

## **Few Believe the Administration Overstates the Level of Threat**

Americans are more apt to believe the administration is understating rather than overstating the threat of future terrorism, a sign of the anxiety fueling the public's demand for vigorous counter-terrorism efforts.

Only 12 percent in an ABC News poll believe the administration is overstating the risks, regardless of suggestions that Attorney General John Ashcroft may have exaggerated the threat posed by Jose Padilla, an alleged Al Qaeda plotter arrested in May.

Instead a plurality, 45, percent, thinks the government is accurately describing the level of threat. And 39 percent believe it's actually understating the risks.

Administration has been:	
Overstating the threat	12%
Understating the threat	39
Accurately describing it	45

**DETENTION** – In cases such as Padilla's – a U.S. citizen charged with planning an Al Qaeda attack – a modest majority supports military detention rather than a criminal trial. This grows to a broader preference for detention if the government says a trial would jeopardize sensitive intelligence.

Padilla was arrested in Chicago on charges he was part of an Al Qaeda plot to detonate a "dirty bomb" – a conventional explosive laced with radioactive material – in the United States. The administration has said the military will hold him, without trial or access to a lawyer, as an "illegal combatant." That's expected to be challenged in court.

In this poll, 54 percent agree that someone in Padilla's circumstances should be held by the military rather than being tried in the civilian courts; 42 percent prefer a court trial. (The question did not state the administration's position.) If the authorities maintain that a trial would compromise intelligence, support for military detention rises to 67 percent.

	Padilla's fate
Hold by military	54%
Try in court	42
	If gov't says intelligence would be compromised
Hold by military	67%
Try in court	28

**RIGHTS** – While civil rights watchdogs have raised alarms about measures such as the Padilla detention and expanded FBI surveillance authority, two-thirds of Americans say they believe the government is doing enough to protect the rights of U.S. citizens.

That's in accord with previous ABC News polling, in which majorities have given their highest priority to deterring terrorism, even at the expense of limited intrusions on personal rights.

**CAN DO?** – Recent ABC News polling also has shown a decline in confidence that the United States can prevent further attacks. But that appears to reflect the complexity of the job more than a lack of effort: Most in this poll, 56 percent, say the government is “doing all it reasonably can” to try to prevent terrorism. Still, 40 percent say it “should do more.”

The number of people who say the government is doing what it can against terrorism has fluctuated since Sept. 11, from a high of 71 percent early last October to a low of 54 percent last month. By comparison, just 31 percent last fall said the government did all it reasonably could to try to prevent the Sept. 11 attacks.

**GROUPS** – There are some political differences in these views. Democrats are more apt to express criticism of the Republican-led government on several fronts – more apt to say it's understating the threat of terrorism, to say it should be doing more to prevent attacks, and also to say it isn't doing enough to protect individual rights.

Democrats also narrowly prefer trial over detention for accused terrorists such as Padilla, by 51-46 percent, while Republicans prefer detention by a 62-36 percent margin. If a trial would jeopardize security, support for detention rises to 58 percent of Democrats, and 76 percent of Republicans.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News.com survey was conducted by telephone June 12-16, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,023 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer and Dalia Sussman.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:  
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Here are the full results:

12. Do you think the United States is doing all it reasonably can do to try to prevent further terrorist attacks, or do you think it should do more?

US doing all it can	US should do more	No opin.
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6/16/02	56	40	4
5/19/02	54	42	4
3/10/02	66	33	1
12/19/01	59	40	1
11/27/01	62	36	1
11/6/01	56	43	2
10/15/01	68	29	3
10/9/01	71	27	2

13a. SPLIT SAMPLE A As it conducts the war on terrorism, do you think the United States government is or is not doing enough to protect the rights of American citizens?

	Yes	No	Doing too much (vol.)	No opin.
6/16/02	65	30	2	3

13b. SPLIT SAMPLE B As it conducts the war on terrorism, do you think the United States government is doing enough to protect the rights of American citizens, or do you think the government is not doing enough to protect the rights of American citizens?

	Yes	No	Doing too much (vol.)	No opin.
6/16/02	62	34	2	2

14. Do you think the Bush administration has been (overstating) the level of threat the country faces from terrorism, (understating) it, or (accurately describing) it?

	Overstating	Understating	Accurately describing it	No opin.
6/16/02	12	39	45	4

15. Say an American citizen is arrested on charges of planning an Al Qaeda terrorist attack in the United States. Should he be (held by the U.S. military as a wartime prisoner, without being put on trial or given access to a lawyer); or should he be (given access to a lawyer and put on trial in the U.S. criminal court system)?

	Held as wartime prisoner	Tried in criminal court	No opin.
6/16/02	54	42	3

16. (IF CRIMINAL COURT) What if the U.S. government says that would jeopardize sensitive intelligence - should he still be put on trial, or held by the military without trial?

	Should still be put on trial	Held as a wartime prisoner	No opin.
6/16/02	67	29	4

NET All respondents

	Held as wartime prisoner	NET	-----Tried in criminal court----- Even if jeopardizes	Not if jeopardizes	DK	No op.
6/16/02	54	42	28	12	1	3