



Americans Support Limited Military Action in Syria against ISIS

But majorities oppose arming anti-government groups and negotiating a peace with Assad remaining in power

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Two million Aleppo residents are trapped in the city because of accelerating fighting between the Syrian government forces and opposition fighters from various factions. The resulting humanitarian catastrophe has prompted the United Nations to put aside Syria peace talks in favor of gaining agreement on a cease fire to deliver humanitarian aid. The Chicago Council Survey shows that while Americans favor targeted military action against combat violent extremist groups like the Islamic State in Syria, they are less supportive of US involvement in the internal conflict in Syria between the Assad regime and anti-government forces.

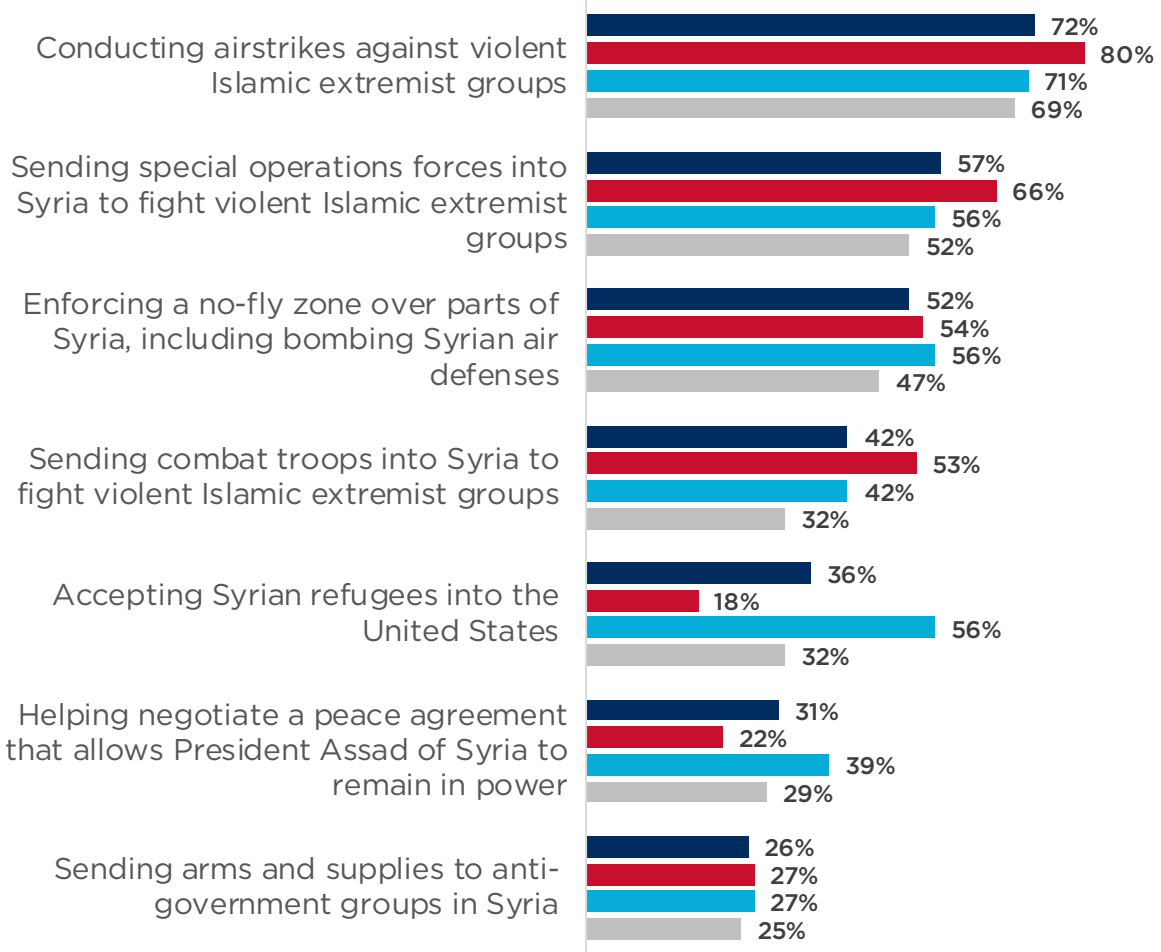
Americans in favor of limited military missions to combat ISIS

Both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump support continued military action against the Islamic State (ISIS) and related groups, and a majority among the American public backs this position. The June 10-27 Chicago Council Survey shows that seven in ten Americans overall support the current US policy of conducting airstrikes against violent Islamic extremist groups in Syria, including majorities across the political spectrum. Hillary Clinton has also pushed to create a no-fly zone over Syria, a move supported by a bare majority of Americans overall (52%, and moderate majorities of Republicans and Democrats) (see figure next page).

In line with the Obama Administration's decision to steadily increase the number of [full-time Special Operations forces to 300 in Syria](#), six in ten (57%) Americans also support sending Special Ops forces to fight violent Islamic extremist groups, with a larger majority of Republicans than other partisans in favor. But only a minority of Americans (42%, with 53% of Republicans) support sending *combat* troops into Syria to fight Islamic extremist groups.

Do you support or oppose the United States taking each of the following actions with respect to Syria? (% support)

■ Overall
 ■ Republican
 ■ Democrat
 ■ Independent



2016 Chicago Council Survey
THE CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Republicans, Democrats divided on accepting Syrian refugees

Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton have expressed especially stark differences on the issue of Syrian refugees. Donald Trump has said that he would halt the arrival of refugees from Syria and from [“areas of the world with a proven history of terrorism against the United States, Europe or our allies.”](#) In 2015, Hillary Clinton said that she would increase the number of Syrian refugees beyond President Obama’s pledge of [accepting 10,000 this year to 65,000](#), with an emphasis on the most vulnerable.

Reflecting the stark divisions between candidates, Americans too are divided along partisan lines. Similar to views in the [2014 Chicago Council Survey](#), three in ten Americans overall (36%) support taking in refugees from Syria. A majority of Democrats (56%) support admitting Syrian refugees; in contrast only minorities of Republicans (18%) and Independents (32%) agree. In part, Republican opinion reflects a [partisan preference](#) to limit immigration into the United States. Further, Republican support has declined since 2014, when one in four (27%) favored taking in Syrian refugees. Independent support has also declined (from 40% in 2014), while Democratic support is relatively unchanged from 2014 (when 55% supported admitting them).

Americans reject both arming anti-government forces and negotiating a peace agreement with Assad remaining in power

The Chicago Council Survey also reveals that Americans are especially wary of US involvement in the conflict between the regime of Syrian President Assad and the anti-government forces fighting against him. The Obama Administration began [arming Syrian rebel forces in 2013](#), which Hillary Clinton strongly supported when she was Secretary of State. However, Americans do not endorse this idea. Just 26 percent of Americans support sending arms and supplies to anti-government groups in Syria, with little variation across parties. But at the same time, only 31 percent of Americans support the United States helping to negotiate a peace agreement that would allow President Assad of Syria to remain in power, in line with Obama Administration demands that [Assad step down and be replaced through a negotiated political transition](#). Republicans are particularly skeptical of negotiating an agreement that allows Assad to remain in power (22% compared to 39% Democrats and 29% Independents).

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2016 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy. The 2016 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel between June 10-27, 2016 among a national sample of 2,061 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error ranges ± 2.2 to ± 3.5 percentage points, depending on the specific question, with higher margins of error for partisan subgroups (Republicans ± 5.8 , Democrats ± 5.1 , Independents ± 5.3). Partisan identification is based on respondents' answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?"

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