

Americans Want to Begin Drawdown of Troops in Iraq but Not a Quick Pullout

March 15, 2006

Confidence in Success of Mission Low and Getting Lower

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A large majority of Americans want to begin drawing down US troops in Iraq, although only one in four favors a quick pullout, according to a new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll. Two out of three perceive that the situation in Iraq is getting worse, and a clear majority expresses low confidence that the US intervention will succeed. A majority is not convinced that a US withdrawal would make the situation in Iraq worse than it is. Support for drawing down US troops does not appear to be related to the growing number of US troop fatalities. The strongest factor appears to be the perception that the presence of US troops provokes more attacks, followed by the lack of confidence that the operation will ultimately succeed.

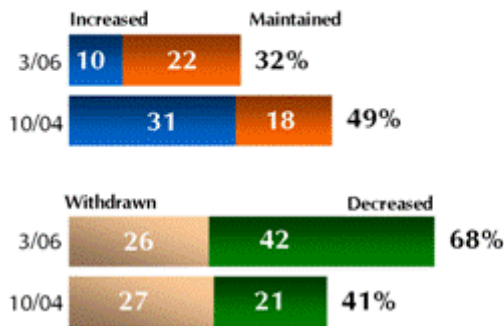
The poll of 851 Americans was conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org and Knowledge Networks March 1-6, 2006. The margin of error was 3.4 percent for questions going to the full sample (4% for questions going to a three-quarters sample).

A large majority--68 percent--favors beginning to draw down US troops in Iraq. But only 26 percent think that all troops should be withdrawn within 6 months. The percentage favoring reductions is up sharply from December 2004, when just 48 percent favored them. Support for reduction is also now a bipartisan majority--favored by 52 percent of Republicans as well as 80 percent of Democrats.

This desire to begin disengaging is not derived from a sense that the mission is complete, but from a growing lack of confidence that it will succeed. Asked to assess the current situation in Iraq, 64 percent say the situation is getting worse, while just 36 percent say it is getting better. Asked to rate how confident they are that "that the US intervention in Iraq will succeed" on a 0-10 scale, 58 percent gave a low confidence rating (0-4), while just 28 percent give a high confidence rating (6-10). The mean score was 3.97.

US Troop Levels in Iraq

Over the next six months, do you think the numbers of US troops in Iraq should be:



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These assessments show a marked downward trend. There has been an 11-point increase in those saying that the situation is getting worse as compared to October 2004, when 53 percent saw the situation getting worse and 46 percent saw it getting better. The percentage expressing low confidence that the mission will succeed has increased 13 points: in October 2004, the number expressing low confidence (45%) was only slightly lower than those expressing high confidence (40%). The mean score was also higher at a nearly-evenly balanced 4.80.

This lack of confidence is not, however, prompting Americans to want to redouble US efforts. A mere 10 percent favors increasing US troop presence--down from 31 percent in December 2004.

Confidence in Success

How confident are you that the US intervention in Iraq will succeed. Please answer on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all confident and 10 being extremely confident.

Confident (6-10)



3/06 Mean = 3.97

10/04 Mean = 4.80

Uncertain (5)



Not Confident (0-4)



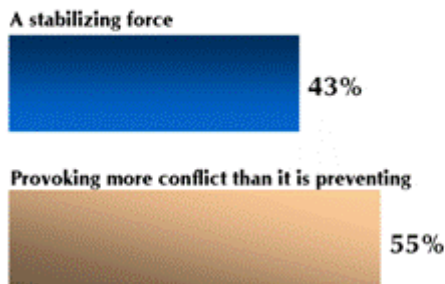
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Americans also show doubts about whether US military presence is even a positive factor for Iraq. Asked whether US military presence is a stabilizing force or whether it is "provoking more conflict than it is preventing," 55 percent selected the latter position, while just 43 percent said it was a stabilizing force.

Asked about the likely consequences of US-led forces withdrawing in the next six months, there is not a clear majority expressing concern that it will make the situation in Iraq worse than it is--suggesting doubts about the necessity and value of maintaining US troops. Respondents were roughly divided between those who thought this would have a negative effect and those who thought it would either have no effect or a positive effect.

Are US Troops Provoking More Conflict?

Do you think the US military presence in Iraq is currently:



WPOXN 3/06 Only 46 percent said that the "presence of foreign fighters" would increase, while 51 percent said that it would either have no effect (31%) or decrease (20%). Thirty-nine percent said that day-to-day security for ordinary Iraqis would decrease (18% a lot), but 59 percent believe that it would have no effect (30%) or increase (29%). Asked how a withdrawal would affect the willingness of the factions in Parliament to cooperate, only 24 percent said it would decrease, while 73 percent said that it would increase (31%) or have no effect either way (42%). In just one case, a plurality said that the consequences would be negative--50 percent said that the amount of interethnic conflict would likely increase (23% said a lot).

The Role of US Troop Fatalities

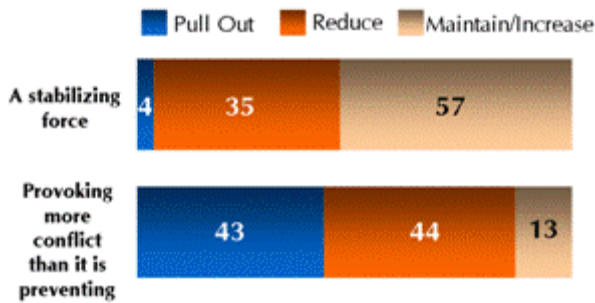
A common view is that it is the rising number of US troop fatalities that is prompting the public's desire to disengage. If so, it would follow that those who believe that the number of US troop fatalities is relatively high would be more eager to withdraw than those that have relatively low estimates. But this does not appear to be the case.

The public overall is fairly accurate in its estimate of American troop fatalities to date. During the week the poll was in the field, the number of fatalities most commonly disseminated in the media was about 2,300, with approximately 1,800 of these due to hostile fire. The median estimate was 2,000 fatalities, and 45 percent gave a roughly accurate estimate--between 1,700 and 2,500.

Comparing those who estimated below 1,700 fatalities and those who estimated above 2,500 fatalities, the numbers wanting to withdraw all US troops within six months were not significantly different. The numbers wanting to reduce US troops were also no different (though those who estimated high were more likely to say that the US made the wrong decision in going to war with Iraq--64%, compared to 49% for those estimating below 1,700 fatalities.)

Assessment of Military Presence and Desire to Pull Out

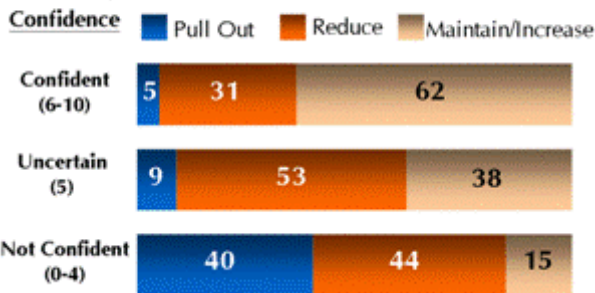
Do you think the US military presence in Iraq is currently:



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Confidence in Success and Desire to Pull Out

How confident are you that the US intervention in Iraq will succeed. Please answer on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all confident and 10 being extremely confident.



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Factors Related to Desire to Draw

Down Troops

A regression analysis reveals that the most powerful factors related to the desire to draw down US troops in Iraq is the perception that the US military presence is "provoking more conflict than it is preventing." Overall, this view is held by 55 percent as compared to 43 percent who believe that the US presence is "a stabilizing force." Among those who believe that Iraq is provoking more conflict than it is preventing, 43 percent favor reducing and 44 percent want to withdraw completely within six months. Among those who believe that the US presence is a stabilizing force, only 4 percent want to reduce troops and only 36 percent want to withdraw completely within six months.

Another key factor is the level of confidence that the Iraq operation will succeed. Among those with low confidence that the operation will succeed, 44 percent want to reduce US troops and 40 percent want to withdraw completely within six months. Among those with high confidence, 31 percent want to reduce and just 5 percent want to withdraw completely within six months.

Other factors that have more mild effects are the perception that the situation in Iraq is getting worse, and beliefs that if the US withdraws that the security situation in Iraq will be no worse as a result.

