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## Policy Elites Ignore Public Opinion on Foreign Policy

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| [Justin Logan](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

It's a bit striking how different public opinion and elite opinion are regarding U.S. foreign policy. One useful juxtaposition I've found is using *National Journal's* "national security insiders" polls and contrasting them with polls of the public. Two recent examples:

- In a June "insiders" poll, 57 percent of the experts said that President Obama should remove a "modest" number—"5,000 or fewer"—of troops from Afghanistan this summer <sup>[3]</sup>. A March poll from the *Washington Post/ABC News* indicated that 73 percent of the public favored "substantial" withdrawals this summer <sup>[4]</sup>.

- In the new insiders poll, 70 percent of experts favor keeping troops in Iraq beyond the deadline in President Bush's SOFA agreement with that country <sup>[5]</sup>. (It's not clear exactly how they would have us do so, considering Iraqi politics.) Contrast that with a poll from Gallup last August that asked the more leading question whether Washington should "keep its troops in Iraq beyond 2011 if Iraqi security forces are unable to contain insurgent attacks and maintain order in Iraq." The answer to that question, according to the public, was 53 percent "leave regardless," 43 percent "stay if Iraqis cannot maintain order." <sup>[6]</sup>

When Benjamin Page and Marshall Bouton asked <sup>[7]</sup> members of the Washington foreign-policy elite what the public thought about 11 international political questions, the elites only gave the correct answer on two of the 11 issues.

All of this seems to suggest that Washington policymakers and members of the New York-Washington foreign-policy elite have little to fear in defying public opinion. As an Almond-Lippman <sup>[8]</sup>-y sort of guy myself, in the present context I'm in the odd position of lamenting the lack of public influence on our ruling clique.

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