



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 1, 2021

**LATEST REAGAN NATIONAL DEFENSE SURVEY FINDS DECLINING
CONFIDENCE IN MILITARY & UNCERTAINTY ABOUT GLOBAL LEADERSHIP**
China Now Dominates Americans' Security Concerns

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute today released the results of its fourth [Reagan National Defense Survey](#). The survey revealed a continuing decline in trust and confidence in the United States military and uncertainty about whether or how America should lead in the world. There is a growing sense of pessimism, with 59 percent of respondents saying the country is headed in the wrong direction.

At the same time, there is bipartisan consensus about the threats we face. For the first time, a majority of respondents say a single nation poses the greatest threat to the United States: China. That view, crossing all partisan and demographic lines, reflects concerns over China's military buildup, economic practices, technological advancements, and human rights record.

“When President Reagan first took office, Americans were concerned that we were falling behind our adversaries abroad, and pessimistic about their situation at home. This survey tells us they feel similarly today,” said Roger Zakheim, Director of the Ronald Reagan Institute. “Now, as then, the American people need a reminder of our country's potential and its unique role in the world. President Reagan inspired the kind of renewed optimism, confidence, and purpose that Americans clearly need today from leaders across the political spectrum.”

For more information about the survey, including a summary, interactive visualizations, and additional data, visit: www.reaganfoundation.org/defensesurvey.

The survey found the following key takeaways:

- **Declining Trust and Confidence in the U.S. Military** – The number of Americans who say they have a great deal of trust and confidence in the military has fallen by 25 points (from 70 percent to 45 percent) in the last three years, including 11 points just since February. Trust in the military is declining across all major demographic subgroups, including age, gender, and party affiliation. To understand this trend, a new survey question this year asked respondents to identify the reason for their level of confidence in the U.S. military. Those with

high trust and confidence attribute it to our men and women in uniform. A lack of confidence seems to be more about a general negative sense than a predominant or precise reason, though political leadership tops the list. Perhaps most troubling for recruitment in the all-volunteer force, only one-third (33 percent) of adults under the age of 30 have high confidence in the military, which is down 20 points since 2018.

- **Equivocation and Ambivalence About American Leadership** – The survey reflects growing ambivalence on issues related to America’s role in the world, as fewer people expressed support for active global leadership. The survey found 42 percent of Americans believe that the United States should be more engaged and take the lead in the world, which is down 9 points since February. A growing number (22 percent) said it depends or that they don’t know, which is an increase of 6 points from February. Only 30 percent say the United States should be less engaged. However, Americans still overwhelmingly support a forward-deployed military presence abroad. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of the American people believe that the United States should maintain military bases around the world to deter attacks and respond quickly to threats.
- **Consensus Over the China Threat** – China is the country that poses the greatest threat to the United States, according to 52 percent of Americans. This response is also reflected across all major demographic subgroups (including age, gender, and party affiliation). This is the first time a single adversary has captured a majority of respondents’ concerns since the survey began. The American people have a diverse set of concerns when it comes to China, including its military buildup, economic practices, technological advancements, and human rights abuses. Americans also support a robust U.S. response if China were to invade Taiwan.
- **Complex Views on Afghanistan** – After 20 years of American involvement in Afghanistan, 59 percent believe the war there was a failure, up almost 10 points since February. A plurality of Americans (40 percent) believe the withdrawal weakens the United States, with slightly fewer (35 percent) saying it does not make much difference. Only 14 percent believed the withdrawal strengthens the United States. Overall, approval of the decision to withdraw stands at 47 percent. Only 27 percent say the United States should have left troop levels the same. However, a majority (62 percent) disapprove of how the withdrawal was handled. Nearly half (49 percent) believe the problems associated with the withdrawal were the fault of President Biden’s poor judgment.
- **President Reagan’s Legacy Lives On** – Ronald Reagan remains the most popular former president in recent history, with a 69 percent favorable rating, including 51 percent of Democrats, 63 percent of Independents, and 91 percent of Republicans.

Media Contacts: Claude Chafin (chafin@invariantgr.com) or Rachel Hoff (rhoff@reaganfoundation.org)

About the Reagan Foundation and Institute: The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute is the nonprofit organization created by President Reagan himself and specifically charged by him with continuing his legacy and sharing his principles - individual liberty, economic opportunity, global democracy, and national pride. The Foundation is a non-partisan organization which sustains the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, CA, the Reagan Center for Public Affairs, the Presidential Learning Center, The Air Force One Pavilion and the award-winning Discovery Center, as well as the Reagan Institute, which carries out the Foundation's work in Washington, D.C. The Reagan Library houses over 55 million pages of Gubernatorial, Presidential and personal papers and over 60,000 gifts and artifacts chronicling the lives of Ronald and Nancy Reagan. It also serves as the final resting place of America's 40th President and his First Lady. www.reaganfoundation.org

###