

Americans Prioritize Using US Troops Defensively

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In 2024, Donald Trump ran on an antiwar platform, [declaring](#) in his victory speech, “I’m not going to start wars, I’m going to stop wars.” Yet he has used military force controversially since returning to the White House, deploying troops to American cities and [killing dozens](#) in [strikes](#) on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean without congressional approval. Besides threatening intervention from [Greenland](#) to [Nigeria](#) and [Mexico](#) to [Venezuela](#), he has previously suggested [withdrawing protection for US allies](#) if they did not increase their defense budgets.

Results from the 2025 Chicago Council Survey, fielded July 18–30, reveal these policies to be at odds with large swaths of public opinion. Americans overall prefer to reserve US troops for defending allies and American territory, though Republicans are more amenable to seeing boots on the ground domestically. While bipartisan majorities [oppose](#) sending troops to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia, protecting European NATO allies against Russian invasion remains the top priority. And though support for maintaining overseas bases has dropped slightly since 2022, many still recognize the importance of a long-term US military presence in frontline allies in Europe and Asia.

Key Findings

- In principle, majorities favor deploying troops to defend allies (81%) and American territory (94%). Seven in 10 also support preventive action to stop countries from supporting terrorism (69%) or obtaining nuclear weapons (72%).
- Republicans are more willing than Democrats or Independents to use military force abroad and at home, including for territorial expansion (30%

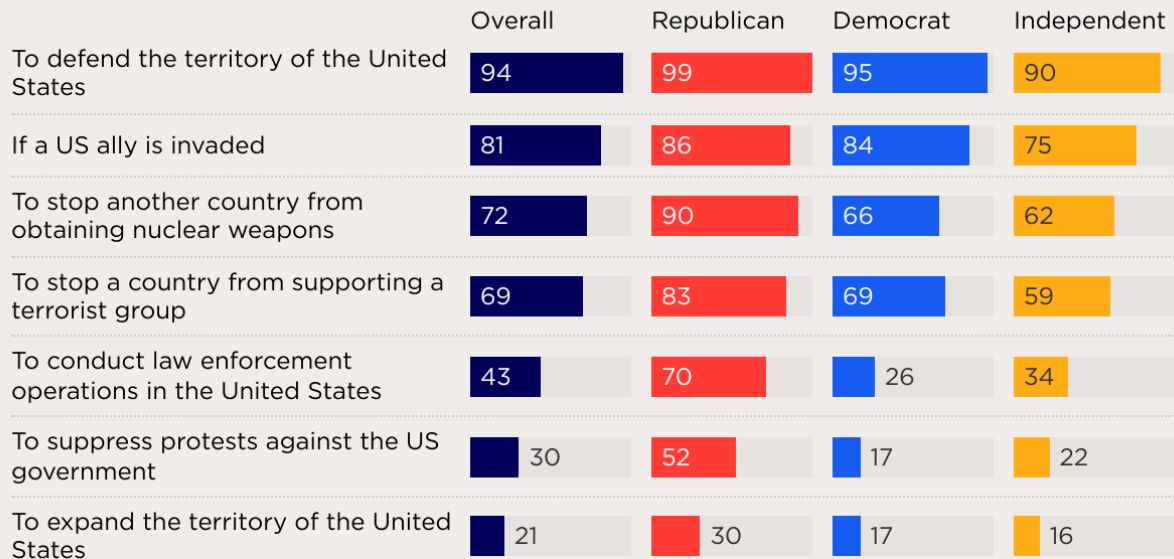
- vs. 17% Democrats), suppressing protests (52% vs. 17% Democrats), and enforcing the law (70% vs. 26% Democrats).
- When asked separately about specific scenarios, Americans support using US troops to defend Poland (62%) or the Baltic states (55%) from Russian attack and to defend South Korea from a North Korean attack (52%). A minority (41%) support US forces defending Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.
 - More than half favor maintaining bases in South Korea (66%), Germany (60%), Japan (59%), the Philippines (56%), the Baltic states (56%), and Poland (53%), though support for all bases around the world has dipped since 2022.

Public Agrees on Priorities for US Troops; Republicans More Open to Military Deployment

Americans have a clear hierarchy of preferences for defensive, preventive, domestic, and expansionist uses of military force. At least eight in 10 favor using troops to defend US allies (81%) and American territory (94%), though a separate set of questions reveals that support varies according to the specific ally. Solid majorities also believe the military should be used preventively, either to stop other countries supporting terrorist groups (69%) or from acquiring nuclear weapons (72%). In contrast, public appetite for boots on the ground for domestic purposes is limited, whether for suppressing protests (30%) or conducting law enforcement operations (43%). At the very bottom is territorial expansion, for which only a fifth (21%) favor military deployment.

Public Priorities for Using US Troops

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: (% favor)



July 18-30, 2025 | n=1,068
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS



At the top of the list of priorities, Republicans and Democrats overwhelmingly endorse defensive military force. Six in seven partisans (86% Republicans, 84% Democrats) favor deploying troops in case allies are invaded, with 99 percent of Republicans and 95 percent of Democrats (95%) in support of protecting the American homeland.¹

Americans also support using troops for preventive operations abroad. Despite a [steady decline in concerns about terrorism](#) over the past decades, seven in 10 Americans (69%) support military action against terrorist

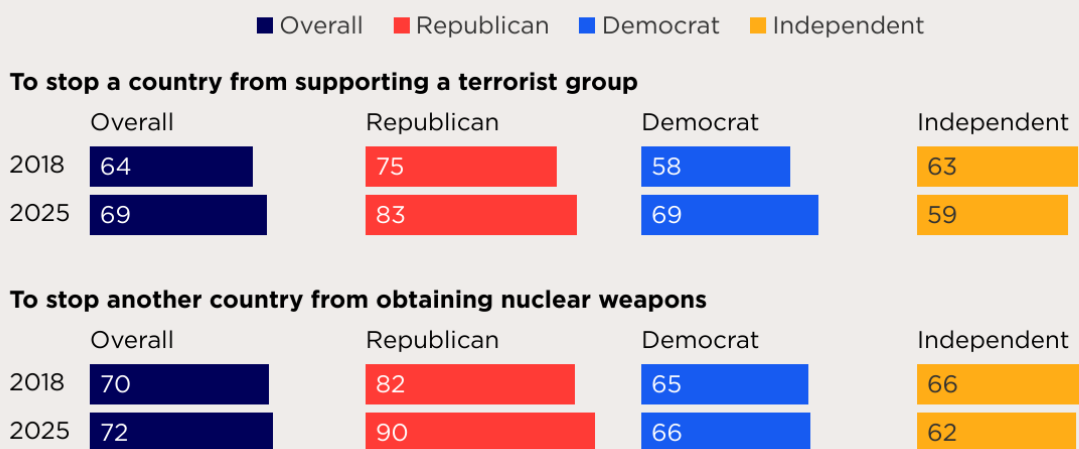
¹ In this survey, one-half of the total sample was asked questions about general uses of force (to defend allies, domestic purposes, etc.) while the other half was asked about specific hypothetical scenarios. As in past polls, more general questions find higher levels of support while more specific questions yield lower levels of support.

sponsors, up from 64 percent in 2018 when the Chicago Council last asked this question. More than eight in 10 Republicans (83%, up from 75% in 2018) and seven in 10 Democrats (69%, up from 58% in 2018) endorse using the US military for this purpose as do six in 10 Independents (59%, down from 63% in 2018).

A similar proportion of Americans today (72%) are willing to see troops deployed to stop more countries from acquiring nuclear weapons compared to seven years ago (70%). While support over the period remains largely unchanged among Democrats and Independents, Republican support has risen eight points (90%, up from 82%). A month before the 2025 Chicago Council Survey was fielded, Trump ordered [military strikes](#) on Iranian nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan, potentially influencing Republican opinion.

Using Troops to Curb Terrorism and Nuclear Proliferation

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: (% favor)



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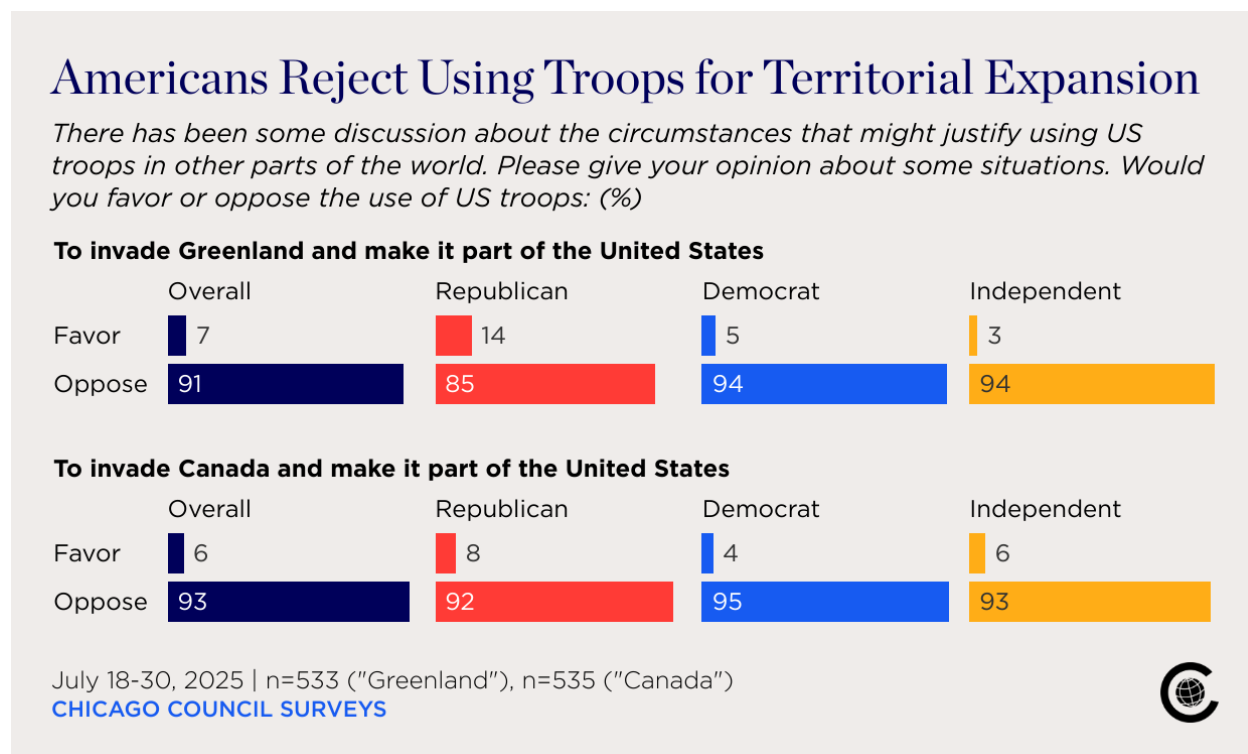


However, recent polling suggests there are limits to what Americans will consider “preventive” uses of force abroad. [In recent months](#), Trump has ordered the military to destroy small boats carrying suspected “[narco-terrorists](#)” in the Caribbean without judicial due process. Administration officials [claim](#) the strikes are conducted in self-defense to prevent drugs from

entering the United States. But a Reuters/Ipsos [poll](#) fielded in November shows that just three in 10 Americans (29%) support the strikes while half (51%) stand opposed.

All partisans view deploying troops within US borders as less palatable than in any other scenario posed, with the exception of territorial expansion. Republicans, however, are much more amenable to using troops domestically. Just 17 percent of Democrats and 22 percent of Independents favor suppressing protests militarily compared to half of Republicans (52%). Likewise, though only minorities of Democrats (26%) and Independents (34%) want US troops to enforce the law on American soil, a majority of Republicans favor doing so (70%).

Though a minority, Republicans (30%) are more likely than Democrats (17%) or Independents (16%) to favor using US troops to expand US territory. Support for military expansion is even more limited under more specific scenarios. More than nine in 10 Americans oppose using US troops to annex Canada (93%) or Greenland (91%), with only small portions of Republicans favoring either.

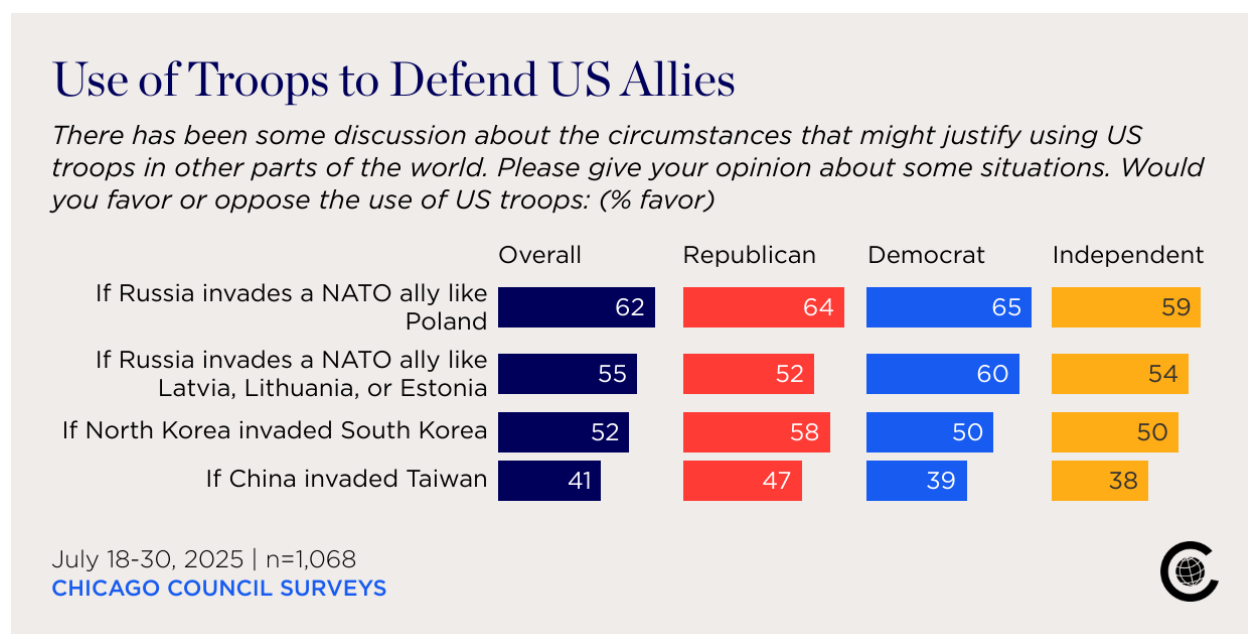


Americans' distaste for military adventurism abroad likely extends to attempted regime change. Over the past few months, Trump has [amassed military assets](#) in the Caribbean and repeatedly [hinted at sending troops](#) to depose Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. A CBS News/YouGov [poll](#)

fielded November 19–21, however, shows a significant majority of Americans would oppose military action in Venezuela (70%), a country only 13 percent consider a “major threat” to US security.

Europe Remains the Center of US Defensive Commitments

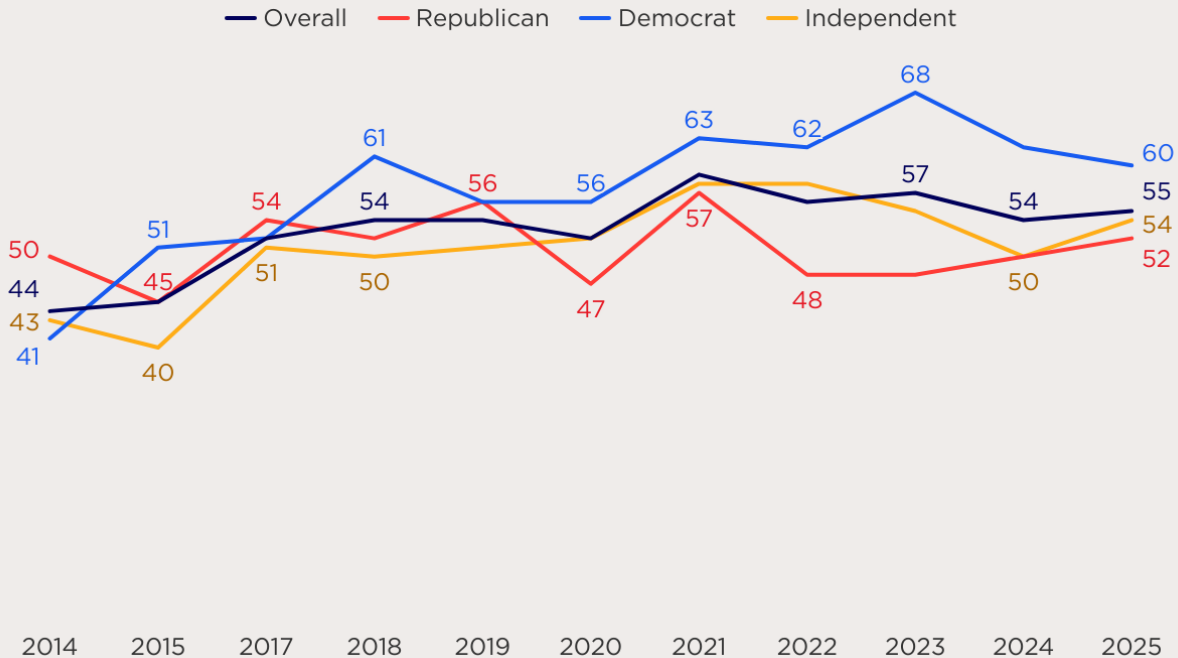
A second set of questions that offered specific situations for potential conflicts finds that support for defensive intervention abroad varies geographically. Across the four scenarios posed, the public is most likely to favor a military response to Russian invasions of European allies. Roughly six in 10 Americans favor using US troops “[if Russia invades a NATO ally like Poland](#)” (62%), and majorities across all partisan stripes agree. And when last asked [in 2024](#), two-thirds overall (64%) said they would favor using US troops “if Russian invades a NATO ally, like Germany.”



A majority of Americans also favor using US troops if Russia were to invade “a NATO ally like Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia” (55%). This is broadly in line with previous results following an increase in overall support for backing the Baltics in 2014 and 2015, directly after the Russian annexation of Crimea. While this scenario garners more Democratic (60%) than Independent (54%) or Republican (52%) support, majorities within each group currently endorse US action.

Using Troops to Defend Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: **If Russia invades a NATO ally like Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia** (% favor)



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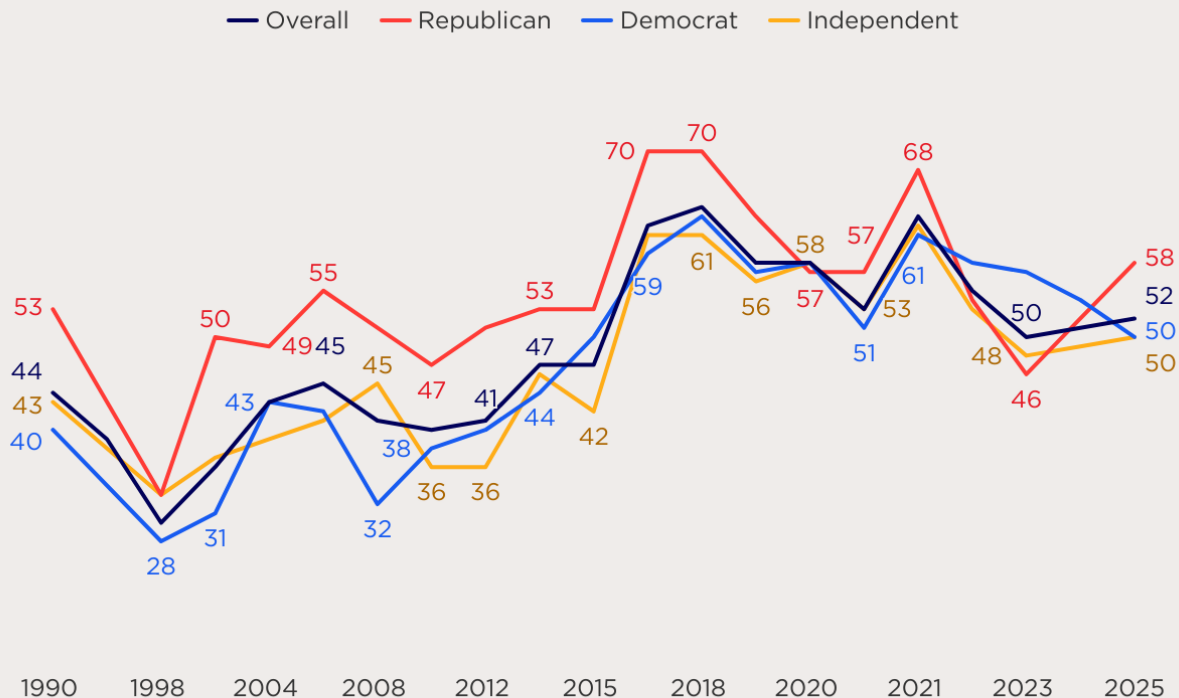


Regarding the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, however, Americans across the political spectrum broadly [oppose](#) sending US troops to help Kyiv defend itself against Russia (35% overall oppose), including 20 percent of Republicans, 34 percent of Independents, and 48 percent of Democrats.

The American public is less likely to favor military intervention in Asia than in Europe. Nevertheless, cross-partisan support for transpacific alliances has [risen in recent years](#). Chicago Council polling shows that from 2017 to the present, [at least half of Americans](#) have consistently supported military intervention to defend South Korea from an attack by North Korea. This year, 52 percent of Americans favor this approach, a figure that includes 58 percent of Republicans and half of Democrats and Independents (50% each). Support for aiding South Korea in the event of a North Korean attack tends to increase when threat perceptions from Pyongyang are more pronounced, as they were in 2017 and 2018.

Support for Defending South Korea

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: **if North Korea invaded South Korea** (% favor)



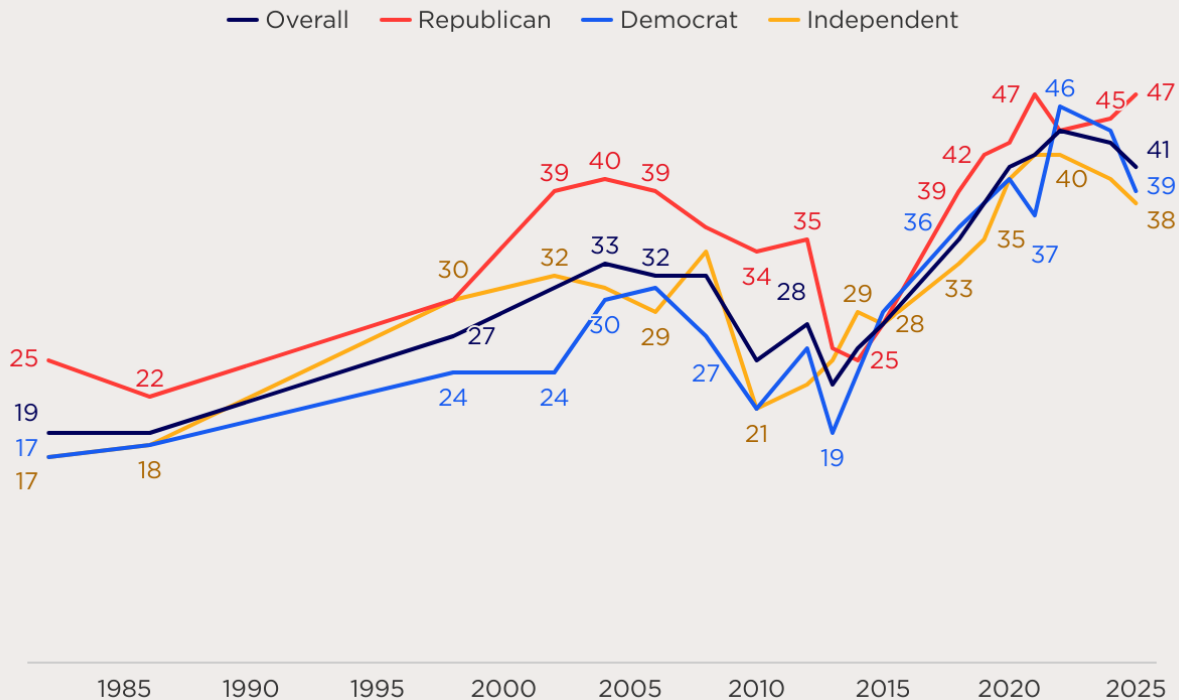
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Since 2019, roughly four in 10 Americans have favored using US troops to defend Taiwan if it is invaded by China (41%). While this backing is limited, it represents a consistent climb in support since the question was first asked in 1982 (when just 19 percent agreed) and comes alongside [strong support for nonmilitary aid](#) to Taiwan. As is the case with defending South Korea, Republicans (47%) are more likely than Democrats (39%) and Independents (38%) to support using US troops for this purpose. This difference likely reflects Republicans' higher sense of threat from China than other partisans. While six in 10 Republicans say the development of China as a world power is a [critical threat](#) (61%), only 44 percent of Democrats agree.

Using Troops to Defend Taiwan

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: **If China invades Taiwan** (% favor)



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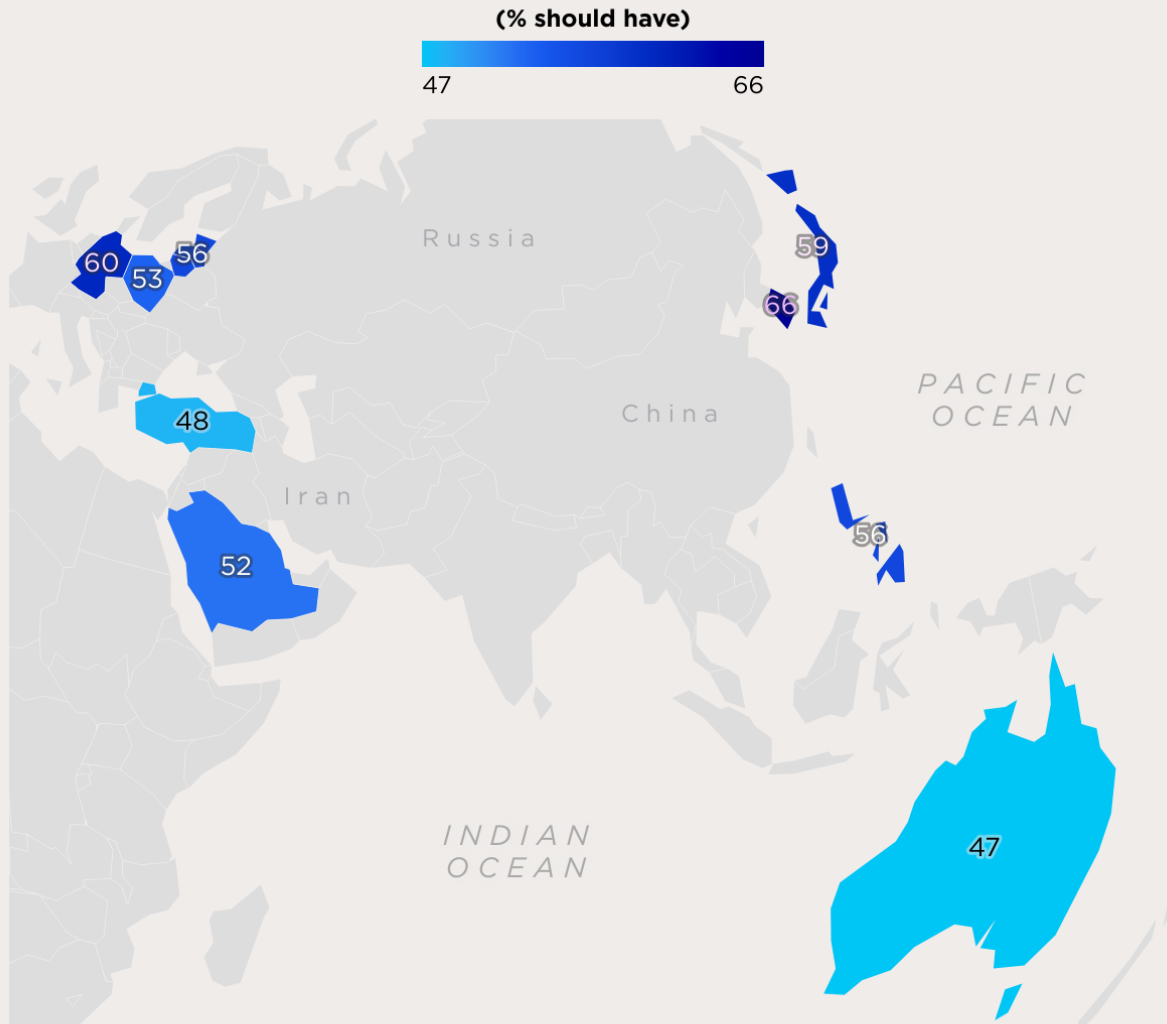


Public Backs Frontline US Military Presence, though Support Down Slightly Since 2022

The ability to deploy troops during a crisis depends on permanent US military bases abroad, which currently number [at least 128 across 49 countries](#). Support for America's overseas military presence remains at comparable levels to previous years, with the public prioritizing frontline bases in Europe and Asia.

Where do Americans Want US Military Bases?

Do you think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places?



July 18-30, 2025 | n=2,148

Baltic states combined in single option ("NATO allies like Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia")

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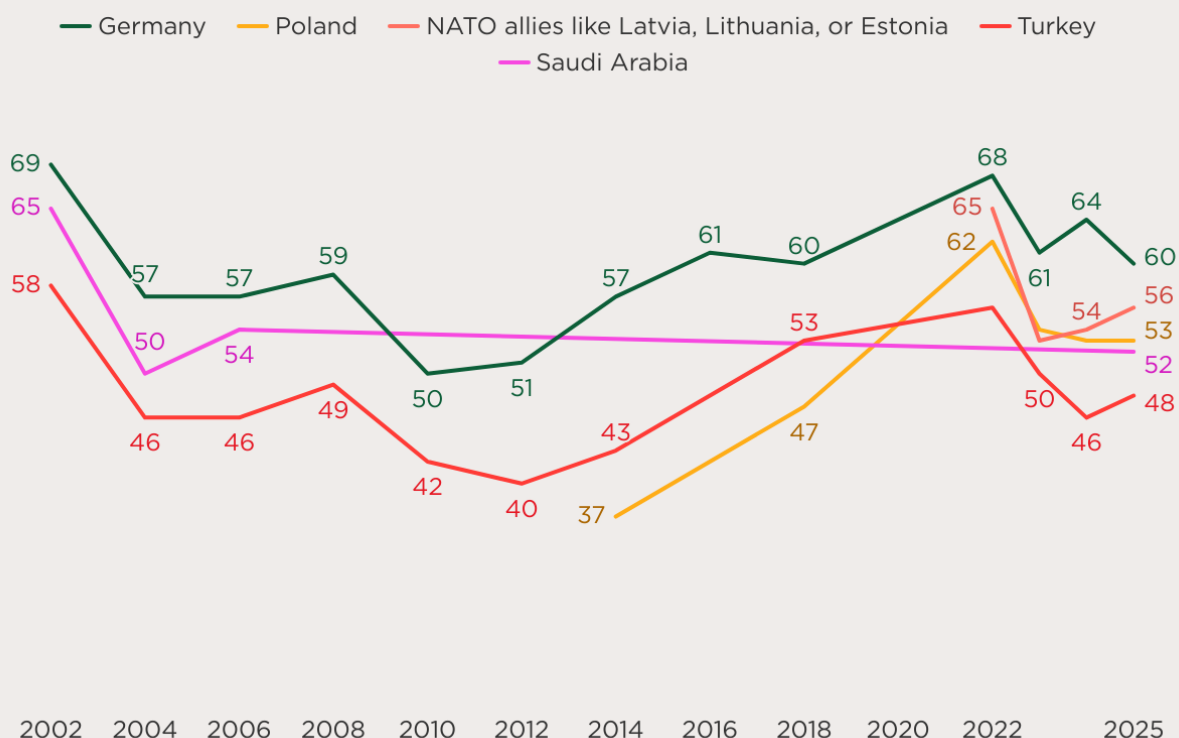


In Europe, at least half say the United States should maintain bases in Germany (60%), Poland (53%), and "NATO allies like Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia" (56%). Though [support for all of the above has dipped slightly](#) since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, that year marked the first time support for bases in Poland surpassed 50 percent, overtaking bases in fellow NATO member Turkey. This year, 48 percent of Americans think the United States should maintain bases in the latter country. Notably, half of Americans

(52%) currently support maintaining a long-term American military presence in Saudi Arabia, largely unchanged from 54 percent the last time this option was asked almost two decades ago in 2006.

Support for US Military Bases in Europe and the Middle East

Do you think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places? (% should have)



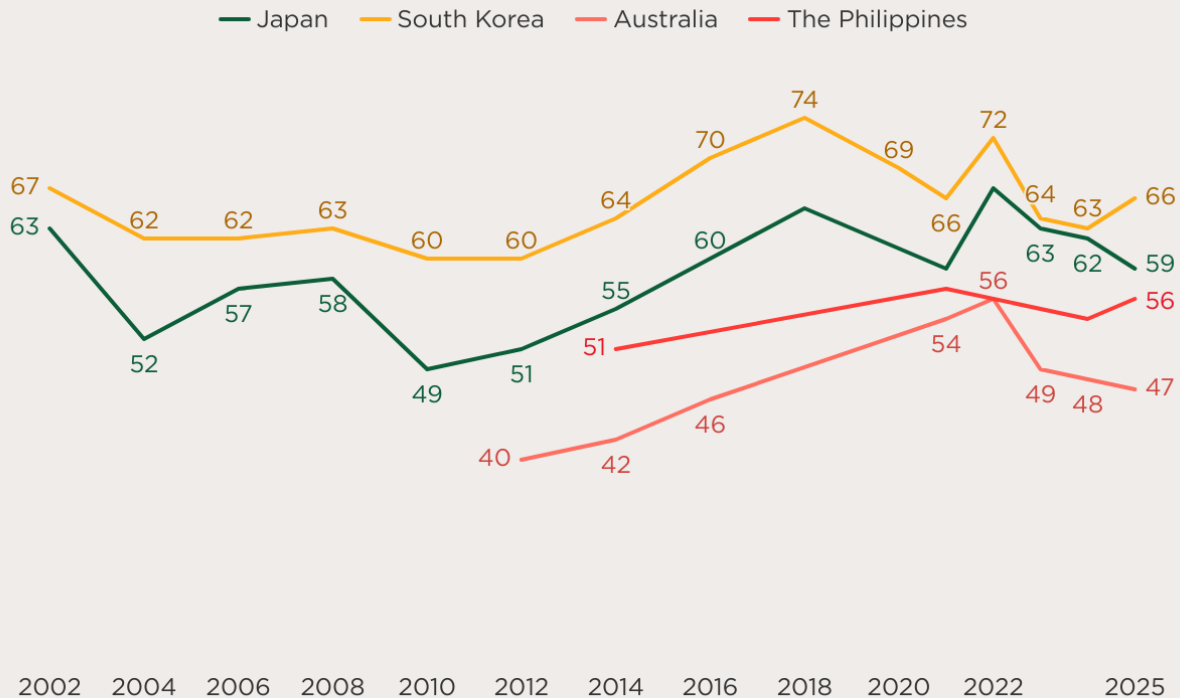
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In East Asia, two-thirds today favor maintaining South Korean bases (66%), support for which has not dropped below 60 percent [in over 20 years](#). Slightly fewer (59%) also say the United States should maintain a long-term military presence in Japan, which hosts the [largest US overseas military presence](#), followed by the Philippines (56%). In contrast, less than half say there should be long-term US bases in Australia (47%), geographically farther from the frontlines of potential new conflicts. Events in Europe appear to weigh on opinion on Indo-Pacific deployments. For all of the above, support for long-term military bases is down from 2022 (2021 for the Philippines).

Support for US Military Bases in Asia

Do you think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places? (% should have)



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In general, Republicans are likelier than Democrats to favor maintaining US overseas bases (see appendix). Eastern Europe presents an exception, perhaps because Republicans are less wary of Russia than are Democrats (51% say Russia's military power is a critical threat vs. 41% of Republicans). Whereas three-fifths of Democrats (61%) support a long-term troop presence in the Baltic states, just half of Republicans do (53%). Nor is there a statistically significant difference between Democrats (53%) and Republicans (57%) on Polish bases (see appendix).

Conclusion

Findings from 2025 show Americans in support of a global US security role grounded in alliances and defense more than in expansion or domestic uses of force. Consensus in coming years may yet change, as Republicans advocate a far greater domestic role for US troops than do either Democrats or Independents. Abroad, Europe remains the public's top priority, though support for defending partners in Asia has grown slowly but steadily.

Though Americans continue to favor maintaining US bases overseas, especially in countries on the front lines of potential new conflicts, declines in those numbers since 2022 serve as a timely reminder that public support responds to current events. As the White House threatens a slate of assertive military actions, policymakers should remember that what Americans see as legitimate uses of US power depends on how prudently that power is wielded.

Methodology

This analysis is primarily based on data from the 2025 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy.

The 2025 Chicago Council Survey was conducted July 18–30, 2025, by Ipsos using its large-scale, nationwide, online research panel (KnowledgePanel) in English and Spanish among a weighted national sample of 2,148 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 2.2 percentage points, including a design effect of 1.07.

Partisan identification is based on how respondents answered a standard partisan self-identification question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”

The 2025 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the Crown family and the Korea Foundation.

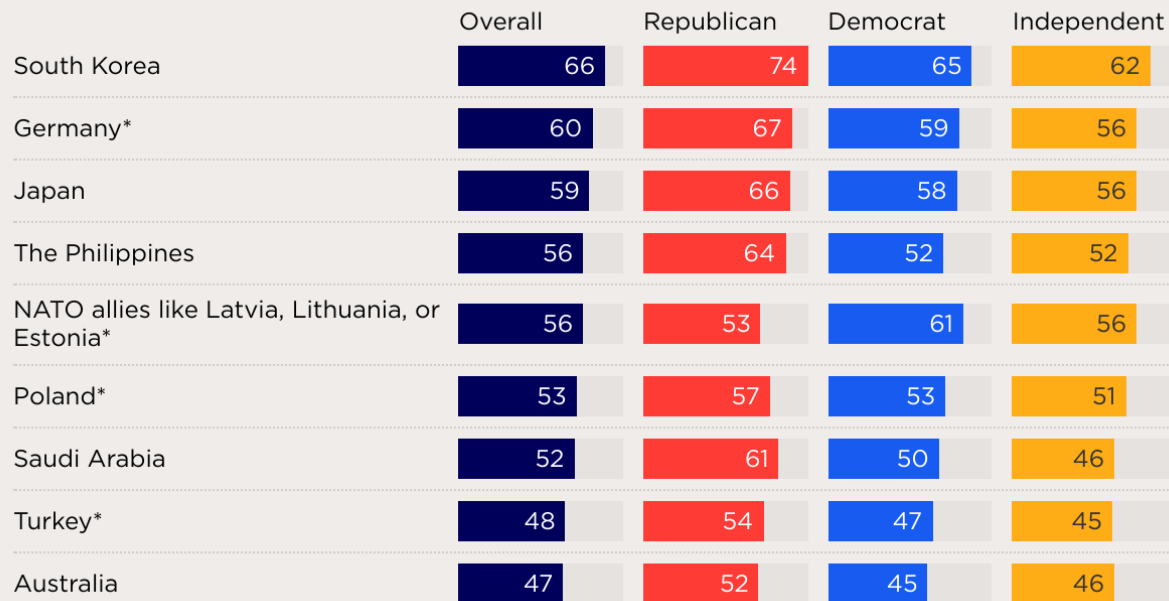
The data for the total sample were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household income using demographic benchmarks from the 2024 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The specific categories used were:

- Gender (Male, Female) by Age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59 and 60+)
- Race/Hispanic Ethnicity (White Non-Hispanic, Black Non-Hispanic, Other Non-Hispanic, Hispanic, 2+ Races Non-Hispanic)
- Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor or Higher)
- Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Metropolitan status (Metro, non-Metro)
- Household Income (Under \$25,000, \$25,000–\$49,999, \$50,000–\$74,999, \$75,000–\$99,999, \$100,000–\$149,999, \$150,000+)

Appendix

Where Do Americans Want US Military Bases?

Do you think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places? (% should have)



* denotes NATO member state
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About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

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About the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy

Established in 2018 with a transformative gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974. For the latest research from the Crown Center, follow [@ChiCouncilFP](https://twitter.com/ChiCouncilFP).