

# THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

## AMERICANS ON IRAN

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**PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL  
POLICY ATTITUDES (PIPA)**

A joint program of the Center on Policy  
Attitudes and the Center for International and  
Security Studies at the University of Maryland



**Knowledge  
NETWORKS**

A polling, social science, and  
market research firm based in  
Menlo Park, California

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**The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)** is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

**Knowledge Networks** is a polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California. Knowledge Networks uses a large-scale nationwide research panel which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and is subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access).

**The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM)**, at the University of Maryland's School for Public Affairs, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners.

**The Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA)** is an independent non-profit organization of social science researchers devoted to increasing understanding of public and elite attitudes shaping contemporary public policy. Using innovative research methods, COPA seeks not only to examine overt policy opinions or positions, but to reveal the underlying values, assumptions, and feelings that sustain opinions.

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Evan Lewis and Phil Warf designed the questionnaire and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Networks' Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaire and managed the fielding of the poll.

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The search of existing poll data was done with the aid of the Roper POLL database.

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**OVERVIEW**

**Introduction**

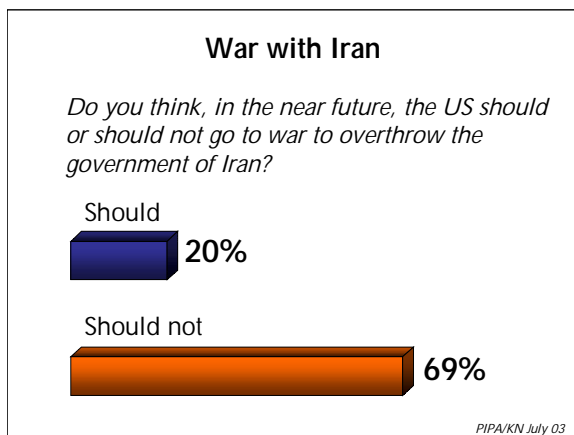
A new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll and an analysis of polling from other organizations reveal that a large majority of Americans oppose going to war with Iran and prefers to pursue a diplomatic approach working through the UN. At the same time a majority would consider using limited military force against Iran, provided that it was established that Iran has a nuclear weapons program, that the program could be effectively targeted and that the UN Security Council would approve the action.

The PIPA/KN poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,066 respondents July 11-20. See below for more details.

**War With Iran**

**A very strong majority opposes the idea of going to war with Iran.**

In the PIPA/KN poll respondents were asked, “Do you think, in the near future, the US should or should not go to war to overthrow the government of Iran?” 69% said that it should not, while just 20% said it should.



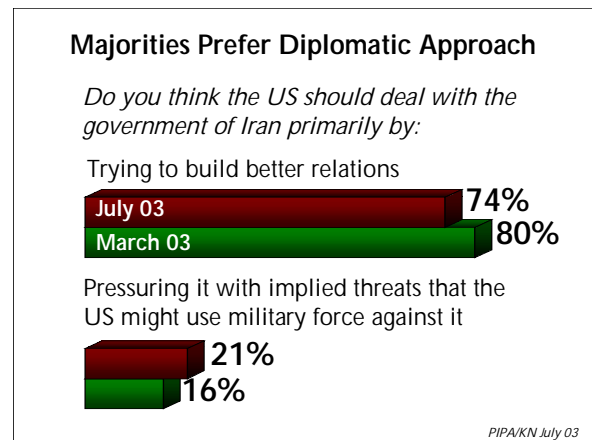
These are very close to the percentages that Gallup found in a CNN/USA Today poll of June 27-29. In this case the question was preceded by the preamble “As you may know, the U.S. believes Iran, North Korea, and Syria are either providing assistance to terrorists or attempting to

develop weapons of mass destruction.” Nonetheless, when asked whether the US should “go to war” with Iran,” 67% said that it should not and 27% said that it should. These are essentially unchanged from when Gallup asked this question in April 2003 and 69% said that it should not and 24% said that it should.

**Diplomacy and Multilateralism**

**Overwhelming majorities prefer emphasizing a diplomatic approach over the use of military threats.**

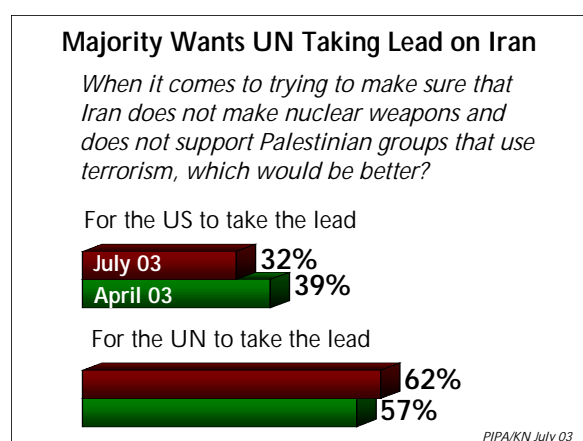
Asked in the July PIPA/KN poll how “the US should deal with the government of Iran,” 74% said the US should do so primarily by “trying to build better relations,” while just 21% favored “Pressuring it with implied threats that the US may use military force against it.” In a March PIPA/KN poll 80% favored diplomacy and 16%



implied military threats.

Consistent with this emphasis on trying to build better relations with Iran, Americans also show doubts about labeling Iran a member of the ‘axis of evil.’ In a March PIPA/KN poll respondents were asked what effect they thought President Bush’s labeling Iran as a member of the axis of evil had on the likelihood that Iran would make weapons of mass destruction. Only 10% said they thought that doing so made it less likely, while 47% said they thought it made it more likely. Thirty-nine percent thought it had no effect either way.

A strong majority of Americans also support the idea of the UN taking the lead in dealing with the problem of Iran—a course of action that Americans may assume would be less likely to lead to the use of force. Asked in the July PIPA/KN poll, “when it comes to trying to make sure that Iran does not make nuclear weapons and does not support Palestinian groups that use terrorism, which would be better?” 62% said it would be better “For the UN to take the lead” while just 32% said it would be better for the US to do so. In an April PIPA/KN poll 57% preferred the UN taking the lead and 39% the US.



The rationale for favoring a nonmilitary approach to dealing with Iran is reflected in a May CBS News poll that asked respondents to characterize the threat from Iran. Only 9% said, “Iran is a threat to the United States that requires military action now,” while a strong majority of 66% said, “Iran is a threat that can be contained.” An additional 18% said, “Iran is not a threat to the United States at all.”

### *Support for Limited Military Action*

**A majority does show a readiness to support a more limited use of military force against Iran’s nuclear weapons program, assuming that the existence of the program is established, the military action would be effective in aborting the program, and it would have UN support.**

In the July 11-20 PIPA poll respondents were asked “would you support or oppose the United States taking military action against Iran to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons.” A

very strong 65% said that they would and 31% said they would not. This question was a repeat of a June 18-22 ABC/Washington Post poll which found 56% approving.

In general it appears that questions that ask about “taking military action” are actually eliciting attitudes about more limited military action than going to war. Just as in this poll, polling that was done in the run-up to the Iraq war, consistently found that support for taking “military action” against Iraq was substantially higher than support for full-scale war. Also, when options for various kinds of action were broken out, support for limited military options such as air strikes or special forces operation were comparable to the support for “military action” and much higher than for questions that clarified that the operation entailed large scale use of ground forces. Thus it appears likely that the term “military action” was interpreted to mean something more limited than going to war with Iran.

The phrase “to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons” also implies action targeted specifically at an Iranian nuclear weapons program. Since it is not in fact established that Iran has a nuclear weapons program, support for military action appears to be contingent on establishing that Iran has such a program and that it can be effectively targeted.

A poll taken in April by the Los Angeles Times that offered a more tentative and uncertain picture about whether Iran in fact had such a program and did not assert what the effect of military action would be, received much lower support. It read, “There is evidence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Do you think the US should or should not take military action against Iran if they continue to develop these weapons?” Just 50% said that the US should do this, while 36% said that it should not.

Another poll taken in April by Newsweek lodged the more amorphous charge that Iran was among countries that are “linked to terrorism or have weapons programs considered a threat to other countries” and did not clarify the purpose

of the action. In this case 45% said they “support using military force” against Iran while 41% were opposed.

It should be noted that all of the questions that use the term ‘military action’ likely shared elevated support for taking action because they included the charge that Iran has a threatening weapons program. This is effectively an argument in favor of taking action and was in no case counterbalanced by an argument that stresses the potential costs and consequences of taking the action or the uncertainty about whether Iran in fact has a weapons program.

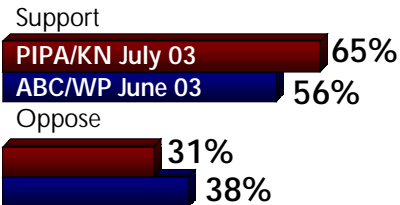
Indeed, when an April NBC/Wall Street Journal poll did not mention an Iranian weapons program but referred only to the vague charge that Iran is among countries “that some people say pose a potential threat to the United States,” only 21% said the US “should take military action,” while 64% said that it should not.

Given the public’s experience with Iraq it is also doubtful whether the president could get broad public support for military action based purely on the suspicion of such a weapons program. In the PIPA/KN poll 50% said that “In the future, if the president presents evidence that a country has a secret program for building weapons of mass destruction” they will, “feel more wary than [they] did before.”

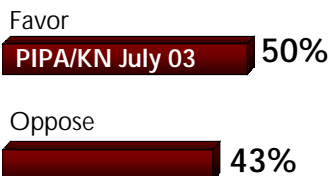
Furthermore, even to the extent that there is support for taking military action as reflected in response to the PIPA/KN and ABC/Washington Post polls, it appears that a substantial portion of this support is contingent on the US getting UN approval for it. PIPA/KN asked a follow on question to the 65% who said they would support the US using military force “What if most members of the UN Security Council opposed such military action—in that case would you favor or oppose having US forces take military action against Iran?” The percentage that would still be willing without UN support was just 50%.

### Taking Limited Military Action

*Would you support or oppose the United States taking military action against Iran to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons?*



*What if most members of the UN Security Council opposed such military action—in that case would you favor or oppose having US forces take military action against Iran?*



### 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)