

Americans Not Confident Pakistan Can Defeat the Taliban or Secure Nuclear Weapons

Americans also believe it is likely there will be a Pakistani government which supports Al Qaeda in the future

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – July 2, 2009 – The country of Pakistan is a bit of an enigma to most Americans – is it a friend and ally or is it an enemy? The Taliban and other extremists have their roots in Pakistan and it is a part of the nuclear club, with the United States committing billions of dollars in aid to the country. Yet Americans are concerned about the Pakistani government's ability to keep their nuclear weapons safe as well as its ability to defeat the Taliban.

These are some of the results of a new **BBC World News America/The Harris Poll** of 2,274 adults surveyed online between June 12 and 16, 2009.

Confidence in Government

More than three in five Americans (63%) say they are not confident that the government of Pakistan will be able to defeat the Taliban and other extremists in its country with just one in five (21%) confident. Almost three-quarters of those aged 45-54 (72%) and 55 and older (73%) say they are not confident.

There is also the nuclear issue and over half of Americans (55%) say that, even though the government of Pakistan says the nuclear arsenal is completely safe and secure, Americans believe it is not safe. Over one-quarter of U.S. adults (28%) say they believe the arsenal is safe, but only 3% say it is very safe.

The Role of the United States

Over the past few years, the United States has committed billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan. Over half of Americans (54%) would prefer to see the majority of this money spent primarily for military and security needs for the war against the Taliban. Just under half (46%) would prefer to see the money primarily spent for humanitarian aid to assist the citizens of Pakistan. Younger adults, those aged 18-34, are more closely divided, but are of the opposite viewpoint as just over half (51%) would like to see the money used primarily for humanitarian aid while 49% would like to see it used for military aid.

Besides money, the United States conducts airstrikes within the borders of Pakistan when it has intelligence that suspected terrorists may be training or have set up a camp. Occasionally, the intelligence is incorrect and Pakistani citizens are killed and/or injured in these attacks. Knowing this, half of Americans (51%) believe that, in order to stop terrorism, the United States should continue to have the right to carry out these attacks as long as the intelligence is deemed credible. One-quarter of U.S. adults (24%) believe if there is any chance that civilians might be killed and/or injured, these airstrikes should not happen at all and 26% are not at all sure.

Pakistani Government Supporting Al Qaeda

Looking at the future of Pakistan, over half of Americans (55%) say that, in the next few years, it is likely there will be a government in Pakistan that will support Al Qaeda in its efforts to launch terrorist attacks against the United States. One-quarter (24%) say it is not likely while 21% are not at all sure.

So What?

Americans are consistently wary of the government of Pakistan and, even though the United States has committed billions of dollars in aid, there is a sense that the Taliban and even Al Qaeda will not be thwarted in the future. The U.S. government needs to work closely with the Pakistani government to show Americans that they are an ally and friend. Even more importantly, the Pakistani government needs to do more to stop the extremists in their country — to prove to United States citizens that when it comes to fighting terrorism, Pakistan will be by the side of the U.S., not against us.

TABLE 1
CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

“How confident, if at all, are you that the government of Pakistan will be able to defeat the Taliban and other extremists in its country?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%
CONFIDENT (NET)	21	29	20	15	19
Very confident	2	5	1	1	1
Somewhat confident	19	24	19	14	17
NOT CONFIDENT (NET)	63	45	67	72	73
Not that confident	38	32	38	42	42
Not at all confident	25	13	30	30	31
Not at all sure	15	26	13	12	8

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

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TABLE 2
SAFETY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN PAKISTAN

“Pakistan is a country that has nuclear weapons. The government of Pakistan says that the nuclear arsenal is completely safe and secure. How safe do you believe Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal is right now?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Region			
		East	Midwest	South	West
	%	%	%	%	%
SAFE (NET)	28	32	33	23	29
Very safe	3	4	3	1	3
Somewhat safe	26	28	29	21	26
NOT SAFE (NET)	55	54	51	59	54
Not that safe	35	36	33	35	37
Not at all safe	20	18	19	24	17
Not at all sure	17	15	16	19	17

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

TABLE 3
WHERE U.S. AID SHOULD GO IN PAKISTAN

“The United States has committed billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan. Out of the following options, where would you prefer to see the majority of the money spent?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%
Primarily for military and security needs for the war against the Taliban	54	49	54	55	58
Primarily for humanitarian aid to assist the citizens of Pakistan	46	51	46	45	42

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

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TABLE 4
U.S. MILITARY AIRSTRIKES IN PAKISTAN

“Currently, the United States conducts airstrikes within the borders of Pakistan when it has intelligence that suspected terrorists may be training or have set up a camp. On occasion, the intelligence is not correct and Pakistani civilians are killed and/or injured in these attacks. Based on the information, which of the following statements is closest to your opinion of the situation?”
Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%
In order to stop terrorism, the United States should continue to have the right to carry out these attacks as long as the intelligence is deemed credible.	51	39	50	54	60
If there is any chance that civilians might be killed and/or injured, these airstrikes should not happen at all.	24	32	27	19	16
Not at all sure	26	29	22	27	24

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

TABLE 5
LIKELIHOOD OF A PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT WHICH SUPPORTS AL QAEDA

“How likely do you think it is that at some point in the next few years there will be a government in Pakistan that supports Al Qaeda in its efforts to launch terrorist attacks against the U.S.?”
Base: All adults

	Total	Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%
LIKELY (NET)	55	51	59	53	58
Very likely	17	15	18	16	18
Somewhat likely	38	35	41	37	39
NOT LIKELY (NET)	24	23	21	25	27
Not that likely	20	18	17	19	25
Not at all likely	4	5	4	6	3
Not at all sure	21	26	20	22	15

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

Methodology

This **BBC World News America/The Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States June 12 and 16, 2009 among 2,274 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also 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 population. 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.

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