

## World Publics Reject US Role as the World Leader

April 17, 2007

### Majorities Still Want US to Do Its Share in Multilateral Efforts, Not Withdraw from International Affairs

#### Mixed Views on US Overseas Bases

[Full Report \(PDF\)](#)

[Questionnaire \(PDF\)](#)

[Methodology/Research Partners \(PDF\)](#)



A multinational poll finds that publics around the world reject the idea that the United States should play the role of preeminent world leader. Most publics say the United States plays the role of world policeman more than it should, fails to take their country's interests into account and cannot be trusted to act responsibly.

*A US Navy CVN-69 Nimitz-class aircraft carrier (US Navy photo)*

But the survey also finds that majorities in most countries want the United States to participate in international efforts to address world problems. Views are divided about whether the United States should reduce the number of military bases it has overseas. Moreover, many publics think their country's relations with the United States are improving.

Americans largely agree with the rest of the world: most do not think the United States should remain the world's preeminent leader and prefer that it play a more cooperative role. They also believe United States plays the role of world policeman more than it should.

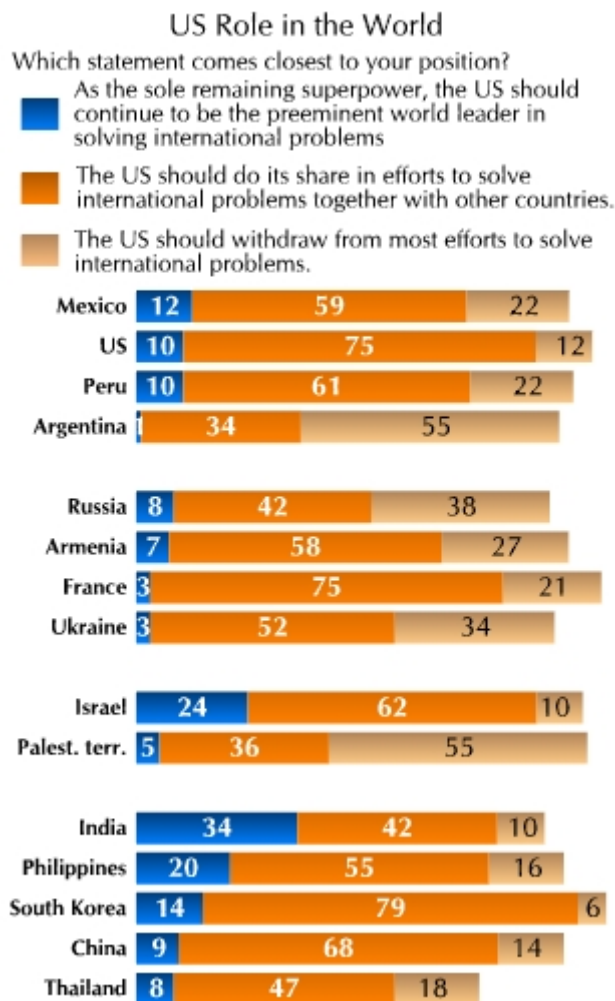
This is the fourth in a series of reports based on a worldwide poll about key international issues conducted by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs and WorldPublicOpinion.org, in cooperation with polling organizations around the world. The larger study includes polls in China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Russia, France, Thailand, Ukraine, Poland, Iran, Mexico, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Argentina, Peru, Israel and Armenia—plus the Palestinian territories.

The publics polled represent about 56 percent of the world’s population. Not all questions were asked in all countries.

Steven Kull, editor of WorldPublicOpinion.org notes that this poll reinforces the conclusions of other recent global surveys, which have found that the United States’ image abroad is bad and growing worse. But he added that it goes further, exploring what kind of role the international community would like the United States to play in the world.

“This survey shows that despite the negative views of US foreign policy, publics around the world do not want the United States to disengage from international affairs, but rather to participate in a more cooperative and multilateral fashion,” Kull said.

### The United States’ Role in the World



*WPO/CCGA* Majorities in all 15 of the publics polled

about the United States’ role in the world reject the idea that “as the sole remaining superpower, the US should continue to be the preeminent world leader in solving international problems.” However majorities in only two publics (Argentina and the

Palestinian territories) say that the United States “should withdraw from most efforts to solve international problems.” The preferred view in all of the other cases is that the United States “should do its share in efforts to solve international problems together with other countries.”

In Asia, large majorities embrace the idea that the United States should play a cooperative role in South Korea (79%) and China (68%). A majority of Filipinos (55%) and a plurality of Indians (42%) also take this view, but they are among the few publics with substantial numbers saying the United States should play the role of the preeminent world leader: 20 percent in the Philippines and 34 percent in India. Thais are also relatively reluctant to support a cooperative role (47%), but very few endorse a preeminent role (8%) or disengagement (18%), while 27 percent declined to answer.

In Europe, the French are those most emphatic in their support for a cooperative role (75%), followed by Armenia (58%). A majority of Ukrainians (52%) also support this position, but an unusually high number (34%) supports US disengagement. In Russia, a plurality (42%) favors a cooperative role, but this is barely more than the percentage (38%) that favors disengagement.

In Latin America, about six in ten Peruvians (61%) and Mexicans (59%) believe the United States should cooperate with other countries to solve international problems. However, as mentioned above, Argentines are one of only two publics favoring US withdrawal from international efforts with 55 percent taking this position and 34 percent in favor of cooperation.

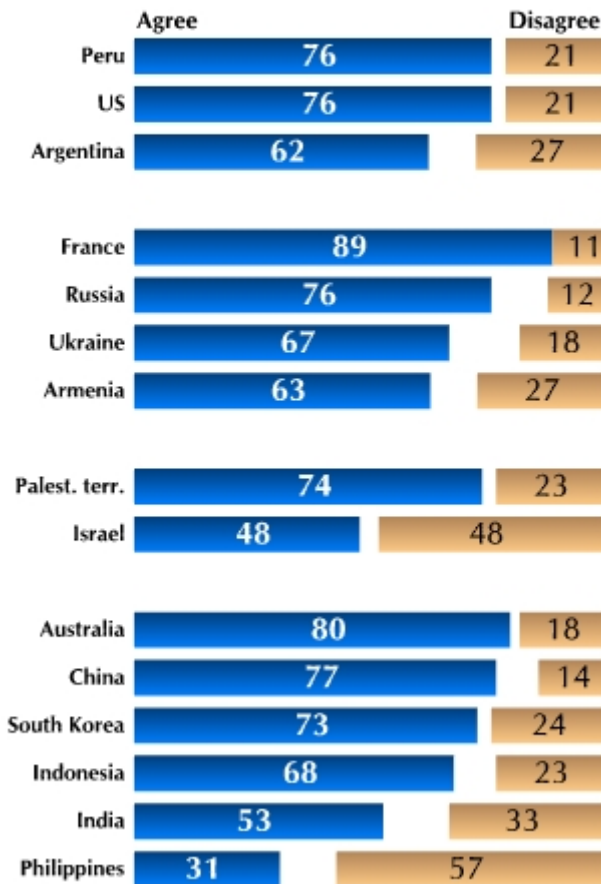
In the Middle East, Israelis and Palestinians differ sharply. A majority of Palestinians favor US disengagement (55%) while more than a third (36%) prefers cooperation. Israelis are more in line with most other publics in that 62 percent favor US cooperation, but they also show the second highest level of support (after India) for the US taking the role of preeminent leader (24%).

Americans match the French in their support for the United States doing its share together with other nations (75%), with small numbers favoring a preeminent role (10%) or isolationism (12%).

### **United States as World Policeman**

## US as World Policeman

"The US is playing the role of world policeman more than it should be."



W/PO/CCGA Majorities in 13 out of 15 publics polled

say the United States is “playing the role of world policeman more than it should be.” This is the sentiment of about three-quarters or more of those polled in: France (89%), Australia (80%), China (77%), Russia (76%), Peru (76%), the Palestinian territories (74%) and South Korea (73%).

The US public is also among those most convinced that United States too often plays the role of world policeman. Seventy-six percent of Americans agree that their country is overdoing such activities.

In only one country does a majority disagree with the idea that the United States tends to take on the role of international enforcer more than it should: the Philippines. Fifty-seven percent of Filipinos reject the idea that the United States plays a police role too often, while only a third (31%) agrees that it does.

Israelis, who are the United States’ closest allies in the Middle East, are divided over whether the United States plays the global policeman role too often. Forty-eight percent of Israelis agree and forty-eight percent disagree.

The five other countries where majorities believe the United States is too often acting as world policeman are: Indonesia (68%), Ukraine (67%), Armenia (63%), Argentina (62%) and India (53%). In India, a country which has been among the most positive about the United States in recent years, a third (33%) disagrees.

The survey also asks respondents in nine countries whether the United States has the “responsibility to play the role of ‘world policeman,’ that is to fight violations of international law and aggression wherever they occur.” Majorities in eight of the nine countries say the United States does not have the responsibility to fight aggression and enforce international law. The exception is India, where a slight majority (53%) says the US does have this responsibility while a third (35%) says it does not.

Palestinians (76%) are the most likely of the publics surveyed to answer that the United States does not have such a responsibility. The next most likely are Americans themselves. Three-quarters of Americans (75%) reject the idea that their country has a duty to enforce international law.

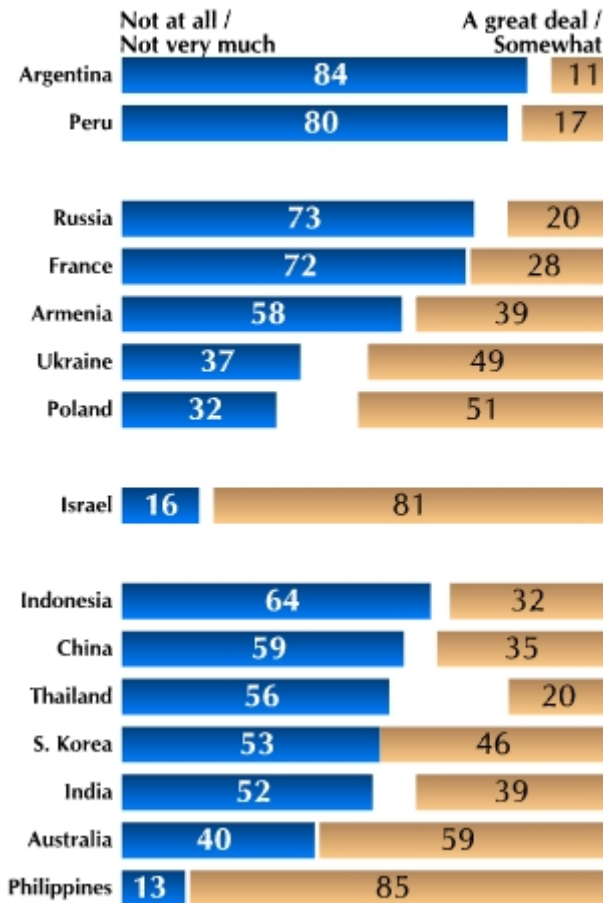
Strong majorities of Armenians (70%), Australians (70%), Indonesians (69%), and Ukrainians (69%) also agree that the United States does not have this responsibility.

The United States’ greatest economic and military rival in Asia—China—and one of its closest allies—South Korea—are equally likely to reject the idea that the US government has a duty to enforce international law. Sixty-one percent of Chinese and 60 percent of South Koreans answer no. South Koreans are only somewhat more likely to say yes (39%) than the Chinese (30%).

### **Trust in the United States to Act Responsibly**

## US as a Responsible Actor

How much do you trust [the United States] to act responsibly in the world?



WPO/CCGA

In 10 out of 15 countries, the most common view is that the United States cannot be trusted to “act responsibly in the world.” Respondents were allowed to choose whether the United States could be trusted “a great deal,” “somewhat,” “not very much” or “not at all.”

Two Latin American countries show the least trust in the United States. An overwhelming 84 percent of Argentines answer that they have little confidence in the United States, including 69 percent who think the United States cannot be trusted at all. Eight in ten Peruvians (80%) also think the US cannot be trusted (23% not at all).

Most Russian and French respondents agree. Nearly three-quarters of Russians (73%) express little trust and a third (31%) says the United States cannot be trusted at all. The French are almost equally skeptical: 72 percent do not trust the United States to behave responsibly, including 30 percent who do not trust it at all.

Also among those who believe the United States generally cannot be trusted are: Indonesians (64%), Armenians (59%), Chinese (59%), Thais (56%) and South Koreans (53%). Half of Indian respondents (50%) also express little or no confidence.

In four countries, majorities or pluralities say the United States can be at least somewhat trusted to act responsibly. Filipinos (85%) are the most willing to trust the United States and half of them think the United States can be trusted a great deal (48%). Eight in ten Israelis (81%) also believe this. They are also the most willing to say the United States can be trusted a great deal (56%). Australians (59%) also tend to trust the United States (18% a great deal).

In two eastern European countries, about half believe the United States can be trusted: 51 percent in Poland—though most of these (44%) think the United States can only be trusted somewhat—and 49 percent in Ukraine, 31 percent of whom answer somewhat. About a third of Poles (32%) and Ukrainians (37%) say the United States cannot be trusted and large numbers are uncertain (17% and 24% respectively).

### **US Willingness to Consider Other Interests**

Of the seven countries polled on this question, five believe the United States does not take their interests into account when making foreign policy decisions. Only in Israel does a large majority believe that the United States takes their interest into account. Indians are divided. In the other five countries, majorities or pluralities answer “not very much” or “not at all” when asked whether the United States takes their interests into account.

Three former Soviet-bloc countries are the most likely to think that the United States fails to consider their concerns. Although Poles tend to have fairly positive views of the United States, three-quarters (76%) think that the United States does not take their interests into account very much (57%) or does not do so at all (19%).

Two-thirds of Russians (66%) also think the United States ignores their interests, including a third who think it ignores them entirely (33%). Ukrainian feelings are similar: 63 percent say the United States tends not to take their interests into account, including 38 percent who say it does not take them into account at all.

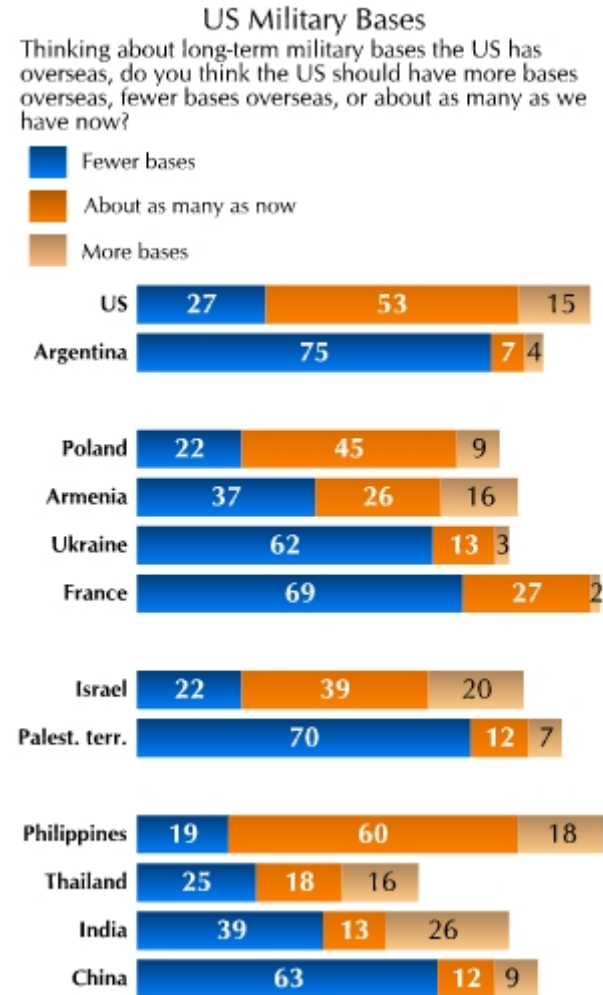
In Asia, the most common view in two countries (China and Thailand) is that their interests are not considered by the United States when making foreign policy decisions. A majority of Chinese (58%) believe this, of whom 23 percent say the US does not do so at all. A plurality of Thais (49%) say the United States does not take their interests into account (30% not very much, 19% not at all) compared to 23 percent who believe it does (15% somewhat, 8% a great deal).

However Indians are divided. Forty-six percent say the United States does not take their interests into account (23% not at all), while 44 percent say that it does take their interests into account (24% somewhat, 20% a great deal).

The Israelis stand out as the only country where a strong majority (57%) says that the United States takes their interests into account a great deal while an additional 25 percent

say that it does so somewhat. Thus a remarkable total of 82 percent of Israelis say that the United States takes their interests into account. A mere 14 percent disagree.

## US Overseas Military Bases



*WPO/CCGA* Despite the widespread belief that the

United States should not be the world's preeminent leader and that it plays the role of world policeman more than it should, countries express mixed views about whether the United States should reduce its military presence around the world. Nonetheless, very few support increasing the number of bases.

Twelve publics were asked whether the United States should have more, fewer or the same number of long-term bases overseas. In six of them, including the US public, majorities or pluralities think the United States should maintain or increase the number of bases it maintains overseas. In five countries, majorities call for reductions. One country—India, again—is divided.



Those most in favor of the United States' at least maintaining its overseas military presence are Filipinos, Americans, Israelis and Poles. Those most likely to support a decreased presence are Argentines, Palestinians, the French and the Chinese.

Filipinos—whose government forced the United States to shut down its last base on Philippine territory 15 years ago—are the most likely to say that the United States should maintain its long-term overseas military presence. Nearly four in five respondents in the Philippines (78%) say the United States should either keep “about as many” bases as now (60%) or add more bases (18%).

Sixty-eight percent of Americans think the United States should either keep as many bases as now (53%) or add bases (15%). Only 27 percent say the United States should have fewer bases.

A majority of Israelis (59%) believe the United States should maintain a strong military presence overseas. Of these, 39 percent say the United States should keep its current number of bases and 20 percent say it should have more.

Respondents in Poland—one of the United States' staunchest allies in Europe—also believe the United States should keep as many or more military bases overseas as it has today (54%). Most of these (45%) believe the United States should maintain the same number of bases and 9 percent believe there should be more.

Pluralities in Armenia and Thailand favor keeping or increasing US overseas bases over decreasing them. Armenians are in favor of maintaining the US military presence abroad by a margin of 42 percent to 37 percent. Thais support it by a margin of 34 percent to 25 percent, with 41 percent not answering.

Of the twelve publics polled, Argentines are those most in favor of shutting down US bases overseas (75%). Palestinians and the French are next with seven in ten (70% and 69% respectively) saying the United States should reduce its military presence abroad.

A majority of Chinese—an emerging military and economic power in Asia—also thinks the United States should have fewer bases. Three in five (63%) say it should reduce its overseas presence.

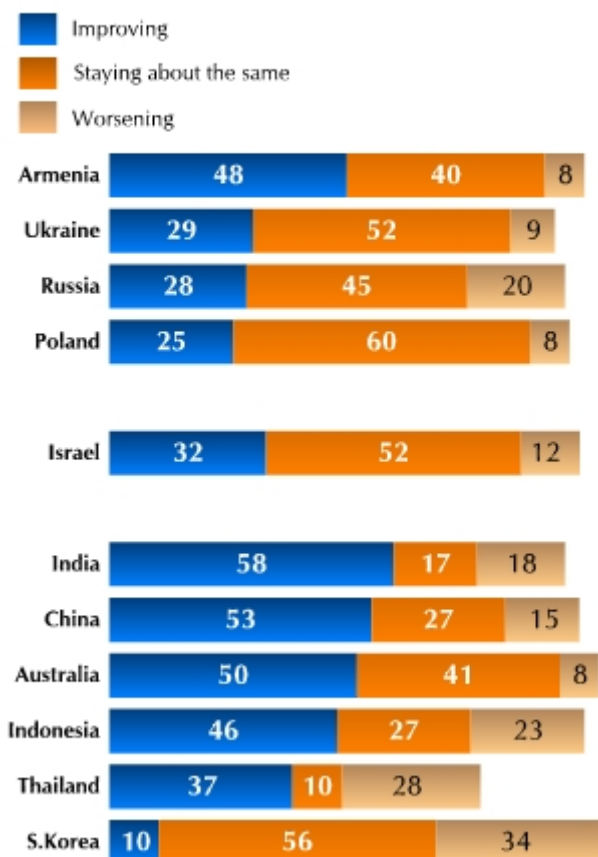
A majority of Ukrainians (62%) think that the United States should have fewer bases while 13 percent say it should keep the current number. Only 3 percent think it needs more and 22 percent are unsure.

Indians are evenly divided between those who say the United States should increase or maintain its bases overseas and those who believe it should decrease them. Thirty nine percent believe the US needs more (26%) or the same number (13%) and 39 percent say it should have fewer. About a fifth of Indian respondents (22%) are unsure.

### **Some Improvement in Bilateral Relations**

## Bilateral Relations with the US

In your opinion, are relations of [survey country] with the following countries improving, or staying about the same...the US:



WPO/CCGA Also contrary to the largely negative

views of the United States' role in the world is the perception in some countries—including some that are highly critical of the United States—that bilateral relations with the United States are improving. Eleven countries were asked whether relations of their country with the United States were “improving, worsening, or staying about the same.”

Six of the eleven countries say their relations with the United States show signs of improvement, including majorities in India (58%) and China (53%) and pluralities in Australia (50%), Armenia (48%), Indonesia (46%) and Thailand (37%).

In the remaining five countries, majorities or pluralities say relations with the United States are staying about the same: 60 percent in Poland, 56 percent in South Korea, 52 percent in Israel, 52 percent in the Ukraine, and 45 percent in Russia.

In no country, does even a plurality think relations are getting worse. South Korea has the largest minority saying that relations with the United States are worsening (34%), followed by Thailand (28%) and Indonesia (23%). Among the other eight countries, only 8 percent to 20 percent feel this way.

“The publics in many countries differentiate between their negative views of the US international role and their perceptions of bilateral relations, which are seen as improving in a significant number of countries, even some that are highly critical of the United States,” said Christopher Whitney, executive director for studies at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs.