



Americans Oppose New Nuclear Weapons *Want Reduced Role for U.S. Nuclear Forces*

A 2004 poll found that most Americans do not support the development of new nuclear weapons by the United States and strongly oppose the idea of the United States ever using a nuclear weapon first. As Congress debates funding for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP), these results are particularly relevant. Findings from the poll, which was conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), include:

A substantial majority of Americans would oppose funding for the RNEP, or “bunker buster.”

- 65% of Americans say there is no need for the United States to develop new types of nuclear weapons.
- 63% found convincing the argument that the United States would be setting a bad example by starting to develop new types of nuclear weapons.

A large majority opposes using nuclear weapons for anything other than a deterrent to prevent other countries from using nuclear weapons.

- 81% oppose the United States ever using nuclear weapons first.
- 84% oppose the United States using threats of nuclear retaliation to attempt to deter an attack on the United States with chemical or biological weapons.
- 57% percent support the United States reaffirming a commitment to not use nuclear weapons against countries that do not have nuclear weapons, as a way of encouraging those countries not to acquire or build nuclear weapons.

Americans have a clear preference for a much smaller U.S. nuclear arsenal.

- 100 – The median answer for the number of nuclear weapons Americans believe are needed to provide deterrence.
- 6,000 – The approximate number of U.S. nuclear weapons, with roughly 2,000 of these maintained on high alert status, ready to be launched in a matter of minutes.

Based on this poll, a substantial majority of Americans would oppose research into the RNEP, a new nuclear “bunker buster” supported by the Bush administration. These findings also show the U.S. public’s distaste for nuclear weapons in general, with a clear preference for a small nuclear arsenal designed only as a deterrent to prevent other countries from using nuclear weapons.

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These poll results are from “Public Believes Many Countries Still Secretly Pursuing WMD,” a media release published by Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) and Knowledge Networks. The poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,311 respondents from March 16-22, 2004. 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. The release can be found at: http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/WMD/WMDpress_04_15_04.pdf and the full poll at: http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/WMD/WMDreport_04_15_04.pdf

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