

THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

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Public Supports Putting Iraq Operation Under UN

**Operation Perceived As Not Going Well
But Support for Staying Course Still Strong**

Iraq Not Helping Bush's Electoral Prospects

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Contact: Steven Kull (202-232-7500)

College Park, MD: Apparently a strong majority of Americans would support the president's September 7 proposal to get UN backing and more international participation for the Iraq operation. According to a new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll conducted August 26-September 3, 64% would even be willing to go further and put the operation under the United Nations, with joint decision-making, if other countries would contribute troops. An ABC poll conducted September 4-7 found 85% support for "supplementing US troops in Iraq with troops from other countries to create a multilateral force," and 55% support "if it meant US troops in Iraq would be placed under the command of the United Nations."

The support may be prompted in part by growing perceptions that the Iraq operation is not going well. The PIPA/KN poll found nearly two-thirds—64%—now think that the process of rebuilding Iraq is not going very well or not at all well (46% and 18% respectively). This is up from 57% in July and 53% in June. Thirty-four percent say rebuilding is going somewhat well or very well (30% and 4% respectively), down from 38% in July.

Nonetheless, there is no change in the overwhelming majority (74%) who say "the US has the responsibility to remain in Iraq as long as necessary until there is a stable government" (72% in July). Only 12% said the US should completely withdraw its troops from Iraq, while 31% said the number of troops should be increased—up from 24% in July—and 20% said it should be decreased. A third (33%) said the current troop level should be maintained.

Support is strong even though there is growing doubt about whether the majority of the Iraqi people want the US there. The percentage assuming that the Iraqi people want the US to stay in Iraq has dropped from 53% in July to 47%, while 50% now believe that the Iraqi people want the US to leave.

Attention to news on Iraq is up. Sixty-two percent said they were following news from Iraq very (17%) or somewhat (45%) closely, up from 56% in July and 41% in June.

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At this point it does not appear that the president's handling of Iraq is likely to be a net benefit for his reelection bid. Respondents were asked how the president's handling of Iraq will affect their likeliness to vote for him on a scale of +5 (meaning it would very much increase the likelihood) to -5 (meaning it would very much decrease the likelihood). The mean score was just a hair above completely neutral at +0.03. A larger percentage (35%) said it would increase the likelihood of voting for Bush than said it would decrease it (30%), but those saying it would decrease the likelihood felt that way more strongly. The net is essentially unchanged from a July poll (net response +0.09), but there is some sign of increasing polarization, as more respondents gave extreme responses at both ends of the spectrum.

Consistent with this overall balanced response, in ABC News' September 4-7 poll respondents were divided over "the way Bush is handling the situation in Iraq," with 49% approving and 47% disapproving. As recently as August 24, 56% approved and just 37% disapproved.

Also, PIPA/KN found 48% saying that they feel the president is handling the situation in Iraq well, 35% poorly, and 15% neither poorly or well, statistically unchanged from July.

Attitudes toward President Bush may also be influenced by increasing concerns about whether the Iraq war has increased the risk of terrorist attacks. The September 4-7 ABC News poll found a 48% plurality thought that "having gone to war with Iraq would increase the risk of further terrorism in the United States"—up from 29% in mid-April.

Misperceptions Persist

Since June, PIPA/Knowledge Networks has asked respondents whether it is their "impression that the US has or has not found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization." In fact, no such evidence has been found, and the consensus view in the intelligence community is that Saddam Hussein was not working closely with al-Qaeda. In the current poll, 49% said they thought the US has found such evidence and 6% did not know, while 45% answered that the US had not found such evidence. (In July 45% said the US had found clear evidence, and in June 52% said this.)

The percentage mistakenly assuming that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction have been found has stayed steady at 24%, compared to 21% in July, but is down from 34% in May.

The PIPA/KN poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,217 respondents August 26-September 3. The margin of error was plus or minus 3-4%, depending on whether the question was administered to the whole sample, three quarters of the sample, or a half-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.

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