EXECUTIVE MEMORANDUM

To: Whom It May Concern
From: Chris Anderson, Daron Shaw, & Andrew Schwartz
Date: June 11, 2024
Subject: Results from the Reagan Institute Summer Survey

Overview

From May 20-27, 2024, the Ronald Reagan Institute sponsored a national poll to assess the priorities and opinions of Americans across a wide array of foreign policy issues. The poll builds on a Summer 2023 survey focused on broad foreign policy attitudes as well as surveys conducted in support of the Reagan National Defense Forum since 2018 that explore defense policy issues in greater depth. The purpose of these surveys is to provide politicians, policymakers, and experts with timely and scientifically valid information about what Americans believe about   key foreign policy issues.

Over those 8 days, the bi-partisan team of Beacon Research (D) and Shaw & Company Research (R) interviewed more than 1,250 adults from across the United States. The poll gauged opinions on a variety of issues ranging from America's global leadership to the   NATO alliance to specific questions regarding the conflict in the Middle East, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and relations with China. Below we identify and discuss key findings.

U.S. Foreign Policy Philosophy & Goals

As we move further away from the Cold War and as party coalitions continue to shift, it is often unclear what the American public thinks about how our country should engage with the rest of the world. In the Summer 2024 survey, we asked a simple philosophical question about American foreign policy: "When it comes to international events, do you think it is better for the United States to be more engaged and take the lead, or to be less engaged and react to events?" Over half (54%) of respondents said it is better for the U.S. to be more engaged and take the lead, while one-third (33%) said it is better to be less engaged and react to events. The 54% opting for engagement and leadership represents a 12-point jump from last year, when 42% held that opinion. Support for the less engaged option remained flat at 33%, indicating that those on the fence are driving the increased support for engagement.

The 12-point increase is mostly due to greater support for engagement and leadership among younger (+24) and non-college educated respondents (+15). These groups tended to be relatively more isolationist in 2023, so their movement puts them more in line with mainstream opinion. In

addition, Democrats (+20) moved much more than independents or Republicans, likely because they are receiving and accepting pro-engagement messages from the Biden administration.

The survey explores the rationale for preferring greater U.S. foreign policy engagement by offering several possible reasons for America to be more involved. The rationale garnering the highest level of agreement is that "a strong U.S. military is essential for maintaining peace and prosperity at home and abroad," with 86% agreeing (61% strongly). Rationales focusing on promoting trade and economic prosperity (78% agree, 41% strongly) and standing up for democracy and human rights (77% agree, 44% strongly) also receive high levels of agreement. There are some notable partisan differences within these broadly held beliefs, as Republicans are much more likely to agree that a strong military is necessary for peace and prosperity (75% to 53% for Democrats) while Democrats are more likely to agree that America has a moral obligation to stand up for human rights and democracy (55% to 37% for Republicans).

Curiously perhaps, a 62% majority (34% strongly) also agrees with a central isolationist rationale—that the U.S. is better off staying out of foreign conflicts and should focus more on problems at home. However, the fact that Americans can hold contrary views at the same time should not obscure the fact that there is more support (and more intense support) for engagement rather than isolationist rationales.

Compared to 2023, strong agreement with specific engagement rationales principles is up between 3 points (the need for a strong military) and 8 points (the need to promote trade and economic prosperity) whereas agreement with the isolationist principle held steady.

By a more than two to one margin, the influence of American engagement is seen as broadly positive by respondents. When asked about the impact of U.S. engagement on the world, 61% say it has been positive compared to 27% negative. When asked about its impact on the U.S., 57% say it has been positive compared to 33% negative. As might be expected, the percentage saying the impact of greater U.S. engagement has been positive is exceedingly high with older voters (76% positive among seniors) and more educated voters (74% among post-graduates). In partisan terms, Democrats are more likely to say the impact has been positive (68%) than are Republicans (53%) or independents (44%).

Attitudes towards NATO

Logically, support for greater U.S. engagement with foreign affairs would seem to suggest support for a military alliance like NATO. The data indicate that this is indeed the case, as almost two-thirds of Americans (62%) have a favorable view of the alliance whereas slightly over a quarter have an unfavorable view (26%). These numbers are largely unchanged since last year (60% favorable, 23% unfavorable).

This year, we probed respondents as to the perceived benefits and drawbacks to our NATO alliance. On the plus side, an overwhelming percentage of Americans say that NATO benefits the U.S. by (1) providing us with allies to stand by us if we are attacked (77%), (2) checking the Russians (69%), (3) deterring conflict in Europe that would disrupt economic trade (66%), and (4) protecting freedom and democracy in Europe (61%).

On the minus side, when asked to identify drawbacks, roughly three out of four say that NATO could possibly commit the U.S. to a European war (76%) or point to the financial costs of aiding and

supplying the alliance (74%). On this second drawback, almost three-fifths (59%) of respondents think that our NATO allies are not doing their fair share, a number that has been static since our first poll in 2018. Finally, another four in ten (39%) cite as a drawback the possibility that NATO could provoke Russia into a conflict.

But what about the core premise of the alliance itself: are Americans in favor of honoring our commitment to respond if any county in the alliance is attacked? Currently, 72% support honoring this commitment, while 16% oppose. This support extends across all demographic and partisan sub-groups. For example, earlier we noted that support for engagement and internationalism is lowest among younger people (less than 30 years of age), those without a college degree, and political independents—but 58% of those under the age of 30 support honoring our commitment to NATO if a member country is attacked, as do 67% of non-college respondents and 58% of independents.

Can this high level of support be further solidified by pointing out that the "collective defense" principle has only been invoked once—after the 9/11 attacks, when allies supported the U.S. war on terrorism? Not really. When this piece of information is offered and we re-ask the question concerning offering military support for a NATO member who has been attacked, support moves up by only a single point, from 72% to 73%. The small percentage opposing the NATO commitment seem intent on remaining so.

Conversely, it does seem that support for "collective defense" can be weakened. When asked if the U.S. should honor its commitment to come to the aid of a NATO member who has been attacked *if that country has not spent the required 2% of its GDP on defense*, support drops by 20 points (from 72% to 52%), while opposition rises (from 16% to 30%). Put another way, the +56 support of a member country decreases to +22—there is still majority support, but it is dramatically weaker. The decrease in support comes from voters across the political spectrum (-18 points among Democrats, -21 among independents, -22 among Republicans) and holds regardless of a voters' age, education, view on NATO, or preferred level of US engagement with world affairs.

Global Hot Spots

Although foreign policy often takes a backseat to domestic politics in an election year, Americans clearly think that the conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, as well as relations with China matter a great deal. When asked "how much" these issues matter "to U.S. security and prosperity," 74% say that the war between Israel and Hamas matters (43% say it matters "a great deal"), 73% say a potential conflict between Taiwan and China matters (43% "a great deal"), and 73% say the war between Ukraine and Russia matters (40% "a great deal"). While these "hot spots" are seen as comparably important, let us consider them in this order.

<u>The Middle East</u>

When asked about their top concerns in the Middle East, respondents continue to cite (1) terrorist attacks against Americans or American interests (84% concerned, 48% extremely), (2) the U.S. getting pulled into a military conflict in the region (81% concerned, 43% extremely), and current hostilities escalating into a broader conflict (78%, 42% extremely). In other words, citizens are worried about both quagmire and conflagration in the Middle East.

Slightly below this top tier of concerns, Americans are worried about increasing antisemitism in the U.S. (77%, 47% extremely) and further terrorist attacks against Israel (75%, 40% extremely). And then we see concerns about humanitarian issues in Gaza resulting from the war (75%, 46% extremely) and, finally, the possible deterioration of U.S.-Israel relations (70% concerned, 36% extremely).

Partisan differences are evident from the "concern" series, as Democrats are more likely to be highly concerned about humanitarian conditions in Gaza (61% extremely concerned), while Republicans zero in on terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens or interests (55% extremely concerned) and increased antisemitism in the U.S. (52% extremely concerned). These differences are even more apparent once one focuses on Republican supporters of the MAGA movement, where the percent saying they are "extremely concerned" about future terrorist attacks and antisemitism rises to three in five.

When asked about the appropriateness of Israel's response to the October 7, 2023, attacks, Americans are sharply divided. About one-third think Israel's response has been "appropriate," while one-third think it has been "too harsh." Fifteen percent say the response hasn't been harsh enough, and 19% say they don't know. This split in opinion masks important differences by demographic and political groups. Perhaps most predictably, Democrats are more likely to say Israel has been "too harsh" (48%) whereas Republicans are more likely to say "appropriate" (39%) or not harsh enough (26%).

We asked respondents to choose between supporting Israel's right to continued military action in Gaza until the security threat has been removed versus supporting a cease-fire—46% choose Israel's right to "keep going" and 43% choose a cease-fire.

Again, significant group differences emerge. Men support Israel's right to keep going by 14 points, while women prefer a cease-fire by 6 points. Those under 30 years of age prefer a cease-fire by 20 points, while those aged 65 years or more support Israel's right to keep going by 21 points. People of color support a cease-fire by 25 points, whereas whites prefer that Israel keep going by 13 points.

These group differences are undoubtedly correlated by preferred news source, as those relying on social media like TikTok and Instagram are much more supportive of a cease fire, compared to those relying on cable TV like Fox News who are much more likely to back Israel's right to keep going.

We asked respondents about how pro-Palestinian protests on college campuses has affected their views on the conflict. The response suggests that the protests have been either ineffective or even counter-productive. While 22% say the protests have made them more sympathetic to the Palestinians, 30% say they have made them less sympathetic (40% say they have made no difference). Reactions to the protests appear highly correlated with social and political divides:

- Seniors are less sympathetic by 28 points, compared with those under 30 years of age who are more sympathetic by 11 points.
- People of color are more sympathetic by 11 points, compared with whites who are less sympathetic by 16 points.
- Republicans are less sympathetic by 35 points, compared with Democrats who are more sympathetic by 18 points (independents are less sympathetic by 11 points).

Although the plight of Palestinian civilians in Gaza has caused tensions in the American-Israel alliance, public support for military assistance to Israel remains strong. A solid majority (56%) support sending U.S. weapons to Israel (about one-third oppose). Young people and political independents are roughly split on this question, yet all other groups are strongly supportive. Interestingly, those who say they know more about the 10/7 attacks are particularly supportive of military aid to Israel, compared to those how know little or nothings (who are split on the question of military aid).

This support increases substantially if one moves from "military weapons" to "missile defense weapons," such as those necessary to defend Israel from attacks like the one launched in April by Iran. Sixty-eight percent support for such weaponry—compared to 56% for conventional military weapons. Support climbs most significantly among left-leaning groups, such as Democrats (+18 points) and Biden supporters (+21 points).

Conversely, support drops down again if the policy in question is an Israeli counter-attack on Iran in response to the missile attack. Fifty-five percent of Americans say they would support such a counterattack by Israel, while 31% say they would oppose this. Moreover, fewer than one-in-five (17%) would support direct U.S. military involvement in such a counter-strike. Exactly half would support the U.S providing intelligence and logistical support. About one-quarter (24%) oppose the U.S. doing anything to support an Israeli counter-attack.

China

Perhaps the main concern Americans have with respect to U.S. policy in China is that it isn't clear we have one. By a two-to-one margin, respondents say we do not have a "China policy" (56% "no, we do not" versus 27% "yes, we do").

This is a major problem because Americans are quite concerned about an array of threats coming from the Chinese Communist Party . The top five concerns about China, in order, are (1) technology theft (55% extremely concerned), (2) holding $1.2 trillion U.S debt (53%), (3) human rights violations (48%), (4) artificial intelligence development (48%), and (5) the overall military build-up (46%). There are some differences here compared to the results from 2021—most notably, Americans are less concerned about Chinese human rights violations (-10 points) and the treatment of the Uyghurs (-9 points), but more concerned about AI development (+5 points).

On the specific strategic question of Taiwan, clear majorities support U.S. actions to deter a Chinese attack on the island. Fifty-eight percent support increasing the U.S. military presence near Taiwan, while 56% support increasing U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

Interestingly, demographic and partisan differences on U.S.-China policy are less stark than they are on other foreign policy questions. For example, Democrats and MAGA Republicans are among the most supportive of increasing the U.S. military presence near Taiwan (61% and 67% supportive, respectively).

Finally, Chinese Communist Party ties to the social media giant TikTok have become a political issue over the past year or so, yet Americans are torn over whether the federal government should ban TikTok in the U.S.: 41% support a ban but 44% oppose it. We tested whether additional information on the Chinese government's access to TikTok's usage data influences support for a ban—re-asking

the same question with this information increases support for a ban by 10 points, from 41% to 51%, while decreasing opposition by 5 points, from 44% to 39%.

Ukraine

One of the most striking findings in the survey is that the American public now thinks Russia is winning the war with Ukraine. In 2023, respondents said that Ukraine was winning by 3 points (34% Ukraine, 31% Russia)—now, they say Russia is winning by 20 points (19% Ukraine, 39% Russia).

To be clear, almost no one *wants* Russia to win. Americans either prefer Ukraine (59%) or have no opinion either way (34%). The common trope that Republicans want Putin to win is completely unsupported by the data: only 8% of Republicans prefer that Russia win, compared to 7% of Democrats and 7% of independents.

Furthermore, most Americans (75%) say that Ukrainian victory is important for the U.S. This number is essentially unchanged since 2023. Concurrently, there has been a very slight downtick in support for sending U.S. military aid to Ukraine (from 59% in 2023 to 57% in 2024), but a solid majority still backs this policy.

Support for U.S. military aid to Ukraine is strongest among seniors (+54 points more support than oppose), those with a college degree (+30 points), men (+36 points), and Democrats (+59 points). Republicans (+3 points) and independents (+1) are more skeptical about this policy.

Reasons for supporting the provision of weapons to Ukraine run the gamut, with no clear dominant rationale. One-quarter cite the need for Ukraine to be able to defend itself, followed by the need to counter Russian power (20%), the potential for the conflict to expand if unchecked (16%), a desire to prevent Russia from winning (15%), and support for Ukrainian sovereignty (13%).

On the other side of the ledger, there is also an array of reasons why respondents oppose sending weapons to Ukraine. Topping the list is the fear that we are spending too much money (18%), followed by the general sense that we should focus on America first and stay out of foreign conflicts (17%), the specific opinion that the conflict does not concern us (16%), the notion that money involved could be better used on domestic projects (13%), a dislike of any war or violence (10%), and a belief that there has been a lack of accountability or occurrence of waste and corruption (10%).

There is a general sense among those studying foreign policy attitudes that it is exceedingly difficult to mobilize public opinion in support of engagements like the one between Ukraine and Russia after a few months. With this conventional wisdom as the backdrop, we tested several messages designed to educate respondents about what is going on in Ukraine to see if they might increase support for the current U.S. policy. Eight specific messages were tested (four per respondent) and each of them proved resonant, with between 71% and 52% saying they were "more likely" to support sending weapons to Ukraine.

At first glance, three messages stand out: (1) supporting Ukraine is crucial to upholding the principle of national sovereignty (42% say they are "much more likely" to support sending weapons upon hearing this), (2) if Russia wins in Ukraine, the rest of Europe will be at risk (40% much more

likely), and (3) Russia is winning because Ukraine is running out of ammunition and weapons to defend itself (37% much more likely).

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the collective impact of these messages is quite powerful. Support for arming Ukraine increases by 7 points after hearing these messages, while opposition decreases by 5 points. Among undecided respondents, support increases by 41 points. Increased support is particularly notable among women (+10 points) and MAGA Republicans (+8 points).

A deeper look at the effectiveness of the messages indicates that focusing on the economic benefits to the U.S. and the long-term preservation of U.S. lives matters most. More specifically, if one actually focuses on those who move to support arming Ukraine, the most impactful messages are (1) aiding Ukraine actually creates manufacturing jobs in the U.S. and boosts our economy (among movers, 39% said this makes them much more likely to support arming Ukraine), (2) if Russia wins in Ukraine, the rest of Europe will be at risk (37% much more likely among movers), and (3) arming Ukraine helps degrade Russian military capacity without risking American lives (37% much more likely among movers).

Methodology

This survey was conducted from May 20-27, 2024. It features a mixed-mode design, with 463 responses collected by live telephone interviewers and another 794 responses gathered online. The telephone portion of the survey is a probability sample, relying on a multi-stage cluster design. Fifty percent of the calls were completed via landline and 50 percent were completed via cell phone. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. To ensure that results accurately reflect the demographics of the country, they were weighted by age/gender, race/region, and education targets drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey. The probability sample was then used to calibrate the non-probability online sample (conducted over the same dates) by key demographic and attitudinal variables. For the full sample of 1,257 respondents, the estimated margin of error is +/- 2.8 percentage points. Some questions were asked of half the respondents, with an associated margin of error of +/- 3.9 points. The margin of error for sub-groups is larger.