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--Media Release--

Three Out of Four Americans Favor UN Military Intervention in Darfur

Six in Ten Say US Should Contribute Troops

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College Park, MD: As the UN Security Council on Tuesday, January 25 hears the report of a special commission of inquiry on whether genocide has occurred in Darfur, a PIPA-Knowledge Networks poll conducted December 21-27 finds that 74% of Americans say that the UN should “step in with military force and stop the genocide in Darfur.” Only 17% are opposed. Ten percent did not answer.

If other members of the UN are willing to contribute troops to such a military operation, 60% say that the US should be willing to contribute troops as well. Only 1 in 3 are opposed. These are some of the key findings of the poll of 801 Americans (margin of error +/- 3.5%).

These attitudes represent a bipartisan consensus. A UN military intervention is supported by 83% of Republicans and 71% of Democrats (independents: 70%). Contributing US troops is supported by 62% of Republicans and 64% of Democrats (independents 58%).

It should be noted that these questions did describe what is occurring in Darfur as genocide (as has the US government). However, when PIPA/KN did not refer to the operation as genocide, support for contributing US troops to a UN operation in Darfur was nearly as high. In a July 2004 PIPA/KN poll, 57% said the US should be willing to contribute one quarter of the troops for a UN military force to enforce the ceasefire agreement in Darfur.

In the same poll, respondents were posed the question of whether genocide is occurring in Darfur—the question now being addressed the UN Security Council. Fifty-six percent chose the position that genocide was in fact taking place, while only 24% chose the option that it was “not really genocide” but “a civil war between the government and people in a resistant region that happen to be of a different ethnic group.” Twenty percent did not take a position.

If the UN Security Council determines that genocide is occurring in Darfur this will likely have a strong effect on American attitudes. Asked in July what should occur if the UN were to determine that genocide is occurring in Darfur, 69% thought that “then the UN, including the US, should decide to act to stop the genocide even if it requires military force.”

However, the December poll found low levels of confidence that the international community will step in. When asked whether they think “the international community, including the US,” will actually “step in with military force and stop the genocide in Darfur,” the public is divided but leans toward pessimism, with 42% thinking this will take place and 47% thinking it will not. Republicans divide 45% to 47%, and Democrats 41% to 50%.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA comments, “It appears that the regrets about failing to act in response to the Rwanda genocide may be influencing Americans. Even with the US stretched in Iraq, a majority of Americans say they are willing to contribute troops to an operation in Darfur. Moreover, this support is bipartisan, in sharp contrast to the support for the operation in Iraq which is sharply divided along party lines.”

Kull adds, “With the signing of the peace agreement in the North-South conflict in Sudan, this might contribute to a greater momentum to resolve the conflict in Darfur.”

Support for the principle of contributing US troops to deal with humanitarian crises and especially genocide was also found in the July 2004 poll by Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Posed a number of possible uses of US troops 72% supported using them to “deal with humanitarian crises.” Support for using troops “to stop a government from committing genocide and killing large numbers of its own people” was even higher at 75%.

PIPA/KN’s July poll also found strong support for the use of economic and diplomatic measures. Sixty-eight percent thought “the UN should put pressure on the Sudanese government to stop the militias, by deciding that all UN members should freeze the assets of Sudanese officials and ban them from traveling to other countries.”

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

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