

Publics in Europe and India See U.S. as Violating International Law at Guantánamo

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Majorities in Great Britain, Germany, No Longer See U.S. as Leader in Advancing Human Rights

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Large majorities in Germany and Great Britain, and pluralities in Poland and India, believe the United States has committed violations of international law at its prison on Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, including the use of torture in interrogations.

Large numbers oppose letting the United States use their airspace when transferring terrorism suspects to countries that use torture. The U.S. image as a promoter of human rights has deteriorated sharply in Germany and Great Britain.

U.S. Naval Station Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. (Sgt. Sara Wood/U.S. Army)

These are some of the results from a new multinational poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org. Polling organizations in Great Britain, Germany, Poland and India surveyed over 1,000 people in each country during June 2006. A [parallel poll](#) asked Americans about U.S. treatment of terrorism detainees.

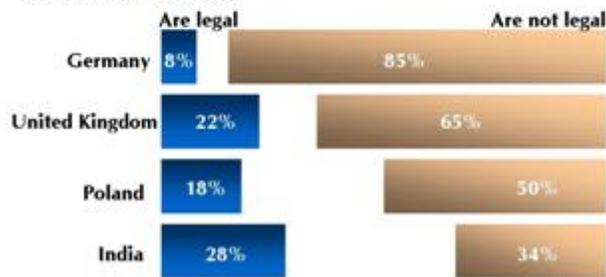
The findings come as lawmakers in the United States begin the arduous process of trying to devise legislation governing the treatment of the hundreds of terrorism detainees held at Guantánamo and other overseas detention facilities. On June 29, the Supreme Court overturned Bush Administration plans to try the suspects by military commissions allowed to waive basic due-process protections.

“The whole world is watching how our country handles this issue,” said U.S. Sen. John W. Warner, R-Va., chairman of the armed services committee, which has held hearings on detainee treatment.

Large numbers in all of the countries polled, but especially in Germany and Great Britain, think U.S. treatment of terrorism suspects violates international law.

International Beliefs About Legality of Guantanamo Policies

Is it your impression that current US policies for detaining people it has captured and is holding in Guantanamo Bay are or are not legal, according to international treaties on the treatment of detainees?



WPO/AN 6/06

Respondents were asked: “Is it your impression that current U.S. policies for detaining people it has captured and is holding in Guantanamo Bay are or are not legal, according to international treaties on the treatment of detainees?” Majorities in Germany (85%) and Great Britain (65%) said the policies were illegal. Pluralities in Poland (50% to 18%) and India (34% to 28%) agreed, though in both countries large percentages (32% and 38%, respectively) did not answer.

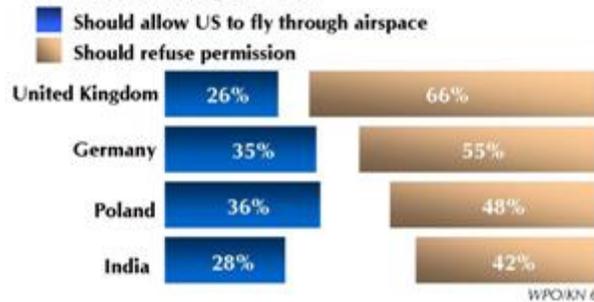
Asked specifically about whether the U.S. government was “currently allowing interrogators to use torture,” majorities or pluralities said yes. Again, the British and Germans were the most likely to answer affirmatively. Three out of four Germans (76%) and three out of five Britons (62%) said they thought detainees held by the United States could be tortured. Nearly half of Poles (49% to 24%) also thought so, as did a plurality of Indians (33% to 23%). Again, many Poles (27%) and Indians (44%) did not answer.

The poll documents a dramatic deterioration in the United States’ reputation as an effective advocate of human rights in the world. Majorities in Germany (78%) and Great Britain (56%) said the U.S. government did a “bad job” of promoting human rights. Eight years ago, fewer than one in four Germans (24%) and Britons (22%) rated U.S. performance in this area as “bad.”

The U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva takes up the issue of U.S. treatment of terrorism detainees at a series of hearings beginning July 17. In May, another U.N. body, the Committee Against Torture, urged the United States to close its prison at Guantánamo and to stop transferring detainees to countries with a history of abuse and torture.

Letting US Use Airspace

If the US requests permission to fly through [COUNTRY'S] airspace when it is transporting a terrorism suspect to a country that has a reputation for using torture, do you think [COUNTRY] should allow the US to do this or do you think that it should refuse permission?



No Use of Airspace for Renditions

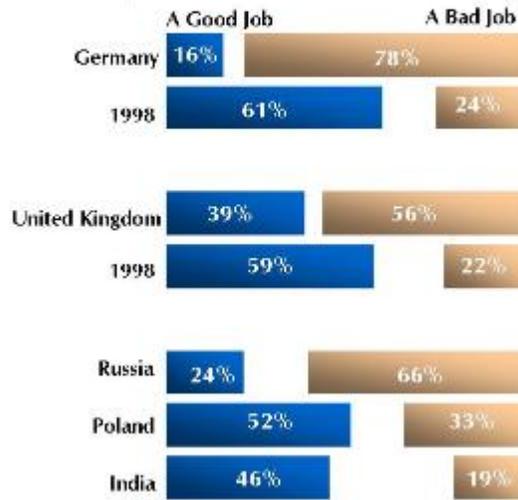
The Bush Administration's policy of extraordinary renditions—the secret transfer of detainees for interrogation in countries known to use torture—has generated controversy at home and abroad. Majorities or pluralities in the four countries polled say their leaders should not permit the United States to fly through their airspace for these transfers.

Majorities in Great Britain and Germany, and pluralities in Poland and India, oppose cooperating with the U.S. government in extraordinary renditions, an opposition that is consistent with their belief that U.S. treatment of detainees violates international law. Asked whether their governments should allow the United States to use their airspace “when it is transporting a terrorism suspect to a country that has a reputation for using torture,” 66 percent of British and 55 percent of German respondents said no. Pluralities of 48 percent in Poland (36% should, 16% no answer) and 42 percent in India (28% should, 30% no answer) to use of their airspace for such renditions.

Americans are also opposed to the Bush Administration's renditions policy. Fifty-seven percent said military and intelligence agencies should not be allowed to send detainees to countries where they might be tortured, even if promised such methods would not be used.

US Leadership in Human Rights

Please tell me whether you think that, in the area of advancing human rights in other countries, the United States does:



WPO/KN 696 **U.S. Rated Negatively as an Advocate for Human**

Rights

The British and Germans no longer believe the United States is an effective international advocate for human rights. However, a slight majority of Poles and a plurality of Indians think the United States is doing a good job on human rights.

The belief that the United States' treatment of detainees violates international treaties appears to have contributed to a sharp decline in British and German perceptions of its ability to promote human rights in the world. In 1998, the U.S. Information Agency asked the British and Germans to evaluate how well the United States was doing in "in the area of advancing human rights in other countries." At that time, 59 percent of the British and 61 percent of Germans said the United States did a good job promoting human rights, while only 22 percent and 24 percent, respectively, said it did a bad job.

WPO's new poll shows big increases in the numbers who rate the United States poorly in this area. Among British respondents, the percentage saying the United States is doing a bad job has surged 34 points to 56 percent and among Germans, it has risen an extraordinary 54 points to 78 percent. The proportions saying the United States does a good job advocating human rights has plunged 20 points in Great Britain to 39 percent, and 45 points in Germany to 16 percent.

Poles and Indians, however, take a more positive view of the United States' performance on human rights. A slight majority of Poles (52%) and a plurality of Indians (46%) said the United States did a good job promoting human rights abroad, while 33 percent and 19 percent respectively, said the United States was doing a bad job. There is no trend line information on this question in these countries.

Reject Exception for War on Terrorism

In principle, majorities or pluralities in all four countries reject the idea that governments need to be freed from international conventions on human rights to pursue the war on terror. Large majorities in Germany (72%), Great Britain (64%) and Poland (60%) disagreed with the view that international treaties protecting the rights of detainees were “too restrictive because our government needs to have all options available when dealing with threats like terrorism” A plurality of those polled in India (42%) also disagreed.

Most Americans (73%) also rejected the argument that international conventions were too restrictive in the fight against terrorism.

But support is weaker for specific treaty-based standards for the treatment of detainees. Respondents were asked about three prohibitions: against using physical torture, against threatening torture, and against humiliating or degrading treatment.

Germans and Poles supported most strongly a ban on “using physical torture,” at 76 percent and 67 percent, respectively. Among the British, majority support for such a ban was slimmer, 53 percent to 45 percent. Indians tended to find a prohibition on torture too restrictive (39%), while 35 percent approved of one and 27 percent did not answer.

There was less consistent support for a prohibition against threatening physical torture. Majorities in Germany (69% vs. 28%) and Poland (54% vs. 38%) approved of prohibiting such threats. A majority of Britons (53%), however, said such a standard was too restrictive (43% approved). In India, a 39-percent plurality says it is too restrictive while 33 percent approve (28% no answer).

The prohibition against “treating detainees in a way that is humiliating or degrading” received a similarly mixed response. Germans were the most supportive of a ban on such treatment, with 72 percent approving. Fifty-nine percent of Poles also approved of a ban (32% say too restrictive). A modest majority of Britons (53%) once again said such a ban was too restrictive, while 43 percent approved of one. In India, a clear plurality opposed prohibiting the humiliation of detainees: 42 percent said a ban would be too restrictive while 32 percent approved of one (25% no answer).