

A Tempered Response to the EP-3 Imbroglia

Most Americans are expressing a tempered response to the EP-3 imbroglia, with broad approval of the Bush administration's approach and fairly muted criticism of China's detention of the spy plane's crew.

While 83 percent call China's delay in releasing the crew and plane a cause for concern, half as many, 41 percent, call it a cause for alarm. And while three-quarters say the incident threatens U.S.-China relations, fewer, 48 percent, call it a "serious threat."

Similarly, suspicion of China is up - but moderately so. Fifty-eight call it an "unfriendly" nation, 11 points higher than in 1998. But far fewer, 20 percent, are prepared to call China an "enemy" of the United States.

RALLY - Most Americans are rallying around the White House, as is common in international disputes. Sixty-four percent approve of the way George W. Bush is handling the situation, though fewer, 36 percent, approve "strongly."

About six in 10 also say the administration's actions have been neither too weak nor too strong. Most of the rest would like to see a tougher U.S. response.

APOLOGIZE? - What to do about it? The threat of trade sanctions is the most popular option by far, with three-quarters saying the United States should move to restrict trade with China if the crew and plane are not returned.

By contrast, 61 percent oppose a pledge to cut back on the use of U.S. spy planes to intercept Chinese communications, as China has requested. And 54 percent oppose the U.S. apology that China also seeks.

Still, opposition to an apology isn't all that broad. And four in 10 favor an apology - a fairly sizable number, given that just five percent think the incident is the United States' fault.

Should the U.S...	Yes	No
Apologize	40%	54
Cut back on spy flights	28	61
Move to restrict trade	74	19

GROUPS - Democrats and Republicans agree on the severity of the situation, but not on the question of an apology. Fifty percent of Democrats favor an apology; this falls to 39

percent of independents and 28 percent of Republicans. There are no such divisions on other possible remedies: Most people in each political grouping oppose cutting back on the use of U.S. spy planes, and support trade sanctions.

Democrats and independents are less apt to approve of Bush's handling of the situation. Fifty-two and 57 percent approve, respectively, compared to 87 percent of Republicans.

There are divisions between the sexes, and by age, on an apology: Women divide evenly on whether the United States should apologize to China, while men oppose an apology by a 2-1 margin. Younger adults are more apt to favor an apology; older Americans, less so.

	Should the U.S. apologize?	
	Yes	No
Men	33%	61
Women	46	47
Age 18-30	44	54
Age 61+	31	62

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone April 5, 2001, among a random national sample of 505 adults. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at: <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Media contact: Todd Polkes, (212) 456-4586

Here are the full results (*= less than 0.5 percent):

1. (and 2) In terms of its overall relations with the United States, do you think of China as a friendly country or an unfriendly country? (IF "UNFRIENDLY") Do you see China as an enemy of the United States, or just unfriendly?

	Friendly	-----Unfriendly-----			In between	No
	NET	Enemy	Unfriendly	(vol.)	opinion	
4/5/01	28	58	20	37	8	6
6/2/98	39	47	12	35	9	5

3. (and 4) As you may know, a U.S. spy plane and a Chinese military aircraft collided last Saturday and the U.S. plane had to land on a Chinese island, where the plane and crew remain. Do you think this incident poses a threat to U.S.-China relations, or not? (IF "YES, THREAT") Would you describe it as a serious threat or not serious?

	-----Threat-----			Not	No
	NET	Serious	Not serious	threat	opinion
4/5/01	75	48	25	21	4

5. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the situation with China?

	-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	op.
4/5/01	64	36	28	24	11	13	12

6. (and 7) As of now China has not released the U.S. plane or its crew. Would you say this delay is or is not a cause for concern? (IF "YES, CAUSE FOR CONCERN") Would you say it's a cause for alarm, or not?

	-----Concern-----			Not	No
	NET	Alarm	Not alarm	concern	opinion
4/5/01	83	41	40	16	1

8. Held for release.

9. Do you think this incident is mainly the United States' fault, mainly China's fault, the fault of both sides equally, or just an accident and no one's fault?

	U.S.	China	Both	Neither	No opin.
4/5/01	5	25	18	46	5

10. As you may know, China has asked the United States to apologize for this incident before it releases the plane and crew. Do you think the United States should or should not apologize to China?

	Should	Should not	No opin.
4/5/01	40	54	6

11. In order to try to recover the plane and crew, do you think the United States should or should not:

4/5/01

	Should	Should not	No opin.
a. Agree to reduce the use of American spy planes to intercept Chinese communications	28	61	11
b. Move to restrict U-S trade with China if the crew and plane are not returned	74	19	7

12. Held for release.

13. In handling this situation, do you think the Bush administration has been (too tough) with China, (not tough enough), or about right?

	Too tough	Not tough enough	About right	No opin.
4/5/01	6	23	62	9

END