

Americans on the Iraq War and the Future of the U.N.

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Public Rallies Behind President on Iraq But Still Wants Major Role for United Nations

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[Comments by Steven Kull at the National Press Club](#)

A new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll finds that a strong majority of Americans has rallied in support of the President's decision to go to war with Iraq, despite the lack of U.N. approval. Nonetheless, the public feels that in the future the U.N. should play a major role in international affairs, including governing post-war Iraq.

Seventy-five percent say they support the President's decision to go to war with Iraq, with 54 percent saying they agree with the decision and 21 percent saying they support the president even though they do disagree with the decision.

But Americans do not appear to believe that the United States should regard the choice to go to war without U.N. approval as a precedent. Asked, "Do you think that in the future the U.S. should or should not feel more free to use military force without U.N. authorization?" only 29 percent said that it should, while 66 percent said that it should not.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA comments, “While the public is ready to give the president a pass this time, it appears that in the future, two-thirds will still insist on getting UN approval for the use of military force.”

Americans also do not believe that United Nation’s failure to authorize going to war with Iraq has undermined its future importance. Only 26 percent anticipate that in the future the U.N. will have a less important role in the world while 71 percent said that it will be at least as important as before the war.

Asked who should govern Iraq in the aftermath of the war, only 30 percent said it should be the United States, while 52 percent said it should be the U.N., and 14 percent gave other answers.

Strong majorities want the United Nations, not the United States, to take the lead in dealing with North Korea (72%) and Iran (63%). Steven Kull comments, “There is no evidence that the majority of Americans believe that the UN has become irrelevant.”

Americans show a moderate level of confidence that the decision to go to war was the right one. Asked to answer on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being certain that it was the wrong decision, 10 being certain that it was the right decision, and 5 being unsure, 59 percent gave a score above 5 and 27 percent gave a response of 10. The mean score was 6.32.

Many more Americans believe that the United States going to war with Iraq will have negative consequences for U.S. foreign policy than believe it will have positive consequences. More believe that it will increase the likelihood that North Korea will make nuclear weapons, that feelings in the Muslim world toward the United States will worsen, that the risk of terrorist attacks will increase, and that it will be harder for the United States to get cooperation from other countries.

A strong majority (63%) favors trying to limit the number of Iraqi civilian casualties even if this means the war would last longer.

Though only a minority would prefer to see the United States govern post-war Iraq, an overwhelming majority (85%) says the United States has the responsibility to remain in Iraq until there is a stable government, which the median respondent estimates will take 2 years. An overwhelming majority (86%) thinks it is important to bring democracy to Iraq and a strong majority (63%) believes this will eventually occur.

It does not appear that the support for war with Iraq has generalized to become broader support for a confrontational approach with North Korea and Iran. Almost four out of five respondents—79 percent—said “the U.S. should deal with the government of North Korea primarily by trying to build better relations,” while only 15 percent said the United States should emphasize an approach of “pressuring it with implied threats that the U.S. may use military force against it.” Asked the same question about Iran, an overwhelming 80 percent thought the United States should deal with the Iranian government by trying to build better relations, and just 16 percent preferred to pressure it with implied military threats.

The poll was conducted with a nationwide poll of 795 American adults over March 22-25, 2003. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.5%. The poll was fielded using 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.

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