



Americans and Russians Agree on Priorities for Syria, Differ on Urgency of North Korea

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This is the first of three reports based on coordinated surveys conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Levada Center in Moscow on US-Russian public opinion about foreign policy issues, generously funded by the Carnegie Corporation.

In a holiday greeting to US President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin urged "pragmatic cooperation" between the United States and Russia to address global challenges and threats. This message builds upon previous Trump-Putin phone conversations regarding the situation in Syria and threats from North Korea. Survey results show that the Russian public places ending the conflict in Syria and reducing nuclear weapons worldwide at the top of the bilateral agenda. The American public emphasizes potential joint efforts to pressure North Korea, likely reflects heightened American concern over Pyongyang's actions.

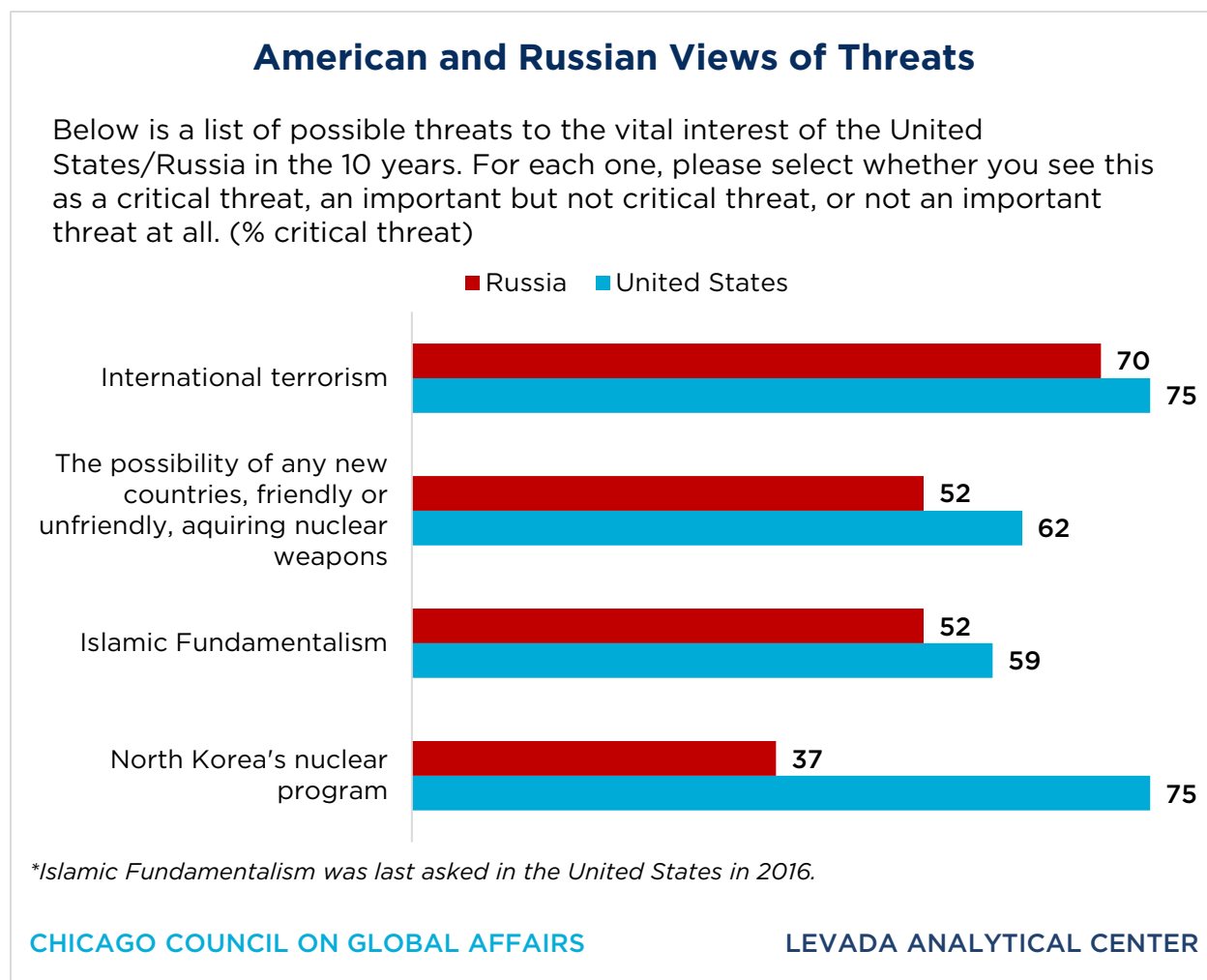
Both Publics Feel Threat from Terrorism and Nuclear Proliferation

When asked about a series of potential threats to their country, Russians rate international terrorism the most critical threat (70%), followed by Islamic fundamentalism and the possibility of any new countries becoming nuclear powers (52% each), with less urgent concern about the North Korean nuclear program (37% critical).

For their part, [the annual 2017 Chicago Council Survey](#)¹ found that equally large majorities of Americans describe international terrorism and North Korea's nuclear program (75% each) as critical threats facing the United States, followed by the

¹ The annual Chicago Council Survey was conducted in June-July 2017.

possibility of new countries becoming nuclear powers (62%). While terrorism is consistently a top threat in Chicago Council Surveys, concern about North Korea spiked fifteen percentage points over the past year (60% critical threat in 2016). Media reports about technological advances to North Korea's nuclear program and incendiary rhetoric from both the North Korean and American governments has likely increased awareness of this issue in the United States.



Russians Support Fighting Violent Islamic Extremists, Not Protecting Assad

Both Russians and Americans believe their country's military priority in Syria should be to combat violent extremist groups rather than to take sides in the civil war.

Despite Moscow's official claims that Russia has been targeting the Islamic State (or ISIS), the Russian military intervention has in fact focused primarily on airstrikes [against rebel forces](#) opposing Assad. But the Russian public is far more supportive of combating groups like ISIS than in propping up Assad. More Russians support (48%) than oppose (36%) the use of Russian troops to fight against violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria. In contrast, more Russians oppose (49%) than support

(27%) using Russian troops to prevent the overthrow of Assad.² These findings echo a [Spring 2017 Pew study](#) that found that 64 percent of Russians think fighting extremism should be a top priority for Russia's military in Syria, compared to only 25 percent who think keeping Assad in power should be a top priority.

In general, however, Russians seem unsure of the benefits from Moscow's military involvement in Syria. Nearly as many Russians say that the intervention has brought more good (31%) as say it has brought more harm (33%), and 37 percent say it has brought neither good nor harm. Russian interest in events in Syria is also waning. [A September 2017 Levada poll](#) found a quarter (26%) who said they know nothing about latest news from Syria, compared to only 11 percent in 2015.

Americans Focus on Fighting Extremists, Not Removing Assad

Under President Trump, the US military focus in Syria has been to defeat ISIS, not to remove Assad from power. This emphasis is generally in line with US public opinion. [The annual 2017 Chicago Council Survey](#) found that a majority of Americans support airstrikes against violent Islamic extremist groups in Syria (68%), but only 45 percent support the United States conducting airstrikes against Assad.

Even fewer Americans support sending US combat troops into Syria to remove Assad from power (28%).³ At the same time, however, Americans would like to see Assad go. Only a quarter would support the United States helping negotiate a settlement that keeps Assad in power (25%) compared to 70 percent who would support a US-aided settlement that establishes a new leader.

Top Priorities for Russians for Joint Efforts: Nuclear Proliferation & Terrorism

[The Islamic State has been able to recruit more volunteers](#) from Russia and the former Soviet republics than any other region in the world, including the Middle East.⁴ This fact, combined with the Russian public's focus on terrorist threats and fighting extremists in Syria, helps to explain why these issues are also named as top priorities for US-Russia cooperation. A combined four in ten Russians most frequently choose either ending the Syria conflict (24%) or combating terrorism in the Middle East (18%) as the first priority of Russian cooperation with the United States.

But nuclear issues are also rated highly. A combined four in ten most frequently choose reducing nuclear weapons worldwide (27%), eliminating North Korea's

² According to [a 2015 Levada survey](#), Russians believed the prime motivation behind Russia's engagement in the conflict was to eliminate the threat of military action by Islamic radicals and terrorists spilling over into Russian territory (47%). Only 29 percent thought the motive was to protect Assad's government.

³ 41 percent of Americans support using US combat troops to fight against violent Islamic extremist groups in Syria.

⁴ What's more, these foreign fighters will likely return—an estimated 10 percent already have—and fluid borders between the Middle East and Central Asia has enabled foreign-trained jihadis to return to Russia [with disastrous effects](#).

nuclear program (9%) or limiting Iran's nuclear program (7%) as top areas for joint efforts.

Americans Prioritize Joint Efforts on North Korean Threat

The United States and Russia have worked together for decades in attempts to reduce nuclear proliferation. Russia was one of the countries that helped to broker the Iran nuclear deal, and the United States and Russia have made moderate steps in the same direction on North Korea through a UN Security Council resolution that will [impose the strictest sanctions](#) to date on Pyongyang. While there has been some collaboration on terrorism as well, the two countries have had less policy commonalities in Syria.⁵

When the US public is asked which of a series of items should be the top priority for US-Russia cooperation, a majority of Americans most often name an item related to nuclear proliferation: eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons program (38%), reducing nuclear weapons worldwide (14%) and limiting Iran's nuclear program (4%). Far fewer choose combating terrorism in the Middle East (6%) or ending the Syrian conflict (5%).

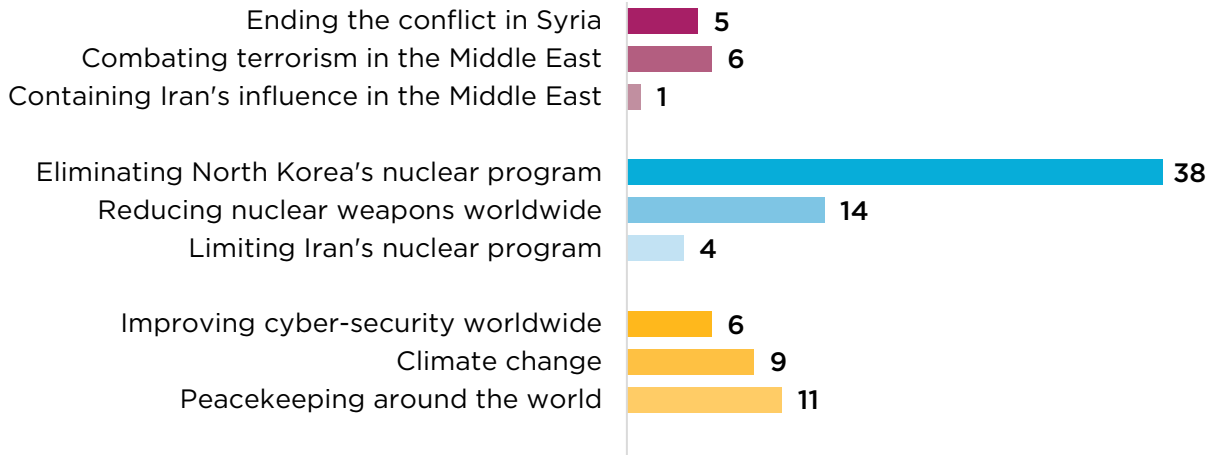
Asked their perception of current joint efforts, Americans are decisively more likely to say that Russia is working at odds with the United States on reducing nuclear weapons worldwide (50% different, 29% same), ending the conflict in Syria (56% vs. 22%), and combating terrorism in the Middle East (45% vs. 34%). Questioned before the recent UNSC resolution imposing sanctions against North Korea, Americans were somewhat divided on whether Russia and the United States are working in a different (44%) or the same (39%) direction on eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons program.⁶

⁵ Both Russia and the United States have recently expressed their commitment to a UN resolution calling for UN-verified elections in Syria as part of any peace process.

⁶ This series of questions was only asked in the United States.

American Priorities for Collaboration

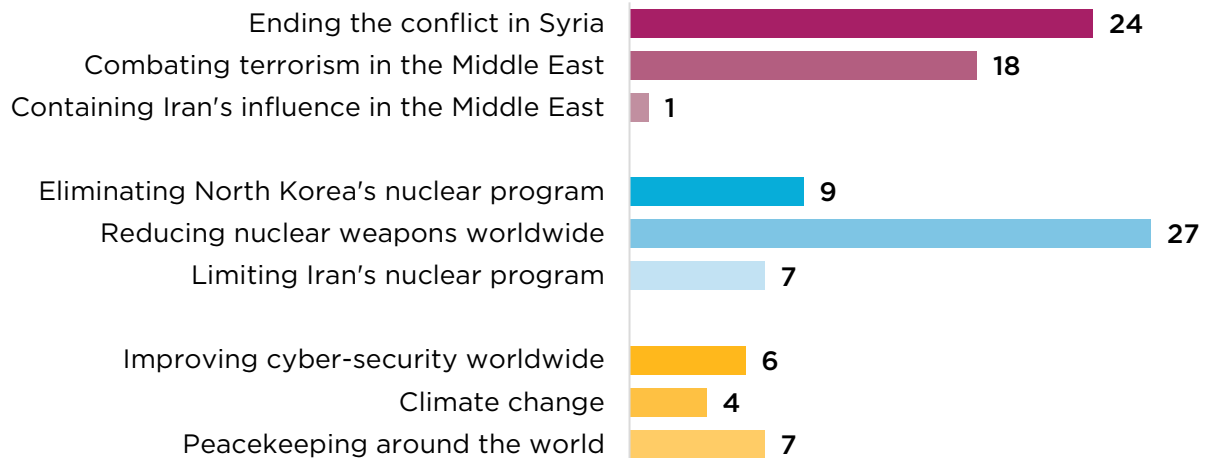
The United States collaborates closely with some countries—including Russia—in trying to solve international problems. From the list of problems below, please select which one of these problems should be the number one priority for cooperation between the United States and Russia? (% number one priority)



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Russian Priorities for Collaboration

Russia collaborates closely with Western countries—including the United States—in trying to solve international problems. From the list of problems below, please select which one of these problems should be the number one priority for cooperation between the United States and Russia? (% number one priority)



LEVADA ANALYTICAL CENTER

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the joint 2017 Chicago Council-Levada Analytical Center survey on Russian and American Attitudes conducted in December 2017. The 2017 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, conducted in the summer of 2017, is also cited.

The Chicago Council Survey on issues related to Russia was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their national online omnibus service, KnowledgePanel™, between December 1-3, 2017 among a weighted national sample of approximately 1,000 American adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.

The Levada Center survey was conducted between December 1-5 by the Levada-Center (Levada Analytical Center) with face-to-face interviews conducted among a representative sample of 1,605 Russians aged 18 years and older, living in eight federal districts of the Russian Federation. Inside each district the sample is distributed among five strata of settlements proportionally to the number of population living in them in age of 18+ years. The margin of error is ± 3.4 percentage points.

The 2017 Chicago Council-Levada Analytical Center Joint Survey on Russian and American Attitudes is made possible by the generous support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Results are also cited from the 2017 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel between June 27 and July 19, 2017 among a weighted national sample of 2,020 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is ± 2.4 percentage points.

The 2017 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the personal support of Lester Crown and the Crown family.

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan organization that provides insight – and influences the public discourse – on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices and conduct independent research to bring clarity and offer solutions to challenges and opportunities across the globe. Ranked [No. 1 Think Tank to Watch](#) worldwide, the Council on Global Affairs is committed to engaging the public and raising global awareness of issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business and governments engage the world. Learn more at thechicagocouncil.org and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](#).

About the Levada-Center

The Levada-Center is one of the leading research organizations in Russia that conducts public opinion surveys, expert and elite surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups and other survey methods. The Center brings together experts in the fields of sociology, political science, economics, psychology, market research, and public opinion polls. The Center's research and experts have been cited in national and international media such as *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*, *RBC*, *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Reuters*, *BBC Radio*, *Radio Liberty*, and others. Learn more at levada.ru and follow [@levada_ru](https://twitter.com/levada_ru) or on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/levada.ru).

Appendix 1- US Survey Questions

Q. Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat:

Threats- International terrorism

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
US (2017)	75	23	2	0	100
2016 (internet)	75	22	2	0	100
2015 (internet)	69	27	5	0	100
2014 (internet)	63	33	4	0	100
2012 (internet)	67	28	3	1	100
2010 (internet)	73	24	2	1	100
2008 (internet)	(64)	(32)	(4)	(1)	100
2008 (internet)	70	26	3	1	100
2006 (internet)	74	23	2	1	100
2004 (internet)	75	22	1	2	100
2004 (internet)	81	16	1	2	100
2002 (internet)	91	7	2	--	100
1998 (internet)	84	13	1	2	100
1994 (internet)	69	25	3	3	100

Threats- Islamic fundamentalism

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
US (2016)	59	32	8	1	100
2015 (internet)	55	33	12	0	100
2014 (internet)	40	44	14	1	100
2012 (internet)	39	46	14	1	100
2010 (internet)	43	44	11	2	100
2008 (internet)	42	43	13	2	100

2006 (internet)	43	41	12	3	100
2004 (internet)	38	43	16	3	100
2004 (telephone)	38	34	17	11	100
2002 (telephone)	61	24	8	5	100
1998	38	33	16	13	100
1994	33	36	14	17	100

Threats- The possibility of any new countries, friendly or unfriendly, becoming nuclear powers

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
US (2017)	62	34	3	0	100

Threats- North Korea's nuclear program

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
US (2017)	75	39	6	1	100
2016	60	35	6	0	100
2015	55	23	2	0	100

Q. The United States/Russia collaborates closely with some countries/Western countries—including Russia/the United States—in trying to solve international problems. From the list of problems below, please select which one of these problems should be the number one priority for cooperation between the United States and Russia? And which should be the number two priority?

- Eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons program*
- Reducing nuclear weapons worldwide*
- Peacekeeping around the world*
- Climate Change*
- Improving cyber-security worldwide*
- Combatting terrorism in the Middle East*
- Ending the conflict in Syria*
- Limiting Iran's nuclear program*
- Containing Iran's influence in the Middle East*

Collaboration- number one priority

	DPRK nuclear program (%)	Reduce nuclear weapons (%)	Peace-keeping (%)	Climate change (%)	Cyber-security (%)	Terror in M.E. (%)	Ending Syria Conflict (%)	Iran's nuclear program (%)	Iran's influence (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>											
US (2017)	38	14	11	9	6	6	5	4	1	6	100

Collaboration- number two priority

	DPRK nuclear program (%)	Reduce nuclear weapons (%)	Peace-keeping (%)	Climate change (%)	Cyber-security (%)	Terror in M.E. (%)	Ending Syria Conflict (%)	Iran's nuclear program (%)	Iran's influence (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>											
US (2017)	13	14	10	11	11	12	7	10	4	8	100

Collaboration- number two priority

	Reduce nuclear weapons (%)	DPRK nuclear program (%)	Terror in M.E. (%)	Climate change (%)	Cyber-security (%)	Iran's nuclear program (%)	Peace-keeping (%)	Ending Syria Conflict (%)	Iran's influence (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>											
US (2017)	14	13	12	11	11	10	10	7	4	8	100

Q. And do you currently think the United States and Russia are working in the same or different direction on each of the following issues?

Ending the conflict in Syria

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	22	56	22	100
<i>2016</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>100</i>

Limiting Iran's nuclear program

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	28	50	21	100
<i>2016</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>100</i>

Reducing nuclear weapons worldwide

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	29	50	20	100
<i>2016</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>100</i>

Eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons program

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	39	44	17	100

Improving cyber-security worldwide

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	19	59	21	100

Combatting terrorism in the Middle East

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				

US (2017)	34	45	21	100
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Containing Iran's influence in the Middle East

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	26	51	24	100

Peacekeeping around the world

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	23	56	21	100

Climate change

	Same direction (%)	Different direction (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	30	49	21	100

Appendix 1- Russian Survey Questions

Q. Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat/Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of Russia in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

Threats- International terrorism

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	70	21	9	-	100
2016	73	23	5	0	100

Threats- Islamic fundamentalism

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	52	33	15	0	100
2016	63	28	9	0	100

Threats- The possibility of any new countries, friendly or unfriendly, becoming nuclear powers

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	52	35	14	0	100

Threats- North Korea's nuclear program

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	37	42	20	0	100
2016	38	43	19	0	100

Q. There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US/Russian troops. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would favor or oppose the use of US/Russian troops:

Use of troops- To fight against violent Islamic extremist/extremist groups in Iraq and Syria

	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
Russia (2017)	48	36	16	100

Use of troops- To prevent the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad

	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
Russia (2017)	27	49	24	100

In your opinion has Russian military involvement in Syria brought Russia more good or more harm on the whole?

Good or harm- Military involvement in Syria

	More good (%)	More harm (%)	Neither good nor harm (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	31	33	37	0	100

Q. The United States/Russia collaborates closely with some countries/Western countries—including Russia/the United States—in trying to solve international problems. From the list of problems below, please select which one of these problems should be the number one priority

for cooperation between the United States and Russia? And which should be the number two priority?

- Eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons program*
- Reducing nuclear weapons worldwide*
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- Climate Change*
- Improving cyber-security worldwide*
- Combatting terrorism in the Middle East*
- Ending the conflict in Syria*
- Limiting Iran's nuclear program*
- Containing Iran's influence in the Middle East*

Collaboration- number one priority

	DPRK nuclear program (%)	Reduce nuclear weapons (%)	Peace-keeping (%)	Climate change (%)	Cyber-security (%)	Terror in M.E. (%)	Ending Syria Conflict (%)	Iran's nuclear program (%)	Iran's influence (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<i>Country</i>											
Russia (2017)	9	27	7	4	6	18	24	7	1	0	100

Collaboration- number two priority

	DPRK nuclear program (%)	Reduce nuclear weapons (%)	Peace-keeping (%)	Climate change (%)	Cyber-security (%)	Terror in M.E. (%)	Ending Syria Conflict (%)	Iran's nuclear program (%)	Iran's influence (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<i>Country</i>											
Russia (2017)	10	15	10	7	10	17	15	9	3	3	100