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The London Free Press NEWS

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Thursday, February 20, 2003

Sun poll finds 66% oppose lone U.S. attack

Most Canadians want to see UN approval of any war in Iraq.

By **BILL RODGERS**, Free Press Parliamentary Bureau Chief

OTTAWA -- Two-thirds of Canadians remain firmly opposed to Canadian support for a unilateral U.S.-led attack on Iraq, an SES/Sun Media poll reveals.

In a survey conducted by SES Canada Research, 66 per cent said they believe Canada should not support a U.S. invasion of Iraq without United Nations approval.

Only 26 per cent of respondents would support unilateral American action in Iraq.

The results "point to the fact that the U.S. efforts in the media and at the United Nations have had no impact," said SES president Nik Nanos.

The survey of 1,000 Canadians, conducted Feb. 2-11, shows almost no change in attitude from a poll that posed the same question last November.

It also illustrates why the federal government has been hesitant to align itself too closely with the Bush administration and its hardline position to oust Saddam Hussein with or without UN approval.

Deputy Prime Minister John Manley said the poll is "pretty consistent

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with what we've heard," adding he hasn't observed a strain in Canada-U.S. relations as a result of Ottawa's position.

"We have tried to be very careful in how we have framed our views on this," Manley said. "In no way have we given comfort to the enemies of the United States and I don't think (Bush officials) necessarily believe that is true of all other countries."

The deputy prime minister said: "I don't think at this point that our position is causing them any unhappiness."

In Washington, U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld expressed appreciation for Canada's commitment. "Canada has been a solid ally in the global war against terrorism and we thank the Canadian people for their support in defending freedom around the globe," he said.

Canadian Alliance defence critic Leon Benoit said he, too, would like to see a UN-sanctioned operation in Iraq, if one is necessary, but added: "If the United Nations won't enforce their own resolutions, then someone has to, and Canada should be a part of that."

Benoit said the Chretien government is being led by public opinion.

"I think it's time (Prime Minister Jean Chretien) started showing some leadership," he said.

"Look at people like (British Prime Minister) Tony Blair -- completely against public opinion. He knows it's the right thing to do."

NDP Leader Jack Layton, whose party opposes war in Iraq, accused the Liberal government of still having a fuzzy position on the issue. "That's why it's important for Canadians to keep speaking out because we haven't got a prime minister with backbone, so the Canadian population has to provide it."

The SES poll is considered accurate plus or minus 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

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