

# THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

## AMERICANS ON THE CONFLICT WITH IRAQ

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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

## OVERVIEW

As Congress deliberates on the President's request to provide him authority to decide the US's future course toward Iraq, despite much polling, key issues remain on which the public has not fully weighed in.

The President has asked Congress to grant him the power to decide if and when to go to war with Iraq. Do Americans want the Congress to give him this power, or do they want the Congress to retain the right to vote on this decision when the President specifically proposes it? Do they think that Congress should grant the President this power, but with certain conditions?

There is a major debate in Washington over whether the goal of US policy should be to achieve regime change in Iraq, or whether the US should set its sights on achieving disarmament through a UN inspection process. Proponents of regime change insist that peaceful disarmament is not really feasible, while proponents of disarmament insist on trying. How do Americans evaluate these goals? Do they believe that disarmament through inspections is feasible?

If it is assumed that disarmament through inspections is not an option, how would the public view the options of deterrence or military pre-emption? Those who argue for deterrence point out that in the Gulf War the US succeeded in deterring Saddam Hussein from using weapons of mass destruction in his possession, and argue that war is too costly. Those backing pre-emptive thinking insist that it is too risky to assume that Saddam Hussein will be deterred, given his record of past miscalculations. How does the American public approach this dilemma?

Finally, how does the public currently rank Iraq compared to the US's other difficult foreign policy problems? The hunt for al-Qaeda and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—among other issues—all get large majorities that call them "important" in polls. But how would respondents prioritize these?

To explore US public attitudes on these issues, the Program on International Policy Attitudes and

Knowledge Networks conducted a nationwide poll of 709 American adults over September 26-30. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.7%.

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 7, or go to: [www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

Key findings:

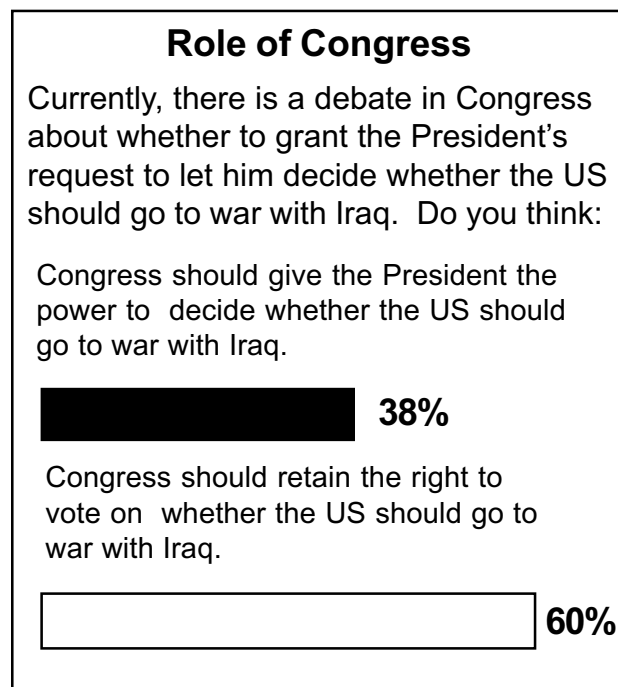
- A majority opposes Congress granting the President's request to give him the power to decide whether to go to war with Iraq, but a majority would support Congress doing so on the condition that the UN first approves the military action. It appears unlikely that the way a member of Congress votes on this issue will have a significant effect on voting in the upcoming election.
- A majority of Americans favors the goal of disarmament of Iraq through the process of UN inspections over the goal of overthrowing the Iraqi regime. This is true even though most Americans have doubts about whether UN inspectors will succeed in discovering all of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.
- Most Americans believe that Saddam Hussein already has the capability to attack targets in the US with weapons of mass destruction. If disarmament through inspections is not an option, given the choice between dealing with this threat through deterrence or military preemption, a majority chooses the latter. This suggests that, if efforts at disarmament through an inspection process fail, a majority would support using military force, even with the risk of attacks on American cities.
- The problem of Iraq is seen as a high priority, but not as high as the problem of al-Qaeda. Just under half say it is very urgent to resolve the problem of Iraq.

## FINDINGS

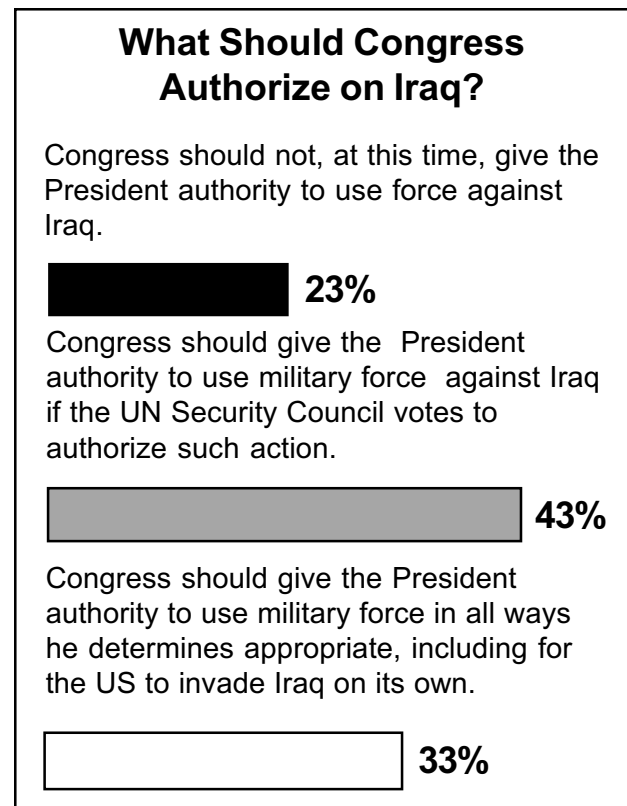
### *Congressional Authorization*

**1** A majority opposes Congress granting the President's request to give him the power to decide whether to go to war with Iraq, but a majority would support Congress doing so on the condition that the UN first approves the military action. It appears unlikely that the way a member of Congress votes on this issue will have a significant effect on voting in the upcoming election.

Despite the President's popularity, Americans show a reluctance for Congress to pass a resolution—as requested by the President—that would give him the power to decide whether to go to war with Iraq. Respondents were told, "Currently there is a debate in Congress about whether to grant the President's request to let him decide whether the US should go to war with Iraq," and then asked to choose between two positions. Only 38% chose the option that "Congress should give the President the power to decide whether the US should go to war with Iraq," while a majority of 60% chose the option that said that "Congress should retain the right to vote on whether the US should go to war with Iraq."



However, when respondents were presented the additional option of giving the President the power to take action against Iraq in the event that "the UN Security Council votes to authorize such action," a plurality of 43% chose this option. Combined with the 33% that would support giving the President the power to make decisions "to use military force in all ways he determines appropriate," an overwhelming 76%, under these limited conditions, would then support giving the President the power to decide.



This emphasis on the importance of getting UN approval for military action has appeared in numerous polls and was confirmed in the present poll as well. Sixty-four percent agreed with the statement, "The U.S. should only invade Iraq with UN approval and the support of its allies."

Nonetheless, a majority of respondents (52%) said that how members of Congress vote on the President's request for such authority would have no effect on whether they would vote for their member. Among those who said it would have an effect, a slightly larger percentage (27%) said that a vote *against* granting the President authority

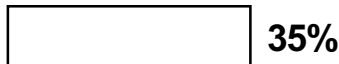
### Importance of Multilateral Support

The US should only invade Iraq with UN approval and the support of its allies.

Agree



Disagree



would make them *less* likely to vote for him or her, as compared to those who said it would make them more likely (20%). This, however, divides along party lines such that substantially more Republicans would be more inclined to vote in favor of a member who voted to grant the President authority, while modestly more Democrats would be inclined to vote in favor of a member who voted against granting the President authority. For independents, the effect would be equally balanced.

#### Goal of Disarmament or Regime Change

**2** A majority of Americans favors the goal of disarmament of Iraq through the process of

UN inspections over the goal of overthrowing the Iraqi regime. This is true even though most Americans have doubts about whether UN inspectors will succeed in discovering all of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Currently there is substantial debate about whether the US should accept the goal of disarming Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction or whether it should still pursue the more ambitious goal of achieving regime change through military force. It appears that a majority of Americans favors accepting the more limited goal of disarming Iraq.

One question asked respondents to choose between two arguments on this issue. Only 30% chose the argument that "The US should invade Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein, whether he cooperates with UN inspectors or not, because the UN inspectors might not find all his weapons." A very strong 68% chose instead the argument that "If Iraq allows the UN to conduct unrestricted inspections, the US should agree to not invade Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein as long as Iraq continues to cooperate, because we should only go to war as a last resort."

In another question the margin was somewhat smaller. Asked, "Suppose it does prove possible to disarm Iraq of any weapons of mass destruction it may have, should the US still invade Iraq in an attempt to overthrow Saddam Hussein's

### Disarmament vs. Regime Change

With which statement do you most agree:

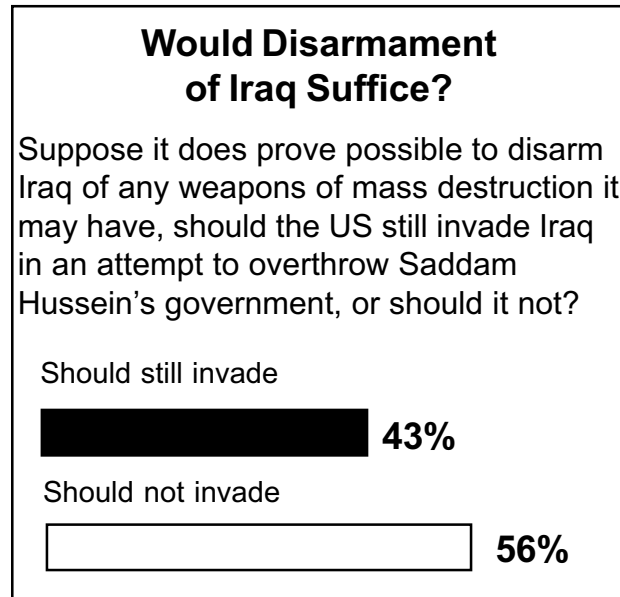
If Iraq allows the UN to conduct unrestricted inspections, the US should agree to not invade Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein as long as Iraq continues to cooperate, because we should only go to war as a last resort.



The US should invade Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein, whether he cooperates with UN inspectors or not, because the UN inspectors might not find all his weapons.



government, or should it not?" A more modest majority of 56% said the US should not invade while 43% said that it still should.

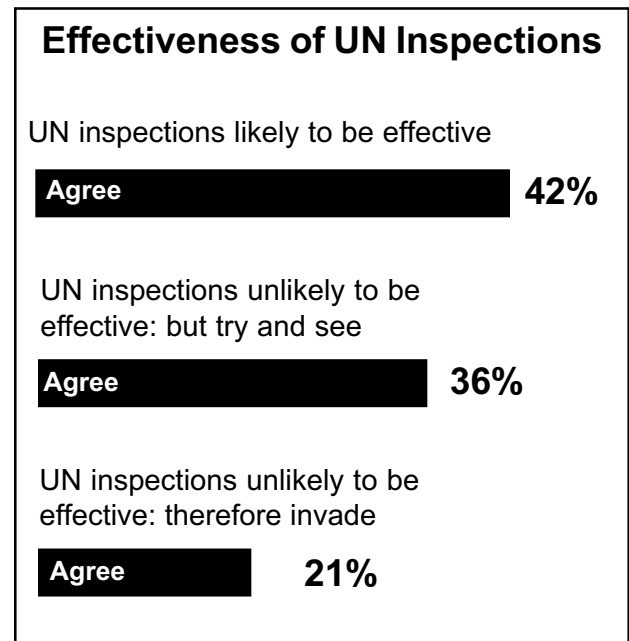


Two possible factors could explain why these two questions elicited different responses. In the first question, a larger percentage may have been expressing willingness for the US to "agree to not invade Iraq" because it was part of a quid pro quo for Iraqi compliance with an inspection regime. In the second question, some may have been simply rejecting the proposition that it could prove possible to disarm Iraq of "any" weapons of mass destruction.

Indeed, a two-thirds majority in a September Gallup poll found substantial doubts about whether UN inspections would achieve disarmament. Asked, "If the United Nations does conduct inspections, do you think these would — or would not — be effective in eliminating the threat of Iraq using weapons of mass destruction against the United States?" 68% said they would not and just 27% said they would.

However, it is unclear whether those who have such doubts necessarily favor proceeding to take military action, or whether they still want to see if UN inspections may prove effective. To find out, in the current poll the above-mentioned Gallup question was repeated. In this case the majority saying that inspections would not be effective was a bit lower, at 58%.

Those who took this position were then asked to choose between two positions. Of these, 36% chose the one that said that "Since the UN inspectors will not be effective, the US should proceed with invading Iraq now," while 62% chose the one that said "The UN should first try to disarm Iraq peacefully and see if that proves to be effective or not." Thus only 21% of the whole sample rejected the effectiveness of inspections and wanted to proceed with military action.



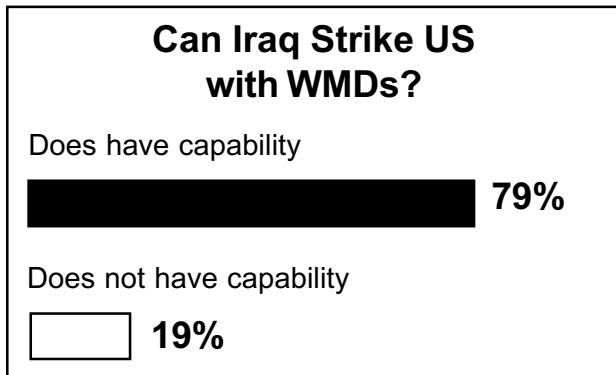
*If No Disarmament, Deterrence or Preemption?*

**3** Most Americans believe that Saddam Hussein already has the capability to attack targets in the US with weapons of mass destruction. If disarmament through inspections is not an option, given the choice between dealing with this threat through deterrence or military preemption, a majority chooses the latter. This suggests that, if efforts at disarmament through an inspection process fail, a majority would support using military force, even with the risk of attacks on American cities.

An unsettling prospect for all Americans is the possibility that Saddam Hussein already may have the capability to use weapons of mass destruction against targets in the US. This raises the critical question of how the US should act if the process of disarmament fails. If US cities were vulnerable

in this way, should the US deal with this threat by seeking to deter Iraqi use of such weapons through a threat of massive retaliation, or should the US take the risk of suffering an attack against its US cities and attack Iraq to remove the threat, lest it become even greater in the future?

Apparently an overwhelming majority of Americans thinks that Iraq already has the capability to use weapons of mass destruction against US targets. Asked, "Do you think that Saddam Hussein does or does not have the capability to use chemical or biological weapons against targets in the US?" 80% said that he does.



Though it is clear that most Americans want to deal with this threat through seeking disarmament, we also sought to find out how they would respond if disarmament were not presented as an option and they had to choose between an approach based on deterrence or preemption in a context in which US vulnerability to attacks was a given.

Respondents were asked to "Suppose the government found out that Iraq has the capability to release chemical or biological weapons against American cities," and asked, "How do you think the US should respond?" They were then presented two arguments. The argument based on a deterrence approach went:

The US should not attack Iraq, because this would make it almost certain that Iraq would use these weapons against American cities. Instead, the US should deter the Iraqi government from using these weapons by warning that if it does it will be destroyed.

It was endorsed by just 42%. The argument based on taking military action went:

The US should attack Iraq even if there is a risk that it will use these weapons against American cities, because if we do not act, Iraq will develop an even greater capability to threaten the US in the future.

It was endorsed by a clear majority of 56%.

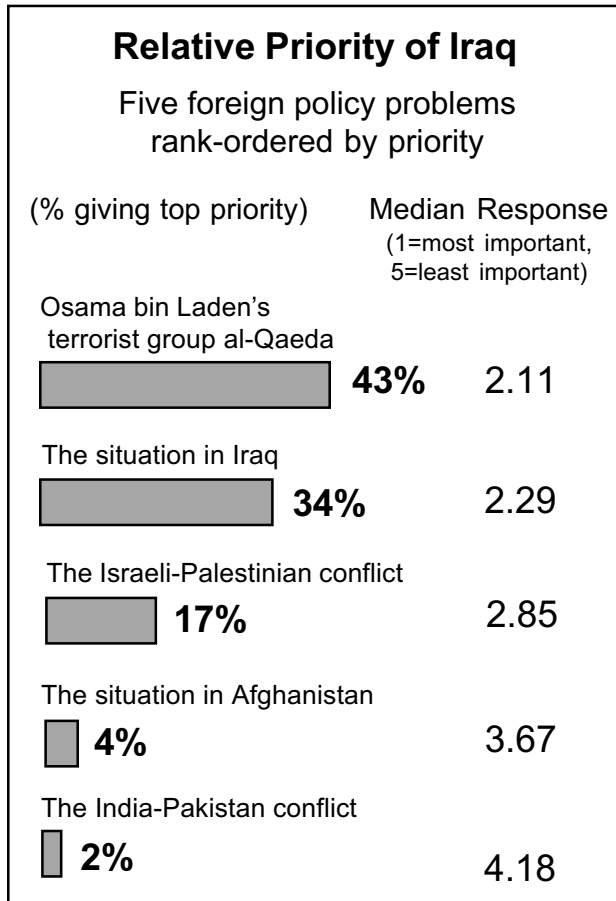
Thus it appears that if disarmament efforts through inspections fail, Americans are more likely to shift their preference to supporting military action rather than relying on deterrence through threat of massive retaliation, even though doing so would make them vulnerable to attacks on American cities.

*Relative Priority of Conflict With Iraq*

**4** The problem of Iraq is seen as a high priority, but not as high a priority as dealing with Osama bin Laden’s terrorist group al-Qaeda. Just under half say it is very urgent to resolve the problem of Iraq.

Respondents were presented five foreign policy problems and asked to rank order them. The highest ranked problem was Osama bin Laden’s terrorist group al-Qaeda, which was given the top ranking by 43% and a mean ranking of 2.11. The situation in Iraq was in second position, with 34% giving it a top ranking. Its mean ranking was 2.29. Lower on the list were the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation in Afghanistan, and the India-Pakistan conflict.

Asked, "How urgent do you think it is to resolve the problem of Iraq?" Just under half (47%) rated it as very urgent. Thirty-nine percent rated it as somewhat urgent, while small percentages rated it as not too urgent (10%) or not urgent at all (3%).



## 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-digital (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).

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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.

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**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, Phil Warf and Monica Wolford designed the questionnaire and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Network's Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaire and managed the fielding of the poll

Trent Perrotto, Monika Kacinskiene, Roman Gershkovich and Batsuuri Haltar contributed to the production of the report.

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

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