

American Public Opposes Arming Rebels in Syria

Dina Smeltz, senior fellow, public opinion and foreign policy
Craig Kafura, senior program officer, studies

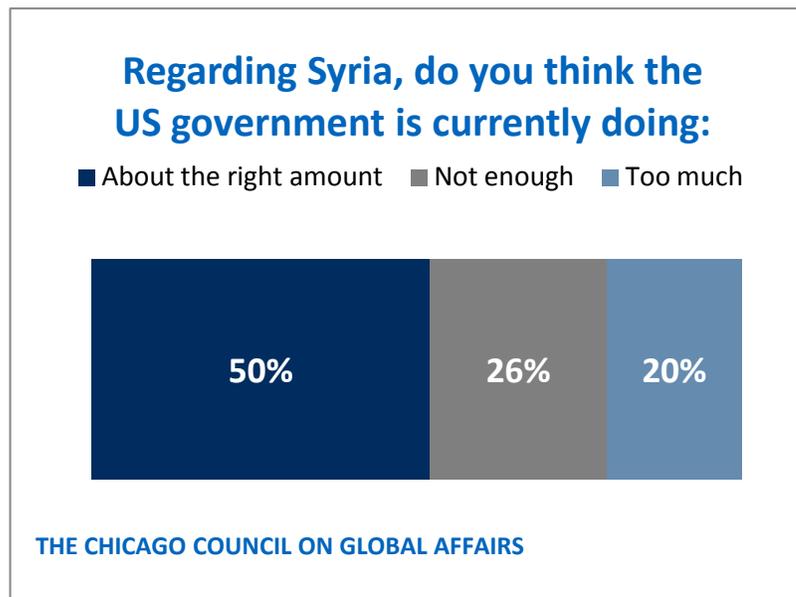
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With the conflict in Syria well into its fourth year, Chicago Council Survey results from May 2014 show that a majority of the American public does not see the conflict in Syria as a critical threat to the United States. While the Obama administration has proposed \$500 million to train and arm rebel groups in Syria, Americans oppose sending arms and supplies to anti-government groups in Syria. Instead, a majority of the public favors increasing diplomatic and economic sanctions on Syria and half say they would support enforcing a no-fly zone.

One in four Americans see conflict in Syria as a critical threat

At the time of this survey, only a quarter (24%) of Americans saw the continuing conflict in Syria as a critical threat. A majority (61%) considered it an important but not critical threat. This is far lower than other threats asked about in the 2014 Chicago Council Survey, placing 19th out of 20 threats to the U.S.

While some politicians have called for a greater US role in Syria, only one in four Americans think the United States is not doing enough (26%). Half (50%) think that the US government is currently doing about the right amount on Syria, with two in ten (20%) saying it is doing too much.



Continued opposition to arming rebels

Americans remain opposed to providing material support to rebel groups in Syria. One in four (25%) say that they would support the United States and its allies sending arms and supplies to anti-government groups in Syria, while seven in ten (70%) oppose doing so. Americans said much the same in 2012, when 67 percent opposed arming rebel groups.

Support for arming rebel groups in Syria is highest among those Americans who say the US is not doing enough, but a majority of this group still opposes sending arms and supplies (40% support, 57% oppose). Larger majorities among those who say the US is doing the right amount (74%, 23% support) or too much (85%, 15% support) oppose sending weapons and supplies.

Solid majority endorse increased sanctions on Syria

After asking for assessments of the US government's current approach to Syria, respondents were presented with several specific options that could be taken. Two in three Americans (67%) support increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions on Syria. This is a slight increase from 2012, when 63 percent of the public supported increasing sanctions on the Assad regime.

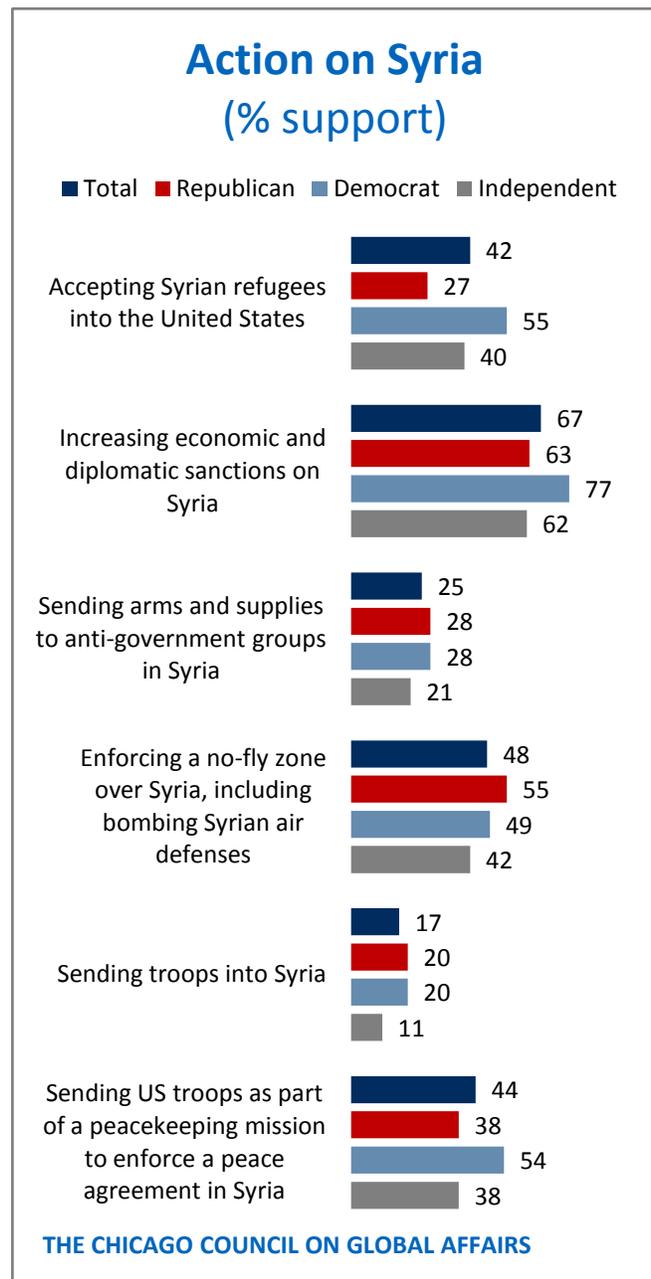
Americans divided on Syrian no-fly zone

Though Americans seem fairly satisfied with the current approach to Syria, there is a relatively high level of public support for enforcing a no-fly zone over Syria, including bombing Syrian air defenses. On this issue, the public is evenly divided, with 48 percent in support and 47 percent opposed. This level of support is consistent whether the operation is part of a United Nations Security Council authorized military mission or if done as part of a coalition of like-minded allies (48% support for each).

As might be expected, support for enforcing a no-fly zone is highest among those Americans who say the US is not doing enough on Syria (65%, 32% oppose). Meanwhile, Americans who say the government is doing about the right amount on Syria are divided on the issue (50% support, 46% opposed). Those who say the government is doing too much oppose a no-fly zone (71%, vs. 28% in support).

Few want to send troops into Syria, but more support peacekeeping mission

Many Americans are also open to the idea of contributing US troops to a peacekeeping mission in Syria if a peace agreement is reached. A sizable minority (44%) say they would support sending troops to enforce that agreement, with 55 percent opposed. Other



than for peacekeeping, though, the idea of sending US troops to Syria is unpopular with the American public: fewer than two in ten (17%) support the US sending troops to Syria. Even those Americans who say the US is not doing enough on Syria are hesitant to put boots on the ground: only a quarter of this group favor sending troops.

Support for sending troops appears to be linked to a sense of moral obligation, national interest and a belief that US intervention would make a difference. When those who supported sending troops to Syria were asked the reason for their support, they most frequently cited that the US had a moral obligation to act, it would make a difference in stopping the war, or that it was in our national interest to act. Fewer said they supported sending troops to Syria because the mission was likely to succeed, people around the world would view it as a legitimate action, the risk of American lives would be low, or the financial cost would be acceptable. Those opposed to sending troops to Syria cited the risks to American lives, doubts that the situation is vital to US national interest, potential financial costs, and skepticism that US intervention would make a difference.

Public opposes accepting Syrian refugees into United States

A majority of Americans (55%) oppose accepting Syrian refugees into the United States, while four in ten (42%) support doing so. This opposition appears to reflect American concerns about immigrants and refugees more broadly. Indeed, Americans who see large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the US as a critical threat are far less likely to support accepting Syrian refugees (19%) than those Americans who see it as an important but not critical threat (51%), or not an important threat at all (61%).

There are also differences among age groups when it comes to admitting Syrian refugees into the United States: a majority of Americans under the age of 45 support taking in refugees (52%; 45% opposed), while a majority of Americans older than 45 oppose doing so (64%; 32% support).

Democrats more likely to support peacekeeping; Republicans more opposed to refugees

As is generally the case with peacekeeping missions, Democrats are more likely to support sending troops (54%, vs. 38% of Republicans and Independents). Republicans, meanwhile, are more likely to support enforcing a no-fly zone over Syria (55%, vs. 49% of Democrats and 42% of Independents). Americans who say they identify as part of or sympathize with the Tea Party movement are more likely to support a no-fly zone as well (59%, vs. 47% of non-tea partiers)¹.

When it comes to refugees, there are strong partisan divisions as well. A majority of Democrats (55%) support taking in refugees from Syria, though only a quarter of Republicans (27%) and four in ten Independents (40%) agree. This fits with partisans' differing levels of concern about immigrants and refugees coming to the United States, which a majority of Republicans (55%) see as a critical threat. In contrast, only two in ten Democrats (21%) say the same, while Independents split the difference (42%).

¹ Among those who consider themselves a part of or identify with the Tea Party movement (12% overall), 49 percent identify as Republicans, 18 percent as Democrats, and 31 percent as Independents.

On other issues, as is usually the case in foreign policy, partisans agree. Majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents oppose sending troops into Syria, oppose arming anti-government groups, and support increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions on Syria.

About the 2014 Chicago Council Survey

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2014 Chicago Council Survey and previous Chicago Council Surveys of the American public on foreign policy. The survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide research panel between May 6 to May 29, 2014 among a national sample of 2,108 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error for the overall sample is ± 2.1 percentage points.

A full report on the results of the 2014 Chicago Council Survey will be released on September 15.

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For more information regarding the 2014 Chicago Council Survey, please contact Dina Smeltz, senior fellow, public opinion and foreign policy (dsmeltz@thechicagocouncil.org; 312-821-6860) or Craig Kafura, senior program officer, studies (ckafura@thechicagocouncil.org; 312-821-7560).