would now play a less important role in the world and 60% said that the US should not feel more free to use military force without UN approval.

The poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,051 respondents June 18-25. The margin of error was plus or minus 3-3.5%, depending on whether the question was administered to the whole sample or three quarters of the 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](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

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