

# Americans more likely than those in the UK to feel threatened by China's development as a world power, survey shows

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Americans were more likely than people living in the UK to feel threatened by China's growth as a world power, a new survey shows.

The research suggests support in both countries for NATO and the UN to act diplomatically and militarily is high, with citizens in favor of nations working together to protect peace.

Seven out of 10 Americans questioned agreed their country needed a strong military to be effective in international relations, as did 63 percent of Britons.

Both US and UK respondents thought a former Soviet state under [threat](#) from Russia should seek support from NATO (55 percent in the UK compared to 41 percent of Americans).

The research, by Catarina Thomson, from the University of Exeter, is published in *The RUSI Journal*. Dr. Thomson used the Gray Zone Security Survey, carried out in the US, the UK and Lithuania, with nationally representative samples of 4,000, 1,300 and 1,000 in March 2021 respectively. Citizens were asked about their perception of the threat from Russia's territorial ambitions and the development of China as a [world power](#) were. Their response was measured using a seven-point scale, varying from 1 (not a threat at all) to 7 (critical threat).

People in Lithuania were more likely to see Russia's territorial ambitions as a critical threat, with a third labeling Russian territorial ambitions as belonging to the highest threat category (compared to just 2 in 10 US respondents, and 12 percent in the UK).

Half of Americans questioned ranked the development of China as a world power as being in the top two highest threat categories, with just over a third regarding it as the most critical threat level. Only 37 percent of respondents in the UK and 32 percent in Lithuania considered China's ascent to world power as being at such high threat levels.

Dr. Thomson says that "although the world is now a different place it is

still important to analyze views taken before the Russian invasion of Ukraine so we have a clear idea of opinions about Russia's territorial incursions."

"The ongoing war in Ukraine has fundamentally changed the international system. A shared Russian threat has translated into NATO and other Western allies being more united than they have been in decades. It must not be forgotten that just months before this show of Western unity, fractured institutional bonds among NATO members culminated in the disorderly withdrawal of allied troops from Afghanistan."

"China's development as a world power and Russia's territorial ambitions were considered critical threats, but not equally for citizens in the three sample countries. Interestingly, citizens in the UK did not feel terribly threatened despite the UK military leadership's years-long messaging on the dangers of an assertive Russia."

"US citizens are also quite threatened by China's rise as a global power. Individuals in the UK and Lithuania, on the other hand, do not tend to consider China's development as a global power a critical threat. This discrepancy between threat perceptions in the US and the UK might be especially poignant in light of the new AUKUS alliance, which also includes Australia and has been lauded as an effort to counter China."

A total of 70 percent of people in the UK agreed or strongly agreed the best way for their country to proceed in [foreign affairs](#) is to build international consensus compared to 59 percent of people in the US and Lithuania.

About 6 in 10 Britons, and half of Americans, agreed it is sometimes necessary for their [countries](#) to 'go at it' alone in [international relations](#), this is the case for 45 percent of Lithuanian respondents. Less than a

third of respondents in each country (21 percent in the UK, 29 percent in the US and 31 percent in Lithuania) considered their country's interests are best protected by avoiding involvement with other states.

**More information:** Catarina P Thomson, Foreign Policy Attitudes and National Alignments in Times of Chinese and Russian Threats, *The RUSI Journal* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/03071847.2022.2088610](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2022.2088610)

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