

NEWT GINGRICH TOWN HALL

[BEGIN FILE]

JOEL ARENDS:

One. . . good evening everyone on the telephone call. Fellow vets, veteran supporters. My name is Joel Arends, I'm the chairman of Vets for a Strong America. I want to thank you for joining us tonight for our live tele-town hall with former speaker of the House and current Republican presidential candidate, Newt Gingrich. Veterans for a Strong America's mission is simple. It's to communicate the importance of strong national defense. To that end, tonight, we've enlisted former Assistant Secretary of Defense, Frank Gaffney, to assist with this task. Frank is currently the president of the Center for Security Policy and founder of the Coalition for the Common Defense. If any of you want more information during this call or after, you can go to our website, which is veteransforstrongamerica.org. With that, I'd like to ask former secretary Gaffney to take over the phone call.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Joel, thank you so much. And again, my welcome to all as well. This is an exciting opportunity to interact with a man I'm sure you all know something about. I'm just going to very briefly touch on some of the highlights of his career. You know that he was the speaker of the House of course from 1995 to 1999. Served in that capacity, capping twenty years in the Congress representing the sixth district of Georgia. He is the author of some twenty-three books. Thirteen of which were *New York Times* bestsellers, at least four movies that I know of. He has been working on and concerned about national security throughout his life. His father was a career soldier. He calls himself an Army brat, but he has gone on, not only in his service in the Congress but subsequently to work hard on matters involving national defense policy, including the defense policy board under the George W. Bush Administration, teaching in a number of different national security institutions, including the Air University and the National Defense University. He is an historian by training, a professor, certainly a politician, a patriot, a statesman. We were privileged to honor him at our Center for Security Policy with our Keeper of the Flame Award years ago and I would argue that no presidential candidate since Abraham Lincoln has fought harder or studied longer or had a more impressive grounding in America's exceptional history, let alone more relevant hands-on experience in these matters than Newt Gingrich. So it's a privilege to have you with us, Speaker Gingrich and we wanted to sort of start if we could with some thoughts from you about the process by which we are currently making national security decisions, specifically this so-called super committee and sequestration exercise. You might need to explain a little bit about what that is about if you would, but what are your concerns about it?

NEWT GINGRICH:

Well, let me say first of all, I think every veteran who is on the call is on the call because they care about defending America. They care about our freedom and they care about our safety. And so I speak to people, my dad spent twenty-seven years in the US Army infantry. So I speak to people who I know understand that the worst thing you can do is have a defense so weak that you invite a war because somebody thinks that they can take you down. Or to have your own troops, your own personnel, so under equipped and under trained that you run a very real risk of getting defeated, taking unnecessary casualties. And so I think from that perspective, what I feel deeply is that this super committee legislation and the way this Congress and this president have dealt with this is really dangerous. I mean, they have in effect set up a proposal that unless they find some magic number of savings they

will cut five hundred billion dollars out of defense. Without any sense of where it's coming from, why it's happening, or what it does to our strategic position. And I'm not an automatic defender of defense spending. I helped form the [UNCLEAR] back in 1981. I tell people that I'm a hawk, but I'm a cheap hawk. But this is an outrageous approach. This is a situation where you have the Congress, for political reasons, setting a political number – not a national security number, and I think that it's very important for us to understand that we have to start from the standpoint of what threatens the United States, what does it take to keep us safe and free and then what is the budget that that requires? And that's the opposite of the way this particular group is going about doing this. So I think it's a very big issue, Frank and one that I hope everybody listening tonight will tell their congressmen and their senators do not allow some kind of automatic, gigantic cut in national security. Which will put all of America at risk for no good reason.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

If I could just add, of course the five or six hundred billion dollars spending and how this is sorted out in this so-called second phase is on top of some half a trillion dollars that has already been slated for cut. So your point about hollowing out or, I think, eviscerating our military and the provocativeness that that is likely to be seen as around the world is very well taken.

JOEL ARENDS:

Frank, I would just jump in for a moment.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Go ahead.

JOEL ARENDS:

And remind listeners that they can press zero if they'd like to ask the speaker a question. Press zero on their keypad if they'd like to ask the speaker a question.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Great. Could I just ask you, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that as a historian and as also a practitioner you have had a lot of experience with what President Reagan used to call Peace Through Strength. We have seen, over time – before we got on the call you were mentioning Churchill. The opposite approach. The practice of perhaps hoping for peace despite weakness. How would you characterize the Obama administration's approach to the world we're in now and the effect it's having shaping that world, passing on to our children and grandchildren?

NEWT GINGRICH:

Well, I would say that this is an administration which lives a fantasy life. They think you can somehow talk to Kim Jong-Il in North Korea and everything will work out. You can talk to Ahmadenijad in Iran and everything will work out. They think that if only you're nice to the terrorists, then Hamas and Hezbollah somehow will all get together. You know, their understanding of how the world really works is frighteningly inaccurate. And leads them, I think, to put America in enormous vulnerability. I mean, I think that they have no understanding of how dangerous the world is, no understanding of how serious

we are threatened by some of these people and how determined they are to defeat us. And if they can, Frank, they're going to kill us. And I think that that makes this administration very, very dangerous in national security terms.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Could specifically address one issue that I know that you've been thinking a lot about and talking a lot about on the campaign trail in this regard, a shariah-adherent state known as Iran with apparently incipient access to nuclear weapons as well as a long-running support for terrorism. How do you see that as sort of an example of the dangers and what should we be doing about it?

NEWT GINGRICH:

You mean Iraq or Iran?

FRANK GAFFNEY:

I meant Iran.

NEWT GINGRICH:

Yeah. Okay. Well, I think that the danger in Iran is very, very real and if you listen to what Ahmadienjad and others say, they're pretty clear they're quite prepared to engage in warfare and, you know, Ahmadienjad talks about eliminating Israel from the face of the earth and he talks about the idea that the United States needs to be driven out of the Middle East, and he comes from a particular sect of Islam which believes that if you could create Armageddon, that you could somehow bring back the thirteenth imam and that somehow you would in effect enter into a heavenly experience. So there's a very real danger. People who are prepared to put on bombs as body vests and walk into a supermarket or a bus and blow themselves up are people who could easily do the same thing with a nuclear weapon and that's why this is much more dangerous in my mind than the Soviet Union, because if you are a bureaucratic atheist in a communist dictatorship, you had no existential incentive to go out and kill yourself, because you weren't going to go to heaven, cause there's no heaven in your model. But here you have people from a very, very different world.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Mr. Speaker, we may have some questions from our listening team as well. But just one further one from me if I may. Are you concerned that the Republican Party and conservatives specifically, perhaps the American people more generally, simply don't have the kind of appreciation of the military that they have had in the past? For a variety of reasons, but they may well no longer realize the peril that we're facing because they're simply not thinking about it, they're not exposed to military personnel as often as they should have been, your family experience being one example. The base communities have greatly shrunk, so there are fewer of us in touch with them that way. The military industrial capabilities have also contracted. Do you see perhaps the fix we're in at the moment with this budget exercise possibly being a function of that lack of familiarity, lack of contact and connection? And what should we be doing about that? Particularly, the veteran community?

NEWT GINGRICH:

No, I actually don't think for the average American that that's true. Everywhere I go, every airplane I ride on, every airport I'm in, every time I run into people who are serving in uniform, the American people are enormously grateful and because of the deep use of the National Guard and the Reserves, there are a lot of families who find themselves actively concerned because they have a loved one overseas on a regular basis. So when I'm in Iowa or New Hampshire or South Carolina, there's tremendous concern, tremendous commitment. I think we should not confuse the will of the American people who would gladly pay what it costs to defend the country and the thankless incompetence of the politicians in Washington who have backed themselves into an utterly untenable position and adopted a procedure which defies any reasonable explanation. I think this is a comment on the failure of a generation of political leaders to show any ability to be creative, to innovate and to find new solutions to problems that cannot be solved by the kind of thing they're doing.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Are there questions, Joel?

JOEL ARENDS:

Yes, Frank and Mr. Speaker, we have the first question of the night from James in Centennial, Colorado. He's asking, what is your opinion on the force posture in Asia?

NEWT GINGRICH:

Well, I think we should look carefully at – again, depending on what you mean by Asia, for example, I'm not quite sure why we're moving back from Okinawa to Guam. Spending, I believe, something like five billion dollars. That's not a number I'm going to stand by, but it's something on that order. Building a new basing facility in Guam. And why the same range couldn't be based in San Diego or based in Alaska. Or some other part of the United States. I mean, the length of time you're gaining by sitting in Guam doesn't strike me as vital for the kinds of things we're doing nowadays. So I don't know if you want to look at that sort of thing. Much more, when you're talking about Asia about the decay of the American Navy. We now have, I believe, the smallest navy since before Pearl Harbor. [UNCLEAR] wrote, this may be the smallest navy we've had since before World War One in total ships. Now, obviously, it's dramatically more capable, but historically the navy believed you had to be at least three hundred ships. I think we're now drifting down to like two hundred and forty-two. And so I worry a great deal about a need to invest in modernization and recapitalization simply to be in a position where we are capable of dealing and providing security across the Pacific without running the risk of the Chinese thinking that they can bluff us or that they can engage us with any hope of success. I think it's very dangerous to get weak enough that the Chinese get confused about who the dominant player is.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Do you see the Chinese as a threat at this point?

NEWT GINGRICH:

Yeah, I don't see them as a threat in the sense of the enemy looks weak, but I certainly see them as a threat in the sense that they have a legitimate difference in national objectives. They would like to be the dominant country of their region. And they are quite prepared to make the investment to do that if we let them get away with it. So I think it's, you know, it's up in the air. I think that we have to take a

serious look at what the situation is and we have to – my only point would be historically when you're dealing with a dictatorship, and let's make, you know, no bones about it, the Chinese government's a dictatorship, when you're dealing with a dictatorship, it is dramatically better to be strong than to be weak. And there's no evidence I know of that weakness is a useful habit when you're dealing with dictatorships.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Right. The history is rather grim as a matter of fact. Are you comfortable with what we're doing with respect to withdrawal of forces from Iraq and Afghanistan? Given the sacrifices that have been made to have them come out rather better than they might otherwise?

NEWT GINGRICH:

Well, I think we have an administration which is desperate to cut and run. You have to be very careful about trying to [UNCLEAR] against their own will. It's very clear when the president proposed to going down to three thousand troops, I thought that was an invitation to a disaster. I think the professional military believes the smallest number that could defend itself is in the twenty to twenty-five thousand range. So the president in effect was setting up a group of hostages. And, you know, it's clearly for political reasons that the most political president in our lifetime didn't care about national security, didn't care about the advice of his generals, didn't care about the safety of the American troops, he was simply going to make a political point back home with his left wing allies no matter what. Well, I think in that case, you're better off to take the loss and get out. And in my judgment, what that guarantees is, that we will now have lost the third Iraq war. We won the first war in 1991. We drove Saddam out of Kuwait in four days.

We won the second war in 1993. I mean, in 2003. We defeated Saddam in about twenty-three days. And [UNCLEAR] then made the decision which I still don't understand to radically change Iraq without adequate forces and without adequate willpower. And we've been engaged in a war, but these troops, we will have lost. Just give you one piece – two pieces of data. There were a million, two hundred thousand Christians in Iraq when we entered the country. There are now about five hundred thousand. Seven hundred thousand Christians have left. Which is, in my mind at least, certainly not a sign of some great American victory. Recently Iran held this utterly outrageous conference on terrorism and the arrogance of the Iranian dictatorship holding a conference on terrorism when it's the leading state supporter of terrorism is just an amazing thing. And yet, Maliki, the head of the Iraqi government, supposedly our ally, went to the conference. So did Karzai, the head of the Afghanistan government, supposedly our ally. I think it raises great doubts in my mind about how real these guys are and I saw them begin to lay out a series of strategic questions and really rethinking our whole approach to the region. People who want to follow how this is evolving can go to newt.org. That's my first name. Newt.org. Which is my campaign website. Over the next few weeks, we're going to post a number of things to give people a chance to really look at it and think about what should our effective strategy be in the region? Certainly to defend ourselves we should have a strategy in which I believe guarantees a strong, robust ballistic missile defense. We should have a strategy which is designed to only replace the current government of Iran. And we should have a strategy which indicates that there are no circumstances where we'll tolerate the Iranians acquiring nuclear weapons because we have every reason to believe they'll use them.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Yeah.

JOEL ARENDS:

Mr. Speaker, with that said, we have our first poll question of the night. We'd like to ask people to press one on their keypad if they're a veteran or press two if you're a veteran supporter and the poll will be open for the next few minutes. Our next question comes from David in Fairfield, Connecticut, a former Marine, and the question, Mr. Speaker, is how do you define mission accomplishment in Afghanistan?

NEWT GINGRICH:

Well, I think that we're going to find that we don't have a mission accomplished in Afghanistan. Partially because we've tolerated sanctuaries in Pakistan. I mean, you're never going to defeat the Taliban as long as they can go back into Pakistan to refit, reorganize, and prepare. And that's an example of what I'm talking about. This is going to turn out as we coldly and methodically evaluated, to be a much bigger war, a much greater threat, with many more ramifications than just hunting down a handful of terrorists, and, you know, dropping bombs or firing missiles from predators may tactically be satisfying, but it's not a replacement for a strategy. And we don't have a strategy today. The odds are fairly high that if we pull out of Afghanistan within six months to a year the place will be a total mess and the Taliban will be on the offense and we would be backed into a chaotic environment.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

I fear you're right. Joel, is there time for one more question?

JOEL ARENDS:

We do. Lynette from Fort [UNCLEAR], Virginia, is asking, what emphasis do you intend to place on funding for training for military personnel?

NEWT GINGRICH:

Well, I think we have to have a great deal of training for military personnel. This is the most effective military in the history of the world. At a tactical level, we have an astonishing system. And that comes about because of really deep investments in the right training, the right equipment, the right doctrine, and I don't think any of us who care about American security should give up one inch of that commitment. Because anything we give up puts at risk the lives of our young men and women in uniform. And I just want to close with saying to everybody who called in tonight how grateful I am as an Army brat and somebody who watched his dad serve his country for twenty-seven years in the infantry, [UNCLEAR] national security [UNCLEAR] people like Frank Gaffney who just do such a great job intellectually of putting together the case for strong national security. This really matters and I'm really grateful to have this opportunity to talk with you.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

[OVERLAP] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

JOEL ARENDS:

[OVERLAP] – I want to thank you for your comments tonight, Frank. I want to thank you for your comments as well. If people want more information about your campaign, they can go to newt.org. Newt.org. For those who want more information on Veterans for a Strong America, they can log on at veteransforstrongamerica.org. And with that, Mr. Speaker, thank you for joining us tonight.

FRANK GAFFNEY:

Godspeed. Thank you, Joel.

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