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The British people believe in an ethical – and democratic – foreign policy

The British people believe overwhelmingly in an “ethical” foreign policy – and are adamant that Parliament as a whole – not the Prime Minister – should decide Britain’s international policies.

An ICM opinion poll*, commissioned by Democratic Audit, Federal Trust and One World Trust, reveals a major consensus around key elements of an “ethical” foreign policy and a strong wish to pursue policies that are more independent of the United States. The three organisations commissioned the poll to assess the level of public support for the reforms they advocate in their study, *Not in Our Name: Democracy and Foreign Policy in the UK*, published today by Politico’s.

Key findings of the poll are as follows:

- Asked who should decide Britain’s main foreign policy objectives in pursuing British interests abroad, 85% said “Parliament as whole” as against 13% for “the Prime Minister, ministers and their advisers”.
- 86% of respondents agreed that parliamentary committees should agree negotiating positions with the Prime Minister and ministers (“soft mandates”) in advance of negotiations within the EU and with other international bodies.
- 89% of respondents said that Britain should seek agreement through the UN for action to deal with states that endangered British and western interests and should seek to comply with international law. Only 8% favoured the use of armed force by Britain acting on her own or with allies.
- 83% were against arms and military exports to countries which violated their citizens’ human rights (even though they were reminded that exports were important to the UK economy and jobs).
- 85% believed that Britain should “argue vigorously” within the EU for reforms of EU trading practices to make them fairer for developing countries (even with the reminder that these practices benefit British industry and jobs).

Two thirds of respondents also wanted Britain to adopt a more independent position within the Special Relationship with the United States. Asked how Britain should manage the relationship, which had been central to British foreign policy since 1945, if it were to continue, 66 per cent opted for “being a candid friend to an American President, even if that

meant being critical in public”; 26% backed Tony Blair’s policy of full public and military support in return for private influence.

But should the Special Relationship continue? Half of the people asked (49%) said that Britain’s foreign policy should be based on a close and equal association with both the European Union and the United States; 22% said it should be on a close association with the EU and only 7% on such an association with the US. One in five (20%) opted for none of these three options.

Not in Our Name argues that the royal prerogative should be reformed so that Parliament can share fully in making foreign policies on war, treaties, development aid and trade, advocates soft mandating in EU and international negotiations and proposes strengthening Parliament’s capacity – and will – to make government more accountable in all its international dealings.

* ICM Research interviewed a random sample of 1007 adults aged 18+ by telephone between 13 -15 January 2006. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Further information at www.icmresearch.co.uk