

**THE MIDDLE-EAST CRISIS AND
BRITISH PUBLIC OPINION**

By Robert M. Worcester

Early polls conducted in Britain since the 2nd of August when Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's troops occupied Kuwait found widespread support for the British, American, and world community's response — to the delight of Foreign Office Minister William Waldegrave, who "strongly welcomed the evidence that the British public are thoroughly behind the actions the UN, the US and ourselves have taken." Since then, British public support has declined a bit, but a solid majority still (October 20-22) say they are satisfied with the way the British Government is handling the crisis.

A Gallup poll in the Sunday Telegraph in mid-August showed 83% backing Mrs. Thatcher's decision to send troops to defend against an Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia; only 13% disapproved. This is a higher level of support than during the Falklands crisis, when 78% favored the sending of the Task Force. The decision to impose a military blockade received 89% support. Fewer than half, however (42%), favored bombing military and civilian targets, and 83% said they were against American or British use of nuclear weapons even if Iraq used chemical weapons. An ICM (successor to Marplan in Britain) poll for the Sunday Correspondent a few days later found that 77% believed Mrs. Thatcher's reaction to the crisis was "about right;" 15% even said it was not strong enough. Only 9% labeled it too firm.

Strong support was then measured by ICM for different objectives for which British forces might be used in the Gulf crisis: 87% backing for protecting the West's oil supplies; 86% for the defense of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and 84% for restoring Kuwait's independence; 69% for the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq; and 66% for the defense of Israel if attacked. In the event that force was used, 78% of the British were in favor of firing at ships seeking to break the blockade, 75% for

bombing military targets in Iraq from the air, and 74% for committing ground troops to invade Iraq and Kuwait.

The most recent soundings, shown in the first box, indicate there has been only a modest decline in satisfaction with both the British and American governments' handling of the crisis. Note the remarkable consistency in support for both governments' actions. As the British build-up has proceeded, the sense that "we're doing enough now" has risen.

Question: Which of these statements comes closest to your view? (Survey by NOP)

	August	September	October
British forces should not be in the Gulf region	12	12	13
It is right to have British forces in the Gulf, but we have sent enough	34	40	49
Britain should send more forces if necessary	52	42	37

The NOP poll for the Independent also showed that by more than two to one (65% to 24%) the British would support Britain's taking "part in a United Nation's military force to attack Iraq," though by nearly two to one (58% to 30%) they would oppose use of military force if the United Nations does not approve. A Gallup poll published at the end of September found that over two-thirds of the British (67%) think George Bush is a good US president, with only 16% saying he is not. These figures are hardly changed from August (68% good, 13% not good). The last time Gallup asked this question before the Gulf crisis (April 1990), exactly half said they thought Bush was a good president, 18% that he was not. The British public has become more aware of Bush since the Gulf crisis began — and they like what they see.

No "Falkland Factor"

Despite the generally high support given the government for its policies in the Middle East, the crisis is unlikely to prove another "Falklands Factor" for Mrs. Thatcher, no matter what its final outcome. This is so especially because to the British people, the Falklanders were "British," kith and kin; thus coming to their aid was an emotional necessity. If shooting does begin in the Middle East, the Government's backing is likely to be weaker than it was in the case of the Falklands. While there appeared briefly a "Gulf Factor" in the rise in Mrs. Thatcher's satisfaction ratings, they've now fallen back to the 29% satisfied, 66% dissatisfied level of last spring in

Question: Thinking about the situation in the Gulf region, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the British (American) government is handling the crisis? (Survey by NOP)

	August	September	October
Satisfied	62 (61)	65 (63)	54 (54)
Dissatisfied	26 (25)	23 (24)	32 (29)
Don't know	12 (14)	12 (13)	14 (17)

the MORI/Sunday Times poll of late October. Still, this MORI survey found just over half (51%) of the population saying the Conservatives had the best policies for dealing with the crisis, compared to only 15% favoring Labor's approach.

Britain is Different

A survey of surveys across Europe, by the British daily, the Independent, shows that the extent of British support for a strong military response to Iraq is unusual. Public opinion in several continental European countries, while disapproving of Saddam Hussein's actions, is opposed to sending troops to the potential conflict in the Gulf. The most vigorous rejection comes from Turkey, where 72% said in a recent survey that Turkey should not join any military action; 18% would back its joining a multinational force. In West Germany, whose constitution prohibits the country's taking military action in the crisis region, 54% rejected the suggestion that Germany's responsibilities for world peace meant that German troops should be sent; just 33% favored sending troops.

In Spain, 54% opposed direct intervention by Spanish troops and 48% opposed the government's dispatch last month of three warships to enforce the embargo. Nearly a third of those questioned said Spain should keep out of the crisis entirely. In France, 56% opposed any compromise with Saddam Hussein, but 63% opposed putting the lives of hostages at risk by bombing strategic targets. In Japan, like Germany under a constitutional ban on committing troops abroad, 83% opposed military involvement.

According to Eurobarometer findings published the last weekend in October from fieldwork done throughout the 12 member countries of the European Community, 60% favor the formation of a joint European defense force, while 30% don't think this would be a good idea. Fifty-six percent say that EC membership has played an important part in their government's response to the Gulf crisis. Although many people believe that the EC should play a major role in resolving the conflict, the United Nations, followed by the United States, are considered best equipped to deal with the situation.

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