

WORLDPUBLICOPINION.ORG

Poll Finds Widespread International Opposition to US Bases in Persian Gulf

US Approach to Muslim World Given Poor Grades by Many Nations

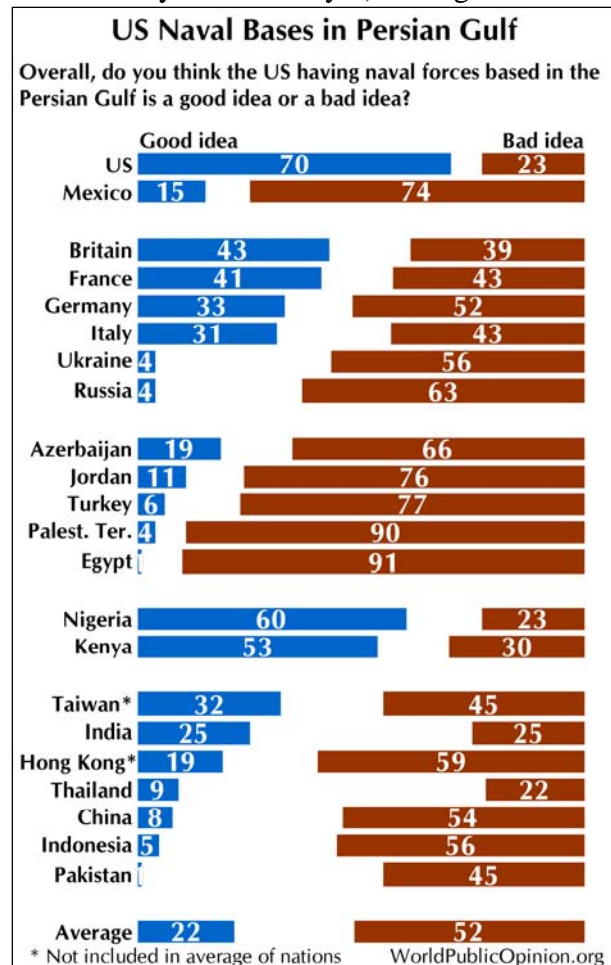
A WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 21 nations around the world finds widespread opposition to the United States having naval forces based in the Persian Gulf. Most also believe that most people in the Persian Gulf region oppose such bases.

In general, America's approach to the Middle East and the Muslim world gets poor grades around the world. The United States is widely viewed as disrespectful of the Muslim world. Its support for democracy in the Muslim world is seen as limited to cases where the government is cooperative with the US. More publics than not believe that US is not really seeking the creation of a viable Palestinian state.

The poll of 21,740 respondents was conducted between July 15 and October 24, 2008 by WorldPublicOpinion.org in 21 nations (in Iran: January 13-February 9). Margins of error range from approximately +/-2 to 4 percent. Most of the world's largest nations were included (China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Russia), as well as several nations in the Middle East (Egypt, Iran, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, Azerbaijan, and Turkey). Also included were Mexico, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Kenya, Pakistan, Thailand, and Ukraine, as were publics in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Not all questions were asked in all nations.

US Naval Forces in Gulf

Asked whether the US having naval forces based in the Persian Gulf is a good idea or a bad idea, 14 of 20 nations say it is a bad idea, three say it is a good idea, and three are divided. On average across all publics polled, just 22 percent say it is a good idea for the US to have naval bases in the Gulf, while 52 percent say it is a bad idea.



Majorities opposing US naval bases in the Gulf are highest in the Middle East, led by Egypt (91%) and the Palestinian Territories (90%) and followed by Turkey (77%), Jordan (76%) and Azerbaijan (66%). However, this view is also fairly strong outside the region—in Mexico (74%), Russia (63%), Ukraine (56%), Indonesia (56%) and China (54%).

The only countries where majorities say US naval bases in the Gulf are a good idea are the United States (70%), Nigeria (60%—including 54% of Nigerian Muslims), and Kenya (53%).

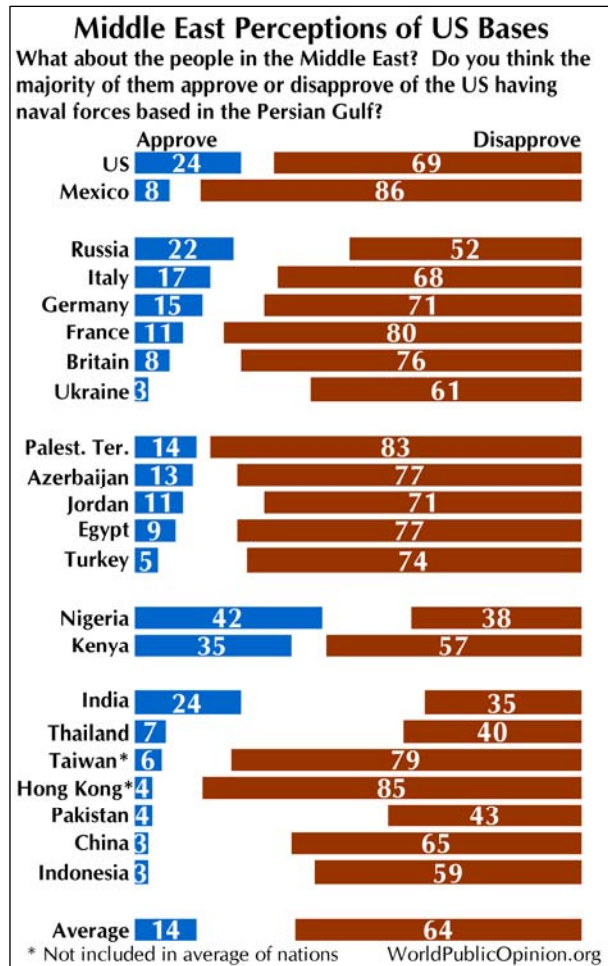
Even in Europe views lean negative. US bases are opposed by a majority in Germany (52%) and a plurality in Italy (43% to 31%). Publics are divided on the issue in Britain (43% positive, 39% negative) and France (41% positive, 43% negative).

Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org comments, “What is striking is that a major purpose of US naval forces in the Persian Gulf is to ensure the flow of oil to US allies, but in no case do the publics in these countries express majority support for the US having forces there.”

The United States itself only receives about 10 percent of its oil supply from the Persian Gulf.

In all but one nation most people think the people of the Middle East disapprove of US naval bases in the Gulf—a correct perception based on the six nations polled in this study. On average across all nations, 64 percent believe Middle Eastern publics disapprove and only 14 percent believe they approve.

This belief is most widespread in Mexico (86%), the Palestinian Territories (83%), France (80%), and Egypt and Azerbaijan (both 77%). It is also widely held in America and Europe, with 76 percent in Britain, 71 percent in Germany, 69 percent in the United States, 68 percent in Italy, 61 percent in Ukraine, and 52 percent in Russia thinking so. The only public to differ is Nigeria, where a narrow 42-to-38 percent plurality believes a Middle Eastern majority approves of US bases.

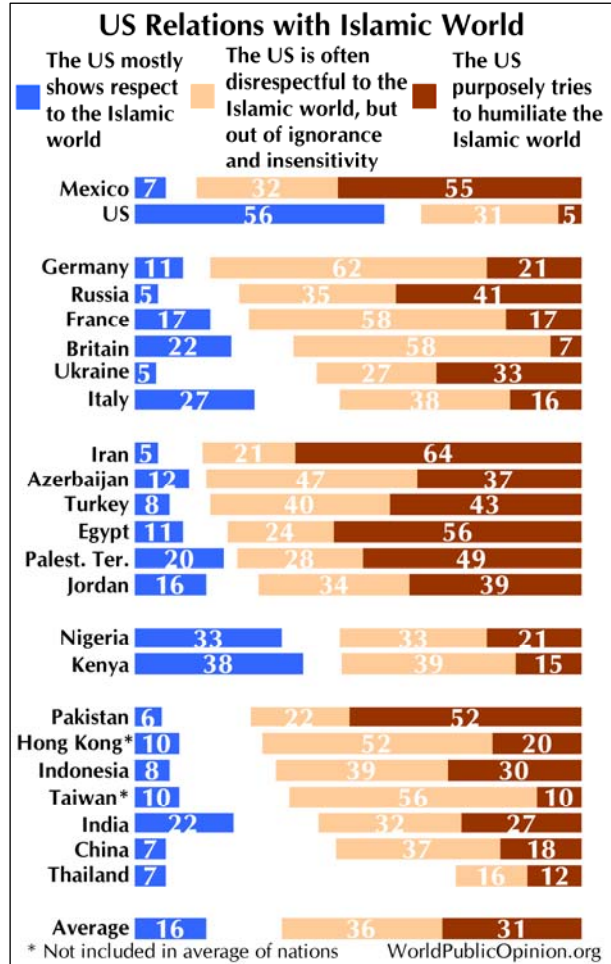


US Relations with Muslim World

Negative views of the US military presence in the Gulf are part of a broader negative view of US relations with the Muslim world.

Most worldwide think the United States is disrespectful of the Muslim world, though only a minority thinks this is done purposefully. Given three options, only 16 percent on average across 21 nations say “the US mostly shows respect to the Islamic world.” Sixty-seven percent think the US is disrespectful, but 36 percent say this is “out of ignorance and insensitivity,” while 31 percent say “the US purposely tries to humiliate the Islamic world.” Only Americans have a majority saying the US mostly shows respect to the Islamic world (56%).

The view that “the US purposely tries to humiliate the Islamic world” is endorsed by majorities in three Islamic countries—Iran (64%), Egypt (56%), and Pakistan (52%)—and in Mexico (55%), as well as by large numbers of Palestinians (49%), Turks (43%) and Jordanians (39%).



In three countries, majorities think the United States is disrespectful, but out of ignorance and insensitivity (Germany 62%, France and Britain both 58%) as does a plurality in China (37%). A majority of people in Taiwan (56%) and Hong Kong (52%) also hold this view. Other nations have more mixed views.

US Support for Democracy

In both Muslim and Western countries there is a widespread perception that the United States does not support democracy per se in Muslim countries; most think it only supports democracy if the government is cooperative with the US. This question was asked to seven Muslim publics and five Western publics. On average across twelve nations, only 15 percent think the US favors democracy in Muslim countries whether or not it receives cooperation. A 50 percent plurality thinks instead that “the US favors democracy in Muslim countries, but only if the government is cooperative with the US.” Another 22 percent think simply that “the US opposes democracy in Muslim countries.”

In seven of the twelve nations majorities or pluralities think the United States favors democracy in Muslim countries only if the government is cooperative: Germany (70%), France (63%), Britain (59%), Azerbaijan (59%), Italy (53%), Turkey (49%) and Indonesia (44%).

In no nation does a majority think the US favors democracy unconditionally, though in the United States views are divided between this view (44%) and the view that the US is conditionally supportive (43%).

In three Middle Eastern nations—Jordan, Egypt, and the Palestinian Territories—views are roughly divided between the views that the US simply opposes democracy in Muslim countries and that it supports it conditionally.

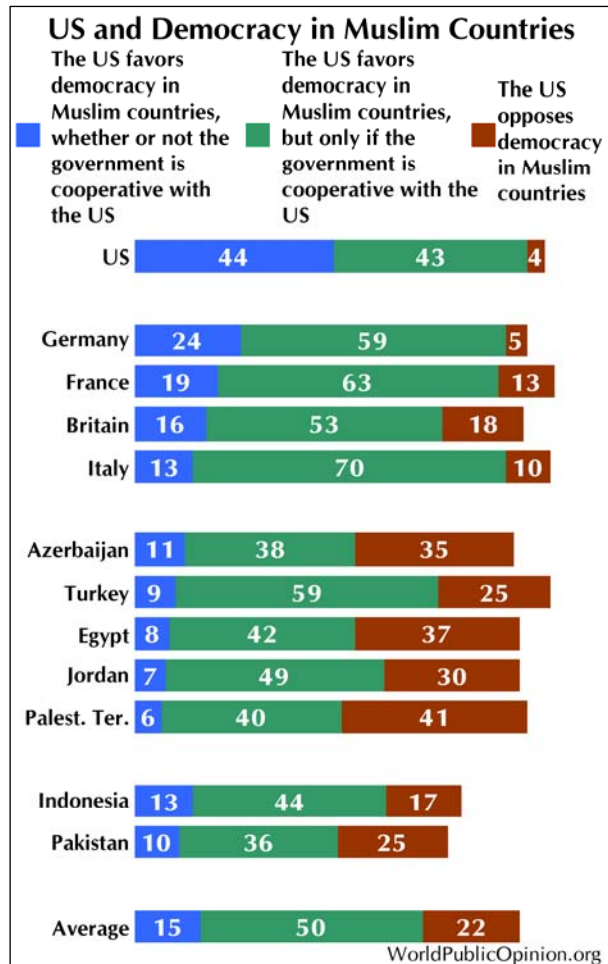
US Support for Palestinian State

More publics than not think that the US is not really trying to bring about a Palestinian state. Across 20 nations polled, 11 say it is not a US goal “to see the creation of an independent and economically viable Palestinian state,” while 9 nations (including the US) think it is a goal. On average across all publics, 44 percent think this is not a US goal while 36 percent think that it is.

Interestingly, a majority of Palestinians themselves say that a Palestinian state is a US goal (59%).

However, other nations in the region think the US does not have this goal: Egypt (87%), Azerbaijan (79%), Jordan (63%), and Turkey (52%). In addition, majorities in Russia (60%) and Mexico (56%) share this view, as well as pluralities in Germany (50% to 41%), Indonesia (48% to 24%), Ukraine (48% to 12%), France (47% to 41%), and China (34% to 20%).

In four publics, majorities think a Palestinian state is a US goal: among Americans (64%), Nigerians (64%), Kenyans (62%), and Palestinians (59%). Pluralities agree in Italy (50% to 36%), Britain (49% to 35%), India (46% to 26%), Pakistan (36% to 22%), and Thailand (33% to 17%) as well as in Taiwan (48% to 26%). Views are divided in Hong Kong.



Note: In 18 of the 21 nations interviews were conducted in the framework of WorldPublicOpinion.org's collaborative research project, involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland.

In three countries—Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia—interviews were conducted in the framework of the START consortium at the University of Maryland. The START data included here are part of a much larger study which will be released at a later time. The START research was supported by the United States Department of Homeland Security through the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), grant number N00140510629. However, any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect views of the US Department of Homeland Security.