

**PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL POLICY ATTITUDES**

---

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

**Americans on the  
War on Terrorism**

---

**A STUDY OF US PUBLIC ATTITUDES**

November 13, 2001

Principal Investigator  
Steven Kull

## **Board of Advisors**

### **I.M. Destler**

University of Maryland

### **Gloria Duffy**

Commonwealth Club

### **Bill Frenzel**

Brookings Institution

### **Alexander George**

Stanford University

### **Alan Kay**

Americans Talk  
Issues Foundation

### **Catherine Kelleher**

Aspen Institute

### **Anthony Lake**

Georgetown University

### **Benjamin Page**

Northwestern University

### **Robert Shapiro**

Columbia University

### **Fred Steeper**

Market Strategies

### **Daniel Yankelovich**

Public Agenda Foundation

**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.

**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.

## **Acknowledgments**

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Phil Warf and Monica Wolford designed the questionnaire and wrote the analysis.

I.M. Destler, Alan Kay, Robert Shapiro, William Durch and Steven Dimoff contributed to the development of the questionnaire.

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

Communication Center, Inc., carried out the telephone interviewing. Scientific Telephone Samples supplied the random-digit sample.

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

## Overview

The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks had an extraordinary effect on the American public. Nearly all Americans followed the story closely, and most reported having wept about it. Overwhelming majorities closed ranks behind the President and supported his call for a war on terrorism, including the option of using military force. In subsequent weeks, including after the onset of military strikes against the Taliban government, support persisted.

Nonetheless, there are numerous questions about public attitudes on the war on terrorism that remain unanswered. These questions include:

- whether the public supports the administration's current reluctance to include other countries in the military operation in Afghanistan, despite the offers of numerous countries to participate. Administration representatives have explained this reluctance as based on its resistance to having to make joint decisions with these other countries over the conduct of the war.
- how the public feels about engaging in a broader war on terrorism, beyond targeting those who were behind the September 11 attacks.
- in the event that bin Laden is captured, where Americans would like to see him tried; in a federal court in New York or in an International Criminal Tribunal.
- whether in light of the dramatic costs, Americans might have greater reservations about US international engagement, or if recent events have galvanized a greater resolve to be engaged.
- how Americans would feel about the possibility of invading Iraq, as some government officials reportedly have been advocating, and if so, whether Americans would support doing so concurrent with the war in Afghanistan or without the support and participation of allies.
- whether Americans are having second thoughts about US Israel-Palestinian policy, given that it appears to be a focus of concern for terrorists; how they feel about President Bush's newly announced support for a Palestinian state, as well as other proposals for the region; and what kind of role they would like to see the US play in the Middle East.
- what kind of role they would like to see the UN play in the war on terrorism, given the public's general support for the UN, as well as the potential for feeling that the UN could become too powerful.
- how Americans feel about non-military approaches to addressing terrorism, such as efforts to build goodwill toward the US through humanitarian and development assistance.
- whether Americans feel that there is a fundamental and inevitable clash of cultures between Islam and the West.

To address these questions, PIPA undertook a study that included a comprehensive review of existing polling data from other organizations (this can be found at [www.americans-world.org](http://www.americans-world.org)); focus groups in Frederick, Maryland, and Raleigh, North Carolina; and a nationwide poll of 602 randomly selected American adults (margin of error: plus or minus 4%).

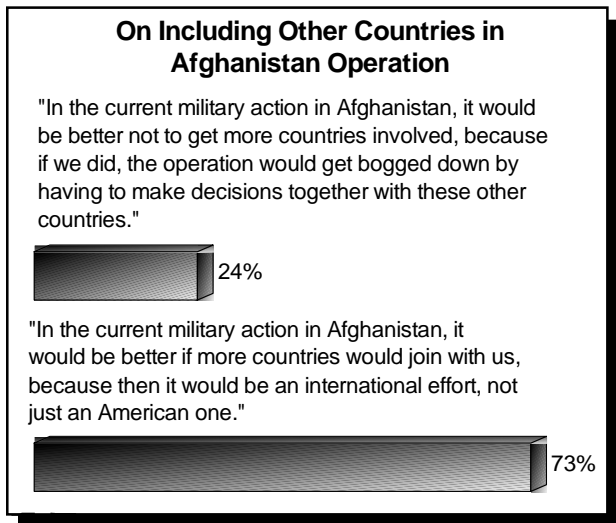
## Findings

### *Overwhelming Support for More Multilateralism in War on Terrorism*

**1** An overwhelming majority supports taking military action against the perpetrators of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack. However, contrary to current US policy, a very strong majority favors including other countries' forces in the current action in Afghanistan, even though the US would be constrained by the need to make joint decisions. A near-unanimous majority feels that it is important for the war on terrorism to be seen as an international effort, not just a US effort. A broader war on terrorism (beyond targeting those behind the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks) does not receive majority support if it is a unilateral effort, while a multilateral effort gets overwhelming support. If bin Laden is captured, a plurality favors having him tried, not in a federal court in New York, but in an International Criminal Tribunal.

As numerous other polls have also found, an overwhelming majority of Americans supports the current military action against the perpetrators of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack. An extraordinarily high 91% said they favor (82% strongly) "using American military force against terrorist groups that were behind the September 11 attacks."

However, contrary to current US policy, a very strong majority favors including other countries' forces in the current military action in Afghanistan. Respondents asked which one of two statements was closer to their position. As shown below, by a three-to-one margin respondents chose the one in favor of including other countries.



An overwhelming majority feels that it is important for the war on terrorism to be seen as a multilateral effort. A near-unanimous 95% said that it is important (82% very important) "for the war on terrorism to be seen by the world as an effort of many countries working together, not just a US effort."

Based on a series of questions, it appears that solid majority support for a broader war on terrorism—beyond efforts against those behind the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks—is only possible as part of a multilateral effort, while support for a multilateral broader war would be overwhelming.

Several polls have found that support for a broader war is not overwhelming. In a September 21 CNN/USA Today poll, just 53% felt "the U.S. should mount a long-term war to defeat global terrorist networks," while 33% favored focusing on "taking military action to punish the specific terrorist groups" behind September 11. On October 7 NBC News asked respondents to choose between two statements on what "should be the objective of a campaign against terrorist organizations":

Statement A—Limiting the campaign to defeating, capturing, or killing Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network.

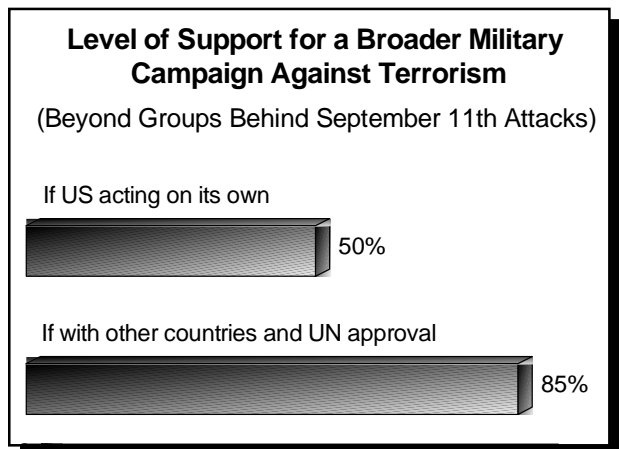
Statement B—Broadening the campaign to defeating, capturing, or killing members of major international terrorist organizations, even if they were not involved in this specific attack.

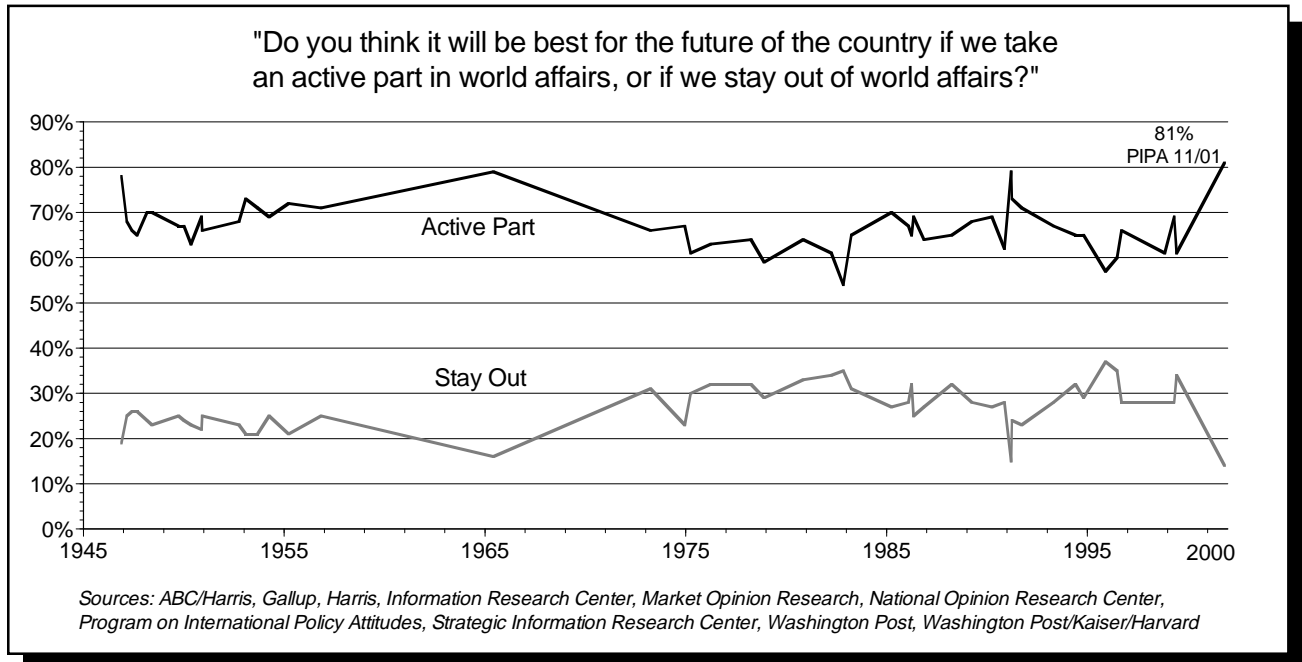
NBC found 61% in favor of the broader campaign and 32% for the more limited one.

In the current poll PIPA repeated the NBC question, and found 67% support for the broader option and 28% for the more limited one. However, follow-on questions revealed that this support was potentially weaker or stronger, depending on whether this broader war would be conducted multilaterally.

Those who said they favored the option of a broader campaign were asked, "In this broader campaign, if other countries are not willing to participate in a military action, and the UN does not approve it, do you think the US should or should not take military action on its own?" Only 75% of this group said the US should, thus lowering the percentage in support of the broader campaign to a plurality of 50% ready to support a unilateral effort.

Those who favored a limited campaign, or said they did not know how to answer in the original question, were asked the follow-on question: "What if the broader campaign were limited to military actions conducted together with other countries and with UN approval?" In this case 69% of this group said they would then support a broader campaign, thus raising the percentage in support of a broader campaign to an overwhelming 85%.





Consistent with this support for a multilateral emphasis in the war on terrorism, if Osama Bin Laden were captured, a plurality of 49% would even favor trying him in an international criminal tribunal, as compared to 44% who would prefer to try him in a federal court in New York.

**Support for International Engagement at High**

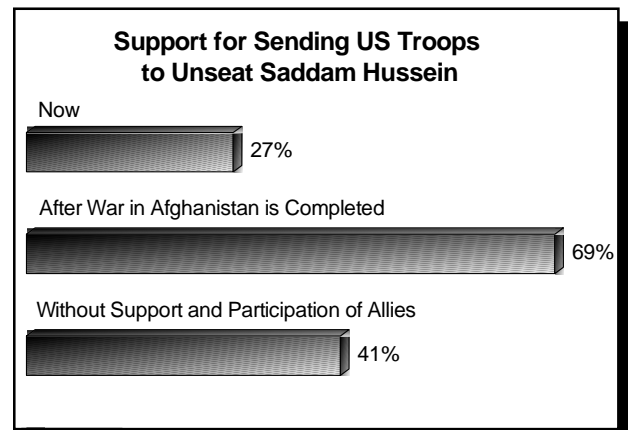
**2** Support for general US engagement in world affairs, while always a strong majority, has become an overwhelming majority, reaching the highest level since the end of World War II.

Since immediately after World War II, numerous polling organizations have regularly asked the question, "Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs, or if we stay out of world affairs?" In the current poll, an overwhelming 81% supported the US taking an active part, while 14% endorsed the more isolationist position of staying out. This is the highest percentage in favor of playing an active part ever recorded in response to this question. The only time in recent years when support for engagement reached similar heights was during the Gulf War, when 79% took this position. If a goal of those behind the September 11th attacks was to generate public support for US disengagement, the plan clearly backfired.

**Support Soft for Invading Iraq**

**3** Only a small minority supports sending US troops into Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein at this time. A majority would favor doing so after the war in Afghanistan is completed, but only with the support and participation of allies in the region and Europe.

Various polls before and after September 11 have found majority support for using military force against Iraq. However, a series of questions in the current poll reveals that only a small minority (27%) supports sending in US troops at this time. A majority (69%) would favor doing so after the war in Afghanistan is completed, but this majority public support is contingent on the support and participation of allies in the region and in Europe.



Only 41% would support invading Iraq without such support and participation.

The first question in the series asked, "Do you favor or oppose sending US troops into Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein's government?" Sixty-one percent said that they did favor doing so, while 29% were opposed, and 4% volunteered the answer that they would favor doing so, but not while the war in Afghanistan was still going. Those who said they favored sending in US troops were then asked, "Would you favor the US sending its troops into Iraq at the same time it is fighting in Afghanistan, or do you think this should be done later?" Of these only 45%, or 27% of the total sample, said they would favor doing so at this time.

Those who said in the first question that they opposed sending US troops into Iraq, or did not know, were given the follow-on question, "Would you favor sending US troops into Iraq after the fighting in Afghanistan is over...?" Twelve percent of this group, or 4% of the total sample, said they would. When this 4% is added to all those who said in the first question that they would favor invading Iraq, it yields a majority of 69% saying that they would at least favor doing so later.

However, this support for taking such action is contingent on the support and participation of allies. Those who favored taking such action, either now or later, were asked whether they would favor doing so "if our allies in the region and in Europe were opposed and refused to participate." Just 41% of the total sample said they would still favor doing so.

### *US Israel-Palestinian Policy*

**4** The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks have, if anything, slightly increased US public support for Israel. However, just as before September 11<sup>th</sup>, a strong majority favors the US playing an even-handed role in the Israel-Palestinian conflict—something that most Americans think the US is not doing. With President Bush's endorsement, an overwhelming majority now favors an independent Palestinian state. A slight majority supports making Jerusalem the capital of both Palestine and Israel and giving it an international police force. If the Palestinians agree to a peace plan, a major-

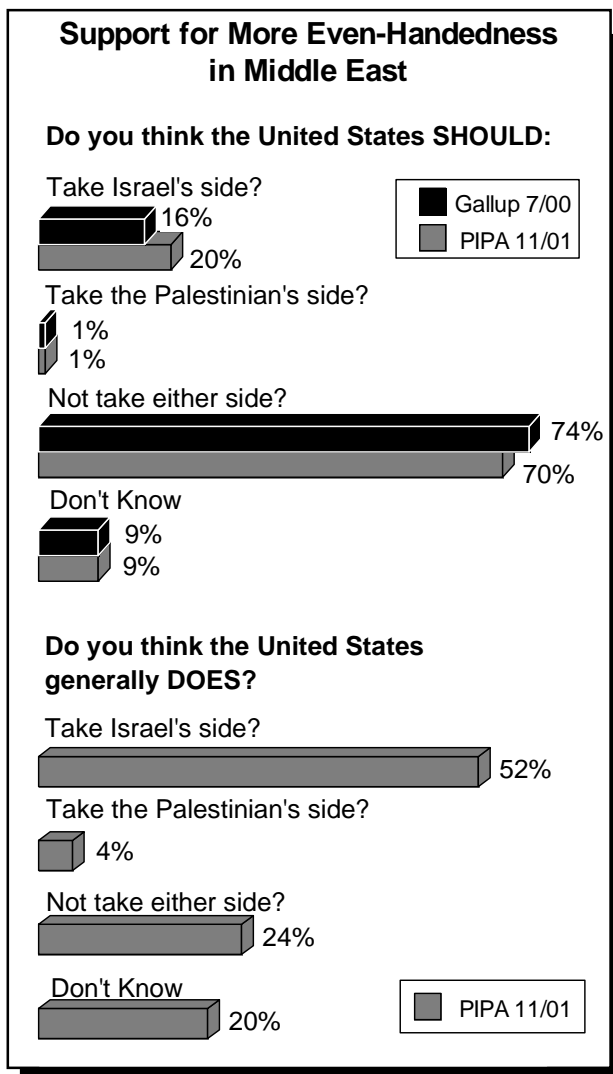
**ity believes that aid to Palestine should be equalized with aid to Israel. In response to the terrorist crisis, a strong majority supports putting greater pressure on Israel and the Palestinians to reduce the level of their conflict.**

If one of the goals of the perpetrators of September 11<sup>th</sup> was to diminish US public support for Israel, their plans clearly failed. Gallup asked in July 2000, "In the Middle East conflict, do you think the United States should take Israel's side, take the Palestinians' side, or not take either side?" At that time just 1% favored taking the Palestinians' side, while 16% favored taking Israel's side. In the current poll, when this question was repeated, support for Israel actually rose a bit to 20%, while support for the Palestinians did not budge. Other polls have also found slight increases in support for Israel.

However, the dominant public attitude, both before and after September 11<sup>th</sup>, has been that the US should "take neither side" in the Israel-Palestinian conflict—70% in the current poll, as compared to 74% in July 2000. In the current poll, a strong majority of 63% also said that as a way to try to reduce the problem of terrorism, they favored "making a major effort to be seen as even-handed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Apparently this is not an endorsement of current policy. Only 24% said they felt that the US does not take either side in the Middle East conflict, while 52% said that the US takes Israel's side. Just 4% felt the US takes the Palestinians' side. (Unfortunately, this is the first time this question has been asked, so there is no comparable data from before September 11<sup>th</sup>.) Responses to this question were highly affected by respondents' education level. Among those with high school education or less 42% thought the US takes Israel's side, while among those with an advanced degree 80% believed the US takes Israel's side.

Consistent with this theme of even-handedness, an overwhelming majority supports the idea of a Palestinian state, provided it recognizes Israel's right to exist. Respondents were asked, "President Bush has said that there ought to be a Palestinian state, provided that it recognizes the right of Israel to ex-



ist. Do you support or do you oppose this position?" Seventy-seven percent said that they do support this position, with just 13% percent opposed. Clearly President Bush's endorsement of the idea has had a significant effect on the level of support. Earlier polls and even recent ones that do not mention the President's endorsement have never found percentages supporting a Palestinian state higher than the low 50s.

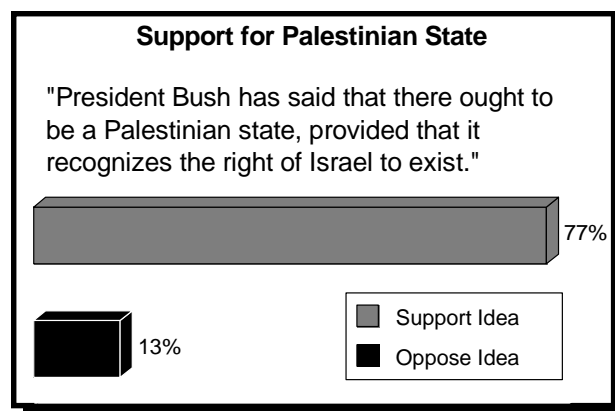
Another sign of even-handedness is that a slight majority supports the idea that the Israelis and Palestinians should share Jerusalem. Fifty-one percent supported, and just 34% opposed, the idea that "Jerusalem become an international city that would be policed by an international police force, so that they can each have their capitals in different parts of the city."

Perhaps the most dramatic sign of the support for even-handedness is the strong majority support for possibly equalizing the amount of aid given to the Palestinians and Israel. Asked, "If the Palestinians come to terms with Israel in a peace agreement, do you think the US should equalize the amount of aid it gives to Israel and to the Palestinians, or should the US continue to give Israel more?" a strong 62% favored equalizing the aid, while 23% favored giving Israel more.

### Putting Pressure on Israel and the Palestinians

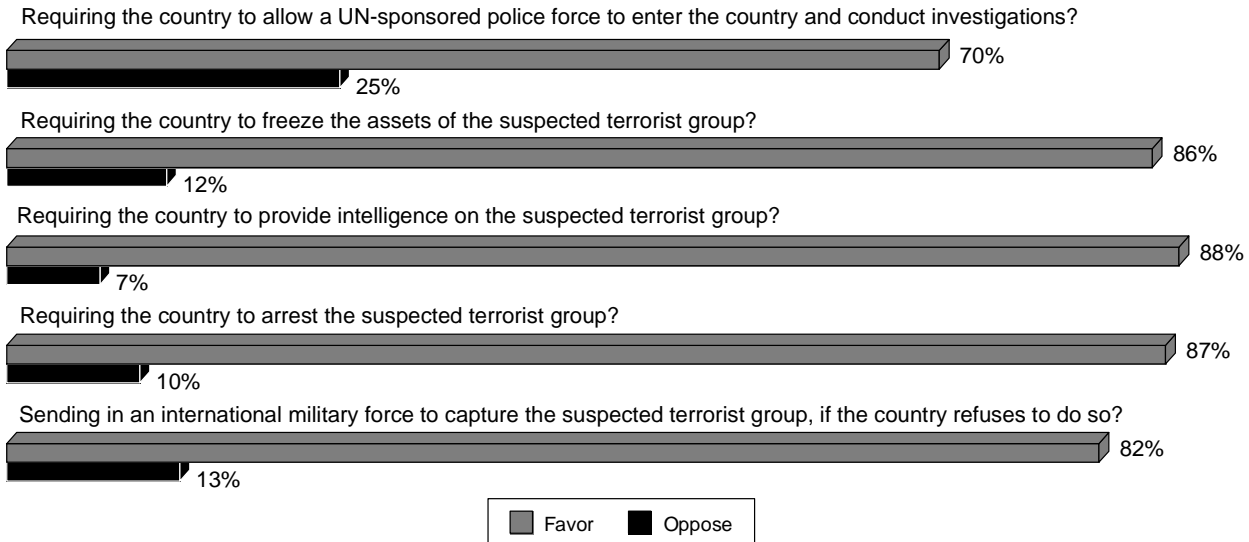
A strong majority favors the US playing an active role in the Middle East by putting pressure on Israel and the Palestinians to reduce their level of conflict. Respondents were presented a series of options for trying to reduce terrorism, one of them being "putting greater pressure on both Israel and the Palestinians to reduce their level of conflict." A strong 74% said they supported this approach (49% strongly), while 18% were opposed (12% strongly). Also, when respondents were asked "Given America's current struggle with terrorism, do you think it is reasonable or not reasonable for the US to expect Israel to make a special effort to reduce its level of conflict with the Palestinians?" 64% said that it was reasonable, while 25% said it was not.

While there are no past polls that ask questions with identical wording, it appears that this support for the US exerting pressure is at a new high. In May 1998, Gallup found that 49% felt that the US had not put "enough pressure" on Israel "to make compromises," while 54% felt that way about the Palestinians. By the summer of 2001, however, support for an active American role in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute had declined significantly, per-



**Support for Stronger UN Role**

"In the event that the UN has evidence that there is an international terrorist group operating in a country, there are a number of things that the UN Security Council might consider doing. I'm going to read some of these options, and for each one I would like to know if you think this is the kind of thing the UN Security Council should be able to do, or if you think this would make it too powerful."



haps taking a cue from the new administration of George W. Bush. In an August 2001 Gallup survey, just 32% felt the US "should take an active role in attempting to find a diplomatic solution to the violence in the Middle East," while 65% believed the US "should not take an active role." Also, when asked by the New York Times in April 1998 whether "the United States has the right to try to influence Israeli policy" because of the amount of aid the US gives Israel, the public was divided, with 47% saying that it did and 45% saying that it did not.

Consistent with the present study's findings showing support for an active US role, the Los Angeles Times conducted a poll two days after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and found 62% supporting the US role as "mediator between Israel and the Palestinians," with 26% disapproving.

**Overwhelming Support for Much Stronger UN Role in War on Terrorism**

**5** An overwhelming majority favors having the UN play a much stronger role than it has in the fight against terrorism, by strengthening international laws on terrorism and the means to

**enforce them. Overwhelming majorities support the UN Security Council being able to require UN members to allow a UN-sponsored police force to enter countries and conduct investigations, to freeze the assets of suspected terrorist groups, to provide intelligence on them, to arrest them, and if the member country refuses to do so, to send in an international military force to capture suspected terrorists.**

An overwhelming majority favors a much stronger role for the United Nations in the fight against terrorism. Ninety percent said that they favored (71% strongly) "working through the UN to strengthen international laws against terrorism and to make sure UN members cooperate in enforcing them."

Perhaps most striking, strong to overwhelming majorities favor the UN Security Council having extensive powers to make demands on member states or to intervene in their territory in the effort to track down terrorist groups. While the UN Charter has language that gives the UN Security Council broad powers, in practice exercising such powers would break new ground.



### *Building Goodwill Through Aid*

**6** In the effort to address the problem of terrorism, support for building goodwill toward the US through providing humanitarian aid and development assistance to poor countries is very strong— about as strong as support for military approaches.

When respondents were asked to consider various “possible approaches for trying to reduce the problem of terrorism,” efforts related to providing aid received extremely high levels of support. An overwhelming 86% favored (57% strongly) “building goodwill toward the US by providing food and medical assistance to people in poor countries.” Nearly as many, 80% (40% strongly) favored “building goodwill toward the US by helping poor countries develop their economies.”

Interestingly, this level of support was comparable to that of military approaches. The approach of “using American military force against terrorist groups that were behind the September 11 attacks” received higher levels of support, with 91% endorsing it (82% strongly). However, “using American military force against groups in other countries that have committed international terrorist acts, but were not behind the September 11 attacks” received lower levels of support, with 77% favoring it (52% strongly).

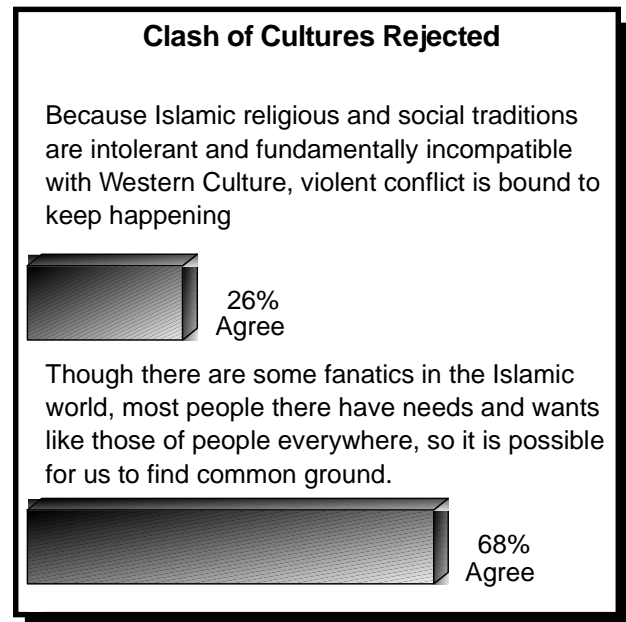
Other non-military methods, discussed above, also received high marks. “Working through the UN to strengthen international laws against terrorism and to make sure UN members cooperate in enforcing them” was favored by 90% (71% strongly). Support for efforts focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a bit lower, though still strong. Seventy-four percent (49% strongly) favored “putting greater pressure on both Israel and the Palestinians to reduce their level of conflict” and 63% (34% strongly) favored “making a major effort to be seen as even-handed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

### *Clash of Cultures?*

**7** By an almost three-to-one margin, the public rejects the idea that Islamic and Western cultures are fundamentally incompatible and that violent conflict is inevitable.

The widespread idea that violent conflict between Islam and the West is inevitable due to the underlying incompatibility of cultures is not a popular idea among Americans. When respondents were presented arguments in favor and in opposition to the idea of a clash or culture

Only 26% chose the position in support of the idea of a clash of cultures, while 68% chose the one that rejected it.



This is consistent with an October 2001 Pew poll, in which only 28% said that “the terrorist attacks are the start of a major conflict between the people of America and Europe versus the people of Islam,” while 63% said that what is occurring is “only a conflict with a small, radical group.” Also, an October 2001 Gallup poll found that 66% said they have a favorable view of “the people of the Islamic faith.”