

# ★ AMERICAS ★ MAJORITY ★



## WAR OF WORDS DAILY DISPATCH

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### **Brookings Institution Mischaracterizes Poll Results, Misportrays Iraqi Attitudes Toward U.S. Troops**

The Saban Center's "Iraq Index," a project of the Brookings Institution, is a ubiquitous data source in the debate over the Iraq war and its aftermath. The Saban Center home page describes it thus:

The index is designed to quantify the rebuilding efforts and offer an objective set of criteria for benchmarking performance. It is the first in-depth, non-partisan assessment of American efforts in Iraq, and is based primarily on U.S. government information. Although measurements of progress in any nation-building effort can never be reduced to purely quantitative data, a comprehensive compilation of such information can provide a clearer picture and contribute to a healthier and better informed debate.

But it is hard to square this self-description with Saban's presentation of polling data in its latest edition of the Index, dated April 6, 2006. At question is the attitude of Iraqis toward the continued presence of Coalition troops. as measured in "What the Iraqi Public Wants" – a January, 2006 poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org

The poll (though not the Brookings presentation of its findings) proceeds quite logically. First, it probes the attitude of Iraqis toward their new circumstances, then toward their new government. By 64%-to-36%, Iraqis respond that their nation is headed in the "right direction." By 66%-to-33%, they rate the recent parliamentary elections as "free and fair." By 68%-to-31%, they are prepared to accept the government established by parliament as "the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people." By a margin of 77%-to-22%, the respondents "personally think that ousting Saddam Hussein was worth it."

**And by a margin of 64%-to-35%, Iraqis prefer a time-table of two-years or longer for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces over a scenario in which U.S. troops are drawn down in the next six months.**

The Brookings abstraction of the WPO poll cherry-picks these results, then records them out of sequence, in order to imply the polar opposite: a surly populace chaffing under an imperial occupation. Brookings records that most Iraqis believe that America *plans* to keep military bases in Iraq. Then it poses a second hypothetical: If the new Iraqi government *were* to tell the U.S. to withdraw its forces within six

months, would it do so? And overwhelmingly, the respondents answered no, it would not. (Never mind that most of the Iraqi subjects agreed with the hypothetical U.S. response!)

Next the “Iraq Index” reports Iraqis’ response to the WPO question, “Do you approve the government endorsing a timeline for US withdrawal?” Unsurprisingly, nine out of ten Iraqis approve. They do not want a permanent occupation.

Brookings/Saban *never* reports the main finding: *that Iraqis themselves want a slow drawdown, lasting at least two years.*

Had Saban/Brookings been interested in clarifying these crosscurrents – a desire for American troops to stay, a desire for them to leave – other parts of the WPO survey could have served. The poll recorded, for instance, that 59% of Iraqis believe that Iraq will still need security assistance from foreign troops at the end of six months – a clear indicator of why most want a slow withdrawal.

When a foreign force enters a country both as both a liberator and as an occupier, its relations with the resident population are necessarily complex, straddling gratitude and resentment. It does not contribute to a “healthier and better informed debate” when an institution as influential as Brookings chooses to ignore the former in favor of the later.

## **An Outbreak of Justice**

After Saddam’s regime fell, the Coalition reviewed the performance of 869 seated Iraqi judges. One-hundred-and-thirty-five of these were removed due to Ba’ath Party affiliations or substantial evidence of corruption. Between May 2003 – the end of major combat – and June 2004, an additional 175 justices were trained. By May of 2005, that number had swelled to 351. As a result, there has been a steady increase in the felony cases resolved by Iraqi courts – from roughly 4,000 in 2003, to 8,000 in 2004, to 10,000 in 2005.

The chief bottleneck in some of the provincial courts was (and is) the lack of prosecutorial personnel to gather evidence. The

coalition has trained 99 judicial investigators to help these courts.

Meanwhile, the Central Criminal Court of Iraq, charged with combating acts of terrorism, has stepped up the prosecution of kidnappers, bombers, snipers, assassins, and their accomplices. To date, the CCCI has held 995 trials, and convicted 908 individuals of crimes against the Coalition and the Iraqi government.

Last week, the CCCI convicted 22 security detainees for crimes ranging from illegal border crossings to mass bombings. To give some idea of the scope of the court’s rulings:

- Mohammed Khalaf Shakara was convicted of deadly attacks and kidnappings for hire, and was sentenced to death.
- Khalid Ibrahim Sulaiman was found guilty of detonating a vehicle-borne IED, and sentenced to life imprisonment.
- Zaher Fayez Mohammed, Adel Salem Mohammed, and Saleh Al-Shafle Saleh were convicted of entering Iraq illegally to join an armed group – the terror cell of Mohammed Shakara – and sentenced to life in prison.
- A’mer Mohammed Jasim, sentenced to 10 years, was found guilty of handling provisions and finance for terror cells.
- Majid Abdullah Su’od, a terror recruiter, will be imprisoned for life.

On the eve of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Sadam emptied his jails. The 150,000 criminals he released now prey on the population. Career thugs have become the “specialists” whom terrorists hire for arms smuggling, kidnappings, and assassinations.

But case by case, justice is reasserted. In Iraq, the campaign for democracy is being won as much in courts as on battlefields.

## **NY Times Scare of the Week: “All the News That’s Nit-to-Pick”**

“U.S. Study Paints Somber Portrait of Iraqi Discord” screams the headline of an April 9<sup>th</sup>

*NYT* article by Eric Schmitt and Edward Wong.  
They write:

“An internal staff report by the United States Embassy and military command in Baghdad provides a sobering province-by-province snapshot of Iraq’s political, economic and security situation, rating the overall stability of 6 of the 18 provinces ‘serious’ and one ‘critical.’ The report is a counterpoint to some recent upbeat public statements by top American politicians and military officials.”

There are a number of problems with this lead:

1) The document, alternately described as a “Study” and a “Report” is in fact a 10-page Powerpoint – a chart-based briefing. Titled “Provincial Stability Assessment,” the presentation is vastly less detailed or authoritative than either the DOD’s 56-page report to Congress – “Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq” – or (if you prefer a more liberal take), the Saban/Brookings 52-page “Iraq Index.”

2) The picture that the “PSA” paints of Iraq contradicts the administration’s public assessments *in no way whatever*. What the powerpoint outlines is what the DOD report elaborated: that the three Kurdish provinces are doing well politically and economically; that eight provinces of the Shi’ite south are doing

moderately well, but could be destabilized; that the Sunni triangle still hosts an insurgency; and that the province of Anbar is a deadly mess. It is an editorial choice of the *Times* writers to emphasize the 7 provinces the PSA describes negatively over the 11 provinces it terms “stable” or “moderate.”

3) The document is not, and cannot be, “a counterpoint to some recent upbeat public statements” because it is not recent. Issued two-and-a-half months ago, it pre-dates both the DOD and the Brookings reports (released Feb. and Apr. 2006 respectively).

An undistinguished “talking points” presentation assembled in January hardly merits screaming headlines in April. There is plenty of genuine news from Iraq – for instance, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter coalition casualty figures (the lowest since the war began), and the upsurge in violence against civilians in Baghdad.

The PSA is, stated simply, *not news*. But having been leaked, it is obviously “fit to print.”

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