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## The Public Turns Against War

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Saber rattling doesn't poll well anymore. After a civilian airline was shot down over Ukraine last week, America's hawks stepped up their calls for a more muscular intervention in the country, with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) calling the White House "cowardly" because it hasn't armed the government in Kiev. But a new YouGov survey shows only 15 percent of Americans favoring such aid. Forty-six percent in the poll think Russia was involved in the crash, and only 14 percent believe it wasn't. But that hasn't translated into an enthusiasm for intervention.

That reluctance should not be surprising. When *Reason* polled Americans about the Ukraine war in April, 58 percent wanted the U.S. to stay out of the conflict altogether. Asked what to do if Russia attempted to invade more of the country, a majority was willing to impose stricter economic sanctions, with 61 percent in favor and 32 percent against. But by essentially the same margin—62 percent to 33 percent—Americans were opposed to sending military aid. They were opposed even more lopsidedly, 76 percent to 20 percent, to sending in U.S. soldiers. That last sentiment seems to have grown even stronger since then: In this week's YouGov survey, only 5 percent of the country endorsed the idea of deploying troops to Ukraine. That's just 1 percentage point more than were willing to tell pollsters last year that the world is controlled by shape-shifting reptile people.

This fits a larger pattern. In 2014, more Americans are skeptical about military action than at any other time in the last half-century. It is not impossible to get a majority to back certain sorts of intervention abroad. But it hasn't been this hard for a long time.

Late last year, the Pew Research Center released one of its periodic surveys of American attitudes about foreign policy. Fifty-two percent of the country, a record high, endorsed the idea that "the U.S. should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own." Only 38 percent disagreed. This marked a striking change: Even in 1976, a year after the fall of Saigon, the people who disagreed with the statement narrowly outnumbered the ones who agreed with it. And Pew's results are not out of step with the data in other surveys. When *Politico* published a poll of likely voters in battleground races this week, for example, 67 percent said that American military actions "should be limited to direct threats to our national security."

How has this disenchantment manifested itself in specific conflicts? In 2013, strong public opposition helped keep Washington out of Syria's civil war. In 2014, for the first time in the 12 years that Gallup has been asking the question, a plurality of Americans said it was a mistake to send troops to Afghanistan after 9/11. In that case the margin was very narrow—49 percent to 48 percent—but when it comes to Iraq the numbers are overwhelming. According to a *New York Times*/CBS News poll released last month, three quarters of the country regrets the Iraq war. Even the troops are inclined to agree: In a *Washington Post*/Kaiser Family Foundation survey released this spring, half the veterans of the Iraq and Afghan wars said the invasion of Iraq wasn't worth it. Only 44 percent said it was.

That doesn't mean Americans have embraced an across-the-board anti-war position, even in Iraq. While there's no enthusiasm for sending combat troops back to Baghdad, that *Times*/CBS survey showed 51 percent of the country supporting President Barack Obama's decision to send in military advisors—a sign that it's possible to sell an intervention if you can convince people it's limited. (When he announced his plan, Obama insisted that the advisors were not being sent into combat.) And 56 percent supported the use of unmanned drones in Iraq. "I understand he wants to fight terrorism," one participant in the poll said, "but send in robots, drones. Don't send in our troops. Our men and women are dying for what?"

Those drones are one of two weak spots in the shift toward anti-interventionism. Last year Gallup reported that 65 percent of the country supports drone strikes against suspected terrorists in foreign countries, at least as long as the targets are not U.S. citizens. That love affair has dimmed a bit since then: In a Pew poll earlier this year, the percentage of the public that favors drone warfare was a much lower 52 percent. Still, only 41 percent were opposed. Most Americans don't seem to be bothered by military interventions that do not put troops in harm's way, especially if they perceive the strikes as acts of self-defense. That's one reason why Washington's critics of the drone war, such as Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), have stressed situations, both real and hypothetical, in which the weapons are used against Americans.

The other exception to the trend? While foreign aid in general is unpopular, Americans are more likely to support than to oppose the substantial assistance the U.S. gives to Israel. A CNN survey conducted over the weekend showed 64 percent of the country believing Israel's aid should be

either increased or kept the same—the same figure the network found three years ago, now with slightly more people in the "increase" column. (Israel is especially popular in the Republican Party, which goes a long way toward explaining why Sen. Paul has been trimming his sails on the subject of Israeli aid cuts.) Here again, a majority is willing to endorse a foreign entanglement that doesn't put American soldiers' lives on the line.

But that is small comfort for the Ukraine hawks, given how reluctant the public has been to enter Kiev's conflict in *any* military manner. In that war, Americans don't even want to lose a drone.