

TRANSCRIPT: Pollster John McLaughlin gauges public opinion on defense issues

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JOHN McLAUGHLIN:

For those of us who have charted public opinion for awhile—I've been doing this over thirty years now, it is a frightening time. And listening to the Lieutenant General right before me, it's even more scary that during the Cold War when we had an enemy that I think we understood, but the American public is really gaining a perspective right now where it's widely reported how insecure they are about the economy. But they're really insecure about their national security.

And when we did this national survey last month, we released it and you can go—if anyone wants to find out more information or more questions that are not in these slides, which there is plenty of, they could go to the website secureamericanow.org and you can get the data. But when we got the results of this we put together a presentation where it says it's not just the economy anymore. It's really about national security. And a case in point, we just had those two special elections at September 13th in Nevada and in New York 9 [UNCLEAR] congressional district. Security was definitely an issue there. Particularly on the heels of the tenth anniversary of 9-11. So going through these slides, the next slide, you can see the methodology of a thousand likely general election voters, people who intend to vote for president, and it has a plus or minus three percent. That means that anytime that [UNCLEAR] doing this poll, the survey numbers will be within three percent. Many of these numbers are well outside that. Next slide, slide three. You can see there when we asked, simply, how important are issues of national security to you in deciding your vote for president, ninety-six percent said important. Sixty-seven percent very important. But this is a huge number. Americans can pay attention to the economy and national security at the same time and they want that report. The next slide. Again, a stunning number. Which country is the greatest threat to the United States? And we gave them choices, they were allowed to list others.

But you can see there on the third column over when it says combined first and second choice, you've got Iran at sixty-three percent. The American people get that. China, who's supposed to be our free trade partner, fifty percent ranking it ahead of North Korea. So, really, Iran, China, North Korea. Russia has gone way done. Venezuela is not really a threat. But we've got a serious threat. Next slide. Which country is the most trusted and dependable ally to the United States? Where we gave them these choices and allowed for others, you can see that Great Britain, without a doubt, was a long first choice, but Israel goes forward there. And you've got England, eighty-four percent in the combined. And you've got Israel forty-six percent followed by Germany and France. And what's scary about that is, except for Israel, England's cutting back its military. And that's got to be a

great concern there. Slide six, the next slide. And this is, again, well beyond the margin of error of the survey. Do you think Obama's policy towards Iran will succeed in convincing them to abandon developing nuclear weapons? Seventy-eight percent, it was four in five Americans, said no. They don't see this president succeeding. I know he's at the UN today and I know they're all talking about this. But it's scary. The American public is way ahead of our leader where for the past well over a year they've been looking at this thing. It's not working. They're developing nuclear weapons. They didn't want to say yes.

Slide seven, next slide. If Iran made a nuclear weapon, do you believe Iran would use that to attack Israel? Seventy-six percent of the American public said yes. Next slide. Well, hey, if Iran gained nuclear weapons, do you believe Iran would use them to attack the United States military bases and ships in the Persian Gulf and Middle East? Seventy percent, seven out of ten Americans, think they will attack us in the Persian Gulf and use their nuclear weapons as a shield there. Slide nine. If Iran made a nuclear weapon, do you believe Iran would arm terrorists, who would use the nuclear weapon to attack the United States? Eighty percent, four out of five Americans, said yes. It's in our pop culture, it's in our movies, it's in our books, it's in our TV. The American public believes that if Iran gets a nuclear weapon, they are going to give it to terrorists who will use it against the United States. For those of us who are older, like Frank, who remember the Cold War, there was always mutual assured destruction. There was some sort of deterrent. American public opinion does not see that deterrent right now with Iran. And therefore, you have the next slide, slide ten.

If sanctions against Iran do not work, would you approve or disapprove of using the military to attack and destroy the facilities in Iran which are necessary to produce nuclear weapons? Sixty-four percent of all Americans of a survey of a thousand likely voters, and, again, there's no red space at the end, there's both Democrats and Republicans in the same poll, it's representative of the national electorate. Sixty-four percent actually approve right now. Only twenty-three percent disapprove it. Thirty-nine percent strongly approve it. So while America's pulling back out of Iraq and out of Afghanistan, we just listened to the experts tell us how they're getting ready to gut the military, the American public is extremely afraid about Iran. They don't want them to have nuclear weapons. And they would be willing to expect military capital and take military action to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. And as you can see from the top line in, the variety of the level of approval is the highest that we've ever polled that over the last two years. Next slide, slide eleven. Regarding China, do you think America can rely on China as a strong economic partner who wants the United States to be safe and secure? Or do you think China's actively trying to undermine the United States to advance its own economic and national interests? Seventy-one to eighteen, they see China as undermining our economic and national interests. Next slide. When we gave them choices about this administration's policy towards China, whether they were successful in dealing with China, only twenty-two percent said yes. Twenty-six percent said they're totally ignoring the threats by China militarily and economically. And forty-one percent see the United—see this administration as compromising American security and economic interests when dealing with China. Next slide. Regarding a cyber-attack on the United States, again, it's gotten a lot of press recently, do you think the United States needs to do more to perform our best

to stop computer and internet hacking by China? Or do you think they've handled it correctly? Nineteen percent say handled it correctly, sixty-six percent said we need to do more. Slide—next slide, slide fourteen. Do they think president Obama's outreach to the Muslim world has increased or decreased the security of the United States? They say decreased. Forty-seven to thirty. Next slide.

Regarding the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, would you say president Obama favors Israel or favors the Palestinians? They see him favoring the Palestinians thirty-six to twenty-one. And only twenty-one percent said he treats them equally. Next slide, another big number. Do you agree or disagree with the position that before the Palestinians are given their own country, they must first recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state? Eighty-two percent of all Americans agree with that statement. Only seven percent disagree. And fifty-three percent strongly agree. That's a pretty significant number considering what's going on in the UN right now. Next slide, seventeen. Do you think the protests in the Arab world known as the Arab Spring will ultimately be a good thing or a bad thing for the United States? In spite of all the media coverage, some of the—some of the hoopla about this, thirty-nine percent of Americans think it's a bad thing. Only twenty percent see it as a good thing. Slide eighteen. When we asked them straight up, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Muslim Brotherhood—now, I didn't know what we would get. We never asked this before and I had seen this week other media pollsters ask this, we got nine out of- nine out of ten Americans had heard the term Muslim Brotherhood. So Americans are engaged. And of their opinion of it, it was forty-four unfavorable, only ten percent favorable. So they already see these—this organization as a bad guy and as a threat to the United States. Slide nineteen. How concerned are you about Islamic terrorism by American-born Muslims? Eighty-six percent concerned. Forty-five percent very concerned. And finally, slide twenty. Recently, Congressman King, who was the Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, launched congressional hearings into the radicalization of Muslims in the United States. Regarding these hearings, would you say that they need to continue because they are providing information which is valuable and important to stop terrorism in the United States? Sixty-three percent agree with that. Or should Congress stop these hearings because they are offensive to Muslims and are a waste of our tax dollars? Only twenty percent said that. Sixty-three to twenty, they said Congressman King's hearings should continue.

With that, the last slide is just a voter profile. But to sum it up, Frank, the American public is extremely insecure about security right now. And the way I describe the effects in this—we just had a recent election, only a third of the voters happened to be Jewish and they certainly were concerned about Israel. But almost half, forty-four percent, were actually Catholic. And they were overwhelmingly Democrat, fifty to twenty. And they responded both to economic messages and to security messages. And it was like a one-two punch against the administration and the current policies right now. We are not at all secure about the economy. We are not at all secure about where we are in terms of homeland security, in terms of national security and we have real—for the first time, since the end of the Cold War, as I said last time I spoke to one of your groups, Frank, we have real external threats that the American public sees, has a clear fix on, it does not feel at all good about where we are or about where the policies are taking us. And it's

certainly—when you intersect these public opinions with the information you just heard about gutting our national military, it's a very bad mix right now compared to where we are right now. So with that, Frank, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this group and you can, again, go to the website, which is secureamericanow.org. You can see this data, you can see other data, you can see lots of other information, precisely on these subjects and it can certainly be very useful in the issue advocacy that you got to make so that we can get some common sense solutions in Washington so that we can strengthen our national security, not so insecure right now.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

John, thank you very much. Can I just ask a quick question? Just to make sure I've got the last slide right. It seemed as though you really went to great lengths in those thousand voters to try and reflect as accurately as you could the demographics of the population at large. Though you were focusing on the voters, which is obviously a subset of that population. Is that about right?

JOHN McLAUGHLIN:

Right. They are—they are, absolutely. When you look at the last statements of the profile page, you can see that we had, you know, there were Democrats at thirty-eight percent, Republicans at thirty-four percent, which is typical of a 2008 election. Democrats had a slight edge. There were no—we did ask a question that was related to some of these Middle East issues. Only three percent of the voters were Jewish. We asked those data if they had any relatives in the household who happened to be Jewish or related to somebody who was Jewish and [UNCLEAR] that's all it was. You had ten percent African-American. You had eight percent Hispanic, which is very close to the census we gave in the [UNCLEAR] because you get some mixed race there. So—and the model, geographically, was based on the 2008 presidential election where you had that kind of a turnout. So, you know, of the Protestant voters, there were fifty-three percent. Half of that, fifty-two percent, were born again evangelical Christians. Which [UNCLEAR]

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Okay.

JOHN McLAUGHLIN:

But twenty-nine percent were Catholic. So it really fits with the model of the profile of the presidential election. And the other part is, the order of the questions is actually on the website, the way we asked it in the top line computer printout. And the reason we did that is precisely because people that don't like the results of what we're getting often argue that there's something wrong with the poll. We put it out there. It's fully out there. The wording of the questions are out there, the order of the questions is out there. Because there's a lot of politically correct spin. Like, for example, you know with Congressman King, a lot of people are pressuring him at those hearings. And what was amazing to the

congressman, as you know, I also do his campaign polling, I have for twenty years, the public backs him up, sixty-three to twenty. I mean, this—you know, Washington is a city that's surrounded on four sides by reality. [LAUGHTER]