

Misrepresentations help gather support for war

A study finds misconceptions about the war in Iraq led to popular support of the effort

By Frank Davies
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — A majority of Americans have held at least one of three mistaken impressions about the U.S.-led war in Iraq, according to a new study released Thursday, and those misconceptions contributed to much of the popular support for the war.

The three common mistaken impressions are that:

- U.S. forces found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.
- There's clear evidence that Iraqi

President Saddam Hussein worked closely with the Sept. 11 terrorists.

• People in foreign countries generally either backed the U.S.-led war or were evenly split between supporting and opposing it.

Overall, 60 percent of Americans held at least one of those views in polls reported between January and September by the Program on International Policy Attitudes based at the University of Maryland in College Park, and the polling firm, Knowledge Networks based in Menlo Park, Calif.

"While we cannot assert that these misconceptions created the support for going to war with Iraq, it does appear likely that support for the war would be substantially lower if few-

er members of the public had these misconceptions," said Steven Kull, who directs Maryland's program.

In fact, no weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq. U.S. intelligence has found no clear evidence that Saddam was working closely with al-Qaida or was involved in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Gallup polls found large majorities opposed to the war in most countries.

PIPA's seven polls, which included 9,611 respondents, had a margin of error from 2 to 3.5 percent.

The analysis released Thursday also correlated the misconceptions with the primary news source of the mistaken respondents. For example, 80 percent of those who said they re-

lied on Fox News and 71 percent of those who said they relied on CBS believed at least one of the three misconceptions.

The comparable figures were 47 percent for those who said they relied most on newspapers and magazines and 23 percent for those who said they relied on PBS or National Public Radio.

The reasons for the misconceptions are numerous, Kull and other analysts said.

They noted that the Bush administration had misstated or exaggerated some of the intelligence findings, with Bush himself saying in May: "We found the weapons of mass destruction ... and we'll find more as

time goes by."

The Bush administration has also been a factor in persistent confusion.

Last month, for example, Bush said there was no evidence that Saddam was involved in the Sept. 11 attack after Vice President Dick Cheney suggested a link. Cheney, in a "Meet the Press" interview, had described Iraq as "the geographic base of the terrorists who had us under assault now for many years, but most especially on 9-11."

Why some news audiences had more accurate impressions than others was less clear. To review the study, go to <http://www.pipa.org>

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CIA leak investigation could extend beyond White House staffers

Politicians are calling for Attorney General John Ashcroft to distance himself from the probe

By Shannon McCaffrey and William Douglas
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — The criminal probe into the leak of a CIA officer's name could go beyond the White House, as the Justice Department was preparing Thursday to tell officials in other federal agencies to preserve relevant documents and records.

Officials at federal agencies said they were expecting letters from the Justice Department urging them to save e-mail, correspondence and other documents that could pertain to the investigation.

Word of the widening probe came amid growing questions about the close relationship between top political appointees at the Justice Department and the White House. Democrats have been calling for Ashcroft to appoint a special counsel, saying his relationship with President Bush and Bush's top political adviser, Karl Rove, taint the prospects for an impartial investigation.

Investigators hope to identify who leaked to reporters the name of an undercover CIA officer who's married to former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, after Wilson debunked a claim in Bush's State of the Union address that Iraq had tried to buy uranium from Niger.

Disclosing the name of a CIA un-

dercover operative is a felony.

At a news conference Thursday on Capitol Hill, Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., called for Ashcroft to recuse himself from the process.

Although the case is being handled by seasoned career lawyers in the Justice Department's counterespionage section, Schumer said federal regulations required Ashcroft to sign off on any subpoenas issued to members of the media for telephone records, a very real prospect in this probe because of its focus on news leaks.

"This situation cries out for Attorney General Ashcroft to be as far away as possible," Schumer said.

But he said possible conflicts went deeper than Ashcroft and Rove, who was hired as a political consultant for three of Ashcroft's political campaigns in Missouri, two for governor and one for U.S. senator.

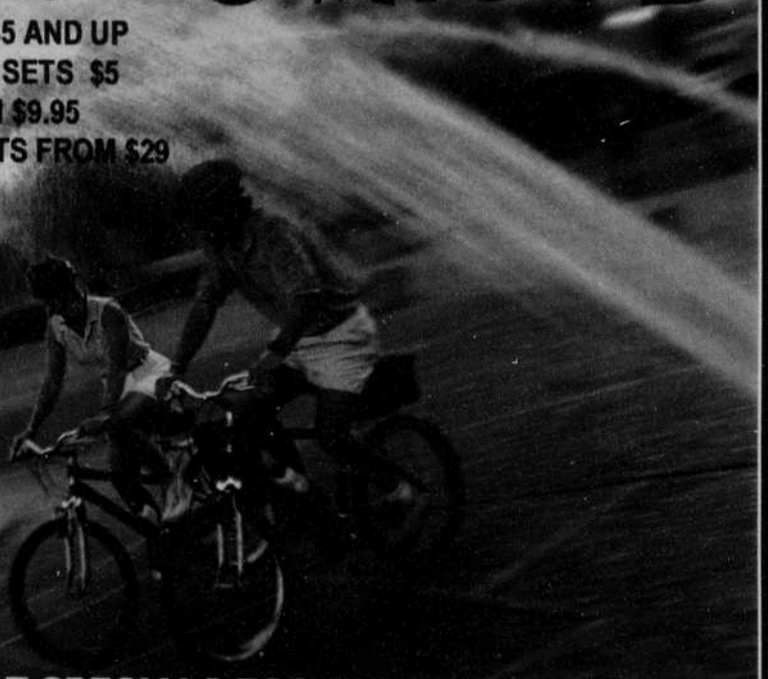
Acting Deputy Attorney General Robert McCallum was inducted into the secret Skull and Bones club at Yale University with Bush. David Israelite, the Justice Department deputy chief of staff, was political director of the Republican National Committee in 1999 and 2000. Solicitor General Ted Olson was the lead counsel for Bush during the Florida election recount in 2000.

White House officials dismissed Schumer's charges and reiterated their faith in Ashcroft and Justice Department staffers to conduct a fair investigation.

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