

Americans on Opportunities for Bipartisan Consensus

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Bipartisan Public Consensus Offers Direction for US Foreign Policy in Second Bush Term

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Despite several years of highly polarized debate and a bruising electoral battle, a new study reveals a striking amount of bipartisan consensus—among the public and foreign policy opinion leaders—that offers surprisingly clear direction for US foreign policy in the second Bush administration. Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) of the University of Maryland comments, “Since many factors influenced the outcome of the election, the question stands: What is the public’s mandate in the specific area of US foreign policy?”

Analyzing the areas of agreement among Republicans and Democrats in several polls of the American public and of foreign policy opinion leaders (government officials and leaders in business, the media, and academia), conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the Program on International Policy Attitudes from July through late December, reveals an underlying consensus on a wide range of foreign policy issues.

A strong consensus among the public and leaders says that the US should pursue a foreign policy that emphasizes multilateral cooperation. Asked by CCFR what is the primary lesson of September 11, among the public 66% of Republicans and 79% of Democrats said the US needed to cooperate more with other countries to fight terrorism, as opposed to the US acting more on its own. Among the leaders interviewed by CCFR, 63% of Republicans and 92% of Democrats took this position.

Asked what kind of role the US should play in the world, only small percentages of the public chose the option of the US continuing “to be the preeminent world leader in solving international problems” (Republicans 12% Democrats 8%). Similar small minorities chose the isolationist option: “the US should withdraw from most efforts to solve international problems” (Republicans 10%, Democrats 10%). Very strong majorities chose the multilateral option: “The U.S. should do its share in efforts to solve international problems together with other countries” (Republicans 76%, Democrats 79%).

Majorities rejected the idea of the US playing the role of world policeman. Asked, “Do you think that the United States has the responsibility to play the role of ‘world policeman,’ that is, to fight violations of international law and aggression wherever they occur?” 73% of Republicans

and 80% of Democrats said no. Among leaders, 68% of Republicans and 79% of Democrats were opposed. Clear majorities also criticized current US foreign policy, saying that “The U.S. is playing the role of world policeman more than it should be” (Republicans 72%, Democrats 87%). Overall, 80% took this position, up from 65% when CCFR asked the question in 2002.

These themes were clear in the late December PIPA poll. Asked how the US should deal with Iran, only 33% of Republicans and 13% of Democrats support pressuring Iran with implied threats of force, while 61% of Republicans and 86% of Democrats support trying to build better relations. Strong majorities of both Republicans (72%) and Democrats (84%) support the EU, not the US, taking the lead in dealing with Iran.

In Iraq, while majorities oppose withdrawing US troops, 52% of Republicans and 79% of Democrats oppose increasing the number of troops. If after the election, the new government requests that the US withdraw its forces, 60% of Republicans and 85% of Democrats say the US should do so. Similarly, when CCFR asked leaders what the US should do if the majority of the Iraqi people want the US to leave, 61% of Republicans and 70% of Democrats said that it should leave. In October 2004, PIPA found that 58% of Republicans and 77% of Democrats opposed US establishing permanent bases in Iraq.

Support is low for increasing US military resources. Majorities of Republicans (56%) and Democrats (75%) agreed that it is not “necessary for the US to develop new types of nuclear weapons” in the December PIPA poll. In the July CCFR poll only 44% of Republicans and 22% of Democrats favored increases in defense spending, while in December Republicans were divided (51% to 47%) and Democrats were at 24% (PIPA Dec 2004). Among foreign policy leaders, just 38% of Republicans and 7% of Democrats favored increases (CCFR). Only a very small number among the public favored more US military bases abroad (Republicans 13%, Democrats 10%).

There remains a long-standing consensus for the US to participate in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, with 80% of Republicans and 91% of Democrats supporting the US doing so (CCFR). PIPA/KN also found strong support—Republicans at 68% and Democrats at 86% (September 2004). CCFR found similar levels of support among leaders--64% of Republicans and 92% of Democrats.

One region where the public does show support for using military force is Darfur, Sudan. Republicans (62%) and Democrats (64%) agreed the US should contribute some troops to a UN intervention to stop the genocide in Darfur (PIPA/KN, December).

Though Republicans and Democrats divide on whether the US should have gone to war with Iraq, they agree that, as a rule, the US should not engage in unilateral preventive war. Asked by CCFR when a country can take unilateral action against another, only 27% of Republicans and 12% of Democrats chose the option: “If they have strong evidence that the other country is acquiring weapons of mass destruction that could be used against them at some point in the future.” Rather, a majority of Republicans (53%) and Democrats (52%) chose the traditional position that nations can go to war “only if they

have strong evidence that they are in imminent danger of being attacked.” Others chose even more restrictive principles. Foreign policy leaders responded very similarly. Only 28% of Republicans and 2% of Democrats endorsed the principle of preventive war, while 60% of Republicans and 62% of Democrats endorsed the traditional principle that imminent threat was the key criterion.

PIPA also found, in December, a public consensus in regard to climate change (or global warming). Fifty-nine percent of Republicans and 74% of Democrats favor “legislation that limits US emissions of greenhouse gases.” Even larger majorities favor legislation that requires “car manufacturers to meet higher fuel efficiency standards, even if this would increase the cost of buying or leasing a car” (Republicans 74%, Democrats 83%). CCFR found public consensus in support of the Kyoto Treaty (Republicans 55%, Democrats 79%), but not among leaders (Republicans 28%, Democrats 89%).

The PIPA/KN December poll also asked for the public’s expectations of what the administration would do in its second term. Republicans were much more confident that the administration would generally pursue more cooperative policies (Republicans 74%, Democrats 29%), approach Iran primarily by trying to build better relations (Republicans 58%, Democrats 31%), and let the EU take the lead in dealing with Iran (68% Republicans, 48% Democrats). However, there was a surprising amount of agreement that the Bush administration would also pursue a number of policies that were unpopular with the public, including increasing US troops in Iraq (Republicans 57%, Democrats 74%), increasing defense spending (Republicans 70%, Democrats 79%), and proposing the development of new types of nuclear weapons (Republican 48%, Democrats 68%). There was also substantial agreement that the Bush administration would not propose legislation or regulations limiting US emissions of greenhouse gases (Republicans 51%, Democrats 63%) but the public differed on whether the Bush administration would require car manufactures to meet higher fuel efficiency standards, with 57% of Republicans saying that it would and 72% of Democrats saying that it would not.

Other positions that were endorsed by majorities of Republicans and Democrats, and, where data was available, included a consensus of foreign policy leaders as well, were for the US to pursue the following approaches and policies:

- Make preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and the combating international terrorism the top priorities in US foreign policy
- Strengthen the United Nations
- Contribute US troops to UN peacekeeping missions
- Participate in the International Criminal Court
- Continue research on missile defense, but do not deploy until proven effective
- Participate in the Land Mines Treaty

- Only go to war with a government that is supporting terrorists if there is an imminent threat to the US or the UN Security Council approves
- Use US military force to deal with humanitarian crises, especially to stop genocide
- Do not use US military force to replace dictators with democratic governments
- Do not use nuclear weapons except in response to a nuclear attack
- Do not use torture to gain information in the war on terrorism
- In the effort to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program, be willing to sign a non-aggression pact and provide North Korea with more food aid
- Do not use military force against North Korea unless the US has approval from the UN, US allies and South Korea
- Be even handed when dealing with the Israel-Palestinian conflict
- Contribute troops to peacekeeping in Afghanistan
- Do not use US troops to defend Taiwan from China.
- Work toward lowering trade barriers while also pursuing more trade adjustment assistance to help American workers adapt
- Include minimum labor and environmental standards in trade agreements
- Pursue a Free Trade Area of the Americas
- Do not have subsidies for large farming businesses, but have them for small farmers

This study draws upon new analyses of surveys conducted by CCFR in 2004, a new poll conducted by PIPA in late December 2004, and previous 2003, 2004 PIPA polls. The CCFR surveys interviewed 1,195 members of the American public in July, 2004 and 450 foreign policy leaders in the summer of 2004. Details of the CCFR studies, entitled “Global Views 2004,” can be found on their website www.ccf.org. The new PIPA poll was conducted December 21-26, 2004 with a national sample of 801 American adults, margin of error +/- 3.5 percentage points. The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide online panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided with internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp. Previous 2004 PIPA polls using the same methodology are also cited.

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