

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**  
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### AMERICANS DIVIDED ON CHINA POLICY

The public is deeply divided about the future of U.S.-China relations. Although a solid 60% majority say relations between the United States and China are stable — neither improving nor getting worse — there is little agreement over the question of whether our current handling of China is tough enough and no single policy stance gets majority support.

Today, 44% of the American people say the Clinton administration has not been tough enough in its dealings with China and 43% say the administration struck the right balance. Just 2% say the U.S. has been too tough.

Similarly, no consensus exists on the question of whether the U.S. should cooperate with China to help maintain peace and prevent the spread of nuclear weapons in Asia *or* take a firm stand against human rights abuses there, even if it increases tensions between the two countries. Today, 45% of the public chooses cooperation; 44% opt for a firm stand.

Again, agreement fails to emerge when the public is asked to balance trade and military security. Given the choice, 47% of Americans say containing China's military power is more important; 42% say maintaining China as a trading partner is more important.

#### More Attention, Less Trust

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Following</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>Story†</u>
<i>China's gov't is becoming...</i>	%	%
More democratic	23	17
Not more democratic	65	82
Don't know/Refused	<u>12</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100
	(N=893)	(N=187)
<i>Clinton Administration has been...</i>		
Too tough	2	1
Not tough enough	44	69
About right	43	28
Don't know/Refused	<u>11</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100
	(N=1786)	(N=187)

†Those who followed news about accusations against China very closely.

Those most attentive to accusations that China stole nuclear technology from the United States, white evangelical Christians, and Republicans take a tougher position on China than the average American. For instance, of the 19% who followed news about the accusations against China very closely, over two-thirds say the Clinton administration has not been tough enough with China, compared to less than half of the general public who agree. In addition, a 55% majority of white evangelical Protestants say the United States should contain China's growth as a military power — eight percentage points above the average.

**Opinion More Negative**

American public opinion toward China has grown slightly more negative since President Clinton visited the Asian nation last summer. As Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji tours the U.S. this week, increasing numbers of Americans express skepticism about China's resolve on free markets, democracy and diplomacy.

Less than one-quarter (23%) of Americans now say China is becoming more democratic and allowing its people more freedom; 65% feel just the opposite is true. This is a return to the 26%-64% split in 1997 and marks a significant change from August 1998, when 35% of Americans thought the Asian nation was becoming more open and 51% disagreed.

Similar movement can be seen on the issue of free markets, although the public is not quite so adamant in their view of China's resistance of economic reforms. Today, 34% say the Chinese economy is becoming more like the U.S. economy; 47% disagree. In August 1998, Americans were more evenly divided: 41% felt the Chinese economy was becoming more open, 44% disagreed.

<b>Less Democracy; Less Capitalism</b>			
	Oct 1997	Aug 1998	Mar 1999
<i>China's gov't is becoming...</i>	%	%	%
More democratic	26	35	23
Not more democratic	64	51	65
Don't know/Refused	<u>10</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>12</u>
	100	100	100
<i>China's economy is becoming...</i>			
More free-market	34	41	34
Not more free-market	55	44	47
Don't know/Refused	<u>11</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>19</u>
	100	100	100

Although a 48% plurality of the public continues to see China as a serious problem — a number basically unchanged since September 1997, when 46% of the public felt this way — many Americans are becoming increasingly critical in their view of China. More Americans now describe China as an “adversary” (up to 20% from 14% in 1997) and fewer dismiss China as “not much of a problem” (down to 25% from 32%). Moreover, two-thirds of the public considers allegations that China stole nuclear technology from the United States to be very serious.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Support for NATO Air Strikes with Plenty of Buts,” The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, March 1999.

### ***Low Priority Given China***

Americans' ambivalence about China may be due, in part, to the relatively low priority they give to the nation. A slim majority (52%) say that keeping a close watch on the development of China as a world power should be a top priority for the U.S. government. This is considerably lower than the number who place a premium on reducing the threat of international terrorism (75%), stopping international drug trafficking (72%) and halting the spread of AIDS (65%).

That said, however, concern about China ranks above that of other Asian nations. Only 38% of the public rates managing trade and economic disputes with Japan a top priority; even fewer (29%) say that countering the threat of militarism in North Korea should be a top priority.

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#### **ABOUT THIS SURVEY**

Results for the survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,786 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period March 24-30, 1999. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on either Form 1 (N=893) or Form 2 (N=893), the sampling error is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**MARCH 1999 NEWS INTEREST INDEX**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**March 24 - 30, 1999**  
**N=1,786**

Hello, I am \_\_\_\_\_ calling for Princeton Survey Research Associates in Princeton, New Jersey. We are conducting a telephone opinion survey for leading newspapers and TV stations around the country. I'd like to ask a few questions of the youngest male, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home. **[IF NO MALE, ASK: May I please speak with the oldest female, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home?]**

**ASK FORM 2 ONLY (N=893):**

Q.10 Do you happen to know which country was recently accused of stealing nuclear technology from the United States? **(IF YES, ASK: Which country? )**

46	China
11	Other answers
33	No
<u>10</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

**ON ANOTHER SUBJECT...**

Q.17 As I read a list of SPECIFIC foreign policy problems, tell me whether each one should have top priority in the U.S. government, a priority but not top priority, or no priority. (First.../How about...) **[READ AND ROTATE]**

<b>ASK ALL:</b>		<u>Top</u> <u>Priority</u>	<u>A</u> <u>Priority</u>	<u>No</u> <u>Priority</u>	<u>Don't</u> <u>Know</u>
a.	Ending the warfare in the Balkans?	34	42	16	8=100
	June, 1995 <sup>2</sup>	32	43	22	3=100
	September, 1993	22	47	24	7=100
b.	Getting Saddam Hussein out of Iraq?	60	28	10	2=100
	September, 1993	54	28	17	2=100
<b>ASK (c-k) FORM 1 ONLY (N=893): [NO ITEMS d OR g]</b>					
c.	Insuring democracy succeeds in Russia and the other former Soviet states?	30	43	21	6=100
	June, 1995	14	54	29	3=100
	September, 1993	23	53	21	3=100
e.	Making the world financial system more stable?	60	31	7	2=100
f.	Bringing about a permanent settlement between Israel and the Arabs?	35	42	19	4=100
	September, 1993	34	45	19	2=100
h.	Protecting the global environment?	62	30	5	3=100
	June, 1995	55	37	6	2=100
	September, 1993	63	31	5	1=100
i.	Better managing our trade and economic disputes with Japan?	38	50	8	4=100
	June, 1995	40	48	9	3=100
	September, 1993	48	43	7	2=100
j.	Monitoring the emergence of China as a world power?	42	38	14	6=100
	September, 1993	33	45	20	3=100

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In June 1995, the story was listed "Ending the warfare in Bosnia (former Yugoslavia)."

**Q. 17 CONTINUED ...**

		<u>Top</u> <u>Priority</u>	<u>A</u> <u>Priority</u>	<u>No</u> <u>Priority</u>	<u>Don't</u> <u>Know</u>
k.	Stopping international drug trafficking?	72	23	4	1=100
	June, 1995	75	20	4	1=100
	September, 1993	82	14	4	*=100

**ASK (l-q) FORM 2 ONLY (N=893):**

l.	Countering the threat of North Korean militarism?	29	49	14	8=100
	September, 1993	20	49	25	6=100
m.	Reducing the threat of international terrorism	75	20	2	3=100
	June, 1995	71	23	5	1=100
n.	Stopping the spread of AIDS around the world	65	29	4	2=100
o.	Preventing human rights abuses in other countries	37	46	13	4=100
p.	Better managing our trade and economic disputes with Europe?	40	47	8	5=100
q.	Keeping a close watch on the development of China as a world power?	52	37	8	3=100

**ASK ALL:**

**ON ANOTHER SUBJECT...**

Q.22 All things considered, which of these descriptions comes closest to your view of China today. . . Do you think China is **(READ)**:

20	An adversary	<u>Sept</u> <u>1997</u> 14
48	A serious problem, but not an adversary	46
25	<b>OR,</b> Not much of a problem	32
<u>7</u> 100	Don't know/Refused ( <b>DO NOT READ</b> )	<u>8</u> 100

Q.23 What is your impression... These days are relations between the U.S. and China improving, getting worse, or staying about the same?

		August
		<u>1995</u>
13	Improving	16
19	Getting worse	22
60	Staying about the same	53
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>9</u>
100		100

**ASK FORM 1 ONLY (N=893):**

Q.24 From what you know or have read, do you think that China's government is becoming more democratic and is allowing more freedoms for Chinese citizens, or do you think this is not happening?

		Early Aug	<i>Gallup</i>
		<u>1998</u>	<u>Oct 1997</u>
23	Becoming more democratic	35	26
65	Not happening	51	64
<u>12</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>14</u>	<u>10</u>
100		100	100

**ASK FORM 2 ONLY (N=893):**

Q.25 Do you think that China's economy is becoming more like the kind of free-market system found in the United States and other Western countries, or do you think this is not happening?

		Early Aug	<i>Gallup</i>
		<u>1998</u>	<u>Oct 1997</u>
34	More free-market	41	34
47	Not happening	44	55
<u>19</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>15</u>	<u>11</u>
100		100	100

**ASK ALL:**

Q.26 In your opinion, has the Clinton administration been too tough, not tough enough, or about right in its dealings with China?

2	Too tough
44	Not tough enough
43	About right
<u>11</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

**ROTATE Q.27 AND Q.28**

Q.27 In your opinion, which is more important — to contain China's growth as a military power, OR to maintain normal relations with China as a trading partner, even if it means overlooking some of their military developments?

47 Contain China as military power

42 Maintain normal relations

11 Don't know/Refused

100

Q.28 In your opinion, which is more important — to cooperate with China in order to help maintain peace and prevent the spread of nuclear weapons in Asia, OR to take a firm stand with China against human rights abuses there, even if it increases tensions between the U.S. and China?

45 Cooperate with China to maintain peace

44 Take a firm stand with China

11 Don't know/Refused

100