

# Foreign Policy in the New Millennium

Results of the 2012 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy

Dina Smeltz, Project Director



CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS



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## 2012 Chicago Council Survey Team

---

Salma Al-Shami, *Team member*

Marshall M. Bouton, *Study chair*

Rachel Bronson, *Team member*

Gregory Holyk, *Team member*

Catherine Hug, *Team member and study editor*

Steven Kull, *Team member*

Benjamin I. Page, *Team member*

Craig Kafura, *Team member and study coordinator*

Dina Smeltz, *Team member and study director*

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THE CHICAGO COUNCIL  
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## Foreword

The 2012 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion provides an opportunity to reflect upon American thinking about U.S. engagement in the world after a decade dominated by the nation's responses to the September 11 terrorist attacks. In 2002, the first survey conducted by the Council after those events, Americans were ready to allocate almost unlimited attention and resources to countering the terrorist threat. Ten years later, as this report shows, Americans still want the United States to play an active part in world affairs. But given the difficulty and cost in lives and treasure of reshaping events in far-off places and the bruising impact of the financial crisis and its aftermath, Americans have become increasingly selective about how and where to engage in the world.

The Middle East and South Asia remain areas of great concern for Americans, but they do not believe that U.S. policies and actions in the region over the last ten years, particularly the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have helped to reduce threats there. While support for military intervention and long-term U.S. bases in the region has waned, most Americans still support actions to combat terrorism and prevent nuclear proliferation, to secure the oil supply, and to respond to genocide and humanitarian crises. They also continue to support diplomatic and multilateral means to address their concerns.

Americans today are turning their focus increasingly to Asia. They see the region's dynamism as a positive development even as they harbor con-

cerns about the potential longer-term dangers of a China whose economy eventually becomes as large as or larger than the U.S. economy. They support U.S. involvement and the U.S. military presence in Asia, and consider alliances with Japan and South Korea as the linchpins of U.S. policy in the region.

Millennials (those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine) are viewing America's role in the world somewhat differently than others and are a group that bears watching. They are less pessimistic than most Americans about their future status and are less alarmed about major threats facing the country, particularly international terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and the development of China as a world power.

The 2012 Chicago Council Survey also reveals partisan differences on some key issues of foreign policy. Although the polarization in American politics has been discussed extensively elsewhere, this report sheds light on greater similarities than differences between self-identified Republicans and Democrats on many aspects of foreign policy, with variances in degree. Over time, Independents have become more inclined than either Republicans or Democrats to limit U.S. engagement in world affairs. Because Independents are an increasing share of the electorate, this development in American public opinion warrants attention.

As always, the survey's findings contain more nuances and trends than the Council can present in one biennial survey report. The full questionnaire, toplines, and data will be posted on

our website for others to examine and analyze. Additional short reports based on these data will also be made available over the course of the year at [www.thechicagocouncil.org](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org).

This report would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of a team of talented individuals with deep and diverse experience in survey research on American attitudes and U.S. foreign policy who have contributed to many of the Council's past survey reports. Benjamin Page, Gordon S. Fulcher Professor of Decision Making at Northwestern University, has worked on the Chicago Council Surveys since they began in 1974 and has been a wise and steady guide through each edition. Steven Kull, senior research scholar at the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) and director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), has been a valuable member of the Council's study team for the last decade and helped thoughtfully ensure that the Chicago Council Survey remains one of the most respected studies of its kind. Catherine Hug, principal and senior editor with the Chicago Creative Group, has been an essential contributor to the team, writer, and editor of the Council's survey reports for two decades. Over the last several years our team has been joined by Gregory Holyk, research analyst at Langer Research Associates, who has brought new energy and rigor to the study.

The newest and very important addition to the Council team is Dina Smeltz, fellow on public opinion and foreign policy at The Chicago Council, who brings almost twenty years of survey experience to this effort. Dina's full-time attention to this study, and the Council's survey work more broadly, promises to elevate the Council's contributions to the national discourse on American public attitudes on world affairs and U.S. foreign policy. Her leadership has already made a big difference in our ability to quickly move from questionnaire to in-depth anal-

ysis and weave together an understanding of how Americans view international engagement. She was ably aided in the research and writing by senior program officer Craig Kafura and consultants Salma Al-Shami and Clay Ramsay. The additional support of Council interns Magda Lasota-Morales and Bemnet Yigzaw was invaluable.

Michael Green, senior advisor and Japan Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Scott Snyder, senior fellow for Korea Studies and director of the Program on U.S.-Korea Policy at The Council on Foreign Relations contributed to the design of the 2012 study as it relates to Japan and Korea, respectively. They have each produced essays on the U.S.-Japan relationship and the U.S.-South Korea relationship based on the 2012 data that will be released separately.

Rachel Bronson, vice president of studies, continues to oversee this project along with the many other projects for which she is responsible. Since the last Council survey in 2010 she has introduced a number of valuable innovations in the design, structure, and process for Council studies.

The 2012 Chicago Council Survey was made possible by the generous support of The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the United States-Japan Foundation. The Council is especially indebted to the MacArthur and McCormick foundations for the support that has made it possible for the Council to ensure the continuity and quality of the Council's survey research over many years. I am grateful to this great team of analysts and supporters for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to one of the Council's signature products.

Marshall M. Bouton

*President*

*The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*

# Executive Summary

The last decade has been a trying time for the American people, who have lived through the aftershocks of the September 11 attacks, two costly wars, a deep financial crisis, and a slow economic recovery. Emerging from years in which antiterrorist efforts were at the center of U.S. foreign policy, Americans now find themselves in a world in which traditional allies in Europe are embroiled in economic crisis, dramatic change has come to the Middle East, China's influence is growing, and Iran and North Korea continue to pursue nuclear programs.

## Past ten years brought hard lessons

The 2012 Chicago Council Survey shows that Americans are recalibrating their views on international engagement and searching for more effective and less costly ways to project positive U.S. influence abroad. The public ultimately has not viewed the Iraq and Afghanistan wars as successful, seeing neither security benefits nor an increase in democracy in the greater Middle East as a result of U.S. efforts. Now, with a strong sense that the wars have overstretched our military and strained our economic resources, they prefer to avoid the use of military force if at all possible.

## Further desire to selectively engage

Over the past two years, the preference for selective engagement that was first revealed in the

2010 Chicago Council Survey has consolidated. Americans are now less likely to support the use of force in many circumstances and are more likely to endorse spending cutbacks, including on defense. As always, if force is necessary, there is a preference for multilateral rather than unilateral approaches.

## Less activist approach most pronounced among Millennials

Millennials (those age eighteen to twenty-nine) are at the front edge of these evolving American attitudes toward certain key aspects of foreign policy, perhaps foreshadowing trends that will continue into the future. They are much less alarmed about major threats facing the country, particularly international terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and the development of China as a world power. They are also less supportive of an activist approach to foreign affairs than older Americans.

Independents, often distinct in their opinions from both Democrats and Republicans, may also be a force for change. Over time they have become less inclined to support an active U.S. role in world affairs at a steeper rate than partisans, and they are less likely to consider strong U.S. leadership in world affairs desirable.

## U.S. still has a positive role to play

Despite military and economic struggles over the past ten years, Americans still consider the United

States as the greatest and most influential country in the world. But they are seeking a lower profile. They clearly reject the role of the U.S. as a hegemon and want to take a more cooperative stance, even if this means the United States might have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.

## Middle East a source of threat

The lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are shaping views of involvement in the Middle East, a region seen as the greatest source of threats in the future. Americans do not prefer to disengage completely from this region, but continue to support military action to combat terrorism, secure the oil supply, and respond to genocide or humanitarian crises (as in Libya). But fewer now favor having long-term military bases in the region, and support for economic aid has also dropped. When it comes to Iran, far more Americans endorse diplomatic rather than military solutions to deal with the nuclear threat.

Americans are unsure whether the political changes resulting from the Arab Spring will be good or bad for the United States. Majorities support continued economic and military aid to Israel, as Americans try to balance their foreign policy approaches among conflicting forces in the region.

## Asia becoming more important

While Americans are not taking their eyes off the ball in the Middle East, they clearly see Asia as a region of great and growing importance to the United States. Overall, Americans see Asia as important because of its economic dynamism rather than as a threat. However, they also recognize that over the longer term, Asia's, and especially China's, rise could be a negative development for the United States.

The American relationships with Japan and South Korea are still viewed as the linchpin of foreign policy in Asia, especially with North Korea's

nuclear capability seen as the greatest threat in this region. But there is a growing trend toward developing relations with China even at the expense of these allies.

## Political polarization overstated

While media attention has focused on growing political polarization in American society, this appears to be exaggerated. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the foreign policy opinions of Americans in “red” and “blue” districts are remarkably similar. Moreover, Chicago Council Survey trends reveal that Republicans and Democrats rarely disagree on key foreign policy issues, though they differ in emphasis. Their sharpest differences are on immigration issues and Middle East policy.

## Reorientation in the new millennium

The United States—and the world—have changed over the past ten years, and Americans believe that the way in which the United States engages with the world should adjust accordingly. While they see value in being a strong military power, Americans seem well aware of economic constraints and the limits of military force to effect change. They want to scale back spending, avoid major new military entanglements, and prefer less dominant leadership from the United States. While there is an increasing focus on Asia, the public does not want to turn away completely from the challenges in the Middle East.

New forces are having an impact on American foreign policy preferences, including the Millennials and Independents. Yet there is great consistency over the past decade in American support for cooperating with allies, participating in international treaties, and intervening militarily against genocide and humanitarian crises. In this regard, Americans remain true to their underlying values and aspirations for the United States to play a positive international role.

# Chapter 1

## Moving Past a Decade of War

Sobered by ten years of war and recent economic troubles, Americans recognize that the United States and the world today are very different than they were in 2002. Ten years ago, after a decade of robust economic growth, Americans rose to the immediate challenge of responding to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Shocked by their country's newfound vulnerability, Americans expressed greater willingness to expand government spending on security-related matters and were willing to take military action against the palpable terrorist threat.

Since then, trillions of dollars have been spent and thousands of lives have been lost in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The public ultimately has not viewed either war as successful, seeing neither security benefits nor an increase in democracy in the Middle East as a result of U.S. efforts. Now, with a strong sense that the wars have overstretched our military and strained our economic resources for dubious gains, they are more than ready to end this chapter of American foreign policy. As they emerge from a preoccupation with the campaign against terrorism, they find themselves in a world in which traditional allies in Europe are embroiled in economic crisis, dramatic change has come to the Middle East, China continues to grow in influence, and the nuclear threat in Iran and North Korea persists.

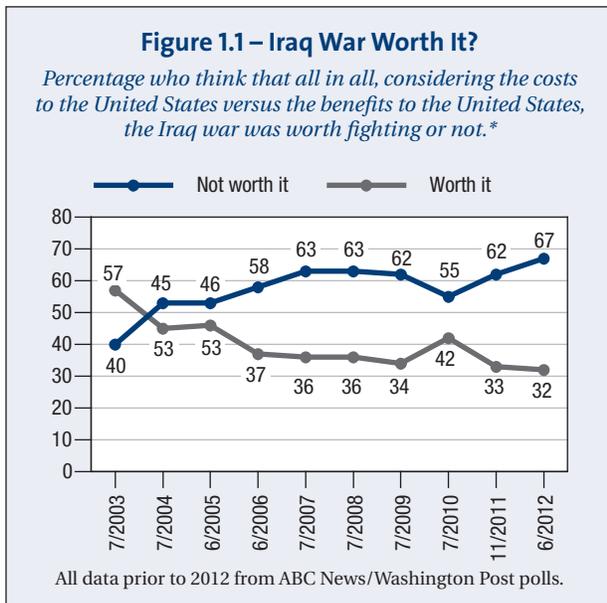
The 2012 Chicago Council Survey shows that Americans want to play a positive and engaged role with the rest of the world. But they are now

less likely to support the use of force in many circumstances and more likely to endorse spending cutbacks, including on defense. While they are keeping their eye on the Middle East, seen as the source of the greatest security threats in the future, there is increasing focus on Asia as Americans recognize the growing influence and economic power of China. Finding themselves in a more multipolar world and aware of domestic economic constraints and the limits of military power, Americans prefer to play a less dominant role in the world whenever possible. Although they see the United States as the greatest country in the world, they are comfortable allowing other countries to assert leadership. Over the past two years, the selectivity about engagement that was first revealed in our 2010 survey has been accentuated.

### **Iraq and Afghanistan wars not worth it**

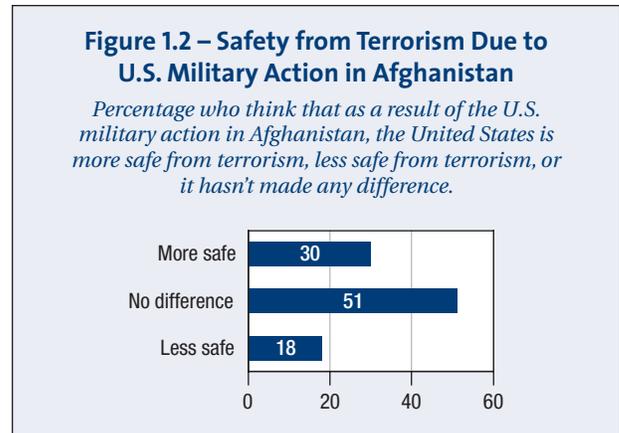
The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan appear to be strongly shaping the American public's views of international engagement. With U.S. combat troops scheduled to withdraw from Afghanistan by 2014 and with the departure from Iraq already complete, the Chicago Council Survey and other polls show a large majority of Americans now say that neither war was worth fighting (in both cases, 67% not worth it; 32% worth it—see Figure 1.1).

Most significant, the prevailing view is that these military actions have not made the United



States safer from terrorism. Seven in ten say the United States is no safer from terrorism as a result of the U.S. military action in Afghanistan (69% say no difference or less safe; 30% say more safe—see Figure 1.2). An identical percentage think the threat of terrorism has not been reduced by the Iraq war (69%, up from 61% in 2006—see Figure 1.3). A majority of Americans support bringing U.S. combat troops home from Afghanistan either by the 2014 deadline (44%) or before (38%).

Moreover, most Americans believe that the Iraq war has worsened America's relations with the Muslim world (70%, up 4 percentage points from 2006) and will *not* lead to the spread of democracy in the Middle East (68%, up 4 points from 2006). A

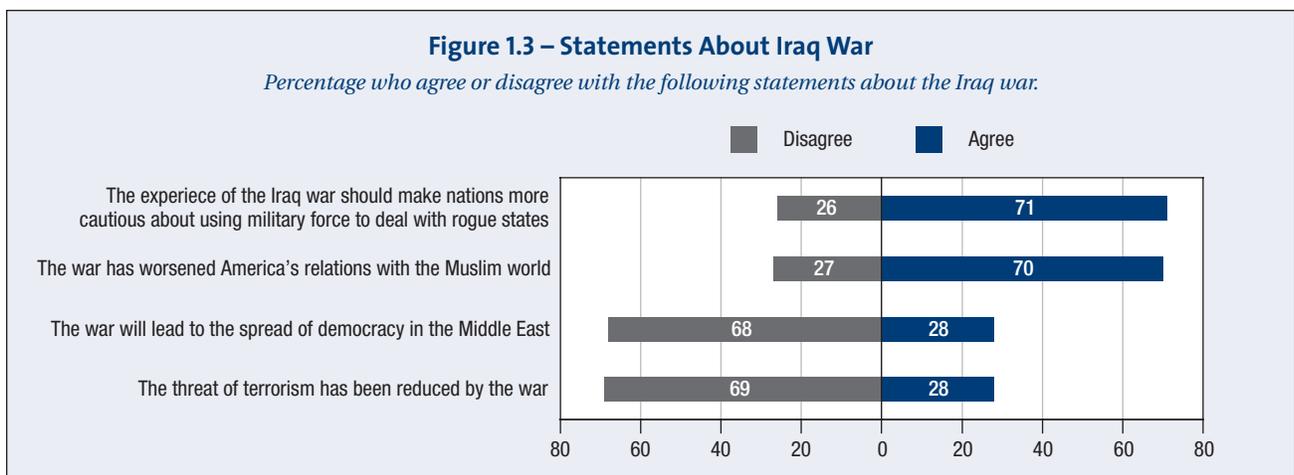


solid majority also believes that the experience of the Iraq war should make nations more cautious about using military force to deal with rogue states (71%, up 5 points from 2006—see Figure 1.3). There are strong partisan differences on the wars, covered in detail in Chapter 5.

## Terrorism fears decline

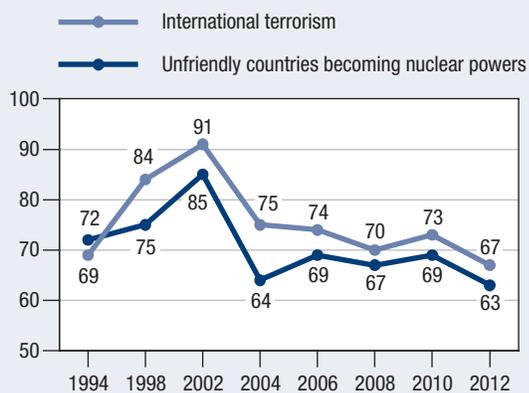
While Americans do not think the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have reduced the threat of terrorism, fewer Americans—though still majorities—are concerned about international terrorism as a critical threat facing the United States. In 2002 nine in ten (91%) considered international terrorism a critical threat.<sup>1</sup> The proportion has steadily declined to its

1. Data for many of the questions in 2002 were gathered by telephone, and all surveys prior to 2002 were conducted face to face. This data may be subject to mode effects when compared with data after 2002.



**Figure 1.4 – Threats of Terrorism and Unfriendly Countries Becoming Nuclear Powers**

*Percentage who see international terrorism and the possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers as critical threats to U.S. vital interests in the next ten years.*

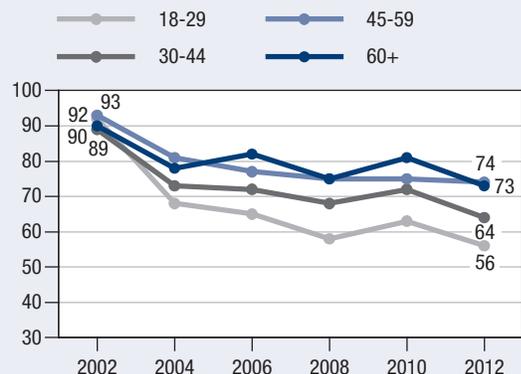


lowest point today (67%). The decline could reflect the fact that there has not been another major terrorist attack in the United States since 2001, that Osama bin Laden was killed, or that Americans are placing a greater focus on domestic economic concerns. It could also be that Americans are simply adapting to the existence of this elusive threat. In any case, the sense of threat felt by Americans from many sources has been declining (see Figure 1.4 and Figure 2.1).

Interestingly, perceptions of the threat of international terrorism vary widely by age and reveal one of the widest generation gaps in this year’s survey

**Figure 1.5 – Threat of Terrorism by Age**

*Percentage who see international terrorism as a critical threat to U.S. vital interests in the next ten years.*



data. In 2002 opinion among the youngest demographic was in sync with older Americans: nine in ten among all age groups considered international terrorism a critical threat to the vital interests of the United States. Now, even though a majority (56%) among those age eighteen to twenty-nine today—broadly referred to as the “Millennials”—see international terrorism as a critical threat, there has been a dramatic drop over time and a widening gap between the generations on this question (see Figure 1.5).

## Economic worries persist

Four years into a painstakingly slow recovery from the financial crash and recession, views about the U.S. economy are no more upbeat now than they were in 2008. Six in ten people continue to say that the way things are going, the next generation of Americans will be economically worse off (58%). Only 8 percent believe that the next generation will be better off, and 34 percent think the economic situation of the next generation will be the same. On a more personal level, only 24 percent say that their household financial situation has gotten better over the past year. Forty-three percent say their situation has stayed the same, and 31 percent say it has gotten worse. Six in ten also continue to say that the distribution of income and wealth in the United States has become less fair (63% less fair; 34% the same; 3% more fair).

In fact, protecting the jobs of American workers is the only foreign policy goal seen to have *increased* in importance since 2008, with 83 percent now saying this is “very important.” Protecting jobs has always been at or near the top of the list of “very important” foreign policy goals since The Chicago Council began polling, but this is the highest level of concern in the past decade (see Chapter 2).

Interestingly, although *Newsweek* recently dubbed the youth of today “Generation Screwed,” citing the widest wealth gap ever recorded between younger and older Americans, Millennials are actually less discouraged than others about the world they face. Even though a slight majority of Millennials (52%) think the next generation of

**Figure 1.6 – Taking an Active Part in World Affairs**

*Percentage who think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs.*



Trend data from 1947 through 1973 come from the following national surveys conducted by NORC in Chicago: Study T-49, 151, 156, 169, 295, 332, 348, 355, 370, 399, and the 1973 General Social Survey. The 1974 survey was conducted by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.

Americans will be economically worse off than the generation of adults working today, a much higher 61 percent of those above age forty-five think this. Historically, younger adults have been less pessimistic about the future, and despite the economic troubles they have inherited, Millennials are no different.

## Declining majority for active role in world affairs

Chicago Council Surveys over the past ten years highlight the American public's impulse to take action after the September 11 attacks. In 2002 public support for taking an active part in world affairs rose to its highest level since the 1950s, when roughly seven in ten said the United States should take an active part.<sup>2</sup>

Ten years later, while a large majority (61%) still thinks it would be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs, fewer Americans prefer to take the international stage than in past years. In 2002, 71 percent preferred to take an active part, with only 25 percent wanting to “stay out.” Now 38 percent say that the United

States should stay out of world affairs, the highest percentage recorded in any survey since 1947.<sup>3</sup> The gap in reported support between the “active part” and “stay out” options is at its narrowest since 1982, with just 23 percentage points separating the two (see Figure 1.6).

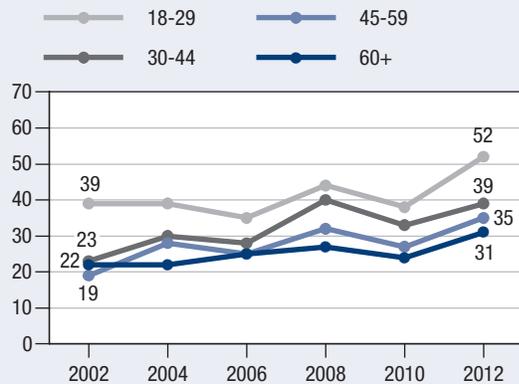
The declining enthusiasm for an activist role appears to be related in part to views of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those who say the Iraq war was not worth the cost are substantially less likely than others to want the United States to actively participate in world affairs (54%, compared to 77% of those who say it was worth the cost). The same is true of those who think the Afghan war was not worth the cost (52% “active part” among those saying not worth it, compared to 77% among those saying worth it). Yet even those who prefer to stay out of world affairs do not want to withdraw entirely. Among those who say the United States should stay out of world affairs, majorities still express support for a wide variety of international undertakings, including strong U.S. leadership in the world, actions against terrorism, humanitarian interventions, and international treaties and agreements.

3. When making inferences to the population, however, we cannot be sure that this level is statistically higher than the proportion in 2008 or 1982.

2. Data prior to 1974 from NORC in Chicago.

**Figure 1.7 – Staying Out of World Affairs by Age**

Percentage who think it will be best for the future of the country if we stay out of world affairs.



To shed more light on why respondents say it would be best for the country to take an active part in world affairs or to stay out, some were asked to explain their responses. Among those who prefer to stay out of world affairs, several emphasize the need to focus instead on domestic problems, such as needing to “*get our people back to work, stop spending money we don’t have, and get out of debt.*” Others express a desire to avoid interfering in other countries: “*It isn’t any of our business. Not every country wants to be like America.*” Dependence upon the United States is also a theme: “*It is time that other countries try to help themselves instead of wanting ... a handout.*”

Those who support an activist stance often mention national security: “*It’s in our national interest in terms of economic growth and national security.*” Some talk about being part of a “*complex, global, and interdependent world*” and providing support and leadership to other nations: “*Many countries look to us for answers to their problems.*” Still others believe that U.S. participation in global affairs makes a positive difference in the world by protecting “*human and civil rights around the world,*” supporting “*policies to make the world a better place,*” and leading by example: “*I really think that we are a shining beacon of light for individual freedoms.*” Some feel the United States has an obligation to play a role: “*As one of the most powerful nations in the world, we need to use our influence to help shape the world into a safe place.*”

The desire to stay out of world affairs is most pronounced among the Millennials. Other surveys have shown that Millennials are more likely than other age groups to support an activist government and a progressive domestic social agenda.<sup>4</sup> But the 2012 Chicago Council Survey indicates that foreign policy is different, with 52 percent of Millennials preferring to stay out of world affairs, compared to just 35 percent among other groups. While the youngest Americans have always been less inclined to prefer an active role, this is the first time in the last decade that more prefer to stay out of world affairs than to take an active role (see Figure 1.7).

## United States still greatest, albeit less influential

Despite the military challenges and economic blows Americans have experienced, they still view their country as the best and most influential country in the world. When asked whether the United States has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world or whether every country is unique and the United States is no greater than others, seven in ten say that the United States is the greatest country in the world (29% say no greater than other countries—see Figure 1.8).

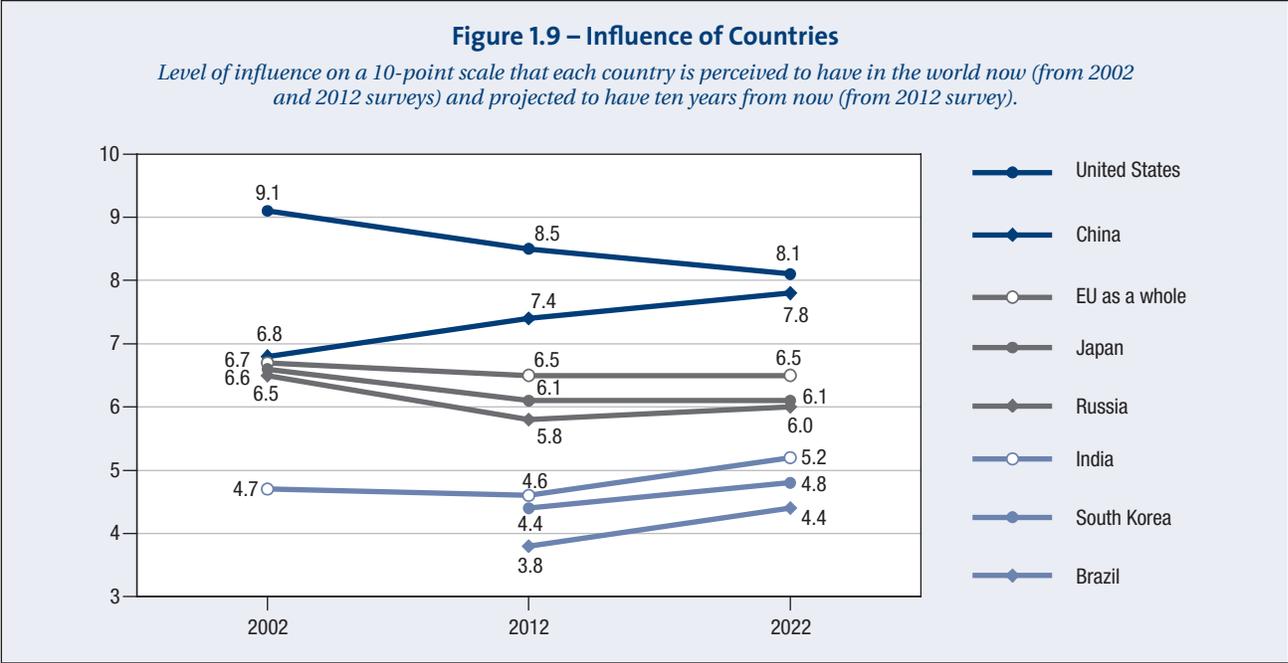
Older Americans are more likely than other age groups to say the United States is the greatest country. But while Millennials are least likely

4. For example, see <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1501/millennials-new-survey-generational-personality-upbeat-open-new-ideas-technology-bound>.

**Figure 1.8 – United States as Greatest Country in the World**

Percentage who believe the United States has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world or who believe every country is unique and the United States is no greater than other nations.





to say so, a majority (58%) still agree. Majorities across the political spectrum also agree, though Republicans (85%) assert that the United States is the greatest more often than Democrats (65%) or Independents (63%).

Americans also continue to see the United States as the most *influential* country in the world today, even as this influence is seen as decreasing relative to other countries. They give the United

States an average rating of 8.5 out of 10 on a scale of perceived influence, above all other countries asked about, including China. This is down, however, from 9.1 in 2002 (see Figure 1.9).

The perception of a relative lessening of influence can be further seen in views of America’s role as world leader. While a majority (55%) in 2002 said that the United States played a “more important” and powerful role as a world leader compared to ten years ago—the highest percentage in these surveys going back to 1974—today only one in four (24%) feel the same way (see Figure 1.10). The percentage saying the United States plays a “less important” role compared to ten years ago has more than doubled, from 17 percent in 2002 to 43 percent today.<sup>5</sup>



### Focus shifting to Asia

In contrast to the perceived decrease in U.S. influence, the perceived influence of China climbed from 2002 through 2012, reaching a 7.4 average today on the 10-point scale. Looking ahead ten years, Americans expect that China’s influence will continue to rise, narrowing the gap with the

5. In 2002, 25 percent said the United States played “about as important” a role as a world leader compared to ten years ago. Today, 32 percent say this.

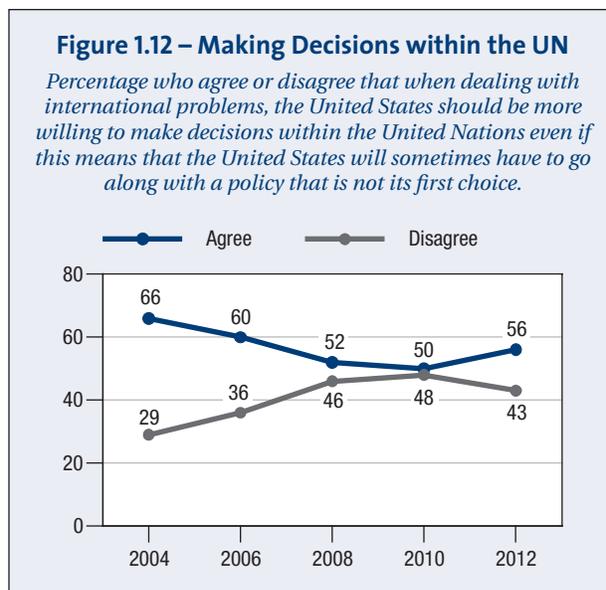
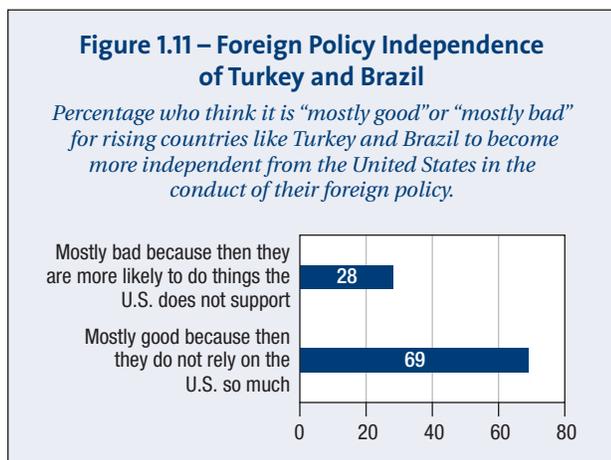
United States, though the United States will remain ahead (see Figure 1.9). However, only 21 percent of Americans think the U.S. economy will always stay larger than China's (21%). Three-quarters (76%) think it is more likely that the Chinese economy will grow to be as large as the U.S. economy. In harmony with this view, a growing share of the American public now places greater importance on Asia (52%) than on Europe (47%—see Chapter 4).

India, South Korea, and Brazil are also expected to gain influence over the next ten years, although not nearing the level of the great powers. Americans rank the influence of the European Union, Japan, and Russia well below that of the United States and China. Their influence is expected to stay about the same in ten years.

## U.S. leadership, not dominance

Americans do not appear to feel highly threatened by the increasing influence of these rising nations. Only a minority (40%) considers the development of China as a world power a critical threat. Notably, a large majority (69%) thinks that as countries like Brazil and Turkey become more independent in their foreign policy, this is mostly a good thing because it makes them less reliant on the United States. Only three in ten (28%) think it is mostly a bad thing (see Figure 1.11).

At the same time, a large majority (82%) continues to say that strong U.S. leadership in the world is desirable, as has been true since 2002. Yet just 36 percent now say this is “very desirable,” with



46 percent saying only “somewhat” desirable.

Interestingly, even most of those who think the United States should stay out of world affairs apparently favor some form of leadership (perhaps through rhetoric or example). A majority (66%) of those who say stay out also say strong U.S. leadership is either “somewhat” or “very” desirable.

According to a follow-up question to explain their views, those who think U.S. leadership is desirable often link their opinions to protecting American national interest in terms of “*economic growth and national security*” and assisting other nations (“*to help guide and protect developing countries*”). Others talk about being a model or setting an example for other nations: “*We must be leaders in the world to demonstrate that a democracy can work,*” and “*our type of government and liberties work far better than any other type of society.*”

While they see leadership as desirable, Americans clearly reject the role of the United States as a hyperpower and want to take a more cooperative stance. Even in 2002, when the public was at its most interventionist, a majority of Americans thought that the United States was playing the role of world policeman more than it should. In the current survey, 78 percent say this, roughly the same since 2004.

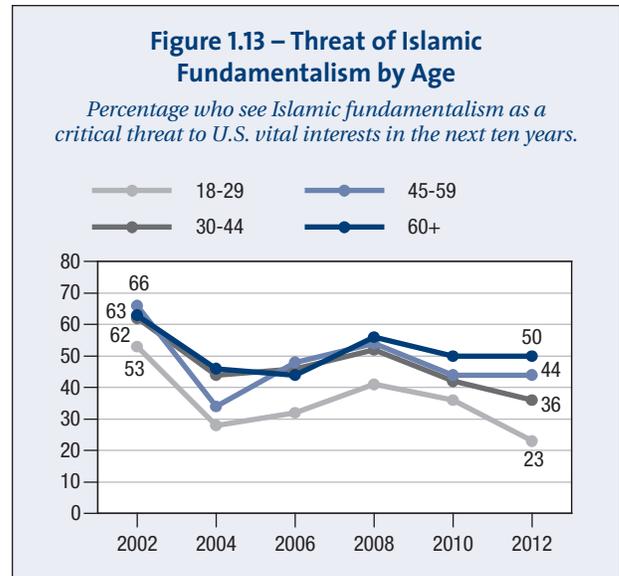
Results also show a desire for the United States to cooperate more with other nations. A majority (56%) agrees the United States should be more will-

ing to make decisions within the United Nations even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice (43% disagree—see Figure 1.12). Seven in ten also believe that the United States should undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China (69%) rather than actively work to limit China’s growth (28%). And in the recent action in Libya, which was led by NATO allies Britain and France, only 7 percent think the United States should have played the leading role. Most were supportive of playing either a major role (41%) or minor role (31%) in the intervention.

### Millennials at leading edge of reorientation

Burnt out from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, mindful of an enormous budget deficit and high unemployment figures, and aware of shifting geopolitical realities, Americans today are recalibrating their views on international engagement, searching for more effective and less costly ways to project U.S. influence abroad. As will be seen in Chapter 2, they value maintaining superior military power, but are also keenly aware of economic constraints and the limits of military force to effect change. They are increasingly focused on the opportunities and challenges in Asia, viewed more through an economic than a security lens.

Millennials are at the front edge of these evolving American attitudes toward certain key aspects of foreign policy, perhaps foreshadowing trends that will continue into the future. They are much less alarmed about major threats facing the country, particularly international terrorism, Islamic



fundamentalism, and the development of China as a world power, and are less supportive of an activist approach to foreign affairs than older Americans. Independents, a growing and increasingly influential group in the American political landscape, may also be a force for change. They prefer an active international role, but to a lesser degree than Democrats or Republicans.

The next four chapters more fully flesh out Americans’ approaches to international engagement. Chapter 2 shows that today Americans want to end large-scale military missions like those in Afghanistan and Iraq, work closely with other nations to achieve foreign policy goals, employ force more selectively, and use nonmilitary approaches to their full advantage. Attitudes toward America’s changing relationships in Asia and the Middle East round out the report in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 5 highlights partisan differences on key issues.

## Chapter 2

# Adopting a More Selective Stance toward International Engagement

After a dramatic increase in 2002 in Americans' desire to take an active part in world affairs and engage in a variety of international actions to combat terrorism and other threats, The Chicago Council has documented a steady decrease in this preference for foreign policy activism. This trend became most sharply evident in 2010 following the financial crisis, with results showing Americans becoming much more “selective” in the kinds of international actions they were willing to take part.

In 2012 the trend toward more selective engagement has continued. This survey demonstrates a strong desire to move on from a decade of war, to scale back spending, and avoid major new military entanglements. The lesson many Americans took away from the Iraq war—that nations should be more cautious about using military force to deal with rogue nations—appears to be taking hold more broadly.

Yet Americans are by no means endorsing a wholesale retreat from the world. While the level of concern about many possible threats to U.S. vital interests has receded, most Americans still recognize dangers in the world, support an international military presence, and are willing to intervene when their security is clearly threatened. Nor have their underlying values as international citizens changed: Americans support action against genocide and humanitarian crises and are highly supportive of multinational and nonmilitary approaches to solving global problems.

### Declining perceptions of threats

As data across Chicago Council Surveys has shown, American perceptions of threats often impact their policy preferences. In 2012 declining percentages seeing top threats as “critical” may be contributing to their desires to scale back internationally.

As they have for the past decade, large majorities rate international terrorism (67%), Iran's nuclear program (64%), and the possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers (63%) as critical threats. In line with these views, large majorities believe that preventing the spread of nuclear weapons (72%) and combating international terrorism (64%) are very important foreign policy goals.

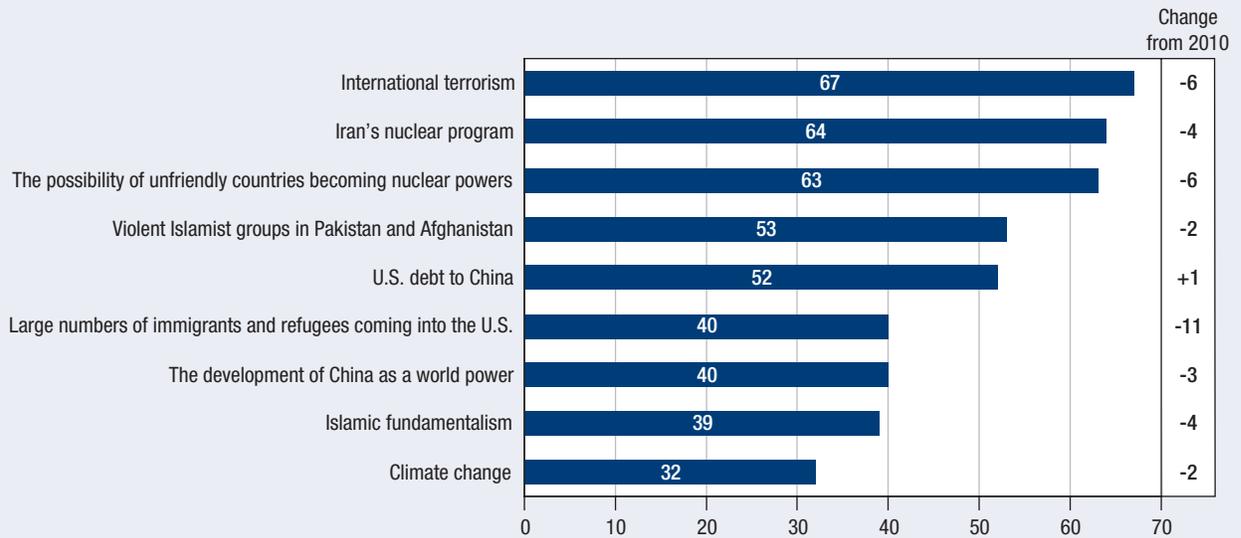
Yet as described in Chapter 1, the percentage of Americans who consider terrorism and nuclear proliferation as critical threats has continued to decline. Percentages have dropped a total of 24 and 22 points, respectively, from their peaks in 2002 and are at the lowest levels recorded on this question (see Figure 1.4). For the full list of threats and goals, see Figures 2.1 and 2.2.

### Desire to close the book on wars

Despite a continuing concern about international terrorism, after a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan many Americans want to put this chapter of American foreign policy behind them.

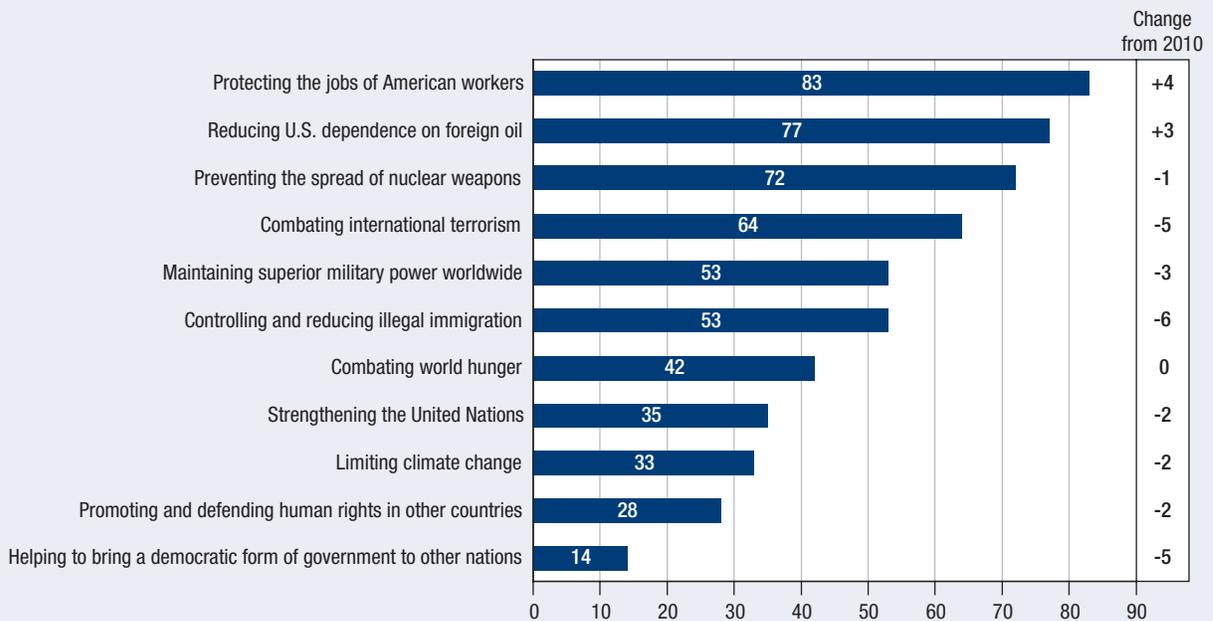
**Figure 2.1 – Critical Threats to U.S. Vital Interests**

*Percentage who see each of the following as a “critical” threat to U.S. vital interests in the next ten years.*



**Figure 2.2 – Foreign Policy Goals**

*Percentage who think each of the following should be a “very important” foreign policy goal of the United States.*



### Figure 2.3 – Withdrawing Combat Troops from Afghanistan

Percentage who think the United States should do each of the following after being told that the United States is currently scheduled to withdraw combat forces from Afghanistan by 2014.



Most want the United States to bring all its combat troops home either as scheduled by 2014 (44%) or before this deadline (38%). Only 17 percent want to leave some combat troops in Afghanistan after the 2014 official deadline for withdrawal (see Figure 2.3).

Further, for the first time in the decade since the question was first asked, majorities of Americans now say we should *not* have long-term military bases in Iraq (53%, with 44% saying we should) or Afghanistan (54%, with 43% saying we should). The highest majority yet (58%) also says we should not have bases in Pakistan, a country closely associated with Afghanistan and the campaign against terrorism, with only 38 percent saying we should have bases there. In 2002 majorities favored long-term military bases in both Afghanistan and Pakistan

(see Figure 2.4). In surveys going back to 2006, support for having long-term military bases in Iraq was numerically higher than for not having them.

Following this pattern, for the first time, a majority thinks economic aid to Afghanistan should be decreased or stopped altogether (60%, up 15 points from 2010). The desire to decrease or stop aid to Pakistan also jumped 19 points from 48 percent in 2010 to 67 percent in 2012.

### More endorse defense budget cuts

Along with the lessons learned from a decade of war and a reduced sense of threat, Americans are also keenly aware of constraints on U.S. economic resources. When asked whether the defense budget should be cut along with other programs in the effort to address the federal budget deficit, 68 percent of Americans say the defense budget should be cut. This is up 10 points from 58 percent in 2010. Thirty-two percent think the defense budget should *not* be cut (see Figure 2.5).<sup>1</sup>

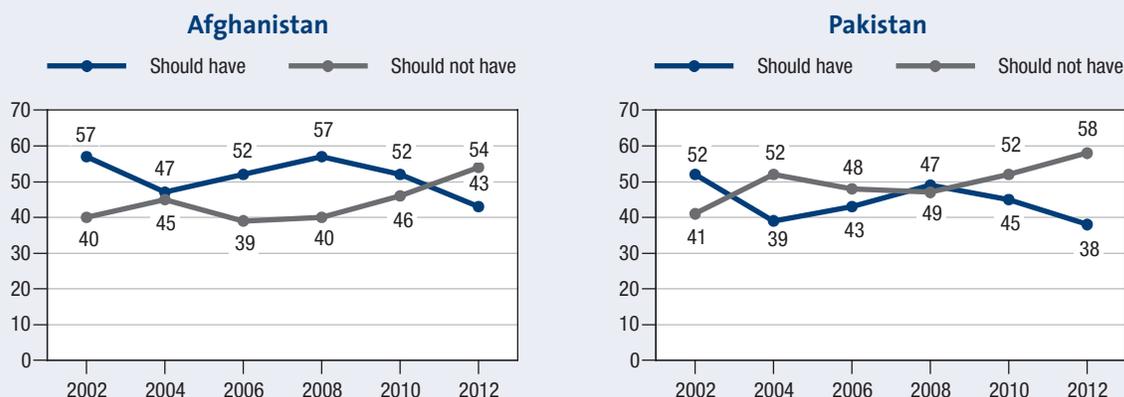
### Desire for military edge, but selective cuts preferred

Overall, a majority of Americans are still committed to a military presence abroad, even if support con-

1. Totals reported may differ from the sum of individual numbers due to rounding.

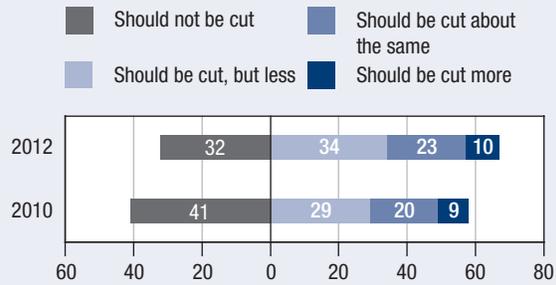
### Figure 2.4 – Bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Percentage who think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan.



**Figure 2.5 – Defense Spending**

Percentage saying that in the effort to address the federal budget deficit, the defense budget should not be cut; should be cut, but less than other programs; should be cut about the same percentage as other programs; or should be cut a greater percentage than other programs.



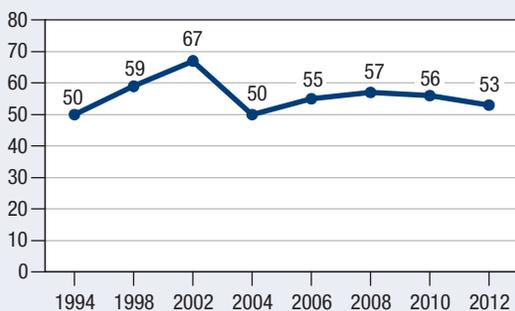
tinues to soften. Fifty-three percent consider maintaining superior military power worldwide a “very important” foreign policy goal, down 14 points from its peak in 2002 (see Figure 2.6). Millennials are much less inclined to consider maintaining superior military a “very important” goal than people in older age brackets (40% compared to about half or more in other age groups).

### Declining support for many base locations

When asked in general whether the United States should have more, fewer, or about as many long-term military bases as it has now overseas, a slight majority of respondents (52%) say the United States should have about as many as now (see Figure 2.7). Yet the number favoring fewer bases

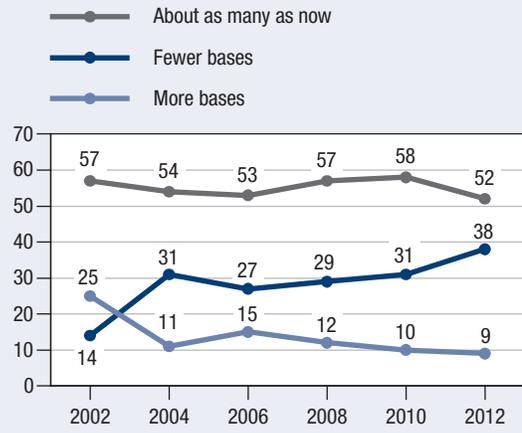
**Figure 2.6 – Maintaining Superior Military Power**

Percentage who think maintaining superior military power worldwide is a “very important” foreign policy goal of the United States.



**Figure 2.7 – Long-Term Military Bases Overseas**

Percentage who think the United States should have more bases, fewer bases, or about as many bases as we have now overseas.

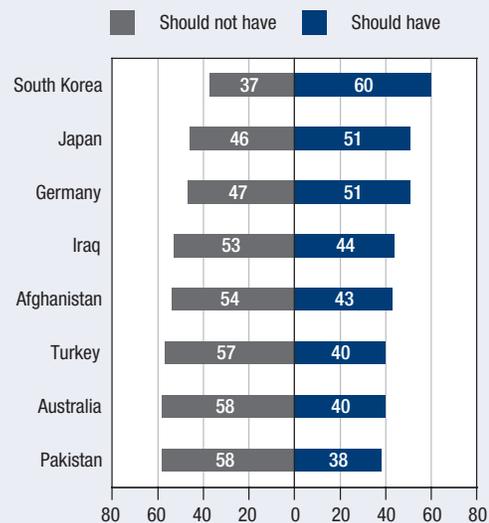


has been rising. In addition, when asked whether the United States should have long-term military bases in specific countries, majorities are opposed in many cases (see Figure 2.8), and the opposition is growing.

Clear majorities prefer to *not* have bases in places associated with wars and terrorism: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. A majority also says we should not have bases in Turkey, a NATO member

**Figure 2.8 – Long-Term Military Bases by Country**

Percentage who think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places.



and ally (57%, with 40% saying we should). In addition, a majority (58%) does not want long-term military bases in Australia (see Chapter 4).<sup>2</sup>

There is more willingness to have long-term bases in the countries of some of our traditional allies: Germany (51% favor, 47% oppose) and Japan (51% favor, 46% oppose). These percentages are about the same as 2010 but have dropped roughly 8 and 7 points, respectively, since 2008. The highest level of support is reserved for South Korea, where a solid 60 to 63 percent have supported bases since 2004. This strong support for bases in South Korea is likely related to concern about the North Korean nuclear threat (discussed in detail in Chapter 4).

### Preference for avoiding major new entanglements

Though a majority of Americans supports maintaining superior military power through a global military presence, they prefer not to use this power if at all possible. In 2012 more Americans are wary of getting involved in potentially high-cost foreign entanglements. As in past Chicago Council Surveys, in response to questions that imply unilateral rather than multilateral action, majorities oppose

2. The question did not specify that the United States does not currently have bases in Australia or Pakistan.

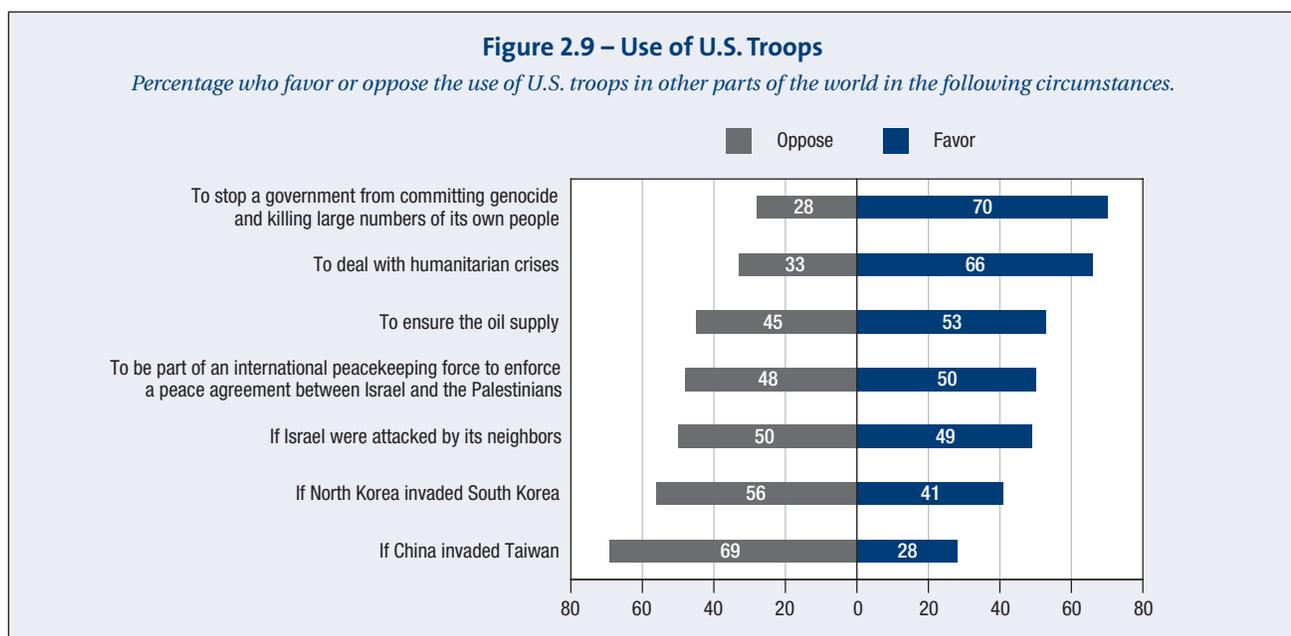
using U.S. troops if China invaded Taiwan (69%, up 8 points since 2004) and if North Korea invaded South Korea (56%). In addition, there is no clear majority support for using U.S. troops to defend Israel if it were attacked by its neighbors: as in 2010, Americans are essentially split down the middle (50% opposed, 49% in favor—see Figure 2.9).

Further, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, majorities generally oppose the use of force to deal with Iran as well as U.S. involvement in a potential war between Israel and Iran over Iran's nuclear program.

The experience of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is likely related to this declining desire to use force. Americans who see the wars as having been worth it are far more likely to support the deployment of U.S. troops in the scenarios mentioned above. Conversely, those who see the wars as having *not* been worth the cost are much less likely to support such uses of U.S. troops abroad.

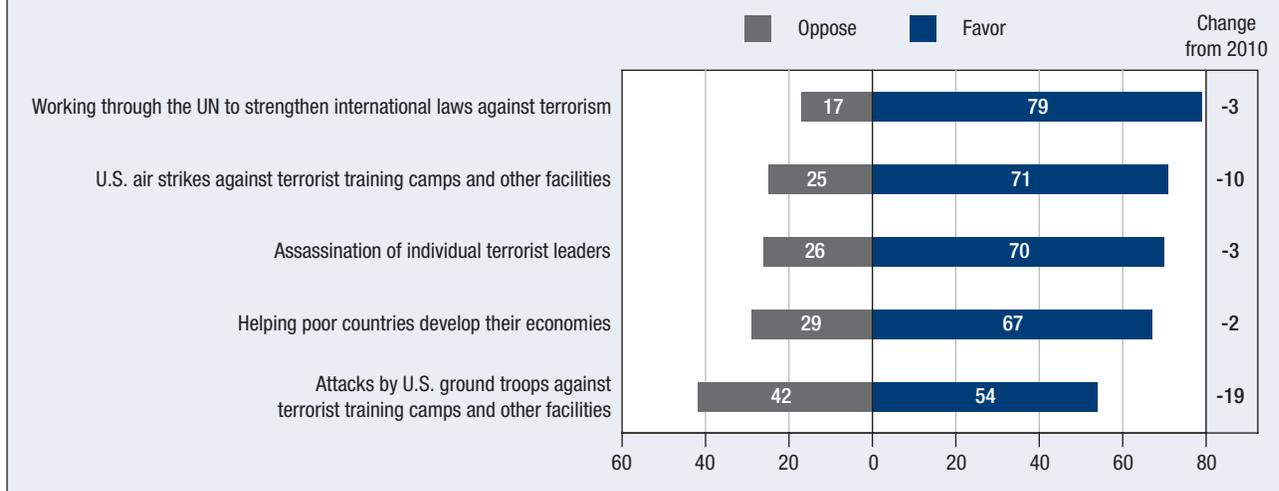
### Support for selective uses of force

Despite their reluctance to get involved in many potential conflicts, Americans are willing to take action when their interests and values are clearly at stake and/or when the likely costs are low. This includes actions against top threats, humanitarian actions, and certain multilateral actions.



**Figure 2.10 – Measures to Fight Terrorism**

Percentage who favor or oppose each of the following measures in order to combat international terrorism.



### Action against top threats

While perceived threat levels are down significantly from 2002 and even 2010, Americans remain supportive of international actions—both military and diplomatic—to counter the most critical threats.

#### Terrorism

With international terrorism still at the top of this list of threats, majorities of Americans support a variety of measures to combat it, though the degree of support has decreased markedly on some specific measures over the past ten years. The most precipitous drop is on support for an attack by U.S. ground troops against terrorist training camps and other facilities. Just over half (54%) now support this, down 19 points from 2010 and 28 points from 2002. Seven in ten (71%) support U.S. air strikes against terrorist training camps and facilities, down 10 points from 2010 and 20 points from 2002. Seven in ten also support the assassination of individual terrorist leaders, down from 2002 by 7 points, but fairly close to 2010 levels (see Figure 2.10).

#### Nuclear proliferation

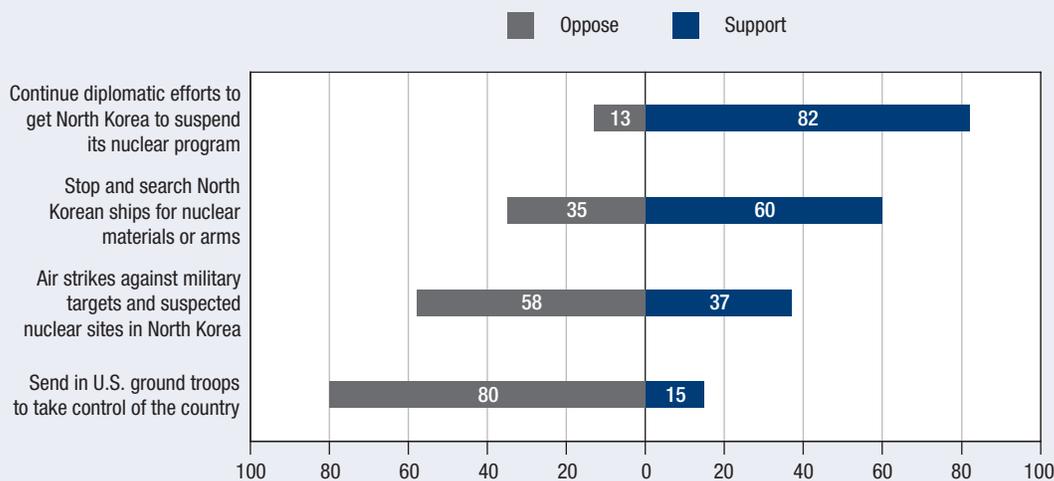
Americans are also willing to take measures to counter the nuclear threat in both Iran and North

Korea, but are much more guarded, stopping short of supporting military strikes. As will be discussed in the Chapter 3, only 21 percent think the UN Security Council should *not* pressure Iran to stop enriching uranium. Instead, the preferred options are continuing diplomatic efforts and tighter economic sanctions to get Iran to stop enriching uranium (roughly eight in ten “strongly” or “somewhat” support both). Forty-five percent support the UN Security Council authorizing a military strike if Iran continues to enrich uranium (19% “strongly”). On a separate question, only 27 percent say the United States should proceed with a military strike on its own if the UN Security Council does not authorize such a strike (70% say it should not).

In the case of North Korea, in keeping with the high importance Americans place on halting the spread of nuclear weapons as a foreign policy goal, preventing North Korea from building its nuclear capability ranks first as a priority in America’s relations with both Japan and South Korea. An overwhelming majority of Americans support continuing diplomatic efforts to get North Korea to suspend its nuclear program (82%), with a substantial majority (60%) also in favor of stopping and searching North Korean ships for nuclear materials or arms. Yet as with Iran, a majority opposes air strikes against military targets and suspected nuclear sites (58%). An overwhelming majority

**Figure 2.11 – Actions to Pressure North Korea**

*Percentage who support or oppose each of the following kinds of U.S. action to pressure North Korea to stop building its nuclear weapons capability.*



(80%) also opposes sending in U.S. ground troops to take control of the country (see Figure 2.11).

### Oil supply

The oil supply is another prominent issue for Americans. In 2010 majorities considered U.S. dependence on foreign oil and disruption in energy supply as critical threats to U.S. interests (not asked in 2012). In 2012 reducing dependence on foreign oil ranked as the second highest goal behind protecting the jobs of American workers on the list of U.S. foreign policy goals (77% “very important”). Underscoring concern about the threat of energy disruption, Americans show willingness to take action if necessary. A majority (53%) favors using U.S. troops to ensure the supply of oil. The percentage in favor of this has varied over the past decade between 45 and 59 percent.

### Many multilateral actions are supported

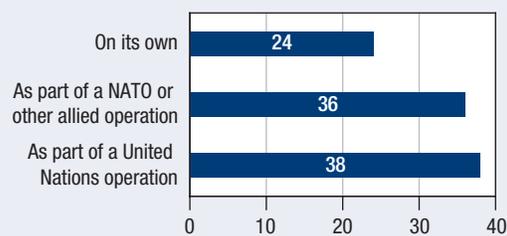
As in the past, Americans strongly prefer multilateral military efforts and in some cases will only consider taking military action if it is part of a multilateral operation. When asked whether they think it is best for the United States to act as part of a United Nations operation, as part of a NATO

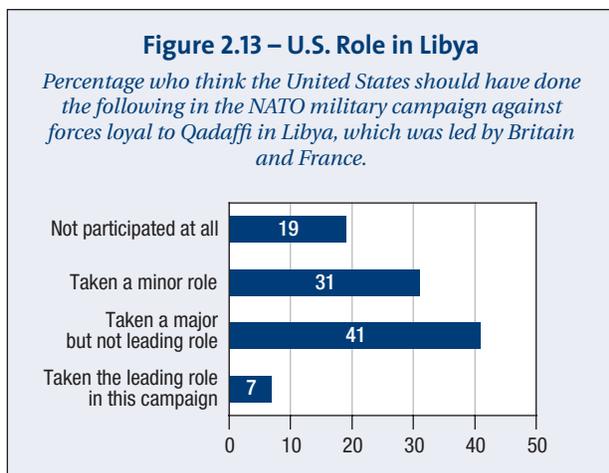
or other allied operation, or on its own when it is necessary to use military force, only 24 percent of Americans prefer the United States acting on its own. Thirty-eight percent favor acting as part of a UN operation and 36 percent favor acting as part of a NATO or other allied operation (see Figure 2.12).

In line with this preference for multilateral engagement, more than sixty years after its founding, Americans are still strongly committed to participating in NATO. A large majority (68%) favors maintaining the current U.S. commitment to NATO, and an additional 7 percent support an increase in that commitment. Only small minorities want to reduce the commitment to NATO (15%) or withdraw from the alliance entirely (8%). The last decade of wars has not taken a toll on this

**Figure 2.12 – Use of U.S. Military Force**

*Percentage who think that as a general rule, when it is necessary for the United States to use military force, it is best for the United States to act as follows.*





support, which remains essentially unchanged since 2002.

The Chicago Council Surveys have long shown that the American public prefers acting in concert with others, and this emphasis on multilateral action can be seen in support for action on the Korean peninsula. While only 41 percent say they oppose sending U.S. troops to defend South Korea in the case of a North Korean invasion, when a different question specifies that this would involve acting with other allies and under the banner of the United Nations, a majority (64%) supports deploying U.S. troops in the defense of South Korea.

This principle can also be seen in the example of the joint action of NATO member nations in Libya. Notably, the United States did not take the lead in the Libya operation—Great Britain and France shared the leading role. This approach proved acceptable to the American people. Only 19 percent of Americans think the United States should not have participated in the Libya campaign at all, and only 7 percent say that the United States should have taken the leading role. Most think the United States should have taken a major role (41%) or a minor role (31%), but not the lead (see Figure 2.13).

While multilateral is preferred to unilateral action, it is not automatically supported. Majorities oppose working with allies to send arms and supplies to antigovernment groups in Syria (67%), to bomb Syrian air defenses (72%), and to send troops into Syria (81%). They remain divided on whether or not to participate in an international

peacekeeping force to enforce a peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians (50% in favor vs. 48% opposed).

### Support for humanitarian interventions

Americans support, in the abstract, the use of troops for humanitarian efforts. This reflects a moral component in foreign policy preferences and signals support for intervening in situations that are viewed as large-scale violations of human rights or humanitarian crises. Seven in ten support the use of U.S. troops to stop a government from committing genocide and favor their use in dealing with humanitarian crises, broadly in line with results since 2002/2004 (see Figure 2.9). As mentioned, only 19 percent of Americans say the United States should have stayed out of Libya, where violence by the Qaddafi regime against its own people led to a humanitarian crisis. Regarding Syria, while most Americans resist military involvement, they do not want to turn a blind eye to the humanitarian crisis precipitated by the civil war there. Majorities support increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions on the Syrian regime (63%) and enforcing a no-fly zone (58%).

As previously noted, there is much stronger opposition to using U.S. troops in most of these scenarios among those who see the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as not having been worth it. But even large majorities of “not worth it” respondents still support using troops to deal with humanitarian crises and to prevent genocide in principle. This contrast may result from an expectation of much lower costs in most humanitarian interventions.

### Nonmilitary approaches favored

As they increasingly seek to cut back on foreign expenditures and avoid military engagement whenever possible, Americans are broadly supportive of nonmilitary forms of international engagement and problem solving, ranging from diplomacy, alliances, and international treaties to economic aid and decision making through the UN.

## Overwhelming support for diplomatic efforts to address the nuclear challenge

Americans see diplomacy as the natural first step in reacting to delicate international situations. This comes across clearly in their views on how to deal with nuclear proliferation. To deal with this threat, large majorities favor diplomatic engagement: 79 percent support the UN Security Council continuing diplomatic efforts to get Iran to stop enriching uranium (44% “strongly” support this), while 82 percent support the United States continuing diplomatic efforts to get North Korea to suspend its nuclear program.

## Talks with leaders of hostile nations and groups favored

Large majorities of Americans favor diplomatic engagement with leaders of countries and groups with whom the United States has hostile or unfriendly relations. By margins of more than two to one, Americans say the United States should be ready to hold talks with the leaders of Cuba (73%), North Korea (69%), and Iran (67%). Somewhat fewer Americans favor negotiating with nonstate actors such as Hamas and the Taliban. A slight majority (52%) thinks the United States should be ready to talk with leaders of Hamas, while Americans

are divided on whether or not the United States should be ready to meet and talk with the Taliban in Afghanistan (48% should, 49% should not—see Figure 2.14).

## Friendly engagement with China preferred

Given the dramatic rise of China in economic and global influence, Americans might be expected to view this as a direct challenge to the United States. However, as will be discussed in the Chapter 4, while Americans are divided on whether China is a rival or partner of the United States, they are not inclined to respond by trying to limit its growing power. In line with their general support for diplomatic engagement, a large majority (69%) supports undertaking friendly cooperation and engagement with China; only 28 percent say the United States should actively work to limit the growth of China’s power. Similarly, limiting the rise of China’s power ranks as a low priority in America’s relationship both with Japan and South Korea.

## Substantial support for sanctions

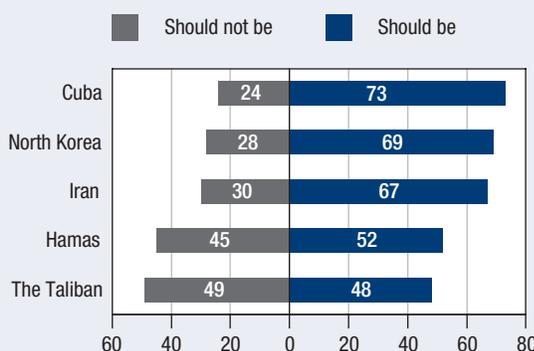
In addition to diplomatic approaches, Americans are also willing to impose economic sanctions to help achieve foreign policy objectives. In the effort to get Iran to stop enriching uranium, 80 percent support the UN Security Council imposing tighter sanctions on Iran (47% strongly). In dealing with the crisis in Syria, Americans support economic and diplomatic sanctions by a two to one margin (63% support vs. 32% oppose).

As to the effectiveness of sanctions, expectations are modest. While a majority of Americans (62%) think that placing sanctions on countries that violate international law has been at least a “somewhat effective” approach to achieving U.S. foreign policy goals, only 16 percent say this approach has been “very effective,” well below the perceived effectiveness of maintaining superior military power (42% “very effective”).

Interestingly, among those who think placing sanctions on countries that violate international law has been an *ineffective* means of achieving

**Figure 2.14 – Talking with Leaders of Unfriendly Countries or Groups**

*Percentage who think U.S. leaders should or should not be ready to meet and talk with leaders of the following countries and groups with whom the United States has hostile or unfriendly relations.*



U.S. foreign policy goals, there is still strong support for continuing to use sanctions. In the case of Iran's nuclear program, for example, 79 percent of those who think sanctions have been ineffective in general support the UN Security Council imposing tighter economic sanctions on Iran. The crisis in Syria prompts similar results, with sanctions receiving majority support even among those who see them as generally ineffective. This shows a strong desire to exhaust nonmilitary approaches to resolving conflicts even if they may not be effective.

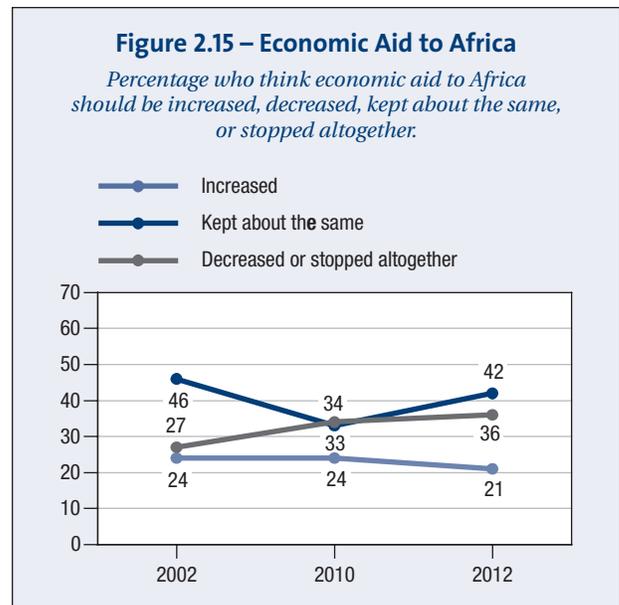
### Selective cuts in economic aid

When thinking about economic aid to specific countries or for specific purposes, many Americans in 2012 are making clear distinctions about whether or not to support it. Most continue to support aid to African countries and to their long-time ally in the Middle East, Israel. But support for aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan, connected to the Afghan war and efforts to combat terrorism, has dropped significantly, as has support for aid to Egypt (see Chapter 3).

Americans' economic outlook influences their attitudes on aid. Those who say their personal economic situations have declined in the past year are less likely to support both economic and military aid. Similarly, those who think the next generation of Americans will be worse off are more likely to say such aid should be stopped altogether rather than decreased, kept the same, or increased.

Support for aid to Africa is the most robust among all places asked about (see Figure 2.15). The support for continuing aid to Africa reflects Americans' humanitarian impulses and is further amplified among those who are most concerned about world hunger. Those who see combating world hunger as a "very important" foreign policy goal are far more likely to support aid to African countries, while those who see this goal as "not important" are far more likely to support eliminating aid.

Support for aid to Israel, a close, long-time ally in the Middle East, has remained fairly steady over the past decade. Many Americans (45%) want to



keep aid at about the same level, 23 percent want to decrease aid, 18 percent want to stop it altogether, and 11 percent want to increase it. "Decrease" and "stop" opinions, taken together, are up 7 percentage points since 2010.

Americans also support aid as a measure to combat terrorism. When asked whether they favor or oppose helping poor countries develop their economies as a measure to combat international terrorism, two-thirds of Americans (67%) say they favor it. This view has held steady for most of the past decade.

### Openness to other strategic initiatives

When asked to evaluate the past effectiveness of a number of approaches to achieving U.S. foreign policy goals, Americans think many of them have been at least "somewhat effective." Maintaining U.S. military superiority ranks the highest as "very effective." The approach of building alliances with new countries, signing free trade agreements with other countries, placing sanctions on countries that violate international law (as mentioned), and strengthening the United Nations (as will be discussed later) are all seen as at least "somewhat effective," though not "very effective" (see Table 2.1). In the context of priorities for America's relationships with Japan and South Korea, building

**Table 2.1 – Approaches to Achieving U.S. Foreign Policy Goals**

*Percentage who think each of the following approaches has been “very” or “somewhat effective” in achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States.*

	Total (very and somewhat)	Very effective	Somewhat effective
Maintaining U.S. military superiority	84	42	42
Building alliances with new countries	77	21	56
Signing free trade agreements with other countries	67	13	54
Placing sanctions on other countries that violate international law	63	16	47
Strengthening the United Nations	62	16	46

a regional free trade alliance between the United States and Asia is considered at least a “somewhat high” priority by about two-thirds, though only 18 percent consider this a “high priority.”

### U.S. participation in international treaties and agreements favored

Large majorities of the American public favor international treaties and agreements to address major international issues, including nuclear testing, prosecution of war criminals, and climate change (see Figure 2.16). As they have since 2002, solid majorities of Americans support U.S. participation in:

- a nuclear test ban treaty that would ban nuclear test explosions worldwide (84%);
- the agreement on the International Criminal

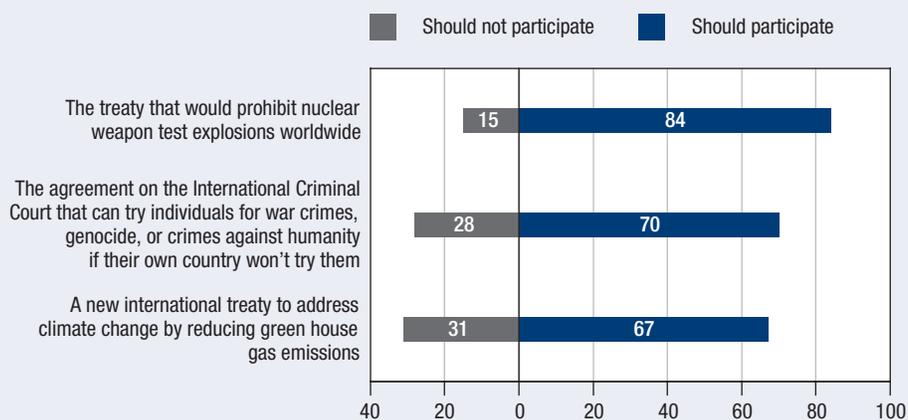
Court that can try individuals for war crimes, genocide, or crimes against humanity in the event that their own country is unwilling to try them (70%);

- a new international treaty to address climate change by reducing greenhouse emissions (67%, though support is down from 76 percent in 2008).

Notably, the American public is far more approving than the U.S. government on these treaties. While the United States has signed treaties addressing these concerns, none has been ratified by the Senate, which is required for participation. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was signed in 1996, the Kyoto Protocol on climate change was signed in 1997, and the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court was signed in 2000, yet all remain unratified today.

**Figure 2.16 – Support for International Treaties and Agreements**

*Percentage who think the United States should or should not participate in the following treaties and agreements.*



## Support for working through the United Nations to solve problems

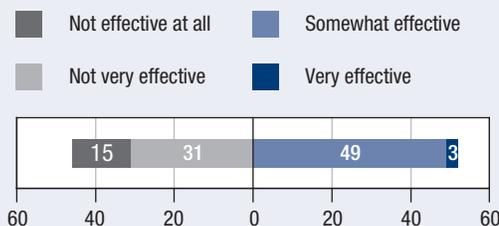
As seen in preferences for troop actions through the UN, a majority of Americans continues to endorse working through the UN to address military challenges. More broadly, when asked whether the United States should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations when dealing with international problems, even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice, 56 percent agree that it should (43% disagree).

While many Americans support working through the UN to deal with international problems, they see room for improvement in the UN's effectiveness. While a narrow majority (52%) says that the United Nations is doing at least a "somewhat effective" job (49%) in trying to solve the problems it has faced, only 3 percent say it is doing a "very effective" job (see Figure 2.17). On the question of whether it is best for the United States to act alone, as part of a United Nations operation, or as part of a NATO or other allied operation when it is necessary to use force, Americans are divided on whether working through the UN (38%) or NATO or other allies (36%) is best.

Despite the perception that the United Nations may not be living up to its potential, Americans are not as supportive of efforts to strengthen it as they have been previously. More Americans see the goal of strengthening the United Nations as "somewhat important" (44%) than as "very important" (35%). This is a decline from 2002, when 55 percent saw it as a "very important" goal, a high-water mark for strengthening the UN in surveys going back to 1974. The 35 percent found in 2012 is among the lowest recorded on this item, in line with attitudes since 2004 when support dropped in the aftermath

**Figure 2.17 – Effectiveness of UN in Solving Problems**

*Percentage who say the United Nations is doing a very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not at all effective job in trying to solve the problems it has faced.*



of the highly publicized debate in the UN over authorization of the war in Iraq.

In terms of past efforts to strengthen the UN, a majority (62%) thinks that doing this has been at least a "somewhat effective" (46%) approach to achieving U.S. foreign policy goals, though only 16 percent think this has been "very effective."

## Conclusion

The trend in American public opinion towards a desire to selectively engage with the world first identified in the 2010 Chicago Council Survey has continued. As this chapter has documented, Americans have a strong desire to move on from a decade of war, to scale back spending, and avoid major new military entanglements. Today, Americans seek a foreign policy characterized by extensive use of American diplomatic resources; by cooperation with other nations in the pursuit of common goals; and by selective, multilateral deployments of military force. The following two chapters will examine how these broader principles apply more specifically in two areas of the world: the Middle East and Asia.

## Chapter 3

# Navigating Perils in the Middle East

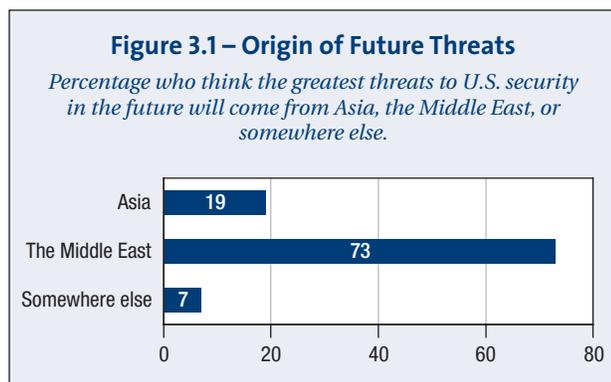
Long a major trouble spot for American foreign policy, the Middle East today is experiencing sweeping change that promises both new opportunities and new challenges. While the uprisings of the Arab Spring hold out hope for a more democratic future, turmoil may persist for a long time to come. The Middle East is seen by most Americans as the source of the greatest threats to the United States in the future. It elicits ongoing concerns about terrorism, violence, and nuclear proliferation. At the same time, worries about these threats have lessened markedly since 2002. Americans will act when necessary, but prefer to avoid military engagement as they try to balance their foreign policy approaches among conflicting forces in the region.

### Middle East source of future threats

As highlighted in previous chapters, 73 percent of Americans say that in the future, the greatest

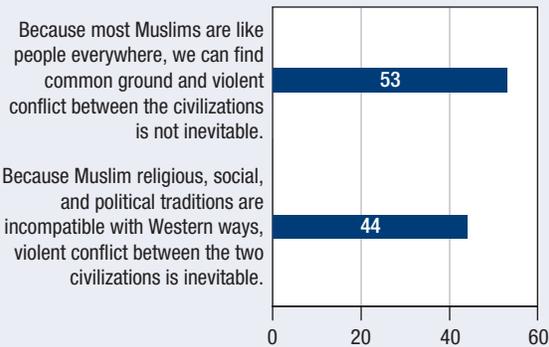
threats to U.S. security will originate in the Middle East. Only two in ten (19%) believe these threats will come from Asia (see Figure 3.1). Concern about international terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and Iran's nuclear program contribute to this belief. But compared to ten years ago, perceptions of these threats as critical have receded. International terrorism, a top concern for Americans over the past decade, is seen as a critical threat by 67 percent of Americans today, down from 91 percent in 2002. It is followed by Iran's nuclear program, seen as a critical threat by 64 percent, down slightly from 2010 when the question was first asked. Fear of Islamic fundamentalism is much less widespread among Americans today than it was ten years ago, with only 39 percent describing it as a critical threat, compared to 61 percent in 2002. Millennials are least worried about Islamic fundamentalism, with only 23 percent of them seeing it as a critical threat, compared to 43 percent of those thirty years of age or older.

Further, a slight majority of Americans do not see a fundamental conflict between Islam and the West. Fifty-three percent believe that “because most Muslims are like people everywhere, we can find common ground, and violent conflict between the civilizations is not inevitable.” Nevertheless, a sizable minority is still skeptical, with 44 percent saying instead that “because Muslim religious, social, and political traditions are incompatible with Western ways, violent conflict between the two civilizations is inevitable” (see Figure 3.2).



**Figure 3.2 – Attitudes toward the Muslim People**

*Percentage who say each of the following statements is closer to their own view.*



## Relations with Muslim world worsened by wars

The lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are shaping views of engagement globally, and in the greater Middle East in particular. As discussed in earlier chapters, in addition to thinking that these wars were not worth it and have not made the United States safer from terrorism, most Americans (70%) believe that the war in Iraq has worsened relations with the Muslim world. Relatedly, 61 percent of Americans think most people in Afghanistan want NATO forces to leave now, up from 47 percent in 2010. Support for having long-term military bases in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and even Turkey, covered in detail in Chapter 2, has dropped.

Despite their desire to pull back, Americans still support involvement in the region when their interests and values are at stake, including actions against terrorism, to secure the oil supply, to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and in cases of genocide or humanitarian crises (see Chapter 2). While support for large-scale military interventions has waned, Americans continue to back a variety of diplomatic and multilateral means to address these pressing problems.

## No consensus on Arab Spring

Almost two years after protestors took to the streets in Tunisia following the self-immolation of

Mohamed Bouazizi, beginning a wave of protests and leadership transitions across the Middle East, Americans remain divided about how to characterize the results of what has come to be called the “Arab Spring.” Thirty-seven percent say these changes will have no impact on the United States, with 34 percent saying these developments will be positive and 24 percent saying they will be negative (see Figure 3.3).

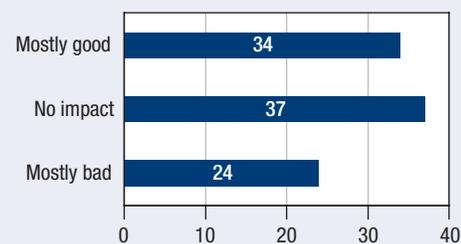
For decades U.S. foreign policy has been driven by concerns that displacing authoritarian regimes in the region would lead to greater influence of Islamic fundamentalist leaders. Yet most Americans do not necessarily share this concern. Asked what the United States should do if it appears likely that a democratic election in the Muslim world would lead to the election of an Islamic fundamentalist, a mere 6 percent say that the United States should discourage democracy. A majority (64%) says that it should not take a position either way. Twenty-nine percent say that America should encourage democracy in this case.

## Egypt: Cuts to economic and military aid preferred

The 2012 survey indicates that compared to the past, there has been a marked increase in those who want to reduce aid to Egypt. For the first time since the question was initially asked in 2002, a majority of Americans say economic aid to Egypt should be decreased or stopped altogether (52%),

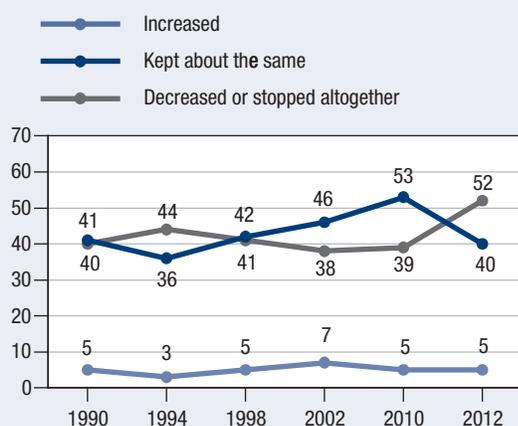
**Figure 3.3 – Impact of Arab Spring**

*Percentage who think the new governments being established in nations such as Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia following the political movements that started in 2010 known as the Arab Spring will be mostly good for the United States, mostly bad, or will have no impact.*



**Figure 3.4 – Economic Aid to Egypt**

Percentage who think economic aid to Egypt should be increased, decreased, kept about the same, or stopped altogether.



with a minority saying it should be kept the same (40%) or increased (just 5%). This is a striking 13-point increase from 2010 in the desire to reduce or stop economic aid (see Figure 3.4). Similarly, many Americans also favor cutting back on *military* aid to Egypt, with a majority (53%) preferring to decrease aid (26%) or stop it altogether (28%).<sup>1</sup> Uncertainty about the government may be impacting views on Egypt: the survey was fielded when the 2012 electoral campaigns in Egypt were in full swing and the balance of power between the legislature, the president, the judiciary, and the military was—and remains—in transition.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those who believe the Arab Spring will have a negative impact on the United States are more favorable to stopping economic and military aid altogether (35% and 39%, respectively) than are those who say the Arab Spring will be mostly good for the United States (15%, 21%) or will have no impact (22%, 27%).

## Libya: A model for future intervention?

When the Arab Spring came to Libya in February 2011, the death toll from the Qaddafi regime's

1. Totals reported may differ from the sum of individual numbers due to rounding.

crackdown on the opposition drew international condemnation. While not leading the international intervention against the regime, the United States joined a coalition of twenty-seven states led by Great Britain and France. Action began with the enforcement of a no-fly zone, followed by a bombing campaign. The U.S. administration assured the American people that there would be “no boots on the ground” in this campaign.

This approach in Libya, letting Great Britain and France take the primary role, appears to be acceptable to the American public. Only two in ten Americans (19%) think the United States should not have participated in the Libya campaign at all, and a still smaller 7 percent say that the United States should have taken the leading role. The vast majority of the American public thinks the United States should have taken either a major role (41%) or a minor role (31%), without taking the lead (see Figure 2.13).

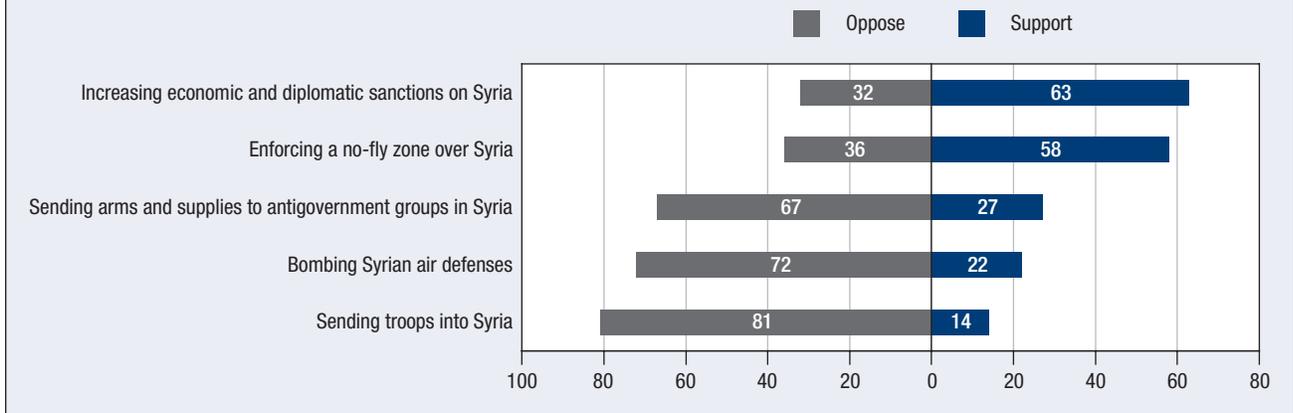
When respondents were asked to explain why they took the position they did on Libya, a large number who supported the U.S. contribution to the NATO effort emphasized its multilateral nature and distinguished between involvement and domination: “*The U.S. should be one of the countries involved, but not always the lead.... Shared responsibility is the key,*” offered one participant. Another echoed this idea, saying, “*We can support others’ causes but not act like we control everything or dominate everything.*” Still another said, “*We should lead by example, not force.*”

Others welcomed a leadership role from other members of the international community and noted that such leadership without dominance would help to improve or counter the U.S. image as a “*bully,*” a word used several times, while still accomplishing U.S. strategic goals: “*By being a major, but not leading, power in these actions we cement our military prowess without taking as much of the backlash that might occur.*” One respondent remarked, “*I have no problem with other countries taking prime roles in global issues,*” with another stating that doing so “*accomplishes our goal and benefits us, but allows us to lower our war cost.*”

Finally, those who do not think the United States should have participated at all tend to men-

**Figure 3.5 – Support for Actions in Syria**

Percentage who support or oppose the United States and its allies taking each of the following actions with respect to Syria.



tion the domestic troubles of the United States, claiming that, “We get involved in too many other countries’ problems and don’t focus enough on our own problems back home.”

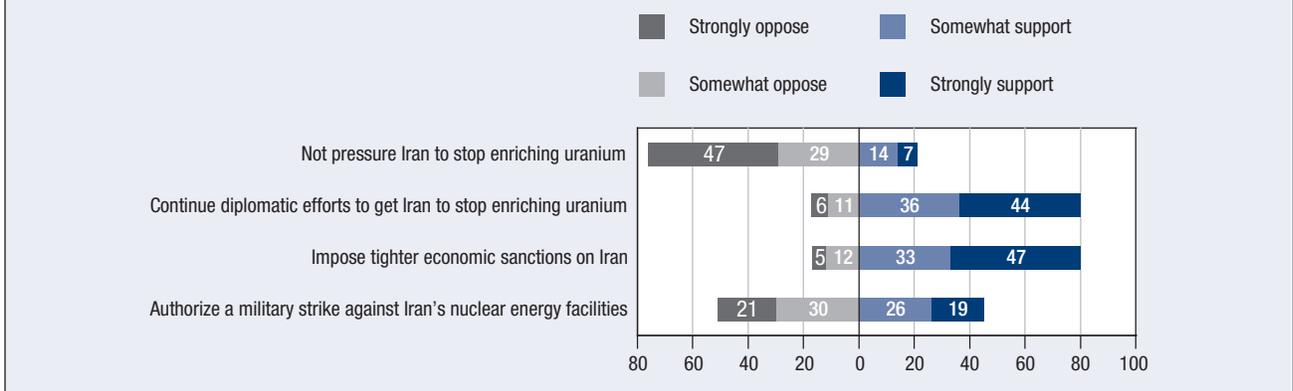
### Syria: Support for sanctions and a no-fly zone

Since its onset in March 2011, the Syrian uprising has turned into one of the most violent in the Arab Spring to date. As of August 2012, the United Nations estimated that at least 17,000 people had been killed, though opposition groups and humanitarian organizations suggest this number may be much higher.

When asked about a series of diplomatic and military options the United States could pursue in Syria along with its allies, support tends to follow the Libyan model. Sixty-three percent of Americans support increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions against the Syrian regime, and nearly as many favor enforcing a no-fly zone over Syria (58%). A majority, however, opposes bombing Syrian air defenses (72%), a likely prerequisite for enforcing a no-fly zone. Beyond these options, there is opposition to sending arms and supplies to antigovernment groups in Syria (27% favor; 67% oppose) or sending troops into Syria (14% favor; 81% oppose—see Figure 3.5).

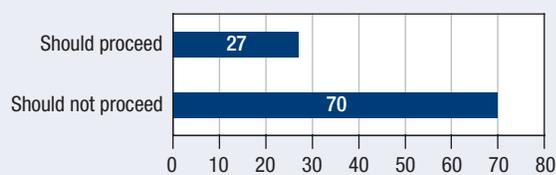
**Figure 3.6 – UN Security Council Actions against Iran’s Uranium Enrichment Program**

Percentage who support or oppose the UN Security Council taking each of the following actions since Iran has continued to enrich uranium even though the UN Security Council has demanded that it stop.



**Figure 3.7 – Military Strike against Iran**

*Percentage who think the United States should or should not proceed with a military strike on its own if Iran continues to enrich uranium, but the UN Security Council does not authorize a military strike.*



## Iran: Sanctions not strikes

Americans continue to see Iran’s nuclear program as one of the greatest threats to the United States, with 64 percent seeing it as a critical threat, second only to international terrorism. Americans are willing to take measures to counter the nuclear threat in Iran, but stop short of supporting military strikes. Only 21 percent of Americans think the UN Security Council should *not* pressure Iran to stop enriching uranium. The most preferred approach to ending this threat, endorsed by 80 percent, is the one that the UN Security Council is pursuing: imposing tighter economic sanctions on Iran. Essentially the same number (79%) approve of continuing diplomatic efforts to get Iran to stop enriching uranium (see Figure 3.6). Consistent with this strong support for diplomatic approaches, in a separate question, 67 percent of Americans say the United States should be willing to meet and talk with Iranian leaders.

A slim majority (51%) opposes UN authorization of a military strike against Iran’s nuclear energy facilities, with a substantial minority (45%) supporting such action. A far broader majority (70%) opposes a unilateral strike by the United States if Iran continues to enrich uranium but the Security Council does not authorize a military strike (see Figure 3.7).

### Perceived status of Iran’s nuclear program affects support for military strikes

Perceptions of how far along Iran appears to be in producing nuclear weapons affect perceptions of

Iran’s nuclear program as a critical threat and support for actions to stop it. In a new question respondents were asked what they thought was “the most recent assessment by the U.S. intelligence services, including the CIA,” of Iran’s nuclear program. When presented four options, only 25 percent of respondents choose the correct answer: “Iran is developing some of the technical ability necessary to build nuclear weapons, but has not decided whether to produce them or not.”<sup>2</sup> The most common answer, chosen by 48 percent, is that, “Iran has decided to produce nuclear weapons and is actively working to do so, but does not yet have nuclear weapons.” Another 18 percent go even further, choosing the position that “Iran now has nuclear weapons.” Just 4 percent say intelligence sources think that “Iran is producing nuclear energy strictly for its energy needs” (see Figure 3.8).

Not surprisingly, those who say that intelligence sources think Iran has nuclear weapons or that Iran is actively working to build them are more likely to see Iran’s nuclear program as a critical threat (72% and 68%, respectively) and to support authorization of a military strike through the UN Security Council (each 52%). Among those who say intelligence sources think Iran is gaining the technical ability but has not decided whether to produce nuclear weapons, many fewer see Iran’s program as a critical threat (53%) or support UN authorization of a military strike (35%).

Interestingly, beliefs about the assessment of Iranian intentions and capabilities are not as strongly correlated with opinions on a unilateral U.S. military strike. Large majorities oppose such a strike, even among those who say intelligence sources think Iran has nuclear weapons (68%), is actively working to produce them (67%), or has not decided whether to produce them (77%).

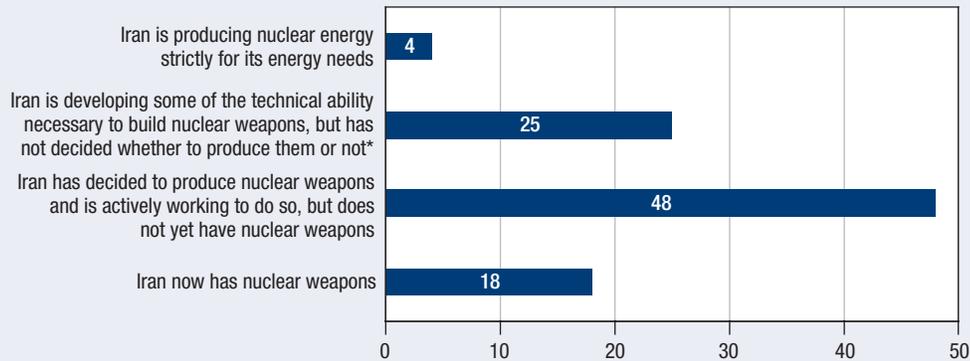
### Support for deal on producing nuclear fuel

Despite the fact that only 4 percent of Americans think the intelligence assessment is that Iran is producing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes,

<sup>2</sup> This was the correct assessment according to publicly available information at the time this survey was fielded.

**Figure 3.8 – Knowledge of U.S. Intelligence Assessment of Iran**

Percentage who think each of the following is a correct statement about the most recent U.S. intelligence services assessment of Iran's nuclear program.



\*This was the correct assessment according to publicly available information at the time the survey was fielded.

a narrow majority (52%) endorses a deal with Iran that would allow it to produce nuclear fuel for the purposes of electric generation if Iran allowed UN inspectors permanent and full access to its nuclear facilities (45% oppose). Again, perceptions of reality come into play. Support for such a deal is higher among those who believe that the U.S. intelligence estimate says that Iran has not decided whether to build a nuclear weapon (64%) than among those believe the assessment is that Iran is actively developing a nuclear weapon (51%) or already possesses such a weapon (40%).

cite “no direct threat to our own country,” claim that “Israel can defend its own borders,” and emphasize that “the U.S. should focus on domestic problems.” Some of those who favor intervention on behalf of Israel characterize Israel as a regional “ally” and “friend,” and claim the United States should intervene only as a retaliatory measure if Iran attacks first and not at all if Israel initiates the strike: “We should support Israel but not participate in a war that they start,” says one. “If Israel were to make the first strike, I would say they were on their own

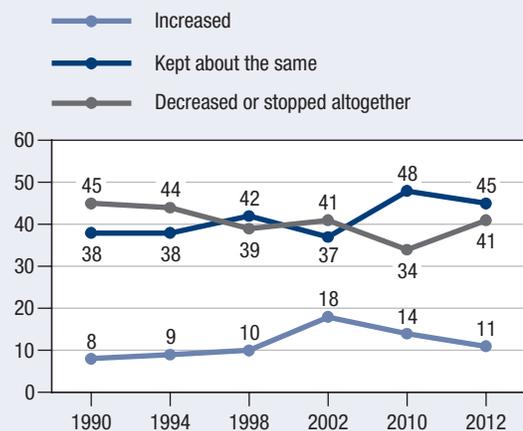
### Opposition to involvement in a possible Israeli-Iranian conflict

A persistent issue in regard to Iran’s nuclear program is the possibility that Israel will attack Iranian nuclear facilities regardless of UN or U.S. approval. In the hypothetical situation in which Israel were to bomb Iran’s nuclear facilities, Iran were to retaliate against Israel, and the two were to go to war, only 38 percent say the United States should bring its military forces into the war on the side of Israel. A majority (59%) says it should not.

When given the opportunity to explain why they approve or disapprove of U.S. involvement on the side of Israel in this situation, some of those saying the United States should not get involved

**Figure 3.9 – Economic Aid to Israel**

Percentage who think economic aid to Israel should be increased, decreased, kept about the same, or stopped altogether.



militarily for their decision. If Israel were attacked by Iran, I would feel that we should go to their aid militarily,” says another.

## Israel: Support for aid, neutrality

As a long-time ally in the Middle East, Israel is still a relatively favored recipient of economic aid among most Americans. Forty-five percent favor maintaining *economic* aid at the same level. Eleven percent want to increase it. Yet Israel is not immune to the broader desire to cut back spending internationally. A growing number (41%, up 7 points since 2010) now says economic assistance to Israel should be decreased or stopped altogether (see Figure 3.9). When it comes to *military* aid, more (45%) prefer to maintain aid to Israel at about the current level, 38 percent want to decrease it (19%) or stop aid altogether (19%), and 15 percent want to increase aid.

Some Americans appear to think of aid to Israel as a potential bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism. Those who view Islamic fundamentalism as a “critical” threat to U.S. vital interests are more likely to support increasing economic aid to Israel (17%, compared to 7% among those who say the threat is “important but not critical”) and military aid (25%, compared to 10% among those saying “important but not critical”). Similarly, they are less likely to support reducing or ending that aid, whether economic (33%, compared to 44% for “important but not critical”) or military (28%, compared to 41% for “important but not critical”).

Those who see the changes of the Arab Spring as “mostly bad” for the United States are also more likely to support increasing military aid to Israel (26% vs. 13% for “mostly good” and 11% for “no impact”). In addition, 23 percent of those who see violent conflict between Muslim and Western civilizations as inevitable favor of military aid to Israel, compared to 10 percent among those seeing “common ground”.

### Neutral stance on Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Americans have not changed their fundamental stance on the “Middle East conflict,” with two-



thirds (65%) saying the United States should not take either side in the conflict (see Figure 3.10). Of the rest, more say the United States should take Israel's side (30%) than the Palestinian's side (3%). This is roughly the same as in 2010. Since 2002 there has been a modest increase in those preferring to take Israel's side, from 24 percent to 30 percent today.

While most Americans prefer not to take sides in the conflict, many still support actions that might help the two sides resolve their differences. Fifty-two percent think U.S. government leaders should be ready to meet and talk with leaders of Hamas, and half (50%) say they would support sending U.S. troops as part of an international peacekeeping unit to enforce a peace agreement.

Americans remain closely divided, as they always have been, on whether to defend Israel with force if it were “attacked by its neighbors,” with 49 percent in favor of using U.S. troops in such a situation and 50 percent opposed. This question was asked from 1990 to 2004 with the wording “if Arab forces invaded Israel.” The question was added again in the 2010 survey with its current wording.

## Conclusion

The Middle East remains a key region for U.S. foreign policy, but the American public is apprehensive about the region. Though some feel that recent changes of the Arab Spring herald a brighter future for the region, not all Americans are optimistic. Americans remain critically concerned

about a number of threats emanating from the Middle East—though less so than in the past—and continue to see the greatest security threats in the future emerging from this region. At the same time, Americans are very much aware of the grow-

ing influence and economic power of Asia, and of China in particular. The American public appears to be reorienting its focus to this region of the world, where we now turn our attention.

## Chapter 4

### Shifting Focus to Asia

While Americans are not taking their eyes off the ball in the Middle East, a region of continuing uncertainty and unrest, they clearly see Asia as a region of great and growing importance to the United States. Overall, Americans view Asia as important because of its economic dynamism rather than as a threat. However, they also recognize that over the longer term, Asia's—and especially China's—rise could be a negative development for the United States.

As China's global influence grows, Americans see it as a powerful economic player with potential upsides as much as downsides for the United States. While they are divided as to whether China is primarily a rival or a partner of the United States, the partner image is growing and has become a slight majority view among Millennials. In general, Americans support friendly cooperation and engagement with China rather than trying to limit its rise to power. Yet they also see value in pursuing a number of strategic objectives in the region in partnership with allies.

The biggest security concern in the region for Americans remains the threat of North Korea's nuclear program. Most continue to see the relationships with traditional U.S. allies, Japan and South Korea, as the linchpin of U.S. foreign policy in Asia. They believe that the U.S. military presence in East Asia increases stability in the region, and they remain committed to basing troops there, especially in South Korea. Yet given their overall desire to scale back military commitments such as the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans

show only modest majority support for the U.S. administration's policy of pivoting diplomatic, economic, and military resources away from the Middle East and toward Asia.

#### Asia more important than Europe

Long focused on their neighbors and friends in Europe, Americans have slowly come to see Asia as an increasingly important region to the United States. For the first time in Chicago Council Surveys going back to 1994, when asked which continent is more important to the United States—Asia or Europe—slightly more Americans (52%) say that Asia is more important than say Europe is more important (47%). This is a 10-point increase from 2010 in those seeing Asia as more important (see

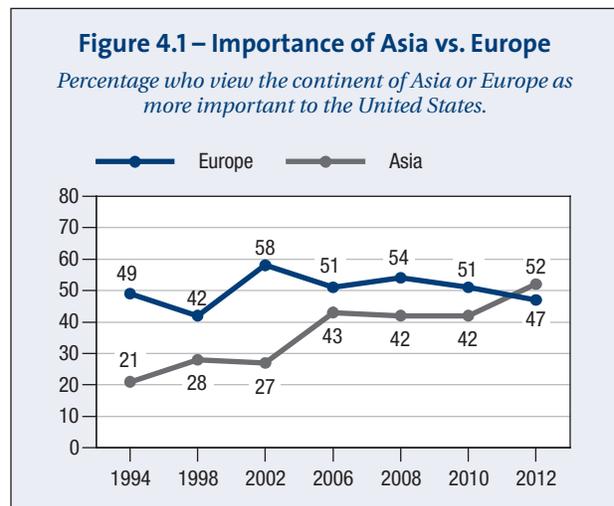


Figure 4.1). The percentage seeing Asia as more important than Europe has been steadily rising over the nearly two decades since this question was first asked.

In an open-ended follow-up question, those who select Asia over Europe attribute their choice to Asia's growing economic power and technological advances. As one respondent says: *"Many state-of-the-art technologies come from Asia, and it's in the best interest of the U.S. to develop strong ties as we move into the future."* Those who select Europe are more likely to stress economic ties, shared history, and culture: *"I think we are most closely connected,"* says one. *"We have over two centuries of ever more complex economic, diplomatic, and military ties to the EU,"* says another. One respondent notes that while today Europe is more important, the balance may shift in the future: *"Europe has always been a large power to the U.S., but I do feel it is changing toward Asia and will soon lean toward Asia more. Europe's economy is going down, Asia's is going up."*

Millennials (as well as those under the age of forty-five) are more inclined to feel that Asia is more important to the United States than Europe (58% Asia to 40% Europe), while those sixty or older (along with those over forty-five more generally) most often name Europe (54% Europe to 46% Asia).

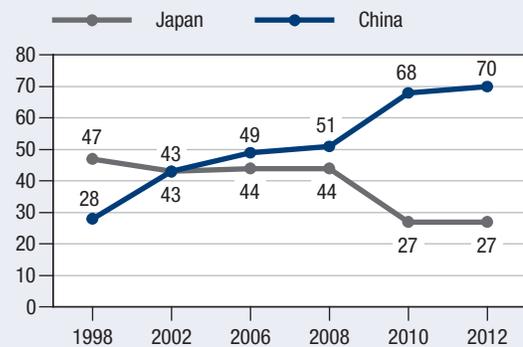
## China looms large

The shifting power dynamics in Asia over the past decade, particularly the dramatic rise of China's economic and military power, have contributed to American views of Asia's importance to U.S. vital interests. In 1998, when first asked whether Japan or China is more important to the United States, Americans saw Japan as more important by 47 percent to 28 percent. By 2002 the two countries were viewed as equally important, and today seven in ten (70%) say that China is more important than Japan (see Figure 4.2).

Similarly, in 2002 China and Japan were viewed as roughly equal in world influence—and roughly equal to the EU and Russia. Ten years later the gap has widened substantially, with China rising from

**Figure 4.2 – Importance of China vs. Japan**

*Percentage who think that Japan or China is more important to the United States in terms of American vital interests today.*



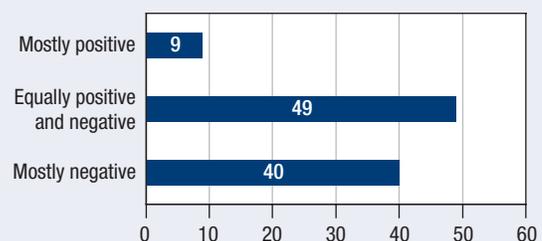
6.8 to 7.4 on a 10-point scale of overall influence and Japan declining from 6.6 to 6.1 (see Figure 1.9 in Chapter 1). Ten years from now, China's influence is projected to rise even further, with Japan's influence remaining the same. South Korea and India are also expected to increase in influence, though to a much more modest level. As described in Chapter 1, China's influence is seen as rising in ten years as U.S. influence lessens, though the influence of the United States is still seen as remaining ahead of China.

## China's economic might: An opportunity and a challenge

China's impressive economic development has certainly been a major factor in perceptions of China's future influence. Three in four Americans

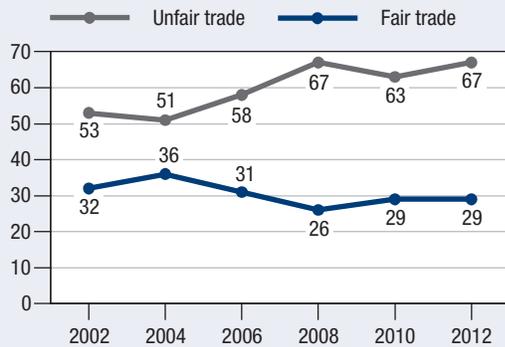
**Figure 4.3 – Impact of China's Economic Growth**

*Percentage who think that if China's economy were to grow to be as large as the U.S. economy, that would be mostly positive, mostly negative, or equally positive and negative.*



**Figure 4.4 – Trade with China**

Percentage who think that in general, China practices fair trade or unfair trade with the United States.



(76%) now expect that someday China's economy will grow to be as large as the U.S. economy. For the most part, the public does not seem to view this development as entirely negative. About half of Americans believe that Chinese economic growth will impact the United States in equally positive and negative ways, though 40 percent see it as "mostly negative" and 9 percent view it as "mostly positive" (see Figure 4.3). These views are broadly consistent with attitudes since 2008.

The challenges of China's economic power can be seen in the image of China as an "unfair" trader, a characterization that has been associated in the past with vigorous competitors such as Japan. Two-thirds (67%) say that China engages in unfair trade (see

**Figure 4.6 – Threat of China's Rise**

Percentage who see the development of China as a world power as a critical threat to U.S. vital interests in the next ten years.

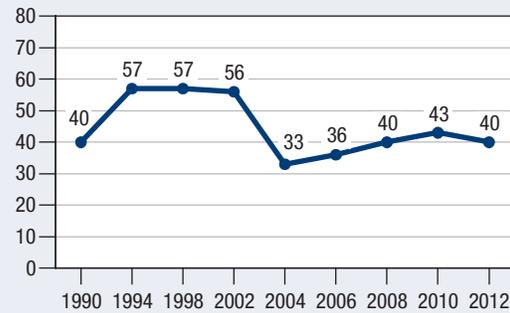


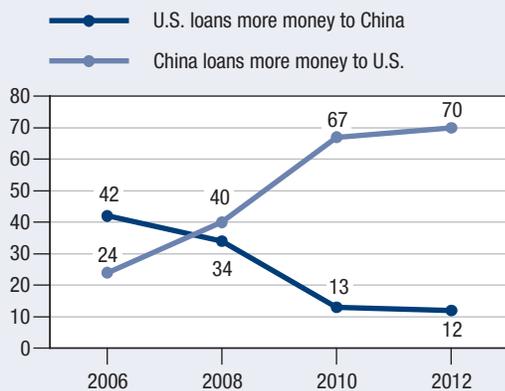
Figure 4.4). In addition, a slight majority (52%) sees U.S. debt to China as a critical threat. Americans have become markedly more aware of the debt situation over time, with 70 percent now knowing that China loans more money to the United States than the other way around. This is up an astounding 46 points in six years (see Figure 4.5). Those who are aware that China loans more to the United States are more likely than those who do not to expect that China's economy will grow as large as the U.S. economy, but they are no more likely to say this would be "mostly negative" for the United States.

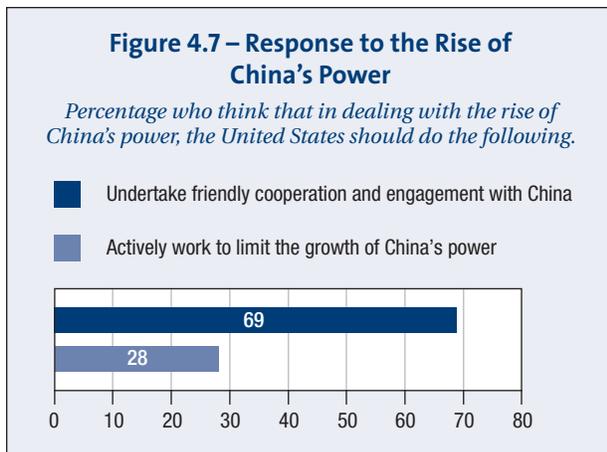
In general, it appears that concern about U.S. debt to China has not translated into an overall fear of China. The development of China as a world power is viewed by a minority (40%) as a critical threat. The 2012 results are striking when contrasted with attitudes in the 1990s and early 2000s, when nearly six in ten considered the development of China as a world power a critical threat (see Figure 4.6).

Like all age groups, Millennials think China's economy will grow as large as the U.S. economy with equally positive and negative consequences, while fewer think China is an unfair trader (51% compared to 67% overall). Along with all those under forty-five years of age, Millennials are less inclined to view the development of China as a world power (30% compared to 40% overall) as a critical threat.

**Figure 4.5 – Loans with China**

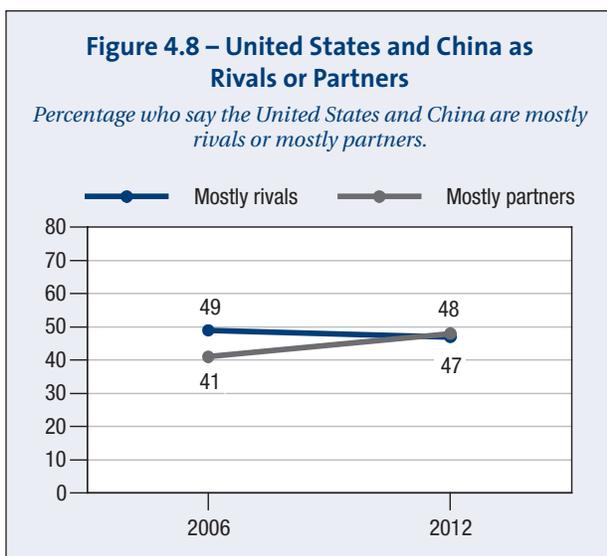
Percentage who think that the United States loans more money to China or that China loans more money to the United States.





## Support for friendly engagement with China

In line with the relatively modest overall sense of threat, Americans are not inclined to take a confrontational stance toward China. Most favor pursuing friendly cooperation and engagement (69%) over actively working to limit the growth of China’s power (28%—see Figure 4.7). These views have been relatively consistent since this question was first asked in 2006. In addition, limiting the rise of China’s power is not considered among the highest priorities in the U.S. relationships with Japan or South Korea, with only 18 and 17 percent of Americans, respectively, saying it should be a “very high” priority, substantially lower than for prevent-



ing North Korea from building its nuclear capability (see Figure 4.15).

Indeed, while Americans are equally divided between those who say that the United States and China are mostly partners (48%) and mostly rivals (47%), the percentage of Americans saying that China is mostly a partner has grown (see Figure 4.8). In 2006 when the question was last asked, more thought the two countries were rivals (49%) than partners (41%). This trend is most pronounced among Millennials, the only age group where more say that China is a partner (51%) than a rival (44%).

## Japan and South Korea: Linchpins of U.S.–East Asia policy

Americans highly value the relationships with their long-standing allies in East Asia, Japan and South Korea, both for security and economic reasons. While they are divided on whether China is a partner or a rival, there is much less doubt about Japan and South Korea. Eighty percent see Japan and the United States as mostly partners, up 7 points since 2006. Two in three (65%) describe South Korea and the United States as mostly partners, with 29 percent saying mostly rivals.

The importance of these relationships is highlighted by trade. Both Japan and Korea are identified as top trading partners. Fifty-six percent see Japan as a top ten trading partner of the United States. Only 25 percent do not see Korea as a top twenty trading partner—22 percent say it is in the top ten and 47 percent say it is in the top twenty but not the top ten (even though it is, in fact, in the top ten). A majority sees Japan as a fair trader (63%), and 53 percent say this about South Korea (see Figure 4.9), the first time a majority thinks so (43% unfair trader). In the case of Japan, this is a dramatic turnaround from the early 1990s when fear of Japanese economic might was high, and only 17 percent saw Japan as a fair trader.

Security is another strong dimension of America’s relationships with Japan and South Korea. Americans have been steady in their support for defending their ally South Korea (as long as the United Nations is involved). Since 2004 between 61

**Figure 4.9 – Trade with Japan and South Korea**

*Percentage who think that in general, Japan/South Korea practices fair trade or unfair trade with the United States.*



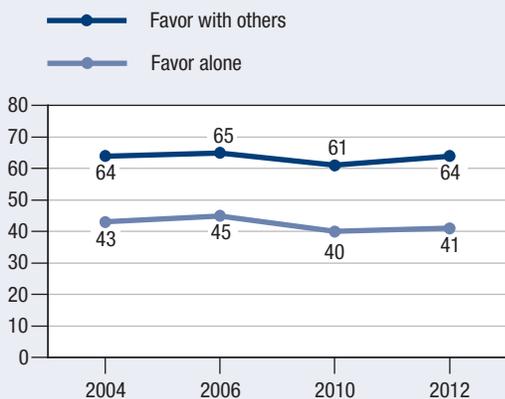
and 65 percent of Americans have supported contributing U.S. military forces together with other countries to a UN-sponsored effort to reverse the aggression if North Korea were to attack South Korea (see Figure 4.10). This is not the case, however, when unilateral action by the United States is implied, with a majority opposed to using U.S. troops if North Korea invaded South Korea (56%).

As the power dynamics in Asia have shifted, a key question is how Americans prioritize relations with traditional allies as compared to China. When asked on which of two options the United

States should put a higher priority, a majority (53%) says the United States should put a higher priority on “building up our strong relations with traditional allies like South Korea and Japan, even if this might diminish U.S. relations with China,” rather than on “building a new partnership with China, even if this might diminish our relations with our traditional allies” (40%—see Figure 4.11). At the same time, however, there may be a growing trend toward building a new partnership with China even at the expense of allies, with a substantial and growing minority (40%, up from 31% in 2010) saying the United States should put a higher priority on this option.

**Figure 4.10 – Use of U.S. Troops If North Korea Attacked South Korea**

*Percentage who favor contributing U.S. military forces, together with other countries, to a UN-sponsored effort to reverse the aggression if North Korea were to attack South Korea and who favor using U.S. troops if North Korea invaded South Korea (with or without others not specified).*

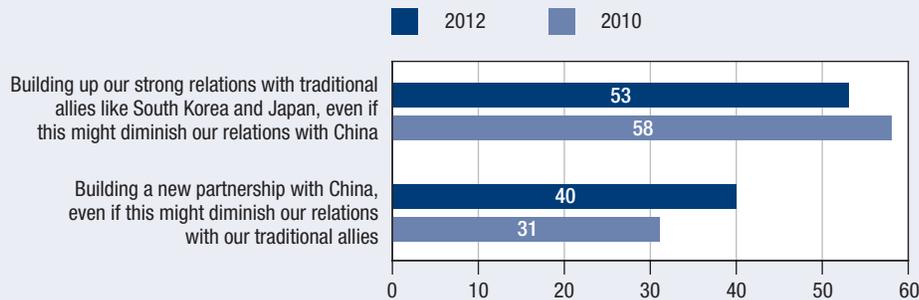


## North Korea greatest threat in Asia

Americans consider North Korea’s nuclear capability the clearest threat in Asia. In general, 63 percent consider the possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers a critical threat to the United States. On a question in which respondents were presented six possible strategic priorities in our relationships with Japan and South Korea, “preventing North Korea from building its nuclear capability” came out highest of the six possible priorities for both countries. Forty-five percent consider this a “very high” priority in the U.S. relationship with Japan (48% say so concerning South Korea—see Figure 4.15). Trying to bring about regime change in North Korea, however, is a much

**Figure 4.11 – Relations with China vs. Traditional Allies in Asia**

*Percentage who say that in thinking about U.S. foreign policy in Asia, the United States should put a higher priority on the following.*



lower priority, with only 17 percent considering it a “very high” priority in America’s relationship with either Japan or South Korea.

Concern over North Korea is also reflected in the high level of support for long-term U.S. military bases in South Korea—substantially higher than for any other country asked about. There has been no significant drop in this support, with a solid 60 to 62 percent supporting bases since 2004 (see Figure 4.12). Just under half (48%) say the current level of 30,000 troops in South Korea is about right. However, 43 percent think this is too many, while only 7 percent think it is too few.

### U.S. military presence a stabilizing force

In general, most Americans perceive clear dividends from having a U.S. troop presence in East Asia, with 59 percent believing that it increases stability in the region (see Figure 4.13). In addition to the strong continued support for bases in South Korea, a slight majority continue to support having troops stationed in Japan (51% in favor, 46% opposed; see Figure 4.14).

However, this sentiment does not extend to support for an expanded presence in the region. As mentioned, only a very small minority says that the number of U.S. troops in South Korea is too few. Nor do most Americans favor expanding U.S. forces to their own bases in Australia.

Millennials are less likely than others to say that the U.S. military presence increases security in

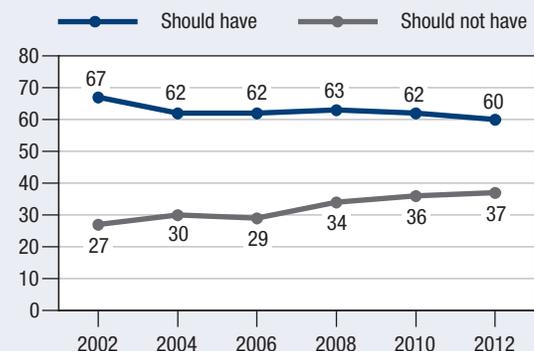
the region (52% compared to 59% overall), but their views on specific bases are no different than those of the overall public.

### Modest support for the “Pacific pivot”

In the fall of 2011 the U.S. administration announced a new foreign policy of redirecting U.S. diplomatic, military, economic and commercial policy resources to Asia. This policy, dubbed the “Pacific pivot,” shifts focus away from the previous decade’s large military deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and terrorist threats emanating from the Middle East and South Asia. While U.S. officials have recently attempted to recast this strategy as a multifaceted policy rather than solely a military one, concern about China’s ability to draw regional actors into its economic orbit along with its grow-

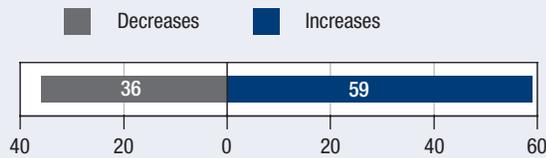
**Figure 4.12 – U.S. Military Bases in South Korea**

*Percentage who think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in South Korea.*



**Figure 4.13 – U.S. Military Presence in Asia**

*Percentage who think that the U.S. military presence in East Asia increases or decreases stability in the region.*



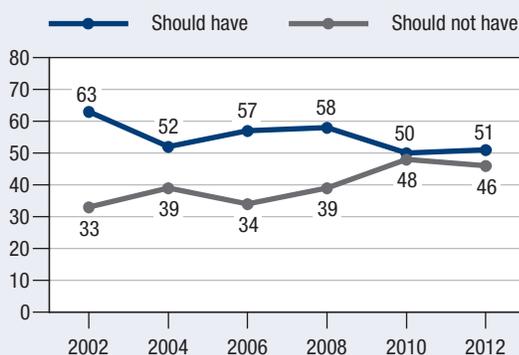
ing muscularity in the South China Sea is a clear motivating concern.

For their part, the American public shows modest support for such a shift. In recognition of China’s growing role in the world and Asia’s importance to the United States, a majority (54%) favors shifting military and diplomatic resources away from the Middle East and Europe toward Asia. Yet this endorsement is rather soft, with only 9 percent supporting it “strongly” and 45 percent supporting it “somewhat.” Forty percent oppose it either “somewhat” (33%) or “strongly” (7%).

Further hesitance about shifting military resources to Asia can perhaps be seen in American views on bases in Australia. One of the first initiatives announced along with the “pivot” to Asia was the stationing of a small contingent of Marines to Australia and plans to increase U.S. naval operations off the country’s northern coast. The United States has stated that its forces will operate out of existing Australian bases and not U.S. bases. This is clearly the preference of a majority of Americans:

**Figure 4.14 – U.S. Military Bases in Japan**

*Percentage who think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in Japan.*



asked for the first time whether the United States should have long-term military bases in Australia, 58 percent say we should not.

Given the widespread desire to reduce the defense budget and to cut back on spending in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Egypt, Americans may be somewhat reluctant to shift resources to another part of the world, as opposed to simply bringing these resources home. They still perceive the biggest future threats as coming from the Middle East and see the Middle East as an equally important part of the world, if more for security reasons. When presented with three parts of the world and asked to name which is more important to the United States—Europe, Asia, or the Middle East—a slight plurality select Europe as more important (39%), with the rest divided between Asia (31%) and the Middle East (29%).

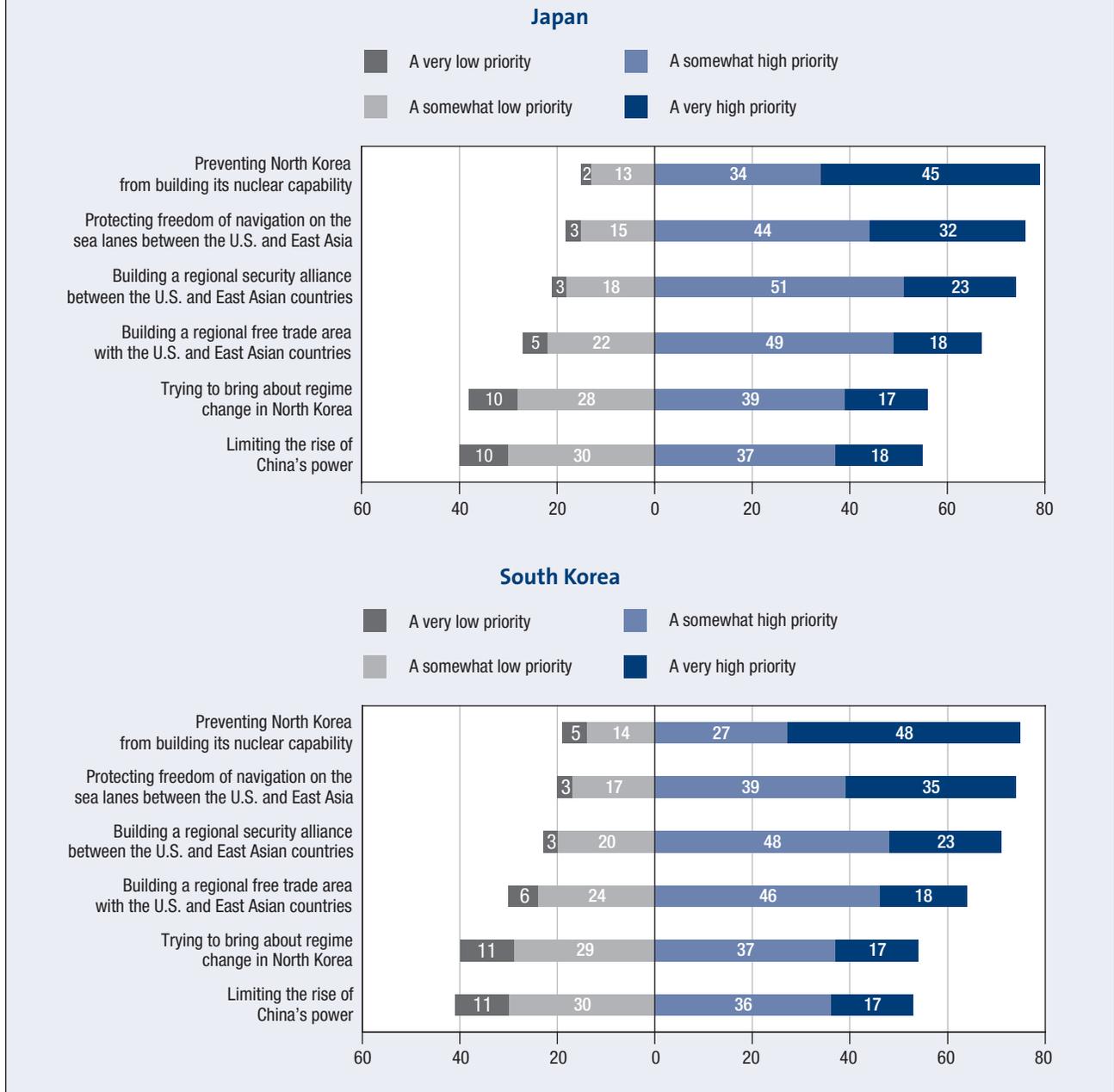
Not surprisingly, those who view Asia as more important to the United States on this question are most supportive of the plans to rebalance efforts toward Asia (74% at least “somewhat” support it). By comparison, those who see Europe or the Middle East as more important do not support the “pivot” (51% and 50%, respectively), with minorities supporting it (45% and 43%, respectively). Among Millennials, 58 percent support the “pivot,” while those sixty and older are evenly divided.

## North Korea at top of strategic priorities in Asia

Overall, Americans seem to recognize the value in leveraging our relationships with allies to pursue a number of strategic goals in Asia. Respondents were presented with identical lists of potential Asian regional strategies to pursue in partnership with both Japan and South Korea and were asked to say how high a priority each should have. In every case a majority believes the strategies are at least a “somewhat high” priority. Preventing North Korea from building its nuclear capabilities tops the list for both countries, with a plurality seeing this as a “very high” priority. The rest are seen more as “somewhat high” than as “very high” priorities (see Figure 4.15).

**Figure 4.15 – Priorities for America’s Relationships with Japan and South Korea**

*Percentage who think that in America’s relations with Japan/South Korea, the United States should place a high or low priority on each of the following.*



## Conclusion

As the United States moves on from a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the fight against terrorism, Americans find themselves in a world of shifting geopolitical realities. The recognition of China’s growing influence and of Asia’s importance

(especially economic importance) to the United States signals a reorientation that is only likely to become more pronounced in the future. Americans appear ready to embrace developments in Asia as an opportunity for the United States, while ensuring the U.S. ability to maintain influence and protect its interests in the region.

## Chapter 5

### Looking at Partisan Divides

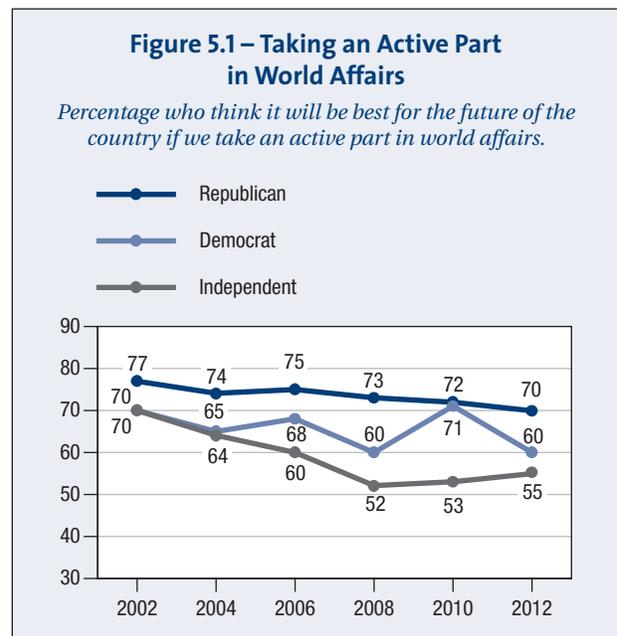
As the 2012 presidential election approaches, concerns about the troop withdrawal in Afghanistan, Iran's nuclear program, violence in Syria, and how to approach the rise of China all surface in campaign debates. The candidates' foreign policy speeches often point to divergences in party approaches, but the 2012 Chicago Council Survey reveals that Democrats and Republicans are very similar in their views on foreign policy. Though they differ in proportion, only rarely do they outright disagree. Moreover, there is considerable continuity over the past decade in the degree to which Republicans and Democrats share viewpoints. Majorities of both parties support active engagement; share concerns about terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and protecting American jobs; and differ little in their preferred approaches toward China and Iran. Their sharpest differences are on immigration issues and on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

#### Independents less engaged than partisans

The broadest change in 2012 is the tendency of Independents to distance their positions somewhat from those of both Republicans and Democrats. Since 2008 Independents have solidified their tendency to favor nonalignment and noninterventionism. While their concerns over terrorism and nuclear proliferation are not very different from concerns among Democrats and Republicans, they are less supportive of an activist role for the United

States and of a strong U.S. leadership in world affairs. Support for taking an active part in world affairs among Independents has dropped 15 points over the past decade, compared to only 7 and 10 points among Republicans and Democrats, respectively, over that same time span (see Figure 5.1). The proportion of those calling strong U.S. leadership “very desirable” is highest among Republicans (45%), while smaller proportions of Democrats (35%) and Independents (28%) share that view.

In general, Independents tend to be less widely supportive than Republicans of “hawkish” forms of engagement; they also tend to be less widely supportive than Democrats of more “dovish”



## Red versus Blue

A widespread assumption is that party polarization in Congress reflects polarization in the general public, including on foreign policy. If this were the case, we would expect to find big differences in the views of people who live in red districts (that is, districts represented by a Republican in the House of Representatives) and those who live in blue districts (represented by a Democrat).

To test this assumption we divided all respondents into two groups: those who live in red districts and those who live in blue districts. We compared their responses on all survey questions that asked about policy preferences or policy priorities, a total of eighty-five items.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the foreign policy opinions of Americans in red and blue districts do not generally differ much at all. In fact, they are remarkably similar: there is an important difference on only four of the eighty-five questions, while Americans' opinions coalesce in similar ways on all other questions.

In only a single case out of the eighty-five does a majority of people in red districts hold a position that is opposite of the majority of people in blue districts. When asked if the United States should commit U.S. troops if Israel were attacked by its neighbors, a majority of people in blue districts (54%) oppose troop use, while a majority of people in red districts (52%) favor it.

In three cases, one group has a majority position and the other is divided. A majority in blue districts (54%) opposes a UN authorization of a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, while people in red districts are divided. A majority in red districts thinks the United States should have bases in Japan (53%) and that foreign aid to Egypt should be decreased or stopped (55%), while in both cases people in blue districts are divided on the issue.

On average, for all eighty-five questions the difference between groups was just 3 percentage points. In only thirty of the eighty-five cases can we even be confident that the difference is greater than zero. (By standard statistical criteria, the margin of error when comparing these two subgroups is about 3.5 percentage points.)

approaches to foreign policy. The following sections detail differences and distinctions among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents across a wide range of specific policy areas.

## Threats from abroad

### Republicans see a more dangerous world

As in the past, Republicans view the world in terms of power and security to a greater degree than Democrats and Independents (see Table 5.1). Accordingly, Republicans see greater threats in nearly all areas tested in the 2012 survey. They are more likely than Democrats and Independents to view U.S. debt to China, immigration, terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, Islamist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Iran's nuclear program as critical threats.

On preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and the development of China as a world power there are more slight, single-digit gaps between Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. The only situation where Democrats see a significantly greater threat is for climate change, where Democrats are three times more likely than Republicans to say climate change is a critical

threat (44% to 15%), with Independents (33%) falling in between the two parties.

Overall, Americans' perceptions of global threats are lower than at any time in the post-9/11 era: perceptions of critical threats are at ten-year lows across many items. However, there are several differences across party lines.

As mentioned earlier, the perception of international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism as critical threats remain greater among Republicans than Democrats or Independents. The decline in perceptions of critical threat from 2002 to 2012 has been greater for Democrats and Independents than Republicans (28 and 23 points vs. 16 points on Islamic fundamentalism and 30 and 27 points vs. 13 points on terrorism, respectively).

The threat of nuclear proliferation follows a similar pattern, with a greater decline in perceived threat over the last ten years among Democrats (24 points) and Independents (26 points) than Republicans (15 points). Sixty-nine percent of Republicans now see nuclear proliferation as a critical threat, compared to 62 percent of Democrats and 59 percent of Independents (a ten-year low).

Lastly, Democrats feel least threatened by immigration, though the sense of threat has decreased for all three groups. Democrats' perceptions of a "critical" immigration threat have seen

**Table 5.1 - Critical Threats***Percentage who see each of the following as a critical threat to U.S. vital interests in the next ten years.*

	Republican	Democrat	Independent
International terrorism	77	65	61
The possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers	69	62	59
Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the U.S.	55	30	40
The development of China as a world power	44	38	39
Islamic fundamentalism	54	31	35

the greatest decline over the past ten years, falling from 62 percent “critical” in 2002 to a ten-year low of 30 percent in 2012. Independents’ perceptions of a “critical” threat from immigrants have also fallen significantly (from 58 to 40 percent) over the past ten years. A majority of Republicans still sees a “critical” threat from immigrants, although this majority has declined significantly in the last two years, going from 63 percent in 2010 to 55 percent in 2012.

## Partisans’ policy goals

### Big gaps on immigration, combating hunger, the UN, and climate change

One of the clearest ways to differentiate the foreign policy views of Democrats and Republicans is to identify which foreign policy goals they see as very important (see Table 5.2). Democrats are more apt

than Republicans to see limiting climate change, combating world hunger, strengthening the United Nations, and defending human rights as “very important” foreign policy objectives by double-digit margins.<sup>1</sup> More Republicans than Democrats see great importance in reducing illegal immigration, maintaining U.S. military power, and combating terrorism (by 27, 20, and 9 points, respectively). In most cases, however, these differences are ones of intensity and not opposing majorities.

There are also many areas of general agreement. Americans of all political stripes place importance on protecting jobs and do not think highly of bringing democracy to other nations, as has been the case for the past ten years. In fact, protecting jobs, reducing dependence on foreign oil, preventing nuclear proliferation, and combating terrorism are

1. Although more Democrats than Republicans think strengthening the United Nations is a “very important” foreign policy goal, only 46 percent of Democrats say so, a ten-year low.

**Table 5.2 - Foreign Policy Goals***Percentage who think each of the following is a “very important” foreign policy goal of the United States.*

	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Protecting the jobs of American workers	84	84	82
Reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil	78	77	73
Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons	76	74	67
Combating international terrorism	73	64	57
Maintaining superior military power worldwide	68	48	46
Controlling and reducing illegal immigration	70	43	48
Combating world hunger	31	54	40
Strengthening the United Nations	28	46	29
Limiting climate change	16	46	33
Helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations	11	21	10

the top four goals among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, indicating a degree of consensus when it comes to the most important priorities in U.S. foreign policy.

Independents, for their part, trail Democrats and Republicans alike in most of these areas. In only two cases do they *not* come in last—limiting climate change and defending human rights—where Republicans are least likely to think these are very important goals.

## Spending: Defense and aid

### Democrats and Independents more supportive of cuts to defense budget

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While all groups have majorities that favor some degree of defense budget cuts, more Republicans favor maintaining the U.S. defense budget than Democrats and Independents. Forty-five percent of Republicans say they do not want any defense budget cuts, compared to only 24 percent of Democrats and 28 percent of Independents. This fits a consistent pattern over the past eight years following a brief post-9/11 period of consensus. While majorities in all three groups want to cut the defense budget, that majority is much smaller for Republicans (54%) than for Democrats (76%) or Independents (71%), and far fewer Republicans would like to cut it as much or more than other programs (16% vs. 42% of Democrats and 39% of Independents).

The issue of the defense budget seems to be a more politicized topic for the American public than military priorities such as bases and military aid for specific countries. While Republicans are more apt than Democrats to support U.S. military bases in countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Iraq (by 11, 8, and 9 points, respectively), partisan differences on bases in other countries—Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, and Australia—are slight. Declines in support for bases in specific countries have occurred similarly among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Independents tend to side with Democrats rather than Republicans on this issue, presumably because it entails less engagement with the world.

There is little difference across the political spectrum in support for long-term bases in the abstract or for military aid to Israel and Taiwan. Military aid to Egypt, however, displays partisan differentiation: Democrats are more likely to support increasing or maintaining military aid than Republicans (52% Republican vs. 39% Democrat), while Republicans are more likely to support decreasing or ending that aid altogether (59% vs. 47%).

### Support for economic aid declines

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Attitudes toward economic aid vary strongly by the target area more so than by party affiliation. The most popular region for directing economic aid is Africa, where all groups want to maintain or increase aid (Republicans 56%, Democrats 71%, Independents 60%). For Israel, at least half of all groups favor maintaining or increasing aid, but Republicans are higher (Republicans 65%, Democrats and Independents 53%).

Aid to countries in the Islamic world encounters considerably more skepticism in nearly all groups. Egypt fares best: a majority of Democrats (54%) would maintain or increase aid, but less than half of Republicans and Independents would do so (34% and 46%, respectively). Less than half of all groups favor maintaining or increasing economic aid to Afghanistan, though Democrats are highest (Democrats 45%, Republicans 32%, Independents 36%). Support is even lower for aid to Pakistan—only 36 percent of Democrats, 22 percent of Republicans, and 31 percent of Independents support maintaining or increasing economic aid.

## Approaches to foreign policy

### Multilateralism and diplomacy

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While majorities of all three groups support a multilateral orientation, there are some noteworthy distinctions. U.S. participation in multilateral treaties on nuclear proliferation and the International Criminal Court (ICC) receives majority support among all three groups, but this consensus breaks down when it comes to climate change. Democrats

(82%) and Independents (67%) support a new international treaty to address climate change, while Republicans are divided on the issue (48% in favor, 50% opposed)

Democrats are also more likely to favor the use of force under the banner of the United Nations (46% vs. 29% of Republicans and 38% of Independents), perceive greater UN effectiveness in dealing with world problems (69% vs. 41% of Republicans and 44% of Independents), and agree that the United States should make joint decisions within the UN (66% vs. 43% of Republicans and 57% of Independents). Lastly, Democrats are far more apt to support U.S. government leaders talking with the leaders of Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Hamas, and the Taliban—though Republican and Independent majorities support talking to all the state leaders in that list and oppose talking to the nonstate actors (Hamas and the Taliban).

### Willingness to use troops

In harmony with their views on foreign policy goals, larger numbers of Republicans tend to support using troops in some situations where traditional allies are threatened, while larger numbers of Democrats tend to support troop deployments for humanitarian purposes. Independents, again, are generally more noninterventionist than either Democrats or Republicans (see Table 5.3).

Republicans favor the use of troops to ensure the oil supply more strongly than Democrats. On Israel, Democrats are somewhat more in favor

using troops to enforce a peace agreement with the Palestinians than Republicans. A majority of Republicans favor troops if Israel were attacked by its neighbors, while Democrats are opposed. Republicans and Democrats agree in opposing sending troops if China invades Taiwan, and they agree in supporting the use of troops to deal with humanitarian crises or to stop a government from committing genocide.

There has been little change over the past ten years in support for the use of American troops in situations where the United States must come to the aid of an ally (e.g., South Korea or Taiwan) and over the last eight years on participating in peacekeeping between Israel and the Palestinians and protecting the supply of oil. However, using U.S. troops to stop genocide differs from the others. Roughly three in four Democrats have consistently favored using troops for this purpose, whereas support among Republicans has declined 11 points over the past decade to 71 percent and 17 points among Independents to a ten-year low of 61 percent.

### Dealing with terrorism: Differences in emphasis

While majorities of both parties support all the measures against terrorism that were asked about, Democrats and Republicans differ in their preferences of how best to deal with terrorism (see Table 5.4). Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support working with the United Nations and helping poor nations economically, while Republicans are more likely to support air strikes on terrorist

	Republican	Democrat	Independent
To stop a government from committing genocide and killing large numbers of its own people	71	78	61
To ensure the oil supply	59	52	49
To be part of an international peacekeeping force to enforce a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians	51	55	45
If Israel were attacked by its neighbors	64	44	41
If North Korea invaded South Korea	51	40	36
If China invaded Taiwan	35	26	23

sites, the assassination of terrorist leaders, and the use of troops to attack terrorist encampments.

Support for these various efforts to deal with terrorism has declined across Democrats, Republicans, and Independents in the ten years since the Council's first post-9/11 survey in 2002. The biggest drops have occurred (with partisan agreement) for the use of air strikes and ground troops to attack training camps. On working through the United Nations to strengthen laws against terrorism, Republicans have seen a double-digit decline (88% to 75%), while the decline for Independents (85% to 78%) and Democrats (91% to 86%) was somewhat less.

## The greater Middle East

A critical question for American foreign policy in the post-9/11 environment is whether or not Islam and “the West” are compatible, and on this topic, Republicans are much more pessimistic than Democrats and Independents. A majority (56%) of Republicans say that “because Muslim social and political traditions are incompatible with Western ways, violent conflict between the two civilizations is inevitable.” In contrast, majorities of Democrats and Independents (58%) say that “because most Muslims are like people everywhere, we can find common ground and violent conflict between the civilizations is not inevitable” (see Figure 5.2).

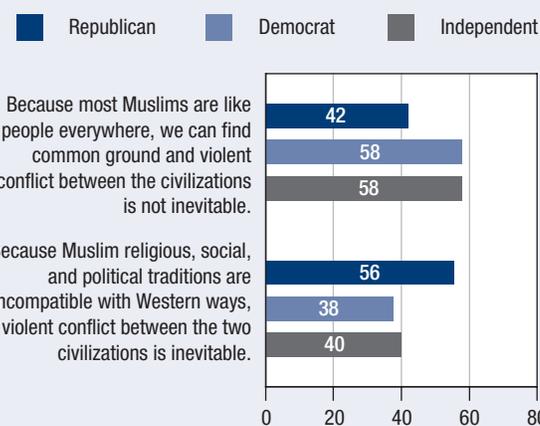
### Afghanistan: Republicans not as negative

While majorities of all partisans do not think the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan was worth the costs and do not think the war has made the United States safer from terrorism, Republicans are not as negative. Among Republicans, a smaller majority says that the war was not worth the costs (55% vs. 68% of Democrats and 75% of Independents) and that the United States is *not* safer from terrorism as a result (62% vs. 73% of Democrats and 71% of Independents).

Republicans are also less likely than Democrats and Independents to want to bring troops home now (25% vs. 41% of Democrats and 44% of

**Figure 5.2 – Attitudes toward the Muslim People**

*Percentage who say each of the following statements is closer to their own view.*



Independents) and more likely to want to leave some combat troops in Afghanistan after 2014 (28% vs. 11% of Democrats and 16% of Independents). Perhaps relatedly, they are also more apt to be “very concerned” about the threat to American national security if the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan (46% vs. 37% of Democrats and 33% of Independents).

### Iraq: Few see the benefits of the conflict

American views of the Iraq war are a sobering assessment that spans partisan lines. Majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans agree that the Iraq war should make nations more cautious about using military force to deal with rogue states and that it has worsened relations with the Muslim world. Most also think the war was not worth it, disagree that the threat of terrorism was reduced by the war, and disagree that it will lead to the spread of democracy in the Middle East.

But partisanship has colored views of the Iraq war even more than it has for Afghanistan. Democrats are 27 points more likely to say that the war was not worth the costs (75% vs. 48% of Republicans). More Democrats than Republicans agree that the Iraq war should make nations more cautious about using military force in dealing with rogue states (75% vs. 63%) and that the war has

**Table 5.4 - Measures to Combat Terrorism**

*Percentage who say they favor the following measures to combat international terrorism.*

	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Working through the UN to strengthen international laws against terrorism	75	86	78
U.S. air strikes against terrorist training camps and other facilities	80	68	67
Assassination of individual terrorist leaders	79	68	65
Helping poor countries develop their economies	64	72	67
Attacks by U.S. ground troops against terrorist training camps and other facilities	62	54	49

worsened relations with the Muslim world (74% vs. 66%). Democrats are also more likely than Republicans to say that the threat of terrorism was not reduced by the war (74% vs. 60%). On these questions, Independents match the opinions of Democrats quite closely.

### Republicans more pessimistic about Arab Spring

While no group is really optimistic about the Arab Spring, Democrats are less likely than Republicans or Independents to see it as a “mostly bad” development. Republicans split evenly between whether the Arab Spring will be good, bad, or have no impact on the United States (32%, 28%, and 34%, respectively), while Democrats tilt away from a negative impact (38% good, 19% bad, and 38% no impact). Independents are somewhat divided (30% good, 27% bad, 39% no impact).

### Syria: Republicans most activist, Independents least

The reverberations of the Arab Spring continue to be felt in the Middle East, no more so than with respect to Syria, where at the time of this release major violence between rebels and the Syrian government continued.

Republicans show the highest levels of support for taking action in Syria, while Independents show the least. This is true for increasing sanctions (Republicans 70%, Democrats 62%, Independents 58%) as well as enforcing a no-fly zone (Republicans 64%, Democrats 57%, Independents 54%). There are no majorities in any group supporting the other

options offered, including sending arms to the opposition and bombing air defenses. For Americans of all political stripes, sending U.S. troops into the conflict is their least favored option.

### Iran: Republicans and Independents more suspicious of Iran’s nuclear program

Americans view Iran and its nuclear ambitions as one of the most critical threats to the United States, and partisanship colors how Americans think the country should handle it. Democrats and Republicans alike are more supportive than Independents of the UN Security Council applying economic sanctions and using diplomacy to pressure Iran, though majorities of all three groups support these options. Only Republicans reach majority support for UN authorization of a military strike against Iranian nuclear energy facilities (58%), while such a proposal receives only minority support from Democrats and Independents (41% each).

When asked if the United States should proceed with a military strike on its own, however, there is majority opposition among Republicans (57%), Democrats (79%), and Independents (73%) alike, though much more so among Democrats and Independents.

When asked about an idea for an agreement in which Iran would permit full, permanent access throughout Iran to UN inspectors in exchange for being allowed to produce nuclear fuel for electricity, modest majorities of Republicans (54%) and Independents (55%) are favorable to this proposal, while Democrats are evenly divided.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, perceptions of Iran's intentions and the present state of its program are related to what actions people are willing to take. Most Republicans (53%) think the U.S. intelligence assessment of Iran is that it is actively seeking nuclear weapons, while smaller pluralities of Democrats (47%) and Independents (46%) think so. Twenty-two percent of Independents think the assessment says that Iran already has nuclear capabilities. Democrats, in comparison, are more likely than others to think that the assessment is that Iran has the technical ability to produce nuclear weapons but has not yet decided to do so—which is currently the case (nearly three in ten say so).

### Israel: Republican ally?

Israel is one of the largest points of difference. Large majorities of Democrats (78%) and Independents (69%) favor not taking sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while a slight majority of Republicans (51%) want to take Israel's side. Likewise, if Israel and Iran were to go to war following an Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, a majority of Democrats (66%) and Independents (65%) favor staying out, while a majority of Republicans (54%) favor the United States entering the conflict on the side of Israel.

Although Republicans have historically been more willing for the United States to take Israel's side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past ten years than Democrats and Independents, this view has been strengthening over time. The number of Republicans who say the United States should take Israel's side has increased 12 points over the past decade, while the low level of support for such a policy among Democrats and Independents has remained relatively constant.

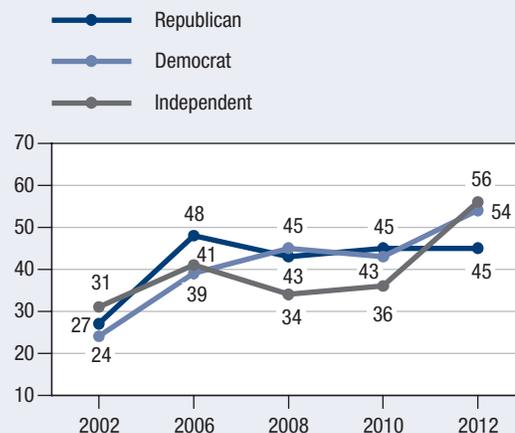
## Asia

### Democrats emphasize Asia more

Although partisanship plays no significant role in public views of the U.S. government's plans to pivot to Asia, Democrats and Independents are more

**Figure 5.3 – Asia More Important than Europe**

*Percentage who view Asia as more important to the United States than Europe.*



likely than Republicans to say that Asia is more important to the United States than Europe (54% and 56%, respectively, vs. 45% of Republicans). However, despite the Democrats' greater relative focus on Asia, the shift in priorities from Europe to Asia over the past ten years has been apparent across the political spectrum (see Figure 5.3).

### China: Republicans see a rival, Democrats a partner

There is little doubt across party lines that China's economy will one day grow as large as that of the United States. But Republicans are more worried about this prospect than others, with 49 percent saying this would be a negative development, compared to 38 percent of Democrats and 37 percent of Independents. In addition, a slight majority of Republicans (51%) and Independents (53%) see China as a rival, while a majority of Democrats (54%) see it as a partner.

Still, although Republicans are not as happy with the world economy's tilt toward Asia, majorities of Democrats (72%), Republicans (65%), and Independents (71%) say the United States should pursue a policy of friendly engagement and cooperation with China, rather than actively working to limit the growth of China's power.

## South Korea and Japan: North Korea is the biggest concern for all

There are just slight differences in the priorities of the American public concerning relations with Japan and South Korea. Republicans and Democrats generally place a higher priority than Independents on stopping North Korea’s nuclear program, bringing about regime change in North Korea, protecting shipping lanes in the South China sea, limiting China’s rise, and creating a regional security alliance and a regional free trade agreement.

When it comes to troop levels in South Korea, Democrats and Independents are more apt than Republicans to say there are too many troops there (46% and 45% vs. 37%). Despite this, majorities of Democrats (64%), Republicans (70%), and Independents (60%) are all supportive of U.S. troops taking part in a UN-sponsored effort to come to South Korea’s aid if North Korea attacked.

In dealing with North Korea, all three groups favor diplomacy and searching North Korean ships for nuclear materials or arms, and all three oppose sending U.S. ground troops to take control of the country. On air strikes, more Republicans are supportive of this approach (47% vs. 33% of Democrats and 34% of Independents), though Republicans themselves are divided about this approach (49% opposed).

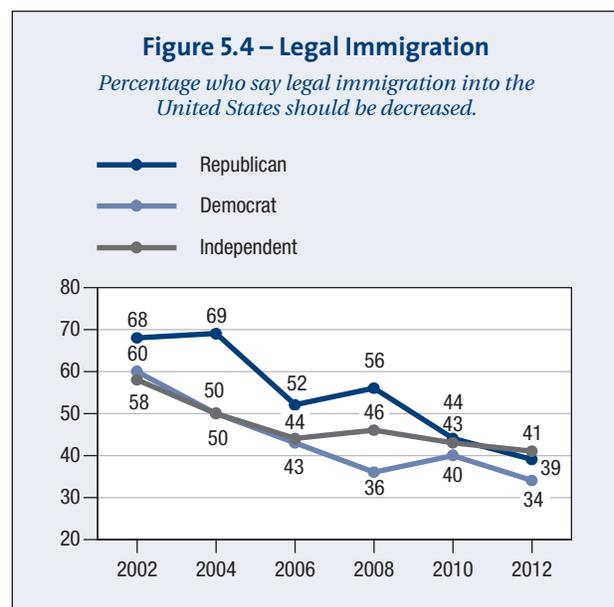
## Trade and immigration

More Republicans than Democrats show reservations with regard to trade, economic aid, and competition from China. When it comes to two often-vilified competitors—China and Mexico—majorities of all groups think China trades unfairly (Republicans 74%, Democrats 63%, Independents 68%); on Mexico a slim majority of Republicans (51%) think Mexico trades unfairly, while Democrats and Independents are divided. Meanwhile, majorities of Republicans (59%) and Independents (51%) think South Korea practices fair trade, while Democrats are divided on the issue (49% to 46%).

## Independents becoming more negative toward immigration compared to partisans

With regard to immigration, a contentious domestic issue, there are no partisan differences in whether or not *legal* immigration should continue at its present pace. However, as mentioned, more Republicans (55%) than Democrats (30%) or Independents (40%) see a critical threat from large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the country. Similarly, Republicans (70%) are more likely to think the goal of reducing illegal immigration is “very important” than Democrats (43%) or Independents (48%). Republicans are also more supportive of an immigration solution that involves greater efforts to secure the border, penalizing employers who hire illegal immigrants, and requiring illegal immigrants to leave unless they agree to a path to citizenship that involves payment of back taxes and learning English (87% vs. 75% of Democrats and 76% of Independents).

An interesting dynamic has occurred over the past ten years in support for legal immigration. The number of Republicans and Democrats who would like to see legal immigration decrease has fallen steadily since 2002 (by 29 and 26 points, respectively). There has been a similar decline among Independents, with opposition to legal immigration decreasing 17 points (see Figure 5.4).



## Conclusion

Contrary to the idea that political polarization among the American public is growing, the 2012 Chicago Council Survey reveals that Democrats and Republicans are actually very similar in their views on foreign policy. Though they differ in the degree to which they hold their views, there are only a few cases where their preferences diverge (especially

on immigration and Middle East policy). What is most striking is the increasing distance in the stances of Independents from both Republicans and Democrats alike. This growing segment has become less favorable toward an active U.S. leadership role over time: they are less supportive of “hawkish” forms of engagement than Republicans and less supportive of “dovish” approaches to foreign policy than Democrats.

## Methodology

This report is based on the results of a survey commissioned by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. The survey results are from the 2012 Chicago Council Survey, which is a wide-ranging biennial survey on American attitudes towards U.S. foreign policy. The 2012 Chicago Council Survey was conducted May 25–June 8, 2012, among a representative national sample of 1,702 adults. The Council also commissioned a smaller oversample of 175 “Millennials,” those between eighteen and twenty-nine years old, yielding a total sample of 1,877 adults and a margin of sampling error of +/- 2.8 points.<sup>1</sup>

The survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Palo Alto, California. The survey was fielded to a total of 3,135 panel members (2,747 for the general population sample and 388 for the eighteen to twenty-nine-year-old oversample), of which 1,984 completed the survey (1,790 general population, 194 eighteen to twenty-nine-year-old oversample), yielding a completion rate of 63 percent (65% general population, 50% eighteen to twenty-nine-year-old oversample).

The survey had a total sample size of 1,877 American adults. Of the total 1,984 completed cases, 107 (88 general population, 19 eighteen to twenty-nine-year-old oversample) were excluded based on four predetermined criteria. Respondents were excluded if they:

- Completed the survey in ten minutes or less, of which seventy-four cases were identified.
- Refused half or more of the items, of which fifty-two cases were identified (several respondents overlapped with the item above).
- Met two of the three following quality checks, of which fifty-two cases were identified:
  - (1) Did not accurately answer a question embedded in the survey to make sure respondents were paying attention (“In order to make sure that your browser is working correctly, please select the number four from the list of numbers below.”)
  - (2) Refused one or more full batteries containing five or more items (there were fourteen such batteries in the questionnaire)
  - (3) Answered exactly the same way to all of the items on at least one of the four lengthy batteries of items.

Of the total 107 excluded respondents, twenty-four failed on all three exclusion criteria, twenty-three failed two of three, and sixty failed one of the three.

The survey was fielded using a randomly selected sample of GfK’s large-scale, nationwide research panel, KnowledgePanel®. The panel is recruited using stratified random digit dialing (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a non-zero probability of selection for every U.S. household with a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance (if necessary), which uses a telephone line to connect to the

1. The subsample of 443 eighteen to twenty-nine-year-old Millennials has a margin of sampling error of +/- 5.8 points.

Internet and uses the television as a monitor. Thus, the sample is not limited to those in the population who already have Internet access.

The distribution of the sample in the Web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the U.S. population eighteen years of age or older on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc. To reduce the effects of any nonresponse and noncoverage bias in panel estimates, a poststratification raking adjustment is applied using demographic distributions from the most recent data from the Current Population Survey (CPS).

The poststratification variables include age, race, gender, Hispanic ethnicity, and education. This weighting adjustment is applied prior to the selection of any client sample from KnowledgePanel. These weights constitute the starting weights for any client survey selected from the panel. The following benchmark distributions were utilized for this poststratification adjustment:

- Gender (male/female)
- Age (18-29, 30-44, 45-59, and 60+)
- Race (white non-Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, other non-Hispanic, 2+ races non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Education (less than high school, high school, some college, bachelor and beyond)
- Household income (under \$10K, \$10K to <\$25K, \$25K to <\$50K, \$50K to <\$75K, \$75K to <\$100K, \$100K+)
- Home ownership status (own, rent/other)
- Census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Metropolitan area (yes, no)
- Internet access (yes, no)

Comparable distributions are calculated using all valid completed cases from the field data. Since study sample sizes are typically too small to accommodate a complete cross-tabulation of all the survey variables with the benchmark variables, an iterative proportional fitting is used for the poststratification weighting adjustment. This procedure adjusts the sample data back to the selected benchmark proportions. Through an iterative convergence process, the weighted sample data are optimally fitted to the marginal distributions. After this final poststratification adjustment, the distribution of the calculated weights is examined to identify and, if necessary, trim outliers at the extreme upper and lower tails of the weight distribution. The poststratified and trimmed weights are then scaled to the sum of the total sample size of all eligible respondents.

In 2004 The Chicago Council shifted from a mix of internet and telephone polling to fully online polling, a shift that produces some mode differences. One difference appears to be that telephone respondents, who are talking to a human interviewer, tend to give more “socially desirable” responses; they may be less likely, for example, to express approval of assassinations or torture. Another difference is that, for some questions with multiple alternatives, telephone respondents may tend to give more quick, “first choice” responses. Again, many or most Chicago Council questions are unaffected by these tendencies. Still, inferences about opinion change in surveys from 2002 and prior require some caution.

For more information concerning the methodology of the U.S. sample, please visit the KN Web site at [www.knowledgenetworks.com](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com).



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332 South Michigan Avenue  
Suite 1100  
Chicago, Illinois 60604  
[thechicagocouncil.org](http://thechicagocouncil.org)