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NATIONAL
INTEREST

NEW POLL: Majority Believe U.S. Foreign Policy Has Made Americans Less Safe Over Last 15 Years

Over half of Americans believe the military should be used less overseas during next administration.

ARLINGTON, VA., OCTOBER 24, 2016 — Only 14 percent of registered voters in the United States believe the country's foreign policy has made them safer since 2001, according to a poll of 1,000 Americans released today by the Charles Koch Institute and the Center for the National Interest. More than half believe that both the U.S. and the rest of the world are less safe today as a result of the nation's foreign policy choices over the last 15 years.

Likewise, only 25 percent of American voters feel the next president should expand the use of military abroad, while over half feel that the next administration should use the military less than it has been used since 2001.

"Per the American people, the foreign policy status quo is failing and a new direction needs to be set by the incoming administration and Congress," said William Ruger, vice president for research and policy at the Charles Koch Institute. "The United States needs a strong national defense to keep us safe, and the public is demanding a humbler, wiser approach steeped in realism when using our military abroad. This poll shows the disconnect between the Washington foreign policy elite, who support an active, aggressive stance, and an American public that is wary of repeated ventures abroad that don't make us or the world any safer. Given our failures in places like Iraq and Libya, the American public desires a more prudential path forward, not surprising since they have had to pay the costs of mistakes made in Washington."

Americans believe U.S. foreign policy over the last several years has made them less safe:

- When asked if U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years had made Americans more or less safe, a majority (53 percent) said less safe. Just 14 percent said more safe, while a quarter said U.S. foreign policy had kept their level of safety about the same.
- When asked if U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years had made the world more or less safe, 51 percent said less safe, 13 percent said more, and 24 percent said safety levels had stayed the same.
- Half of respondents believe the war in Iraq made the United States somewhat or much less secure, while 26 percent said the war didn't increase or decrease U.S. security.
- Forty-two percent of Americans believe the U.S. military operation in Afghanistan made the United States less secure, while 34 percent said the operation didn't increase or decrease U.S. security.

Looking forward, Americans want Washington to practice prudence and exhibit greater realism abroad:

- When asked if, in comparison to the last 15 years, the next president should use the U.S. military abroad more or less, an overwhelming majority (75 percent) said less or were unsure.

- When asked whether the United States should deploy ground troops to Syria, 51 percent of Americans said no, 24 percent said yes, and 25 percent were not sure.
- When asked whether the United States should deploy ground troops to help in Saudi Arabia's war against Yemen, only 10 percent of Americans said yes. In fact, Americans want limited or no engagement in Yemen: Forty-one percent want the United States to only provide logistical military support, while nearly a quarter (23 percent) don't even want that level of support.

Congress should have a greater say in foreign policy. A plurality of Americans are comfortable with current defense spending, while a majority see no need for increases:

- When asked if the president should be required to get congressional authorization before committing the United States to military action abroad, 80 percent of Americans said yes.
- When asked whether the U.S. should increase national defense spending, decrease it, or keep spending at current rates, a plurality (39 percent) wanted to keep spending levels the same, and 17 percent would seek further cuts. Thirty-seven percent want more spending on the military.

"The American people are eager to see the Congress reassert its constitutional role as a check on presidents of either party through requiring congressional authorization for overseas military action," said Paul J. Saunders, executive director of the Center for the National Interest. "They want a strong national defense, but not overseas wars disconnected from essential U.S. national interests that often make America less secure. We are pleased to work with the Charles Koch Institute to share these important findings."

The nationwide survey was conducted by Survey Sampling International, a leading web-based panel firm, in October 2016. Results are un-weighted. The survey had a representative sample of 1,000 total respondents based on age, gender, geographic region, and race/ethnicity, with a +/- 4 percentage points margin of error.

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CENTER FOR THE NATIONAL INTEREST

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