

## **Americans on Iran**

July 31, 2003

### **US Public Opposes War With Iran**

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A new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll and an analysis of polling from other organizations reveal that a large majority opposes going to war with Iran. At the same time a majority would consider using limited military force against an identified Iranian nuclear weapons program, provided that the action were approved by the UN Security Council. But a very strong majority prefers dealing with Iran by pursuing a diplomatic approach and working through the UN.

Asked, “Do you think, in the near future, the US should or should not go to war to overthrow the government of Iran?” 69% said that it should not, while just 20% said it should. This is very close to 67% that opposed the US going to war with Iran in a June 27-29 CNN/USA Today poll.

Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes comments, “In dealing with Iran, Americans show a strong preference for an approach based on diplomacy and multilateralism over the use of military threats.” Asked in the PIPA/KN poll how “the US should deal with the government of Iran” 74% said the US should do so primarily by “trying to build better relations,” while just 21% favored, “Pressuring it with implied threats that the US may use military force against it.”

A strong majority of Americans also support the idea of the UN taking the lead in dealing with the problem of Iran—a course of action that Americans may assume would be less likely to lead to the use of force. Asked what would be the better approach “when it comes to trying to make sure that Iran does not make nuclear weapons and does not

support Palestinian groups that use terrorism,” 62% said it would be better “for the UN to take the lead” while just 32% said it would be better for the US to do so.

The rationale for favoring a nonmilitary approach to dealing with Iran is reflected in a May CBS News poll that asked respondents to characterize the threat from Iran. Only 9% said, “Iran is a threat to the United States that requires military action now,” while a strong majority of 66% said “Iran is a threat that can be contained.” An additional 18% said, “Iran is not a threat to the United States at all.”

At the same time a majority shows a readiness to support a more limited use of military force against an Iranian nuclear weapons program, assuming that the existence of the program is established. Respondents were asked “would you support or oppose the United States taking military action against Iran to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons.” A strong 65% said that they would and 31% said they would not. This question was a repeat of a June 18-22 ABC/Washington Post poll which found 56% approving. The question implies that it would be clear that Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons and thus the action could be effectively targeted to abort the effort.

Given the public’s experience with Iraq it is doubtful whether the President could get broad public support for military action based purely on the suspicion. In the PIPA/KN poll 50% said that “In the future, if the president presents evidence that a country has a secret program for building weapons of mass destruction” that they will, “feel more wary than [they] did before.”

Furthermore, a substantial portion for such limited military action is contingent on the US getting UN approval for it. PIPA/KN asked a follow on question to the 65% who said they would support the US using military force against an Iranian weapons program: “What if most members of the UN Security Council opposed such military action—in that case would you favor or oppose having US forces take military action against Iran?” The percentage that would still be willing without UN support was 50%.

The PIPA/KN poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,066 respondents July 11-20. The margin of error was plus or minus 3-3.5%, depending on whether the question was administered to the whole sample or three quarters of the sample.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided Internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to [www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

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