



## Gauging Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy

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### **TRANSCRIPT:**

Thank you, Bill for that nice introduction. I'm a very lucky person because I don't get to deal like you do in reality. I get to deal in the perception of reality, which can be a lot more interesting, a lot more confounding and a lot more influential, ultimately, on reality.

What I'd like to do is open my remarks very briefly with an overview of the sorts of things that we've found in this poll and what I think some of them mean, and then proceed to lay out for you some of the major findings of the poll. So let me begin by saying that between September 5<sup>th</sup> and September 9<sup>th</sup>, we polled over one thousand likely voters nationwide in the United States and we asked them approximately 65 questions that were foreign policy-related.

Here are some of the highlights of the poll.

First of all, there is a conflicted view of America's role in the world. Americans are clearly conflicted in how they see the U.S.'s current role in world affairs. Americans widely accept descriptions of their country as benevolent, as a multilateral force in the world, and yet majorities also see the United States as a unilateralist power, whose pursuit of self-interest too often contradicts the vision and goals of democracy and human rights.

And I can tell you that overall, there have been two very important sub-group analyses that I think we'll find not surprising, but somewhat interesting. The first is that Democrats are from Neptune and Republicans are from Uranus and depending on your ideology, you can associate which party goes with which, but there is an incredible divergence on foreign policy issues between the two political parties. There is evidence coming in everyday that we are in a 50/50 nation. This poll certainly did not shatter that sense. Secondly, and interestingly, I took special note of 18 to 25 year olds. Now that's a tough group to poll, but one of the things I have found about this group, our MTV generation, is that it is also our globalist, multilateralist group, who on one hand are certainly turned on by global music and fashion, which is a very powerful factor on their lives, but at the same time have a greater and greater appreciation of the world around us that we do not often give them enough credit for.

Among the additional findings, when we consider the two most publicized and potentially dangerous global issues: the prospect of nuclear weapons development in North Korea and securing the peace in Iraq, Americans are three times more likely to say that the United States should confront these issues with the United Nations and with allies, than they say that we should confront them alone.

Three in five Americans say that the UN is needed now more than ever in world affairs while 34 percent, one-third, say the world body is less relevant and less influential today in global matters. Interestingly, we have been polling on the United Nations for years now, and while it used to get a three-quarter, 74-75 percent positive rating, that dipped in the months before and the immediate months after the crisis in Iraq unfolded. There is evidence in this poll, though, that the United Nations is bouncing back in the American view.

We found that Americans generally favor participation, and you'll see this shortly, in international treaties. We are, as a nation, much more likely to consider U.S. participation in international treaties to be important rather than unimportant. The highest levels of importance as you'll see are assigned to treaties that deal with the regulation of nuclear weapons, while lower levels of importance are assigned to treaties that deal with environmental issues.

At least seven in 10 Americans assign the highest importance to four of the seven treaties we tested. Those four are the treaty on Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Elsewhere, there were four other treaties that were tested. Americans are at least twice as likely to agree than to disagree that the United States should participate in the International Criminal Court (53 percent say that we should, 22 percent disagree) and the Kyoto Environmental Protocol (44 percent agree, 22 percent disagree). Interestingly, when we read more information about the Kyoto treaty -- both the pros and the cons -- support for that treaty did in fact jump up.

What about our international relationships? We will unfold for you some non-surprises and maybe a surprise here or there on how Americans view other nations on a scale of whether they are good allies, so-so allies or non-allies. When we consider U.S.-China relationship, Americans most often choose human rights as the most challenging issue, 28 percent say human rights. Twenty-two percent say that differences in our political and ideological views form the key challenge in our relationship.

What about the priorities of national issues? When we asked them to rank certain international issues that we are now confronted with, Americans view first and foremost a potential nuclear crisis in Iran as the highest priority. Fighting between Israel and the Palestinians comes in a very close second on the list of priorities, and fewer than half of Americans assign a high priority to rebuilding Afghanistan.

We are still divided over the issue of free trade. In fact, for the first time in my polling, Americans remain closely divided when asked about NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and whether or not it's been a good thing or a bad thing. Thirty-seven percent say that NAFTA has benefited the United States, but 34 percent say that it has been bad for the United States and our economy.

Let's take a closer look at some of the results of the survey. That again is our methodology. Understand that the results I'm going to give you have a margin of error of plus or minus three. If during my talk I mention differences between political parties or among various age groups, understand that the error margins are significantly higher than three. OK, look at the blue bars, as I read each country please tell me if you think it's a good ally, a so-so ally or not an ally on most issues. These appear here by ranking.

First is the United Kingdom. 90 percent say it is a good ally, seven percent a so-so ally. Those little red bars there on this page indicate those who say it's not an ally. Canada comes in second at 73 percent who say it's a good ally and another 25 percent who say so-so. Israel is in third place among the countries tested. Fifty-seven percent call Israel a good ally with another 25 percent saying it's a so-so ally, and only 13 percent call Israel not an ally at all. And then lastly on the front page, Mexico: 56 say a good ally, 36 a so-so ally, not an ally: six percent.

We continue on with this. Next in line is South Korea. These numbers here reflect the middle ground, where there are almost as many who said so-so as said good. South Korea, 46 percent said good ally but 25 percent so-so ally. Brazil 35 percent good ally. Germany 32 percent good ally, but 46 percent said so-so.

Egypt has dropped dramatically. Egypt was generally considered to be a good ally; well into the forties, now only 21 percent say Egypt is a good ally, 45 percent say so-so ally. Russia is here but will be on the next page. France, of course, has suffered considerably, but I've polled in France and you should see what they say about us. In addition to France, those that get negative perceptions, only 14 percent say Russia is a good ally, Saudi Arabia down to eight percent good ally, 41 say so-so, and then lastly China gets an eight good and 38 percent so-so.

We read to our respondents descriptions that some people might use to describe the role of the United States in the world, and we asked them to determine whether it was very accurate, somewhat accurate or not accurate at all as a description. We have combined the very and the somewhat accurate and those are the blue bars. Starting at the left, "United States is a good friend and ally of people who desire freedom and individual human rights. Ninety-two percent agree that that's accurate.

"That it's a force to promote the values of freedom and democracy everywhere in the world." Eighty-seven percent. "That it's a genuine superpower but one that actively seeks out allies in dealing with global issues." High at 84 percent. How about the description that the U.S. is an imperialist power that acts on its own regardless what the world

thinks? A surprisingly high 68 percent who say that's accurate, and 29 who say that's not accurate.

"The United States is a reluctant sheriff with a responsibility to police the world and regional trouble spots." In that instance you have 59 percent, almost three out of five who say it's accurate. Lastly, "a selfish power that's willing to sell out those who want our freedoms when those desires conflict with our own needs." Forty-three percent called that accurate, 56 percent said not accurate, and there the Democrat and Republican split was particularly noticeable.

What should the proper role of the United States be in the world? On the question of handling nuclear weapons development in North Korea, 68 percent said seek help from the United Nations or other allies and then intervene. Twenty-three percent said do whatever it takes, even if it means acting alone. Only seven percent said leave it alone to work itself out.

These are questions now about the United Nations. The overall impression of the United Nations: 51 percent favorable, 38 percent unfavorable. For the UN, that's good news that it's back up over 50 percent, but for the UN that's also not so good news, because at one time I noted, it was once at about 74 to 75 percent favorable. How about questions of its relevance? Seven out of 10, or 69 percent, said the UN is relevant. Twenty-seven percent, or one out of four, said it is not relevant. This statement, "Some argue that the UN has been reduced in its influence and is less relevant today in global matters, others say the United Nations is needed now more than ever to represent a global perspective in issues that arise." Thirty-four percent hung onto the view that the UN is less relevant, but 59 percent did say we need the United Nations now more than ever.

Back to the proper role of the United States on various issues: how about securing peace and transition to local leadership in Iraq? Sixty-seven percent said seek help from the United Nations or other allies and then intervene, and 22 percent said do whatever it takes, even if it means acting alone. What about reducing violence and facilitating a leadership change in Liberia? Sixty percent said seek help from the United Nations or other allies and then intervene, while 23 percent, or about one in four, said leave it alone.

How about negotiating peace and stability in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute? Fifty-six percent said seek help from allies or from the UN, and 18 percent said go it alone if we need to, but 25 percent, and that is significantly high, I suppose expressing the considerable amount of exasperation, say leave it alone to work itself out. How about reducing the power of the drug cartel in Colombia? Forty-one percent said to seek help from the United Nations or other allies, 36 percent said to act alone and do whatever it takes, and again a significant Democrat/Republican difference in view.

We now did something pretty interesting. We read what essentially is the State Department's policy versus the Defense Department's policy with no label. "Policy A favors diplomacy over strategic power in international disputes and actively seeks out the assistance of international bodies like the United Nations and NATO to work together

with the U.S. in crisis areas.” Two out of three, 66 percent agreed with that. “Policy B favors the U.S. acting alone if necessary and playing the role of both moral force and superpower in such disputes all with the intention of U.S. interests.” We tried to express these as fairly as we could. Twenty-nine percent agreed with that.

Now, note please that when we read essentially the same statement and add Secretary Powell’s name and Secretary Rumsfeld’s name, what happens is that Powell’s numbers jump an additional five percentage points and Rumsfeld’s position drops about eight or nine points. Perhaps saying less about Secretary Rumsfeld and I think saying a whole lot more about the incredible popularity, even to this day, of Secretary Powell. These are the little games that pollsters play, incidentally.

Okay, we read statements and asked people to agree or disagree. “France has never been a good ally of the United States and the Bush administration was wise to act in the Iraq situation without France’s help.” This a testimonial to how far down France has gone in the feelings and sensitivity of Americans, as 57 percent agreed with that, but 37 percent disagreed.

“The United States should sign the Kyoto Global Warming Treaty.” Forty-four percent agreed, and 22 percent disagreed leaving about one in three with no opinion or not sure. “The United States should sign on as a participant in the International Criminal Court.” A majority of 53 percent agreed, 22 percent disagreed. Now, Statement A says that, “The United States should ratify the Kyoto global warming treaty to reduce the emission of industrial pollutants in the atmosphere. When the treaty reduces U.S. and Europeans emissions at a faster rate than those for countries like China and India, it’s only fair that these nations have the opportunity to catch up in industrial development.” Forty-one percent agreed with that. Statement B: “The United States should not sign the treaty because it unfairly punishes the U.S. and Europe and makes them reduce emissions at a faster rate than developing nations and puts the United States economy at a severe disadvantage. It’s also questionable how serious the problem of global warming really is.” Forty-eight percent agreed with that.

Statement A: “U.S. should ratify the creation of the International Criminal Court that enforces a set of standards against war criminals. By signing on, the U.S. brings its moral force to this court and takes a strong stand against serious violations of human rights as in Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda.” Forty-eight percent agreed. But statement B argues that, “The United States participation in the international court ties the hands of the U.S. on matters that it should be free to decide upon unilaterally. In addition, the court could be used against the U.S. interests or allies and thus could be a detriment against U.S. peace efforts.” Thirty-eight percent agreed to that. Again, a huge Democrat/Republican split.

Here are the questions on NAFTA. It’s been in effect 10 years, do you believe it’s been a good thing or a bad thing for the U.S.: 37 percent good, 33 percent bad. Has it created more jobs? Nineteen percent said yes. Or a net loss of jobs? Fifty-five percent. The government is considering expanding NAFTA to not just Mexico, but some other Latin American nations as well. Do you favor or oppose expanding NAFTA? Thirty-one

percent expand, 50 percent oppose. Those are the lowest numbers we've had on NAFTA and free trade yet.

How about ending the embargo on Cuba? Fifty-six percent favor ending the embargo, and 32 percent oppose. Prior to the September 11 attacks, U.S. made strengthening its relationship with Mexico a priority. Since the attacks, the relationship seems to have become a low priority. Do you think Mexico should be a high priority? We have a split: 50 percent said yes a priority, 42 percent other countries are more important.

Priorities for U.S. foreign policy, and these are in order of those who said it should be a high priority. Starting with the nuclear crisis in Iran: 64 percent. Fighting between Israel and the Palestinians: 57 percent. Rebuilding Afghanistan: 43 percent said high priority. How about if there's another Brazilian financial collapse? 19 percent. Instability and war in Indonesia: 18 percent. War in the Congo: 11 percent.

Are these extremely important, somewhat important or not important at all? Treaty on Nonproliferation of nuclear weapons (will not develop nuclear weapons): 77 percent said that was extremely important. The ABM treaty: 73 percent, the Comprehensive test ban treaty: 71 percent said extremely important, and the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: 70 percent said extremely important. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species: 53 percent said extremely important. The Kyoto Protocol: 52 percent extremely important and the International Convention for a ban on commercial Whaling: 43 percent, extremely important.

Which of the following do you think is the greatest challenge facing the relationship between China and the United States? At the top are human rights at 28 percent, but these are all bunched really close together. Differences in political views and ideology: 22 percent, North Korea differences: 21 percent, trade problems: 17 percent, and military competition only seven percent.

If the United States were to announce that it possesses evidence that Iran has weapons of mass destruction or has the means to develop them, how credible do you think this claim would be despite recent weeks? Sixty-nine percent said that the evidence would be credible if it were presented, and 28 percent said not credible.

And then, on a scale of one to five, with one being not important at all and five being extremely important, how important is it for the United States to make the effort to mend its relationship with Europe? I usually add the fours and fives here, so that's very important plus extremely important, which is 53 percent and 18 percent, which is 71 percent.

That is our little poll. They're interesting findings. There are those who might ask, "Is it relevant to tap into public opinion, even those who are not paying close attention?" I always say that their vote counts as much as David Broder's and Bob Novak's vote. There could be a great bumper sticker out there that says, "I don't pay attention and I

vote” so of course, it’s always important to listen to public opinion. Thank you very much.

**Presider:** John, thank you very much. We’re going to have time for a few questions. I think the last point you made was extremely important which was that they are going to vote, and you’re going to have policies made by individuals who may not be as well informed as you might hope they would be. Although, I must say that if you look at that wide range of subject matter that you were polling on, it was quite amazing to find that they had as many views as were reflected there. Now, how well informed they were as a matter of background and how the quality of the judgments they were making remains to be seen. The dynamics behind that set of circumstances is not going to be changed in the near term.

**JZ:** Let me just comment on that for a second. When we do polls like this, the fleeting opinions on matters like this are less important than the values that are reflected. So, always look at these questions and ask yourself, “What core value are we tapping into?” And that’s the key to understanding where the American people are at. And I might also add one other thing that I learned from two decades in being in this business, and that is that there can indeed be deep conflicting values. So that the same person who says, “Killing a fetus is tantamount to manslaughter” can come back five minutes later and say, “I’m pro-choice”. Are they stupid or fickle? No, those are conflicting values. This is what campaigns, discussions, and the FPA debates in local communities are all about. How does information then tweak one value or the other?

**Presider:** I think you probably have accurately described the process. What troubles me is a little bit is whether or not that mechanism of values and whatever underlies that or them leads you to the optimum policy, in short.

**JZ:** I’m not that good...

**Presider:** Well, I know, I’m just trying to put it in context here and figure out how much weight we should give to this.

**JZ:** Yeah, let me just add one other point. There are two things to look at when you look at these numbers as well. One of them is clearly the majorities and the non-majorities. When I see 70 percent or higher, that to me is a community consensus. Secondly, I look at the intensity factors too. So, I gave you all those agrees and disagrees, that was for packaging purposes. I also look for the strongly agrees versus the strongly disagrees on the four-point scale. Those minorities can have much more influence over a policy than whether a majority is formed or not.

**Presider:** Let’s see if we have some questions. Yes Sir?

**Q1:** When you were polling people regarding their attitude toward signing the Kyoto agreement, did you get a sense of whether that was based on political grounds or whether they had a concern about global warming itself?

**JZ:** Global warming itself has moved into the area of general consensus. We now have two out of three Republicans, majorities of self-described conservatives and very conservative people who now believe that global warming is an issue. The complication is whether the United States has to make the kind of sacrifice that is made in the Kyoto protocol or not, which is to reduce its emissions at a faster pace than many of the developing countries do. The jury is still deliberating on that. For whatever it's worth, the Kyoto Protocol has not been in the limelight for the past couple of years and has been sort of a dormant issue, which I think is reflected here. You saw 44-22 favor the treaty: remember that's one out of three who no longer have an opinion because it's been pretty much off the radar screen.

**WT:** Let's go to this side of the room.

**Q2:** You break it down by political party. Anything further to mention on a breakdown by age region, race, gender, religion and so forth?

**JZ:** Not so much religion, age group as I said, I was particularly intrigued by the views of younger people and older people who are the most globalist of the spectrum. The other thing that continues to show up and is one of the reasons for the 50/50 split we have in this country is the significant difference between married voters and single voters and the significant difference between married women and single women. It's just astounding: married voters tending to be more conservative on a whole range of issues and values, single voters, regardless of age, tending to be more liberal on these and other issues.

**WT:** Do we have another question? Yes...

**Q3:** I was wondering if in the structuring of the question on the UN, exactly how it was phrased. You know better than anyone in the room that how you phrase your question clearly can push or pull the poll. One way to phrase it is, "If we can get the UN, should we?" A lot of people might say yes. Another way to phrase it is to say, "If the United States determines that some action is necessary to avoid a catastrophic attack, should that action be contingent upon the unanimous support of the permanent members of the Security Council?" You might get a very different answer. How *exactly* did you phrase those questions?

**JZ:** You are right. And let me just comment that too often, I think, some of us in our field are chastised or accused of "manipulating" voters when in reality what we're trying to do is get at a core value. I say that again and again. A core value is to understand what lies behind the wording or the policies that's reflected, but also legitimately for certain interest groups to test messages that will move people from one level to another level. It's very legitimate, and we do it in product testing all the time, we do it in politics. "Some argue that the UN has been reduced in its influence and is less relevant today in global matters, others say the United Nations is needed now more than ever to represent a global perspective in issues that arise. Which of those statements comes closer to your

own view?" That's one of them. How's that? These reports are available, if not from the Foreign Policy Association, then from Zogby.com

**WT:** Yes, in the front row.

**Q4:** (inaudible)

**Q5:** (inaudible)

**WT:** John, before the clock runs out, I'd like to pose just one more question if I may. We're going into a very political season here, if we're not already there...

**JZ:** Thank God, it's put my kids through college...

**Presider:** One of the areas where I think that it's quite likely that the candidates assisted by polling that will illuminate core values is that the weapons of mass destruction view and all of these issues that have been so much front and center and have such deep impact on public opinion but also created a sharp political divide, and that probably may even be further created in a more deep and more intense way, but I wanted to ask you is there any scenario whereby there could be an agreement reached among the parties where there would be kind of a responsibility pledge? In other words, our voters are going to be making policy decisions that will affect the future of this country and the world. How would you counsel them on something like that?

**JZ:** Well, unfortunately, there is absolutely no chance that there will be for any reconciliation or agreement. That is of course unfortunate for those of us who studied history or even remember the great days of bipartisan foreign policy. We have a very important election in 2004. Carl Rove in the White House has hoped for one of those historical, reorganizational kinds of elections where Democrats become Democrats for good and a majority of Republicans become Republicans for good. The problem as we see it right now is that both parties are on a course to run highly partisan elections.

There's very little evidence of either party trying to come to the center or to appeal to the center, and I suggest to you that if both parties continue on that course I would not be surprised if there were an independent candidate that generates considerable amount of centrist votes. But is there, in the name of the greater good, any chance whatsoever for a bipartisan policy? None whatsoever, so long as we're in the campaign mode we're in right now.

**WT:** John, thank you very much on that high and very troubling note. We're going to have to call it quits.