

# **THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL**

## **THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

--Media Release--

### **Public Believes Many Countries Still Secretly Pursuing WMD**

#### **Favors Addressing Problem by Enhanced Arms Control Efforts Rather Than Military Threats**

#### **Willing to Accept Intrusive Inspections and Limits on US Military Capabilities as Part of Arms Control Agreements**

#### **Opposes Increased Defense Spending**

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College Park, MD: Despite recent progress in Pakistan, Libya and Iran in stemming the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the median American estimates that there are still approximately 10 countries with secret programs for developing weapons of mass destruction, according to a new PIPA/Knowledge Networks poll conducted in conjunction with the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland.

To address the problem, the majority of Americans favor enhanced arms control efforts rather than a reliance on the threat of military force. Asked what is “the more important lesson to be learned from the recent discovery that scientists in Pakistan have transferred nuclear technology to Iran, North Korea, and Libya,” 73% said, “the US should seek to strengthen the international effort to stop the spread of nuclear weapons by giving international agencies more power to conduct intrusive inspections,” while just 23% said, the US should realize such efforts are ineffective and “put more emphasis on the US threat to use military force against countries that try to develop nuclear weapons.”

Perhaps most striking is that the goal of promoting arms control can take precedence over the goal of capturing Osama Bin Laden. Sixty-four percent favored putting more pressure on Pakistan to allow in international arms control inspectors even when presented the argument that this might result in Pakistan not cooperating in the hunt for al Qaeda.

Strong majorities favored taking a number of new steps in support of multilateral efforts to stem proliferation. A near unanimous 92% favored giving international inspectors the

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power to examine biological research laboratories in all countries, including the US, to determine if they are abiding by the treaty against biological weapons, and 74% incorrectly assumed that the US favors inspections, too. When a separate sample was told the US argument that “If international inspectors can look into US biological research laboratories they may get information that they can use for their country’s advantage in commercial biotechnology and biodefense,” support was lower, but still strong at 76%.

Eighty-seven percent favored US participation in the treaty banning all nuclear weapons testing (CTBT) and 56% incorrectly assume that the US is already a member. When presented several arguments for and against participation, including the concern that it would limit development of US nuclear weapons, support was almost unchanged at 84%.

A majority (59%) is not aware that the US made a commitment to seek the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons as part of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. However 84% think doing so was a good idea and 86% think the US should make greater efforts toward that goal. Even without this information 61% favor pursuing the goal of elimination of nuclear weapons, though two-thirds recognize that this is not the goal of the Bush administration.

In general, Americans show a readiness to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in US security policy. Fifty-seven percent favor the US reaffirming its commitment to not use nuclear weapons against countries that do not have nuclear weapons, as a way of encouraging them not to acquire or build nuclear weapons. Despite heightened concerns about a chemical or biological attack, 84% oppose seeking to deter such an attack by threatening nuclear retaliation. Eighty-one percent oppose the US ever using nuclear weapons first. Eighty-two percent favor the idea of the US and other nuclear powers agreeing to reduce the number of nuclear weapons on high alert.

When asked whether it is necessary to develop new types of nuclear weapons, 65% said that it is not. However when a separate sample was presented a series of arguments for and against developing new nuclear weapons, some arguments in favor were found convincing and afterwards the percentage saying that it was not necessary was lower-- 59%. The most convincing argument, though, was a con argument that said, “The immense destructiveness of nuclear weapons makes it critical that the US discourage other countries from developing them. The US would be setting a bad example if it were to abandon its restraint and start developing new types of nuclear weapons,” which 63% found convincing.

Americans show a readiness to make deep cuts in the number of US nuclear weapons. Asked how many nuclear weapons the US has ready to be used on short notice the median estimate was 200—far below the actual number of approximately 6,000 active strategic warheads, more than 2,000 of which are on high alert. Nonetheless, asked

“How many nuclear weapons do you think the US needs to make sure other countries are deterred from attacking it,” the median response was a mere 100. Also, while the Bush administration has proposed only dismantling nuclear weapons that come under US-Russian arms reduction agreements, 72% reject this reversible approach in favor of completely destroying them.

On the biological weapons front, 68% opposed the idea of inventing new infectious diseases as part of biodefense research--rejecting the pro argument that “it is always possible that terrorists will also develop them and we need to be ready with new vaccines and antidotes against them,” in favor of the argument that if the US does, “then other countries are more likely to do so and there is too great a danger that the new infectious diseases will be released into the environment by accident or malicious intent.”

Consistent with the support for deemphasizing the role of military threats in dealing with the threat of proliferation, support for increased defense spending has slipped to its lowest point in a decade. Just 16% said the US spends too little on defense, while the percentage saying that it spends too much—41%—was the same as the percentage saying the present level is about right. The last time the percentage saying the US spends too little has been so low was in January 1992 (NBC/Wall Street Journal).

More broadly, Americans show strong support for a multilateral approach to US security interests. Asked to choose between two statements, only 16% chose the one that said, “The US should use its power to make the world be the way that best serves US interests and values.” Rather, 83% chose the one that said, “The US should coordinate its power together with other countries according to shared ideas of what is best for the world as a whole.” Similarly, 79% rejected the argument that “Since the US is the most powerful nation in the world, we should go our own way in international matters, not worrying too much about whether other countries agree with us or not”—historically a very high percentage for this trendline question that has been asked for decades.

The poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,311 respondents from March 16-22. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.8%-4.5%, depending on whether the question was administered to all or part of the sample. A full report and the questionnaire can be found at [www.pipa.org](http://www.pipa.org).

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](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

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