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NEW POLL: Americans Crystal Clear: Foreign Policy Status Quo Not Working

ARLINGTON, Va., February 7, 2017—The Charles Koch Institute and the Center for the National Interest today released a poll of 1,000 Americans taken the last weekend of January demonstrating that Americans want Washington to show greater restraint when it comes to military spending and intervention in foreign matters. These findings are consistent with our two previous polls conducted before and after the election, in October and December.

“Again, the American public differs sharply with the bipartisan, Beltway status quo. This is the third foreign policy poll the Charles Koch Institute and the Center for the National Interest have conducted since October, and each survey has shown that Americans don’t think that U.S. foreign policy has served to make Americans and the world safer,” said William Ruger, vice president of research and policy at the Charles Koch Institute. “U.S. voters want their elected officials in Washington to prioritize American national interests. Moreover, respondents believe that any additional tax revenue should be focused on domestic priorities, especially reducing the debt and deficit. Americans simply don’t want more military spending. Congress should think twice about sending additional money to the Pentagon and focus on getting more bang for their taxpayers’ buck.”

“Americans have spoken and have clearly called for a foreign policy that gives priority to U.S. national interests and focuses on combating ISIS and other terrorist threats,” said Paul J. Saunders, Executive Director of the Center for the National Interest. “At the same time, they appear skeptical toward using military force to promote democracy and open to alternative approaches to U.S. foreign policy, especially alternatives that respond to domestic concerns, including high federal spending. Finally, Americans have shown that they are willing to work with many other countries—including some that we consider adversaries today.”

Poll results show:

Americans Still Believe Recent U.S. Foreign Policy 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 (51%) said less safe. Just 11% said more safe, while 27% said U.S. foreign policy had not affected their level of safety.
- When asked if U.S. foreign policy over the last 15 years had made the world more or less safe, 47% said less, 9% said more, and 30% said safety levels had stayed the same.
- These findings are consistent with the results from CKI/CNI's [October](#) and [December](#) polls.

Americans Want Greater Foreign Policy Realism And For American Interests to Drive Foreign Policy Decision Making:

- 69% of Americans believe that U.S. national interests should drive U.S. foreign policy; 30% strongly believe that U.S. national interests should always come first. Only 17% believe the interests of other nations should have greater weight than U.S. interests.
- 41% do not think the United States should actively promote democracy abroad through the use of military power. 32% said they neither agree nor disagree with this policy, and only 24% said they agree. Another 4% were unsure.
- Only 11% think the United States should deploy more troops to Europe, and 48% believe current troop levels should stay the same. 27% said the United States should recall troops back home, and another 15% were not sure.
- When asked about the media's coverage of a recent deployment of U.S. troops to Europe, 44% of Americans said they think there has been too little coverage, 30% said there has been the right amount of coverage, and 18% percent said they did not know. Only 8% said the media is covering this issue too much.

Americans Are Skeptical of More Military Spending:

- When asked how the federal government should spend a hypothetical additional tax dollar, 79% expressed a desire to see it go toward a domestic priority. 42% percent said it should go toward debt and deficit reduction, and 37% said it should go toward domestic spending generally. Only 12% said it should go toward military spending, and 1% said foreign aid. An additional 8% did not know how that dollar should be spent.
- When asked how much they thought the federal government spends on the U.S. military, the clear majority indicated that they believe we are spending less on defense than we actually are. Despite this, 43% said they thought it was sufficient to provide for American security, 35% did not know, and 22% said they thought it was insufficient.
- When asked if the United States' current inventory of 7,000 nuclear warheads was too few, too many, or the right amount, 31% said too many, 30% did not know, 26% said the right amount, and 13% said too few.

Americans See Potential Even in Our Relationships With China, Russia:

- When asked to identify the greatest security challenge currently facing the United States, 36% of respondents said ISIS, 12% said Russia, 12% said immigration, and

- 11% said the national debt. 7% said North Korea, 4% said China, 2% said Iran, and 1% said Syria. Another 15% said “other” or that they did not know.
- 35% of Americans think it is in America’s best interest to see Russia as both a rival and a partner when it comes to policy in the Middle East. 29% think Russia should be viewed mainly as a partner, and 17% think it should be viewed mainly as a rival. 19% were unsure.
 - In [December](#), when asked whether the United States should view Russia an adversary or as a potential partner, more than half said Russia should either be viewed as both (38%) or as primarily a potential partner (17%). Only 33% said Russia definitely should be viewed as an adversary. Another 12% said they were unsure.
 - When asked whether American relations with China should be more focused on cooperation or confrontation, 48% of respondents said the focus should be on equal parts cooperation and confrontation, 39% said cooperation, and only 5% said confrontation. Another 8% were unsure.
 - In [December](#), 93% of respondents said they did not view China as an ally. However, 89% also indicated they would not characterize China as an “enemy.” The most accepted term for China was “competitor”—42% of respondents said they agreed with that characterization.

Survey Sampling International fielded the nationwide survey of 1,000 registered voters from January 28th to January 30th. All participants were surveyed online. Results are un-weighted. Methods were used to assure a representative sample with respect to gender, age, broad geography, education level, race, and ethnicity. The results have an approximate +/- 4 percentage points margin of error.

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CENTER FOR THE NATIONAL INTEREST

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