

Declining Support for Tough Measures against Iran's Nuclear Program: Global Poll

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Support for tough measures against Iran's nuclear program has fallen in 13 out of 21 countries according to a new BBC World Service Poll.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks at Columbia University in New York on September 24, 2007 (Photo: Daniella Zalczman)

Compared to results from a June 2006 BBC World Service Poll, support for economic sanctions or military strikes has declined significantly, including in countries that were previously among the highest supporters of tough action.

Support for these measures has dropped 10 points in Australia (52 per cent to 42 per cent), nine points in Britain (43 per cent to 34 per cent), nine points in Germany (46 per cent to 37 per cent), seven points in Canada (52 per cent to 45 per cent), six points in the United States (66 per cent to 60 per cent) and 30 points in Mexico (46 per cent to 16 per cent).

Only three countries show an increase in support for economic sanctions or military strikes: an increase of nine points among Israelis (62 per cent to 71 per cent), six points among South Koreans (47 per cent to 53 per cent), and 12 points among Turkish respondents (21 per cent to 33 per cent).

Most interviews were conducted following the release of the US National Intelligence Estimate that concluded Iran had stopped pursuing nuclear weapons in 2003.

Across all 31 countries surveyed in the latest poll (the 21 tracking countries plus an additional 10 countries polled for the first time), most respondents oppose the use of economic sanctions or military strikes.

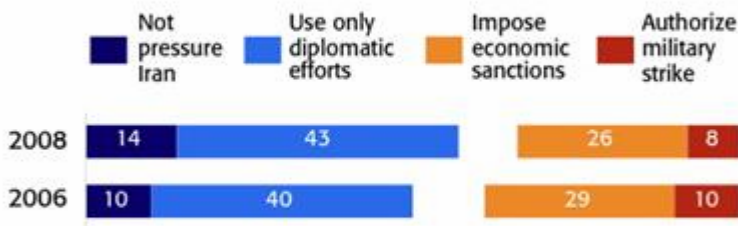
Respondents were presented four options that the UN Security Council could use to address the fact that Iran continues to produce nuclear fuel in defiance of the UN Security Council resolution. The options of economic sanctions or military strikes were rejected in 27 out of 31 countries.

Instead, the most preferred approaches are to either use only diplomatic efforts or not pressure Iran at all.

On average 57 per cent favor diplomacy (43 per cent) or no pressure on Iran (14 per cent). Just one-in-three favor economic sanctions (26 per cent) or military strikes (8 per cent).

Possible Actions UN Security Council Should Take If Iran Continues to Produce Nuclear Fuel

Average of 21 Countries



The white space in this chart represents "DK/NA."

Base: Representative sample of 22,500 (in 2006) and 21,000 (in 2008) adults in 21 countries

The poll also found that there are conditions under which many people would be willing to accept Iran having a limited capacity to produce nuclear fuel. The question asked: "If Iran were to allow UN inspectors permanent and full access throughout Iran, to make sure it is not developing nuclear weapons, do you think Iran should or should not be allowed to produce nuclear fuel for producing electricity?"

In 17 of the 31 countries more people favor than oppose the idea, while in 10 countries more are opposed and four countries are divided. Support is fairly strong in some of the countries in the forefront of the drive to stop Iran's nuclear program, including the US (55 per cent), Britain (71 per cent) and France (56 per cent). On average 47 per cent are in favor while 36 per cent are opposed.

The results are drawn from a survey of 32,039 adult citizens across 31 countries conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. GlobeScan coordinated fieldwork between October 31, 2007 and January 25, 2008.

Steven Kull, Director of PIPA comments, "It appears that people in many countries are interested in ramping down the confrontation with Iran, while still using UN inspectors to ensure that Iran is not developing nuclear weapons."

Detailed Findings

In three countries a majority today favors economic sanctions or military strikes to deal with Iran. These include Israel (sanctions 37 per cent, strikes 34 per cent), the United States (sanctions 45 per cent, strikes 15 per cent) and South Korea (sanctions 48 per cent, strikes 5 per cent).

Canadians are divided between a strong approach (sanctions 35 per cent, strikes 10 per cent) and softer approaches (diplomacy 42 per cent, no pressure 6 per cent). In all other countries, the weight of opinion is towards the less aggressive measures of using only diplomatic efforts or not pressuring Iran at all.

Support for allowing Iran to produce nuclear fuel for electricity, alongside a full program of UN inspections, is found not only in the US (55 per cent), Britain (71 per cent), and France (56 per cent), but also among Egyptians (86 per cent), Mexicans (79 per cent), Australians (64 per cent), Portuguese (59 per cent), Canadians (58 per cent), Italians (58 per cent), Kenyans (56 per cent), Indonesians (56 per cent) and Chinese (51 per cent). More modest support is found in Spain (49 per cent), Ghana (45 per cent), Nigeria (46 per cent), and Russia (33 per cent).

Majorities oppose the idea in Israel (62 per cent), Philippines (60 per cent), Turkey (54 per cent), Japan (54 per cent) and South Korea (51 per cent). Half of Germans are opposed as are 38 per cent of Central Americans.

Indians, Argentinians and Chileans are divided, with large numbers not providing an answer.

In total 32,039 citizens in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Ghana, Germany, Great Britain, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, Portugal, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, and the United States were interviewed face-to-face or by telephone between October 31, 2007 and January 25, 2008. Polling was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country. In 13 of the 31 countries, the sample was limited to major urban areas. The margin of error per country ranges from +/-2.4 to 4.4 per cent.