



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

-- Media Release --

Support for Iraq Invasion Still Soft, Even if Iraq Blocks Access

Majority Says Decision Should be Made By UN, But If Bush Proceeds Majority Would Support President

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Contact: Steven Kull 202-232-7500

College Park, MD: A new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll finds that, even if Iraq blocks access for UN inspectors, only 47% of the public would at this point favor a UN-sponsored invasion of Iraq. The remainder divides between those (24%) who would want to use military power to force Iraq to give inspectors access (an idea sometimes called 'coercive inspections') and those (24%) who would support continuing diplomatic measures.

"The public is not in a spring-action mode," says Steven Kull, director of PIPA. "While Americans are largely committed to solving the problem of Iraq, many want to look at all their options before leaping into an invasion."

The poll of 1,106 Americans was conducted over November 19-December 1, 2002.

Despite the unanimous passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1441, demanding that Iraq allow in the UN inspectors, only a small minority is ready to for the US to take action without further UN approval. "The administration clearly gets points for going to the UN," says Steven Kull. "But this does not mean the administration is completely off the hook. Most Americans still want this to be a multilateral effort."

A majority (55%) continues to take the position that "the US should only invade Iraq with UN approval and the support of its allies," while only 28% say "the US should invade Iraq even if we have to go it alone." Thirteen percent say the US should not invade Iraq at all.

These percentages have changed only modestly from when the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations asked this same question last June—the percentage ready to support unilateral action has risen 8 percentage points, while the percentage insisting on UN approval has dropped 10 percentage points.

Similarly, a November 22-24 Gallup poll asked respondents to “suppose Iraq does not comply with the U.N. resolution.” In that case, only 33% said the US should “begin military action immediately,” while 64% said the US should “go back to the United Nations for authorization to take military action against Iraq.”

But what if the President proceeds without UN approval? Respondents were asked to imagine a scenario in which the US and other countries of the UN Security Council disagree about whether the Iraq is adequately cooperating with the UN inspectors and President Bush, nonetheless, decides for the US to proceed with an invasion of Iraq.

Only 43% said they would agree with such a decision. However, among those who disagreed, about half said they would nonetheless “support the President.” Thus, combined with those who said they would agree with the decision, it appears that a total of 70% would support the President. Kull says, “History suggests that, in the actual event as well, we would see this ‘rally-round-the-President’ effect.”

If the US proceeds to take military action, a majority (57%) says that the explicit goal of the operation should be to remove Saddam Hussein from power, not just disarmament, even though overwhelming majorities believe that this would likely lead Iraq to use weapons of mass destruction against targets in the US (75%) and to transfer weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups to use against the US (87%).

The problem of Iraq is seen as a high priority, but not as high a priority as dealing with al-Qaeda. Despite the prominence of Iraq in the news, the percentage rating it as the top priority concern has fallen from 34% in late September to 29% today, while the percentage rating al-Qaeda as the top priority has risen from 43% to 50%.

The questionnaire was designed by the 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.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling and social science research firm in Menlo Park, California, 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 go to <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp>.

The full results of the poll can be found on the PIPA website (<http://www.pipa.org>) or a report can be obtained by contacting PIPA at 202-232-7500.