
2-to-1 Majority of Americans Favor Obama Meeting with Iranian Leaders, but only 1-in-3 Favor Sending More U.S. Troops to Afghanistan

New Financial Times/Harris Poll examines U.S. and European attitudes to key foreign policy issues

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – January 23, 2009 – Most Americans feel very positively about President Obama, but that does not mean they support everything he says he plans to do. A new **Financial Times/Harris Poll** finds that they support his positions on some foreign policy issues but not on others. The poll, which covers not just the United States but also the five largest European countries, measures public attitudes on some of the key foreign policy issues facing the new president.

A 46% to 30% plurality of Americans is opposed to the president's plan to send more U.S. troops to Afghanistan. On the other hand, a 65% to 35% majority of Americans supports meeting with Iranian leaders, something he has said he would consider. The poll also finds Americans to be split on continuing the embargo on Cuba: 35% favor continuing it, 22% oppose it, while fully 42% neither support nor oppose it.

These are some of the findings of a **Financial Times/Harris Poll** conducted online by Harris Interactive among a total of 6,299 adults (1,000 or more in each country), aged 16-64, within France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, and the United States and adults (aged 18-64) in Italy between 8 and 15 January 2009.

In Europe, there is no public consensus on whether to send more of their troops. Substantial numbers of people (60% in Germany, 57% in Britain, 53% in Italy, 53% in France, and 45% in Spain) are opposed to sending more of their troops to Afghanistan. And these numbers are probably influenced by the extraordinary popularity of the new president ("European Reactions to President Obama Overwhelmingly Positive." January 22, 2009), with many more people now wanting their countries to support President Obama and the United States than wanted to support President Bush's policies.

Other interesting findings include:

- In Europe, majorities (61% in Britain, 51% in France) or pluralities (50% in Germany, 43% in Italy and 32% in Spain) are "neutral" on whether or not President Obama should continue the U.S. embargo on Cuba. Most Europeans with opinions on the subject think the U.S. should end the embargo.
- The international financial and economic crisis is by far the dominant issue that people think President Obama should address. By wide margins, many more people (from 58% in the U.S. to 35% in Germany) mention this crisis than mention any other issue on his agenda.
- Most people in the United States (77%), Britain (77%) and France (71%) think Britain and France should keep their seats on the U.S. Security Council. Most people in Italy (70%) and Spain (58%), and 49% in Germany, think they should give up their seats and be replaced by a single European Union seat.

- Very large majorities of adult Europeans, from 84% in Italy to 68% in Germany, agree with the 65% of Americans who think President Obama should meet with Iranian leaders to discuss Iran’s production of nuclear weapons.
- Majorities in all the five European countries, from 75% in France to 58% in Britain think President Obama should place less emphasis on the “war on terror” than did President Bush. Americans are split 45% to 45% on this.

So What?

Many Europeans indicate by their replies to this survey that they are hoping that President Obama’s foreign policies will be different from President Bush’s policies, for example, on talking to Iran or ending the embargo on Cuba. President Obama’s astronomical popularity in Europe will make it easier for him to request and receive support from Europe. However, this popularity does not mean that Europeans give, or will give, his policies unconditional support.

**TABLE 1
MORE US TROOPS INTO AFGHANISTAN**

“Should President Obama send more US troops into Afghanistan this year?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	United States
	%
Yes	30
No	46
Not sure	24

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 2
EU TROOPS TO AFGHANISTAN**

“If President Obama calls on European Union states to increase significantly the number of troops they deploy in Afghanistan, how should your country respond?”

Base: All EU adults

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%
It should send more troops as a gesture of solidarity with President Obama, irrespective of conditions within Afghanistan	5	4	5	6	5
It should send more troops but only if warranted by conditions within Afghanistan	38	44	42	50	35
It should not send more troops as a gesture of defiance toward President Obama, irrespective of conditions within Afghanistan	7	9	5	19	8
It should not send more troops under any circumstances	50	44	48	26	52

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 3**INTERNATIONAL PRIORITY FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA**

“On January 20th Barack Obama will begin his Presidency. Which one of the following issues do you believe should be at the top of President Obama’s list of priorities in international policy?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Dealing with the international financial crisis	58	41	40	44	46	35
Dealing with the threat from international terrorism	17	14	6	11	11	10
Improving the situation in Iraq	7	6	8	4	4	7
Stopping Iran from making a nuclear bomb	6	6	4	6	2	5
Tackling the threat of climate change	4	12	13	7	7	23
Ensuring there is an immediate and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians	3	11	20	20	21	11
Improving the situation in Afghanistan	3	5	2	2	1	3
Trying to end poverty in Africa	2	3	6	7	7	3
Establishing a better relationship with Russia	1	3	1	1	1	4

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 4**OBAMA MEETING WITH IRANIAN LEADERS**

“The major countries of the West want Iran to stop producing a nuclear weapon. Do you believe that President Obama should personally meet leading figures in the Iranian government to try and persuade them to stop doing this?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, it would help if he were to meet with Iranian leaders in person to discuss the issue	65	76	83	84	75	68
No, it would not help if he were to meet with Iranian leaders in person to discuss the issue	35	24	17	16	25	32

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 5**EMPHASIS ON WAR ON TERROR FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA**

"The Bush presidency was dominated by what the former President called the "war on terror," specifically the threat posed by al Qaeda and international terrorism. How much emphasis should President Obama now place on the threat posed by al Qaeda and international terrorism?"

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
He should place this at the top of his list of priorities in international policy	45	24	17	25	26	13
He should place less emphasis on it than former President Bush but remain wary	45	58	75	55	59	71
He should place very little emphasis on it	8	10	6	8	8	8
He should place no emphasis on it	3	8	2	12	7	8

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 6**OBAMA AND RUSSIA**

"How far should President Obama go to establish a better working relationship with Russia's leaders?"

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
He should go as far as he can making many major concessions if required	14	16	8	18	13	7
He should tread very carefully, possibly making a few major concessions	60	68	73	68	67	65
He should make no major concessions at all	26	15	19	14	20	28

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 7**BRITISH, FRENCH OR EU SEAT ON UN SECURITY COUNCIL**

"As you may be aware, for the last 60 years, the United Nations Security Council has had five permanent members – Britain, France, Russia, China and the U.S. Do you believe the time has now come for Britain and France to give up their seats, replacing them with a single European Union seat?"

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, they should give up their seats, replacing them with a single EU seat	23	23	29	70	58	49
No, they should keep their seats	77	77	71	30	42	51

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 8
CONTINUING EMBARGO ON CUBA

“How much would you support or oppose President Obama continuing the embargo on Cuba?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
SUPPORT (NET)	35	11	9	12	18	8
Very much support	20	4	3	5	7	3
Somewhat support	15	7	6	6	11	5
Neutral	42	61	51	43	32	50
OPPOSE (NET)	22	28	40	45	50	42
Somewhat oppose	12	14	21	22	24	25
Very much oppose	10	13	20	23	26	17

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Methodology

This **FT/Harris Poll** was conducted online by Harris Interactive among a total of 6,299 adults (aged 16-64) within France (1,021), Germany (1,107), Great Britain (1,071), Spain (1,007) and the United States (1,066), and adults (aged 18-64) in Italy (1,027) between 8 and 15 January 2009. Figures for age, sex, education, region and Internet usage were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult populations of the respective countries. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls and of the British Polling Council.

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