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## **Poll of Iraqis Reveals Anger Toward US**

by John Solomon

WASHINGTON - A poll of Iraqis commissioned by the U.S.-governing authority has provided the Bush administration a stark picture of anti-American sentiment — more than half of Iraqis believe they would be safer if U.S. troops simply left.

The poll, commissioned by the Coalition Provisional Authority last month but not released to the American public, also found radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr is surging in popularity, 92 percent of Iraqis consider the United States an occupying force and more than half believe all Americans behave like those portrayed in the Abu Ghraib prison abuse photos.

The Associated Press obtained a copy of a multimedia presentation about the poll that was shown to U.S. officials involved in developing Iraq policy. Several officials said in interviews the results reinforced feelings that the transfer of power and security responsibilities to the Iraqis can't come too soon.

"If you are sitting here as part of the coalition, it (the poll) is pretty grim," said Donald Hamilton, a career foreign service officer who is working for Ambassador Paul Bremer's interim government and helps oversee the CPA's polling of Iraqis.

"While you have to be saddened that our intentions have been misunderstood by a lot of Iraqis, the truth of the matter is they have a strong inclination toward the things that have the potential to bring democracy here," he said in a telephone interview Tuesday from Baghdad.

Hamilton noted the poll found 63 percent of Iraqis believed conditions will improve when an Iraqi interim government takes over June 30, and 62 percent believed it was "very likely" the Iraqi police and Army will maintain security without U.S. forces.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said, "Let's face it. That's the goal, to build those up to the point where they can take charge in Iraq and they can maintain security in Iraq."

The poll, conducted by Iraqis in face-to-face interviews in six cities with people representative of the country's various factions, conflict with the generally upbeat

assessments the administration continues to give Americans. Just last week, President Bush predicted future generations of Iraqis "will come to America and say, thank goodness America stood the line and was strong and did not falter in the face of the violence of a few."

The current generation seems eager for Americans to leave, the poll found.

The coalition's confidence rating in May stood at 11 percent, down from 47 percent in November, while coalition forces had just 10 percent support. Nearly half of Iraqis said they felt unsafe in their neighborhoods.

And 55 percent of Iraqis reported to the pollsters they would feel safer if U.S. troops immediately left, nearly double the 28 percent who felt that way in January. Forty-one percent said Americans should leave immediately, and 45 percent said they preferred for U.S. forces to leave as soon as a permanent Iraqi government is installed.

"To a certain degree it is self-evident that Iraqis have lost some confidence in us, particularly in our ability to protect them," Hamilton said.

Frustration over security was made worse this spring by revelations of sexual and physical abuse of Iraqis by U.S. guards at the Abu Ghraib prison.

The poll, taken in mid-May shortly after the controversy began, found 71 percent of Iraqis said they were surprised by the humiliating photos and tales of abuse at the hands of Americans, but 54 percent said they believed all Americans behave like the guards.

The prison scandal has also become fodder in the United States, as Democratic challenger John Kerry accuses Bush of failing to set a proper moral tone. "I think the president is underestimating the full affect of what has happened in the world to our reputation because of that prison scandal," Kerry said Tuesday.

Anger at Americans was evident in other aspects of the poll, including a rapid rise in popularity for al-Sadr, the Muslim cleric who has been leading insurgents fighting U.S.-led coalition forces.

The poll reported that 81 percent of Iraqis said they had an improved opinion of al-Sadr in May from three months earlier, and 64 percent said the acts of his insurgents had made Iraq more unified.

However, only 2 percent said they would support al-Sadr for president, even less than the 3 percent who expressed support for the deposed Saddam Hussein.

The coalition's Iraq polling of 1,093 adults selected randomly in six cities — Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Diwaniyah, Hillah and Baquba was taken May 14-23 and had a margin of potential sampling error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. Crucial details on the methodology of the coalition's polling were not provided, including how samples were drawn.

The most recent independent polling by Gallup found more than half of Iraqis want U.S. and British troops to leave the country within the next few months.



An Oxford International poll taken in February for ABC News and several networks from other countries found a higher level of optimism than more recent polling taken after months of bombings and other violence. Still, only a quarter of those polled by Oxford said they had confidence in coalition forces to meet their needs, far behind Iraqi religious leaders, police, and soldiers.

*On the Net:*

*The poll results are available in slide form at: <http://wid.ap.org/documents/iraq/cpapoll.htm>*

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