

Ipsos/ Reuters Poll: Libya

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Ipsos' latest poll carried out on behalf of Reuters and published today shows that 60% of Americans support US and allied military action in Libya, and eight in ten (79%) agree that the US and its Western allies should seek to remove Gaddafi.

As is often the case when the American military is deployed abroad, the public have rallied around the flag -- but it is important to bear in mind that this kind of support will have a half-life that depends on the ongoing cost of the undertaking.

This cost can be counted in terms of either casualties or dollars, but as either increases support for the initiative is likely to drop off.

Politically, there is - so far - little cost to President Obama because the public prioritize his performance on domestic (ie. economic) issues rather than foreign policy issues right now.

This is underpinned by the fact that almost half (48%) of Americans choose the phrase 'cautious and consultative' (from a list of options) as the best way to describe Obama's leadership now. Over a third (36%) feel he is 'indecisive and dithering', and one in six (17%) choose 'strong and decisive'.

Other key findings from the survey are below:

- * A majority (60%) support US and allied military action in Libya. Men are more likely to support this than women (65% vs 56%). There is very little difference in support for the military action between Democrats (65%) and Republicans (63%)

- * There is supermajority agreement that the US and its Western allies should seek to remove Gaddafi (79%, consistent across socio-demographic and political subgroups)

- * The public are equally divided on whether the costs of the military operations are justified -- but a split sampling exercise demonstrates that opposition to this notion increases when a dollar amount is affixed to the operations (from 49% to 57% disagreeing that the costs are justified)

- * Almost half (48%) of the public choose 'cautious and consultative' as the set of adjectives that best describe Obama's leadership -- and this figure rises to 63% among Democrats. Over a third (36%) choose 'indecisive and dithering' -- and this figure rises to 64% among Republicans. One in six (17%) choose 'strong and decisive'

- * In the event that the air strikes fail to restrain Gaddafi, a quarter of people (25%) feel that the UN should send in peacekeeping troops, and another quarter (23%) believe air strikes should be increased. One in five (20%) advocate the US and allies sending in special forces. Just 7% advocate sending in ground troops. It is clear the public do not have any appetite for seeing American troops on the ground in Libya.

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