



PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL  
POLICY ATTITUDES (PIPA)

**The PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll**  
*The American Public on International Issues*



## **Americans on North Korea**

### ***Introduction***

In October 2002, in a meeting with US envoys, North Korea reportedly acknowledged that it had a covert program for developing nuclear weapons grade enriched uranium, in violation of the Agreed Framework negotiated with the US and South Korea in 1994. North Korea has subsequently withdrawn from the Nonproliferation Treaty, expelled the IAEA inspectors and reactivated its nuclear reactors capable of making weapons grade plutonium.

In response to these developments, the Bush administration has emphasized that it wishes to achieve a diplomatic resolution of the conflict, but has refused to negotiate with the North Korea until it first verifiably terminates its nuclear weapons program. Initially it insisted that it would not talk with North Korea, because to do so could be regarded as taking a concessionary posture in response to North Korea's violations and thus would be a form of blackmail. Later, the Administration indicated a willingness to talk, but appeared to be still insisting that North Korea must first terminate its nuclear weapons program.

Should the US meet with North Korea, one of the key topics would presumably be the question of a US commitment to not attack North Korea. At the October meeting in which North Korean diplomats disclosed that North Korea had resumed its nuclear weapons program, they stated that doing so was necessary for them because the US had expressed aggressive intent toward North Korea, such as labeling it part of the "axis of evil." South Korean diplomats have reportedly tried to promote the idea of the US making some type of nonaggression commitment in exchange for North Korea shutting down its nuclear weapons program. The Bush administration has stated that it has no intention of attacking North Korea, but has taken no steps to make a formal agreement to this effect.

More broadly, there is some debate about whether the US should seek to get the 1994 Agreed Framework back on track. The Bush administration came into office expressing major criticisms of the agreement, and many members of the President's party have

advocated abandoning it. At this point it is not clear if the administration would be looking to return to the Agreed Framework as a basis for negotiations.

For over a decade the US has sent substantial amounts of food aid to North Korea. The pledged amount of food for this year being nearly exhausted, the administration has not decided whether it will renew food aid for next year. This has been subject to criticism—both from those who believe that the US should terminate all food aid as a way of putting pressure on North Korea, and from those who oppose any reduction of food aid on the basis that food aid should not be used as a political weapon.

Since taking office, the Bush administration's uneasiness with what it saw as the conciliatory quality of the Clinton administration's stance toward North Korea has also extended to South Korea's "sunshine policy" that promotes increased engagement with North Korea. The Bush administration has subtly communicated its lack of enthusiasm for such an approach directly to the South Korean government.

Behind the debates about how to deal with North Korea's nuclear weapons program is a broader question about how the international community can deal with the potential for nuclear proliferation. Now that North Korea has withdrawn from the NPT, it is unclear what the legal basis would be if the US were to consider taking military action against North Korea, such as by bombing North Korea's nuclear reactors, as the Clinton administration considered doing in 1994. Does the US have a right to take such action out of a form of self-defense, does the UN Security Council have the right to do so based on the right to defend international peace as specified in Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, or is there no legal basis for such action?

To explore US public attitudes on these questions, the Program on International Policy Attitudes and Knowledge Networks conducted a nationwide poll of 1063 American adults over January 21-26. The margin of error was plus or minus 3%.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide research panel, which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology see page 10, or go to:

[www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

## *Negotiating With North Korea*

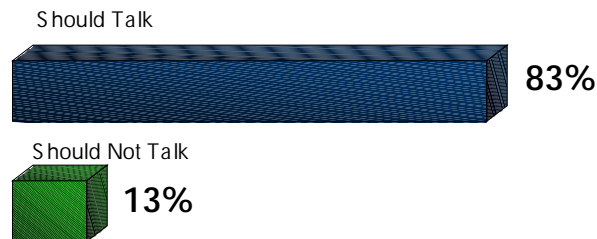
**A very large majority favors negotiating with North Korea. Very large majorities favor talking with North Korea (and reject the argument that doing so would be submitting to blackmail), signing a formal nonaggression commitment provided that North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons program, and generally trying to get the 1994 Agreed Framework back on track. However, the public is divided about whether North Korea, even if it was confident that the US would not attack, would be willing to forego having nuclear weapons.**

In response to a an array of diplomatic options, a very large majority of Americans favors negotiating with North Korea with the aim of ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Even when respondents were presented the argument that “the US should not talk with North Korea until it first proves it is not developing nuclear weapons, because talking first would be submitting to blackmail,” an overwhelming majority of 83% endorsed the idea that that the US should “talk with North Korea at this time.” Apparently the argument that “communication holds out the best prospect for resolving the standoff” was more persuasive.

### **Readiness to Talk With North Korea**

As you may know, North Korea, in violation of its agreement with the US, recently expelled international inspectors, thus making it possible to restart its nuclear weapons program. Some people argue that the US should not talk with North Korea until it first proves it is not developing nuclear weapons, because talking first would be submitting to blackmail. Others argue that it is important to talk with North Korea, because communication holds out the best prospect for resolving the standoff. Do you think the US should or should not talk with North Korea at this time?

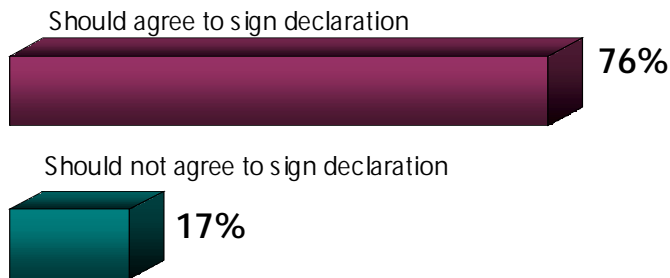


Respondents also showed a widespread readiness to sign a nonaggression commitment with North Korea in exchange for North Korea giving up its nuclear weapons program. Respondents were told that “North Korea has said that they renounced their commitments to not build nuclear weapons because President Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ speech made them think that the US was going to attack North Korea.” An overwhelming 76% said that they would support the US seeking to “reassure North Korea by agreeing to the US and North Korea signing a formal declaration that they will not attack each other, provided that North Korea gives up its ability to develop nuclear weapons.” This goes beyond the

Administration's statements that it has no intention to attack North Korea by making it a formal and bilateral declaration. More importantly, it requires that North Korea give up its ability to develop nuclear weapons as part of the deal.

### Signing a Non-Aggression Agreement in Exchange for Disarmament

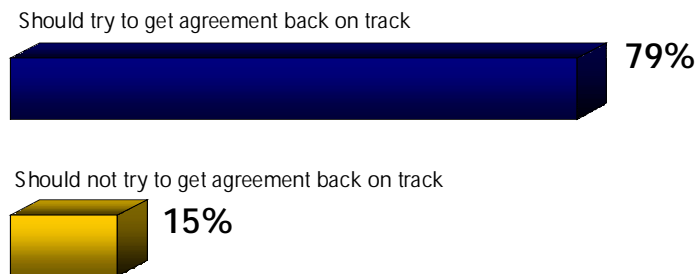
North Korea has said that they renounced their commitments to not build nuclear weapons because President Bush's "axis of evil" speech made them think that the US was going to attack North Korea. Do you think the US should or should not reassure North Korea by agreeing to the US and North Korea signing a formal declaration that they will not attack each other, provided that North Korea gives up its ability to develop nuclear weapons?



More broadly, an overwhelming majority favors trying to get the 1994 Agreed Framework back on track. Respondents were told about the basic features of the 1994 agreement and told that it had been broken down. An overwhelming 79% said that the US should try to get the agreement back on track.

### Getting 1994 Agreed Framework Back on Track

In 1994 the US and its allies and North Korea reached an agreement under which the North Koreans halted their nuclear program and allowed in international inspectors in exchange for shipments of food aid and energy assistance. As you may know, this agreement has recently broken down. Do you think that the US should or should not try to get this agreement back on track?



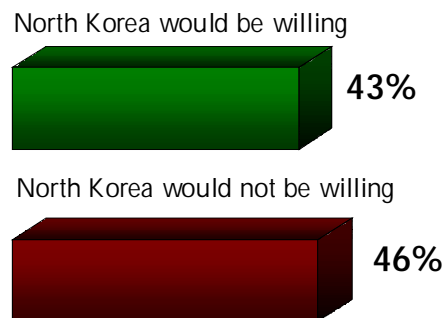
This is consistent with a January 2003 ABC poll, in which 70% said they would support "a diplomatic effort to get North Korea to drop its nuclear weapons program in exchange

for economic aid from the United States.” In the same month CNN/USA Today found 72% saying they thought “the situation involving North Korea can be successfully resolved using only economic and diplomatic efforts”; 20% thought this situation could not be resolved by these means.

Despite this overwhelming support for negotiating with North Korea, however, Americans are divided about whether it can ultimately succeed in getting the North Koreans to relinquish their nuclear weapons. Asked, “if North Korea was confident that it would not be attacked” whether it would be willing to “forego having nuclear weapons,” just 43% said that it would, while 46% said it would not.

### Divided on Whether North Koreans Willing to Forego Nuclear Weapons

Do you think that if North Korea was confident that it would not be attacked, it would be willing to forego having nuclear weapons?



These attitudes are not really contradictory. Among the overwhelming majority that want to try negotiation, a substantial number doubt that it will be effective in getting North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, most of these still want to try, presumably in light of the difficulties associated with any other approach.

### *Food Aid and South Korea's 'Sunshine Policy'*

**Consistent with a non-confrontational orientation, a majority opposes withholding food aid to North Koreans or trying to discourage the South Koreans' "sunshine policy" of increased engagement with North Korea.**

Consistent with the non-confrontational tone of favoring negotiations, a majority opposes withholding food aid to North Koreans. It is long-established US policy that food aid should not be a political instrument. However, in policy debates, frustration is sometimes expressed about the value of food aid as a prop to North Korea's dictatorship.

Respondents were presented two arguments that posed the strategic value of withholding such aid against the humanitarian argument against using food aid as a political weapon. Just 39% endorsed the argument that the US should withhold food aid “so as to put pressure on it to stop building nuclear weapons.” Fifty-six percent opposed withholding food aid “from starving civilians in North Korea, because food aid should not be a political weapon.”

## Opposition to Withholding Food Aid

Which of the following statements is closer to your point of view:

The US government should withhold food aid to North Korea so as to put pressure on it to stop building nuclear weapons



It would be wrong for the US government to withhold food aid to starving civilians. Food aid should not be a political weapon



Also consistent with a non-confrontational orientation, only a tiny minority (6%) favored discouraging South Korea from pursuing its “sunshine policy” of increased economic and diplomatic engagement with North Korea. Approximately one in three favored encouraging such a policy, while just over one half said the US should not take a position either way.

## Very Little Opposition to “Sunshine Policy”

As you may know, South Korea in recent years has dramatically increased its economic and diplomatic engagement in with North Korea as part of what it calls its “sunshine policy.” Do you think the US should:

Encourage this policy



Discourage this policy



Not take a position either way



## *The Right to Forcibly Prevent Nuclear Proliferation*

**As a general rule, and in relation to North Korea specifically, the public is divided on whether the US has the right to use military force to prevent a country from acquiring nuclear weapons. However, an overwhelming majority believes that the UN Security Council has such a right.**

One of the reasons that Americans so overwhelmingly favor the US negotiating with North Korea may be the lack of a public consensus that the US has the right to use military force to prevent North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons. Asked whether “the US, without UN approval” has the right “to use military force to prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them,” the response was evenly divided. Asked whether a country, in general, has such a right, the reply was divided also.

When asked specifically about North Korea, the response was even slightly toward the view that the US would not have the right. To make sure respondents would not simply give their preferred position on what the US should do, respondents were first asked to put “aside what you would favor the US doing” and then asked whether they thought the US would have the right to “to bomb a nuclear power plant in North Korea if it thought the North Koreans were using it to make nuclear weapons.” In this case 51% said that it would not have the right, while 45% said that it would.

### **Right of US to Bomb Reactors**

Putting aside what you would favor the US doing, do you think the US would or would not have the right, without UN approval, to bomb a nuclear plant in North Korea if it thought the North Koreans were using it to make nuclear weapons?

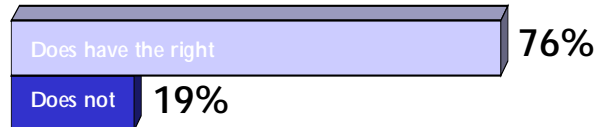


However, an overwhelming majority did say that the UN does have such a right. Seventy-six percent said the UN Security Council has “the right to authorize the use of military force to prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them.” Similarly, when Time/CNN asked: “If North Korea continues to operate its facilities, which produce radioactive material necessary to create nuclear bombs, do you

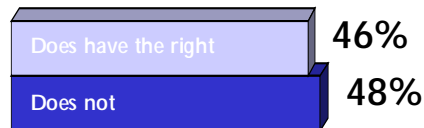
think the US—*along with the UN* [emphasis added]—should take military action to destroy North Korea’s nuclear facilities, or shouldn’t it do this?” 62% said the US and UN should then do this, while 29% said they should not.

### The Right to Use Military Force to Prevent Nuclear Proliferation

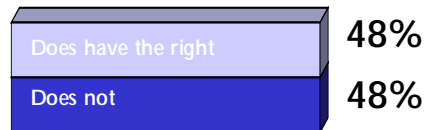
Do you think the **UN Security Council** does or does not have the right to authorize the use of military force to prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them?



Do you think that **a country**, without UN approval, does or does not have the right to use military force to prevent another country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them?



Do you think that **the US**, without UN approval, does or does not have the right to use military force to prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them?



Note: The order of the presentation of the above questions was randomly reversed to offset effects that may be due to the order of the questions.

### *Rising Concern Over North Korea, Lackluster Rating for US Policy*

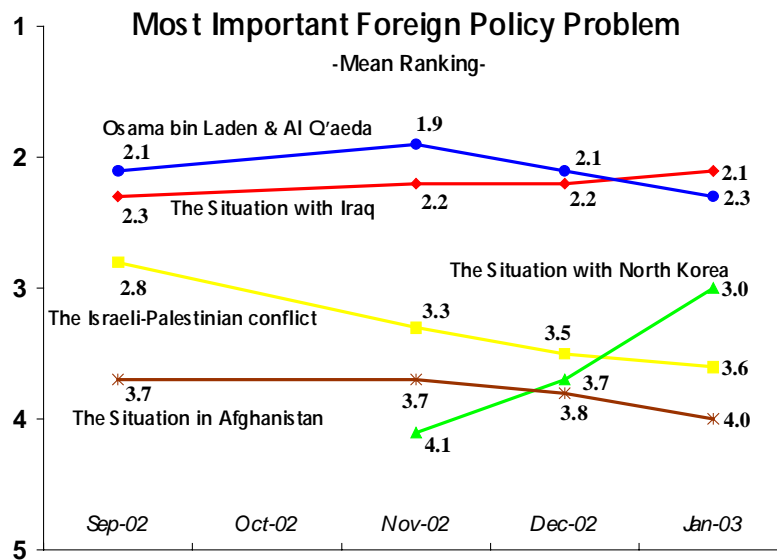
**Rankings of North Korea as a foreign policy priority have risen sharply. Ratings of US policy toward North Korea are lackluster.**

Not surprisingly, given recent events, Americans show a rising concern over North Korea as a foreign policy priority relative to other priorities. Respondents were asked to rank order a list of five foreign policy problems by choosing the most important one; as the selected one was removed from the list, respondents were subsequently asked to choose the most important of the remaining ones. This procedure makes it possible to give each priority a mean ranking on a scale of 1 to 5. .



Looking at just the first response, since November, the percentage giving North Korea the top priority rating has risen from 4% in November to 10% in December to 15% in January.

Looking at the mean ranking, North Korea has risen from 4.1 in November--putting it at the bottom of the list at that time; to 3.7 in December--putting it in fourth place above Afghanistan, but below the Israel-Palestinian conflict; and finally to 3.0—putting it in third place, above the Israel-Palestinian conflict and below only Osama bin Laden and Iraq.



Asked to rate “how well... the US government is dealing with” a list of “international problems and issues” on “on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being very poorly and 10 being very well,” respondents give US foreign policy toward North Korea a lackluster rating. Most recently, the mean rating was 4.91 with 36% giving a positive rating (6-10), 35% giving a negative rating (0-4), and 24% giving a neutral rating (5). These responses are essentially unchanged from November, when the mean rating was 4.90 and positive ratings were given by 34%, negative ratings also by 34% and neutral ratings by 24%.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California, with a randomly selected sample of its large-scale nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access). The distribution of the sample in the web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc.

The panel is recruited using stratified random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a non-zero probability of selection for every US household having a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance, which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. In return, panel members participate in surveys three to four times a month. Survey responses are confidential, with identifying information never revealed without respondent approval. When a survey is fielded to a panel member, he or she receives an e-mail indicating that the survey is available for completion. Surveys are self-administered.

For more information about the methodology, please go to:

[www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp)