EXECUTIVE MEMORANDUM

To:	Whom It May Concern
From:	Chris Anderson, Daron Shaw, & Terry Classen
Date:	November 24, 2025
Subject:	Results from the 2025 Annual Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute National Defense Survey

Overview

From October 23-November 3, 2025, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute (RRPFI) sponsored a national poll to assess the priorities and opinions of Americans across a wide array of defense, military, and foreign policy issues. The 2025 poll is RRPFI's eighth such survey since 2018. The impetus behind the poll is straightforward: to provide politicians, policymakers, and experts with consistent and timely information about public opinion on these critical issues.

Over those twelve days, the bipartisan team of Beacon Research (D) and Shaw & Company Research (R) interviewed 2,507 adult citizens from across the United States. The poll gauged opinions on a variety of issues ranging from trust and confidence in the U.S. military, to assessments of domestic and international threats, to the appetite for U.S. global leadership. The survey includes a particularly comprehensive exploration of American public opinion on U.S. defense capabilities and weaknesses, as well as on key foreign policy issues such as the U.S. bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and policy challenges with China.

The following are key takeaways from the survey:

- ***There is broad support for engagement and peace through strength***—Nearly two-thirds think it is better for the U.S. to lead from the front and be more engaged in international events. Seven-in-ten agree the world is more likely to achieve peace when the U.S. has the strongest military.

- ***There is specific support for an active foreign policy***—Majorities approve of U.S. troop deployments along the southern border, the use of force against suspected drug traffickers, and last summer's U.S. airstrike against Iranian nuclear facilities.

- ***The U.S. military is great, don't mess with it***—Despite some erosion of overall confidence, Americans believe our military is the best in the world but are skeptical of recent initiatives that seem political. For example, most oppose changing the name of the Defense Department to the War Department, and voters are as likely to oppose as support eliminating DEI programs at the Pentagon.

- *NATO has made a comeback*—More than two-thirds have a favorable view of NATO, an all-time high for this poll. This includes 60% of MAGA Republicans, up from 48% who held positive views of the alliance earlier this year.

- *China is no friend, but Taiwan is*—China is seen as the greatest external threat to the US. Nearly eight-in-ten think it is important for the US military to defend Taiwan against Chinese aggression, and support has increased for a wide range of preemptive and retaliatory measures.

- *Russia isn't our friend, either*—Americans remain committed to Ukraine, as roughly two-thirds want Ukraine to win the war, and support is at an all-time high for providing weapons to Ukraine.

In general, the data indicate substantial continuity in attitudes, especially those supporting U.S. engagement and peace through strength. As suggested above, however, there have been some consequential shifts in opinions, most notably increased support for NATO, Taiwan, and Ukraine. What follows is a review of the survey's main findings.

Confidence in the Military

In one of our ongoing, annual question batteries, we asked respondents how much confidence they have in a variety of institutions, including the U.S. military. Overall confidence in the military remains high but is down slightly from 2024. Seventy-seven percent say they have at least "some" confidence in the military (49% say a "great deal") compared to 82% last year. There is some variation by age (older people have more confidence than younger people), ethnicity (white people have more confidence than people of color), and party (Republicans have more confidence than Democrats and independents).

Two tendencies are worth noting. First, confidence in the military is much higher than it is for any other institution evaluated. Police and law enforcement garner at least "some" confidence among 71% of respondents, followed in order by the tech industry (59%), the Supreme Court (47%), the presidency (44%), the news media (42%), and Congress (30%). Second, there has been an overall decline in confidence in the military since our first poll in November 2018. At that time, 93% said they had at least "some" confidence in the military, with 70% expressing a "great deal" of confidence.

While generally bullish on our forces, citizens see the U.S. military as differentially capable across a range of tasks. At the high end, 81% say they have a great deal or some confidence in the ability of the military to keep the country safe, while 76% have confidence they can deter foreign aggression and 71% have confidence in their ability to win a war overseas. Two relative weak spots: 67% are confident the U.S. military can act in a professional and nonpolitical manner and 64% are confident they can prevent a cyber-attack from another country.

When asked whether they would encourage or discourage a family member or close friend from joining the military, 59% said encourage and 27% said discourage. This is an increase in positive sentiment from our 2023 survey (the last time we asked the question), when the numbers were 51% and 33%, respectively.

Engagement, Priorities, Capabilities, and Threats

Americans continue to support engagement over isolationism. <u>When asked a simple question about U.S. foreign policy, a solid majority (64%) prefer that America is more engaged and take the lead rather than be less engaged and react to events (33%)</u>. This 31-point pro-engagement margin is a marked increase from the 17-point pro-engagement margin we noted when we first asked the question in 2019..

The poll also provides compelling evidence that <u>the public agrees with the idea of "peace through strength."</u> Fully 71% agree with the statement that the world is more likely to achieve peace when the U.S. military is the world's strongest. While there is widespread agreement with this notion, men are more supportive than women (77% to 66%), seniors are more supportive than those under 30 years of age (75% to 65%), and Republicans are more supportive than independents and Democrats (89% to 57% and 58%).

Americans desire not only engagement, but power and flexibility. Forty-four percent say our military capabilities ought to be substantial enough to fight wars against China and Russia simultaneously. Another 20% say our military capabilities should be substantial enough to fight a war against China as well as a smaller power, such as Iran or North Korea, at the same time. Just 11% say we should only have a military large enough to defend our own borders. Support for the "two wars" force posture is highest among Republicans (73% for GOPers, 58% for independents and 57% for Democrats). MAGA Trump voters are just as supportive of a "two war" military capacity as Trump voters overall.

In addition, the public believes the American military is—*and needs to be*—the most powerful in the world. Almost nine-in-ten (87%) say it is important to them that the U.S. military is the most powerful on the planet (57% extremely important), while four in five say the U.S. military is more powerful than that of any other country. More particularly, respondents rated the U.S. military as the best or one of the best in the world on rockets and satellites (84%), artificial intelligence (76%), robotics (72%), and semiconductors and computing chips (67%).

When asked about a set of specific policies to bolster national defense, citizens are overwhelmingly supportive of:

- Spending on a "golden dome" project to protect the U.S. homeland against ballistic missile attacks (68%).
- Using military force against suspected drug traffickers in Latin America and the Caribbean (62%).
- Issuing gender-neutral, job-based fitness standards for combat jobs (62%).
- Deploying active military troops or federalized National Guard to support security along our southern border (61%).
- Directing the National Guard to support local police during major civil disturbances and to address violent crime (55%).

Opinions are mildly supportive on restoring the "warrior ethos" across the force (+7 support versus oppose) and on reinstating restrictions on transgender military service (+5).

They are slightly opposed to ending DEI programs across the Pentagon (-1 support versus oppose) and ending reimbursements for abortion travel and related leave for servicemembers (-3), and they are strongly opposed to renaming the U.S. Department of Defense to U.S. Department of War (-23).

Americans are split on how the military balances its emphasis on warfighting versus advancing social issues. A plurality (41%) says our armed forces are currently striking the correct balance, whereas 25% say they are too focused on social issues and 23% say they are too focused on warfighting. Thirty-one percent of Democrats say the military is not focused enough on social issues, as do 28% of voters under 30 years of age.

There is also ambivalence about how artificial intelligence should be used by the U.S. military. Twenty-seven percent say it is a good idea to further integrate AI into our military systems, while 24% say it is a bad idea and 47% say it is too soon to say. When informed that military experts think further integrating AI into the U.S. military can provide a strategic advantage over China, support rises 11 points, to 38%. When further informed that U.S. military policy already involves safeguards with respect to AI, including ensuring that human decision-makers retain authority over AI systems to prevent uncontrolled actions, especially in lethal situations, opinions do not change.

When asked *where* the U.S. military should be focused, opinions are mixed. Twenty-four percent say East Asia, 23% say the Middle East, 18% say Europe, 10% say Central or South America, and 4% say South Asia. This is consistent with the fact that 87% say they are extremely or somewhat concerned about increased cooperation between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. It is, however, somewhat inconsistent with the fact that a plurality (49%) also says they support shifting our military forces from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa to the Western Hemisphere (40% oppose). It seems that invoking geographic proximity can affect public attitudes concerning threats and resource allocation.

This apparent inconsistency aside, respondents are clear about how to prioritize threats to the U.S. Roughly half of our respondents cite China as the greatest threat to the U.S. (48%), followed by Russia (26%), the U.S./ourselves (6%), and North Korea (4%). Although these numbers are mostly unchanged from last year, only 21% chose China in 2018, whereas 30% chose Russia. North Korea has declined from 18% in 2018 to 4% today.

These threat impressions are reinforced by our battery of items asking respondents to assess whether a country is an ally or an enemy. More than three-quarters (76%) see China as an enemy, while 20% see them as an ally (the ally to enemy margin is thus -56). Russia is viewed even more skeptically, with 79% rating the bear as an enemy, compared to 17% as an ally (-62). Iran is seen in a similarly adversarial light (-60). Rounding out the clear "enemies" list, is Venezuela (-26), however 28% still view the authoritarian socialist country as an ally.

And while it is clear who our perceived allies are—the United Kingdom (+76), Canada (+71), Finland (+66), Poland (+63), Ukraine (+56), Japan (+55), and Taiwan (+50)—there are some intriguing mixed ratings associated with other countries. Most notably, Israel and Mexico (+39 each) are clearly viewed as friendlier than not, but more than one-quarter rate each country as an enemy. A similar percentage rates Argentina as an enemy, although a majority see Javier Milei's country as an ally (+30). Curiously, Lithuania is rated as an ally by just half of Americans (+35), despite being a NATO member and fierce critic of Russian aggression. This suggests Americans are not aware of Lithuania's role as a key strategic partner in the Baltics, or perhaps it still carries some stigma from its former membership in the Soviet Union.

One especially striking result is that NATO seems to have rehabilitated its image. Sixty-eight percent say they have a favorable opinion of NATO, compared to 22% who have an unfavorable opinion. This +46 net rating is by far the best we have recorded since this survey began in 2018. In 2018, it was +35 and in 2024 it was +36. The recent warming of opinions is driven largely by Republicans, especially MAGA Republicans (+12 since June of 2025), who could be reacting to increased spending commitments by allies and the "ironclad commitment to collective defense" President Trump made at this year's NATO Summit. When asked about the "collective defense" principle at the core of the alliance, more than three-quarters (76%) said they support the U.S. responding with military force if a NATO member is attacked.

Put a slightly different way, almost six-in-ten (59%) said that they oppose the U.S. withdrawing from NATO (55% opposed in 2024). Amongst those who support a withdrawal (34%), one-in-five change their mind when informed that NATO members recently committed to more than doubling their spending on defense (from 2% to 5% of their GDP) by 2030.

China

The threat from China noted above is very much on the minds of Americans. When asked what concerns them most about China, their economic practices top the list (24%), followed by their military build-up (23%), foreign policy (19%), human rights abuses (15%) and potential invasion of Taiwan (11%). We have seen a 9-point jump in those choosing the economic threat since 2023. Conversely, the perceived threat of the military build-up has declined by 5-points since last year.

This is not to say that Americans think China has achieved superiority over the U.S. In fact, Americans see the U.S. as having an edge over China with respect to air forces (68% say the U.S. has superiority, 7% say China, for a net U.S. superiority rating of +61), naval forces (+48), space forces and capabilities (+45), overall military strength (+43), diplomatic influence (+33), autonomous devices, such as drones (+22), ground forces (+20), and economic strength (+18). The gap is much less pronounced in high tech areas, though, with China rated as within one point of the U.S. on artificial intelligence (30% U.S. superior, 29% China superior), and ahead on cyber capabilities (27% U.S. to 32% China).

As the public believes that China is close to parity with the U.S. when it comes to technological and computing prowess, there is widespread appetite for tightening control over information flowing from American companies. Sixty-five percent support strictly limiting American companies from selling the most advanced AI computer chips to China. Fifty-five percent prioritize preventing the Chinese military from developing advanced AI over ensuring U.S. companies can sell their products overseas (36%). Three-quarters support a federal program to remove and replace Chinese-made networking technology from all U.S. utilities and transportation systems, including water systems, ports, and trains.

This concern extends to our overreliance on China for critical materials. Notably, four-in-five express concern (extremely or somewhat) about the U.S. relying on China for rare earth minerals, which are used to produce batteries, semiconductor chips for electronics, and military hardware. This concern increases to 84% when respondents are informed that nearly 70% of all rare earth materials imported into the U.S. are from China.

What about the threat of Chinese invasion of Taiwan? Most broadly, almost eight-in-ten (77%) say it is extremely or somewhat important for the U.S. military to defend Taiwan in the event of an invasion.

But would public opinion support a strong—even confrontational—response by the U.S.? Soft power responses all have overwhelming support, such as officially recognizing Taiwan as an independent country (79% support, 13% oppose) and imposing economic sanctions against China (74% support, 17% oppose), but so do more aggressive responses, such as sending more military equipment to Taiwan (71% support, 18% oppose), moving U.S. military assets—such as carriers— into the region (70% support, 20% oppose), and establishing a "no fly" zone over Taiwan and possibly shooting down Chinese aircraft that violate this space (62% support, 26% oppose).

These support levels have significantly increased from what we saw only a year ago. Perhaps most strikingly, a solid majority would support sending U.S. troops to help Taiwan repel a Chinese invasion (60%), while only one-quarter (27%) would oppose such a move. There is, in short, +33 net support for direct U.S. commitment of troops to defend Taiwan.

Ukraine-Russia

The American public strongly prefers that Ukraine win its war with Russia. Sixty-two percent say they want Ukraine to win, whereas 11% prefer Russia. When asked for their preferred resolution to the war, most (45%) want Ukraine to regain all of its territory, while 23% support Ukraine conceding territory in exchange for a longstanding ceasefire with security guarantees from western countries to prevent future Russian aggression, and 22% support a temporary ceasefire along current front lines without formally recognizing Russian control of the territory. Importantly, only 28% think Russia can be trusted to honor *any* agreement.

There has been a reversal of what had been a gradual decline in support for sending U.S. weapons to Ukraine. Currently, 64% support sending weapons, up from 55% in 2024. Only 26% oppose this. Furthermore, there is substantial support for several specific U.S. commitments to Ukraine:
- 74% support the creation of an international force to police a demilitarized zone between Ukraine and Russia.
- 69% support providing Ukraine with a collective defense commitment, which would obligate the U.S. and European allies to respond with military force if Ukraine is attacked again.
- 68% support shifting the financial burden of the war by selling American-made weapons to European allies, who would then provide them to Ukraine.
- 65% support sending cruise missiles to Ukraine.

The Middle East

The data show that most Americans continue to stand by Israel. Fifty percent support the U.S. sending weapons to Israel, while 45% oppose. This +5 margin, however, is down from the +15 margin registered in November 2024 (54% support, 39% oppose). There are sharp divides among on this question among demographic and political groups: Republicans (+39 margin of support) and seniors (+23) are highly supportive of sending arms to Israel, while Democrats (-23) and Americans under age 30 (-11) are in opposition.

The public is skeptical of the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas brokered by the Trump administration: 36% are confident the deal will hold, while 62% are not confident. Should the deal collapse due to Hamas not giving up weapons or failing to demilitarize the Gaza Strip, 54% would support further military actions by Israel. On the other side of the ledger, 34% would oppose Israel taking further military actions.

With respect to Iran, the public is not only supportive of the airstrikes conducted last summer, they are keen on several forceful responses to preventing Iran from developing a nuclear device. In addition to majority support for the U.S. military's targeted airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities last summer (60%), Americans back further economic sanctions (73%), deploying U.S. cyber capabilities (70%), renegotiating the Iranian nuclear deal (66%), Israeli airstrikes against nuclear sites (54%), and even using U.S. military force (54%) in the service of thwarting Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Evaluations of Presidents

When asked about their attitudes towards recent presidents (Jimmy Carter through Joe Biden), President Reagan is rated the most favorably. Sixty-six percent view our 40th president "somewhat" or "very" favorably. Thirty-six percent view Reagan "very" favorably and only 11% view him "very" unfavorably. Overall, Reagan's rating is a net +37 favorable.

Ranking just behind Reagan is Jimmy Carter (63% favorable), Barack Obama (62% favorable) and George H.W. Bush (59% favorable), followed by Bill Clinton (58%), George W. Bush (57%), Donald Trump (43%), and Joe Biden (43%).

Methodology

This survey was conducted from October 23-November 3, 2025. It features a mixed-mode design, with 984 responses collected by live telephone interviewers and another 1,523 responses gathered online. The telephone portion of the survey is a probability sample, relying on a multi-stage cluster design. Forty-nine percent of the calls were completed via landline and fifty-one percent were completed via cell phone. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 25 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 2,507 respondents, the estimated margin of error is +/- 1.96 percentage points. Some questions were asked of half the respondents, with an associated margin of error of +/- 2.77 points. The margin of error for sub-groups is larger.