

World Publics Favor New Powers for the UN

May 9, 2007

Most Support Standing UN Peacekeeping Force, UN Regulation of International Arms Trade

Majorities Say UN Should Have Right to Authorize Military Force to Stop Terrorism, Nuclear Proliferation, Genocide

[Full Report \(PDF\)](#)

[Questionnaire \(PDF\)](#)

[Methodology/Research Partners \(PDF\)](#)



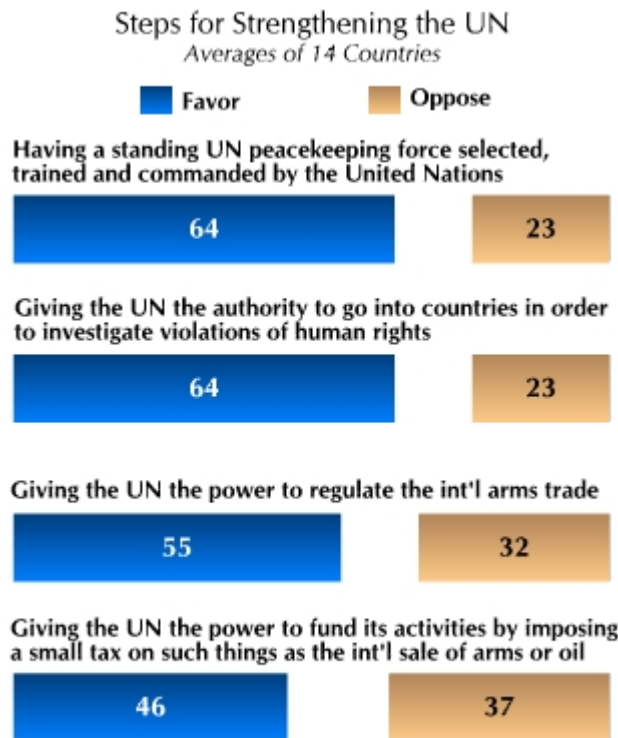
Publics around the world favor dramatic steps to strengthen the United Nations, including giving it the power to have its own standing peacekeeping force, to regulate the international arms trade and to investigate human rights abuses.

UN peacekeepers from Pakistan arrive in Che, Democratic Republic of Congo on 30 January 2005 (MONUC Photo/Christophe Boulierac)

Large majorities believe the United Nations Security Council should have the right to authorize military force to prevent nuclear proliferation, genocide and terrorism. However support is not as robust among the publics polled for accepting UN decisions that go against their countries' preferences.

These are some of the findings from a survey conducted by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs and WorldPublicOpinion.org, in cooperation with polling organizations around the world. Respondents were interviewed in countries that represent 56 percent of the world's population: China, India, the United States, Russia, France, Thailand, Ukraine, Poland, Iran, Mexico, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Argentina, Peru,

Armenia and Israel, plus the Palestinian territories. Not all questions were asked in all



countries.

WPO/CCGA

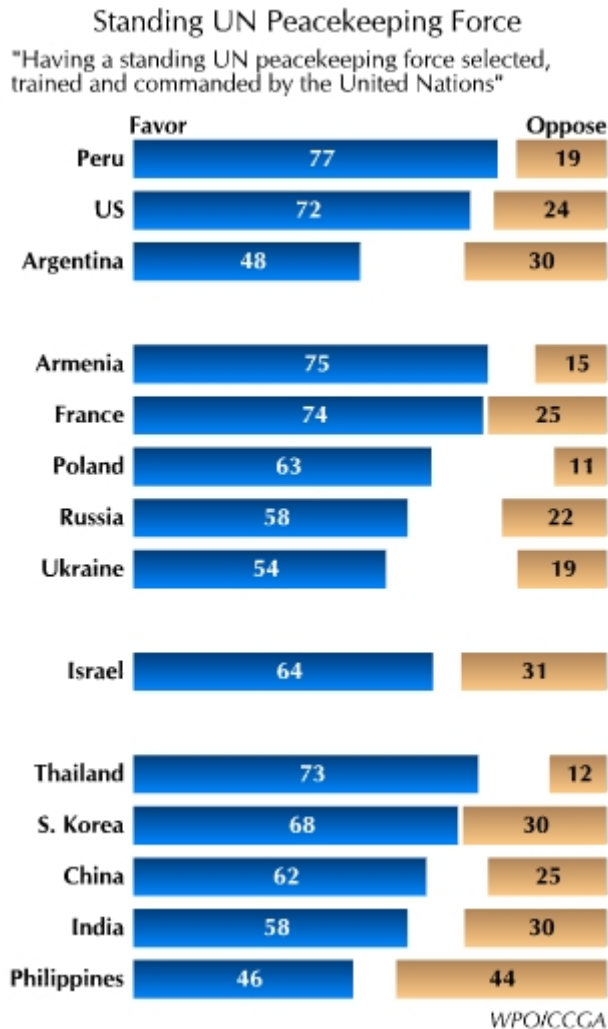
“Despite well-publicized disagreements over the role of the United Nations in world affairs, this survey clearly shows that international public opinion has coalesced around the notion that the UN should be the vehicle for conflict resolution and international cooperation on a wide variety of pressing problems,” said Christopher Whitney, executive director for studies at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Steven Kull, editor of WorldPublicOpinion.org, says the survey suggests that people around the world are more open to multilateral action than their governments.

“While leaders of nation states may be wary of giving the United Nations more power it is clear that publics around the world are comfortable with the idea of a stronger UN,” Kull said.

The idea of “having a standing UN peacekeeping force selected, trained and commanded by the United Nations” gets support from majorities in 12 of the 14 countries asked (64% on average). Peru is the most enthusiastic (77%), followed by Armenia (75%), France (74%), Thailand (73%), and the United States (72%). Argentines support such a force by margin of 48 percent to 30 percent. In none of the countries polled do most respondents

oppose this idea, though views are divided in the Philippines.



Support for “giving the UN the power to regulate the international arms trade” is also supported by majorities or pluralities in 12 of the 14 countries (55% on average). France shows the greatest support (77%), followed by South Korea (75%), Israel (60%) and the United States (60%). Only two publics tend to reject the idea: Filipinos (58% say no) and Argentines (42% negative, 36% positive).

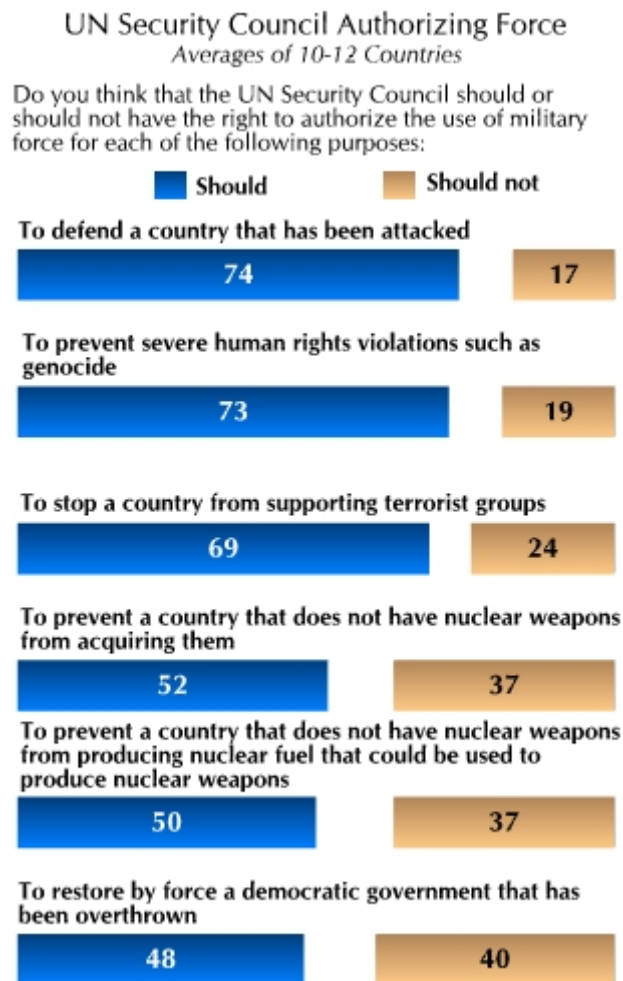
Giving the UN authority “to investigate violations of human rights” receives very high levels of support (64% overall). Overwhelming majorities favor this idea in France (92%), the United States (75%), Peru (75%), and South Korea (74%). The only exceptions are Argentina, where a plurality supports such investigations (46% to 29%) and the Philippines where the public is divided.

Publics show lower, but still substantial, support for “giving the UN the authority to fund its activities by imposing a small tax on such things as the international sale of arms or oil” (on average 46% in favor and 37% opposed). Nine countries favor this idea, led by France (70%), China (55%), South Korea (53%), and Israel (52%). Four countries oppose

it, including majorities in the Philippines (56%), and Peru (55%), and pluralities in the United States (50% to 45%) and Argentina (42% to 32%). Russians are divided.

Use of Military Force

The poll also finds support for giving the UN Security Council the right to authorize the use of military force to address a wide range of problems. Support is strongest for collective military action to defend countries from outside aggression, to prevent governments from supporting terrorist groups and to protect people from genocide. There is also support, though more modest, for such action to prevent nuclear proliferation and reverse the overthrow of a democratic government.



WPO/CCGA

Not surprisingly, using military force to “defend a country that has been attacked” is the most popular. This is consistent with the original conception of the United Nations as a collective security organization. In all 10 countries polled, large majorities, ranging from 84 percent in France to 66 percent in India, believe the Security Council should have this right. Three out of four respondents (74%) on average support this right across all countries polled.

Also popular is giving the Security Council the right to authorize the use of military force “to stop a country from supporting terrorist groups.” In all 10 publics polled, clear majorities favor this. Palestinians and South Koreans are the least supportive (61%) while the most supportive are the Israelis (85%) and the French (84%). Average support for this idea is 71 percent.

There is also modest support for using collective force to achieve the more controversial objective of stopping nuclear proliferation. These results are particularly relevant to a conflict unfolding on the world stage today: Iran’s decision to continue enriching uranium in defiance of the UN Security Council.

When asked whether the Security Council should have the right to authorize the use of military force in order “to prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them,” the most common view in eight out of 11 publics is that it “should” have this right, including majorities in Mexico (70%), Israel (62%), the United States (62%) and Russia (55%). Only in the Palestinian territories (59%) and South Korea (55%) do majorities say the Security Council “should not” have the right to prevent a country from acquiring nuclear weapons. The French are divided. Average support is 53 percent.

More specifically, respondents were asked whether the Security Council should have the right to authorize the use of force to “prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from producing nuclear fuel that could be used to produce nuclear weapons.” Once again the most common answer in seven of the 10 publics polled is that the Security Council “should” have this right. Support is highest in Thailand (59%), United States (57%), and Israel (54%). Again, the exceptions are those polled in the Palestinian territories (57% say no) and South Korea (56% say no). The French, again, are divided. On average, half of the respondents polled across all countries (50%) support this right and 37 percent are opposed.

The poll finds relatively modest levels of support for giving the Security Council the right to authorize the use of force “to restore by force a democratic government that has been overthrown.” Out of 10 publics polled, majorities in six and pluralities in one favor the idea. Support is highest in the Palestinian territories (67%), while more modest majorities favor it in Israel (58%), the United States (57%) and Mexico (54%). A majority of South Koreans (65%) and a plurality of the Chinese (45%) say the Security Council “should not” have this right. Russian respondents are divided (35% favor, 37% oppose). On average, 49 percent of those polled support giving the UN this right and 40 percent are opposed.

Genocide

Publics show very strong support for allowing the UN Security Council to use military force to “prevent severe human rights violations such as genocide.” Very large majorities in all 12 countries polled on this issue agree that the Security Council should have the right to use force in such cases. The lowest levels of support are in Thailand (62%) and

India (63%), and the highest are in France (85%), Israel (83%) and the United States (83%). Average support across the publics polled is 74 percent.

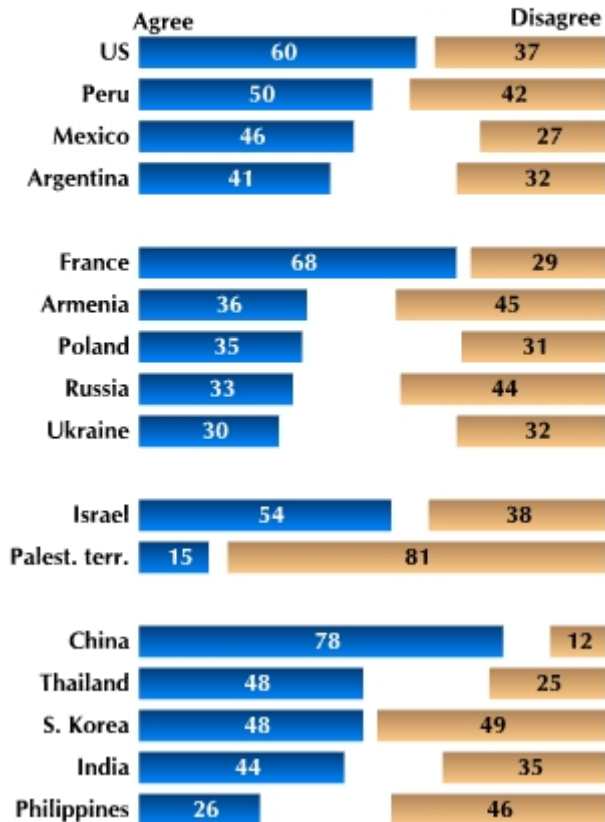
This poll probed further about whether the Security Council has not just the right but the responsibility to intervene militarily to protect people from severe human rights abuses. “Some people say that the Security Council has the responsibility to authorize the use of military force to protect people from severe human rights violations such as genocide, even against the will of their own government,” respondents were told. “Others say that the Security Council does not have such a responsibility.”

The idea that the Security Council has this responsibility is the most common view in all 12 of the publics polled and the majority view in eight of them. Interestingly the Chinese (76%) show the strongest support for this idea, followed by Americans (74%) and Palestinians (69%). In four countries, only pluralities agree: Ukrainians (40%), Thais (44%), Russians (48%), and Argentines (48%). In no country, do more than four in 10 say that the UN does not have a responsibility to act against genocide. On average 57 percent said the UN has this responsibility.

Accepting UN Decisions

Making Decisions within the UN

When dealing with international problems, [survey country] should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even if this means that [survey country] will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.



WPO/CCGA While most respondents support

strengthening the United Nations, there is less enthusiasm about submitting to possibly adverse UN decisions. Respondents were asked whether their country should be “more willing to make decisions within the United Nations” when dealing with international problems, even if this means that their country “will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.” Ten of the 16 publics asked say that their country should do so, but only four of these are a clear majority, while six are pluralities. Four are opposed and two are divided. On average 45 percent said their country should do so, while 38 percent said it should not and 17 percent did not answer.

Not surprisingly the three countries most ready to accept UN decisions are also permanent members of the UN Security Council: China (78%), France (68%), and the United States (60%). The public in Russia, also a member, tend to be opposed to abiding by such decisions by 44 percent to 33 percent, however.

Israel, surprisingly, is another county where there is strong support for making decisions within the United Nations. Fifty-four percent of Israelis agree that their leaders should abide by such decisions even if they disagree. This is striking given the extent to which

opponents of Israel have used the United Nations as a platform for criticism of the Jewish state.

In sharp contrast, the Palestinians are the only public polled with a majority opposed to accepting such collective decisions. A large 81 percent majority of Palestinians say their government should not go along with policies they oppose. This is also striking given that Palestinian leaders have used UN resolutions as a basis for legitimating their demands for statehood.

Pluralities favor accepting UN decisions in Peru (50% to 42%), Thailand (48% to 25%), Mexico (46% to 27%), India (44% to 35%), Argentina (41% to 32%), and Poland (35% to 31%). In two countries, pluralities are opposed: Armenia (45% to 36%), Philippines (46% to 26%). Views are divided in South Korea (48% agree, 49% disagree) and Ukraine (30% agree, 32% disagree and 38 percent do not answer).

General Attitudes toward the UN

The survey also explored more general attitudes toward the United Nations and other international institutions. The UN and its affiliated agencies tend to be viewed favorably, though these questions were asked in only seven or eight publics.

Respondents in eight countries were asked whether a series of objectives should be considered important foreign policy goals for their governments. Majorities in all eight consider “strengthening the United Nations” to be either a “very” or “somewhat” important foreign policy goal (ranging from 79% in the United States and Thailand to 91% in Australia). Majorities in Australia (64%), Mexico (56%) and China (51%) consider this “very important.” Only marginal numbers say making the United Nations stronger is “not important.” This opinion is strongest in the United States, though still expressed by less than one in five (19%), while 40 percent of Americans say it is a very important goal and 39 percent a somewhat important goal.

Respondents in eight countries rated their sentiments toward the United Nations on a 100-degree “feeling thermometer,” where one hundred means very warm or favorable, zero means very cold or unfavorable, and fifty means neither warm nor cold or neutral.

Mexicans express on average the warmest feelings toward the United Nations (mean temperature 80 degrees) followed by the Chinese (75 degrees), Armenians (72 degrees), Thais (71 degrees), South Koreans (70 degrees), Indians (63 degrees) and Palestinians (58 degrees). American sentiments toward the UN are the coolest among the eight publics surveyed: their mean thermometer reading is 55 degrees.

The World Health Organization (WHO), the UN agency that addresses global health issues, tends to receive even warmer ratings. Three Asian countries show the most favorable feelings toward the WHO: Thailand (81 degrees), China (80 degrees) and South Korea (74 degrees). The warm feelings expressed in Asia may reflect the WHO’s work there in preventing the spread of avian flu. Armenians also tend to feel warmly

toward this agency (75 degrees) as do Palestinians (65 degrees). Americans (59 degrees) and Indians (58 degrees) are relatively lukewarm.

Attitudes toward the World Court, the United Nation's judicial organ, are a bit cooler. Chinese sentiments are warmest (70 degrees) followed by Thais (66 degrees), South Koreans (63 degrees), Armenians (61 degrees) and Indians (54 degrees). Americans are relatively cooler (46 degrees). But the least enthusiastic about this international court are the Palestinians: their mean thermometer reading is a chilly 32 degrees.