

EMBARGOED UNTIL 02:00 GMT 10 May 2007



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World Publics Favor New Powers for the UN

- **Multinational Poll Shows Most Publics Support Standing UN Peacekeeping Force, UN Regulation of International Arms Trade**
- **Comprehensive Analysis of US Opinion Finds Americans Back Stronger UN Despite Dissatisfaction with Its Performance**

For release: 10 May 2007, 02:00 GMT

Contact:

Steven Kull, 202-232-7500

Christopher Whitney, 312-451-1040

Publics around the world favor dramatic steps to strengthen the United Nations, including giving it the power to have its own standing peacekeeping force, to regulate the international arms trade and to investigate human rights abuses.

Large majorities believe the United Nations Security Council should have the right to authorize military force to prevent nuclear proliferation, genocide and terrorism. However support is not as robust among the publics polled for accepting UN decisions that go against their countries' preferences.

These are some of the findings from a survey conducted by [The Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#) and [WorldPublicOpinion.org](#), in cooperation with polling organizations around the world. Respondents were interviewed in countries that represent 56 percent of the world's population: China, India, the United States, Russia, France, Thailand, Ukraine, Poland, Iran, Mexico, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Argentina, Peru, Armenia and Israel, plus the Palestinian territories. Not all questions were asked in all countries.

WorldPublicOpinion.org is also releasing a [comprehensive analysis](#) of US public opinion surveys. Over the last few years though Americans have expressed dissatisfaction with UN performance, they have nonetheless consistently favored a stronger United Nations. Americans also prefer that the United Nations—not the United States—take the lead in dealing with international problems, especially when military force is involved.

The multinational survey found that 12 of 14 publics polled believe there should be a standing peacekeeping force “selected, trained and commanded” by the United Nations (64% on average). Some of the highest support is found in Peru (77%), France (74%), and the United States (72%).

Support for “giving the UN the power to regulate the international arms trade” is nearly as robust (55% on average). Majorities or pluralities in 12 countries support this idea, especially France (77%), South Korea (75%), Israel (60%) and the United States (60%).

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Giving the UN authority “to investigate violations of human rights” receives very high levels of support in France (92%), the United States (75%), Peru (75%), and South Korea (74%). This idea is favored by majorities or pluralities in the 13 of the 14 countries surveyed for an average of 64 percent overall.

“Despite well-publicized disagreements over the role of the United Nations in world affairs, this survey clearly shows that international public opinion has coalesced around the notion that the UN should be the vehicle for conflict resolution and international cooperation on a wide variety of pressing problems,” said Christopher Whitney, executive director for studies at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Steven Kull, editor of WorldPublicOpinion.org, adds, “While leaders of nation states may be wary of giving the United Nations more power it is clear that publics around the world are comfortable with the idea of a stronger UN,” Kull said.

Even the idea of giving the UN authority to fund its activities through a tax on the international sale of arms or oil is supported by nine out of 14 countries polled (on average 46% support, 37% oppose). Only 45 percent of Americans support this tax, however, while 50 percent are opposed.

The poll also finds support for giving the UN Security Council the right to authorize the use of military force to address a wide range of problems. Using military force to “defend a country that has been attacked” and to “stop a country from supporting terrorist groups” is favored by majorities in all countries polled.

Very large majorities also agree that the Security Council has the right to use force to stop genocide. Majorities or pluralities in all 12 countries polled on this issue go further and say the United Nations has the *responsibility* to use force to stop massive human rights abuses. Interestingly, the Chinese (76%) show the strongest support for this idea, followed by Americans (74%) and Palestinians (69%).

Support is more modest for using collective force to stop nuclear proliferation. Nonetheless, in eight of 11 countries polled, the most common view is that the UN should have the right to use force to prevent countries from acquiring nuclear weapons.

There is less enthusiasm about submitting to UN decisions if this means going along with policies that are not a country’s first choice. Ten of the 16 publics polled say their government should abide by such decisions. But only four countries have a majority agreeing with this (including Americans), while six have pluralities. Four are opposed and two are divided.

For details, please see www.thechicagocouncil.org or www.worldpublicopinion.org. WorldPublicOpinion.org is a publication of the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland.