

ABC News/Washington Post poll: March 14, 2011

Support for a Libyan No-Fly Zone Comes with Questions about the Future

More than half of Americans support U.S. participation in creating a no-fly zone over Libya, but support for unilateral U.S. military action is lower – and a new ABC News/Washington Post poll finds substantial skepticism about the aims and outcome of political unrest across the region.

Seven in 10 in the national survey express uncertainty that protesters in the Middle East and North Africa are committed to democracy. And sizable numbers see negative impacts of the unrest on U.S. political and economic interests and anti-terrorism efforts alike.

Whatever their compunctions, 56 percent support having U.S. military aircraft participate in efforts to keep Libya's air force from attacking rebel-held areas. France and Great Britain have been pushing for a U.N.-enforced no-fly zone, the Arab League endorsed it Saturday and foreign ministers of the G8 industrialized nations were expected to discuss it in Paris today.

Public support, however, is hardly solid. When people are asked if the United States itself should create a no-fly zone, rather than participate in one, support declines to 49 percent, with nearly as many opposed. And support drops further, by a quarter, given the prospect of bombing runs on Libyan anti-aircraft positions and continuous air patrols – efforts U.S. military officials have said would be needed.

Support for the United States creating a no-fly zone peaks among Republicans (61 percent) and conservatives (54 percent), falling to fewer than half of Democrats, liberals and independents. Support for participation in such an effort, by contrast, is similar across partisan and ideological lines.

QUESTIONS – There are broader questions about the unrest in the region. Most fundamentally, just 20 percent of Americans see the protests as plainly pro-democratic; 71 percent instead think demonstrators want new governments, but not necessarily democratic ones.

Moreover, 58 percent think that in the long run the outcome of the protests will hurt rather than help U.S. political and economic interests in the region, a view possibly informed by soaring gasoline prices. A plurality, 49 percent, also thinks the unrest will hurt the ability of the United States to fight terrorist groups based in these countries. Just 29 and 33 percent, respectively, think U.S. political and economic interests, or anti-terrorism efforts, will be helped.

The perceived aim of the protesters informs these views. Among Americans who think they seek democratic governments, 55 percent expect that U.S. anti-terrorism efforts will be improved in the long run, and 49 percent see help for U.S. political and economic interests. Among those who question the protesters' commitment to democracy, fewer than three in 10 say the same.

Additionally, support for a no-fly zone in Libya is higher among people who think protests in the region ultimately will help, rather than hurt, U.S. anti-terrorism efforts.

President Obama, for his part, gets split ratings for handling the situation in the region overall – 45 percent approve, 44 percent disapprove, largely along partisan lines. On Libya particularly, an identical 45 percent approve, while 36 percent disapprove, with more undecided.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 10-13, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,005 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. The results from the full survey have a 3.5-point error margin. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, with sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

Full results follow.

1, 2a-b, 3-26, 32-36 held for release.

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling [ITEM]? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

3/13/11 - Summary Table*

	Approve			Disapprove			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
c. The political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa	45	18	26	44	17	27	12
d. The situation in Libya	45	24	22	34	14	20	21

*Half samples

27. Thinking about the unrest in the Middle East and North Africa – do you think the demonstrators in these countries are mainly interested in establishing democratic governments, or mainly interested in establishing new governments but not necessarily democratic ones?

	Democratic governments	New governments, not necessarily democratic	No opinion
3/13/11	20	71	9

28. In the long run, do you think the outcome of the unrest in the Middle East and North Africa will help or hurt [ITEM]?

3/13/11 - Summary Table*

	Help	Hurt	No effect (vol.)	No opinion
b. the ability of the U.S. to fight terrorist groups based in these countries	33	49	6	12

*Half samples

In Libya, there's fighting between anti-government protesters and forces loyal to Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi (MOA-mar ka-DAFI)...

29. (HALF SAMPLE) Would you support or oppose using U.S. military aircraft to create a no-fly zone in Libya in order to keep Gaddafi's air force from attacking rebel-held areas?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
3/13/11	49	45	6

30. (HALF SAMPLE) You may have heard about the idea that U.S. military aircraft could participate in creating a no-fly zone over Libya in order to keep Gaddafi's air force from attacking rebel-held areas. Is this something you would support or oppose?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
3/13/11	56	37	7

31. (IF SUPPORT U.S. MILITARY CREATING NO-FLY ZONE) Creating a no-fly zone first requires bombing attacks on anti-aircraft positions, and then requires continuous air patrols. Given those requirements, would you support or oppose using U.S. military aircraft to create a no-fly zone in Libya?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
3/13/11	72	25	3

END