

FOREIGN POLICY AND THE CAMPAIGN

September 21-24, 2008

Friday's first presidential debate is still scheduled to focus on foreign policy issues, and Americans are divided on their views about Iraq, though they are more clear on the kinds of diplomacy they'd like to see in the future. The Iraq divide proves a clear split between supporters of the two candidates for president - those who think things are going well there support John McCain while those who think things are going badly support Barack Obama.

Most Americans do agree that the current president is not doing a good job handling foreign policy, and that can hurt John McCain, who most voters think will continue the policies of the Bush Administration. Americans believe that the country's image in the world needs to be improved, and that Barack Obama is more likely than John McCain to do so.

Overall, Americans prefer diplomacy over military action in handling issues of foreign policy: three in four Americans support the idea of a president meeting with foreign leaders even if they are unfriendly to the U.S. And while Iran is volunteered as the country that poses the greatest threat to the United States, most Americans think that this threat can be contained with diplomacy rather than military action.

FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES: THE BUSH LEGACY

As President Bush winds up his tenure in the White House, Americans give him low marks for handling foreign policy overall. 26% of Americans approve of how President Bush is handling foreign policy, while 64% disapprove.

	BUSH'S HANDLING OF FOREIGN POLICY				
	Now	9/2007	4/2007	2/2007	12/2001
Approve	26%	26%	32%	25%	75%
Disapprove	64	67	59	66	13

The Obama campaign has tried to tie the policies of the Bush Administration to John McCain, and at least in terms of foreign policy, most voters agree. 58% of registered voters think John McCain would generally continue George W. Bush's foreign policies.

WOULD JOHN MCCAIN CONTINUE GEORGE W. BUSH'S FOREIGN POLICIES?

(Among registered voters)

Yes 58%
No 33

Looking ahead, 57% of Americans also think it is very important for the U.S. to improve its image to the rest of the world. Voters pick Obama over McCain as able to do this by a margin of more than two to one.

**HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO IMPROVE
U.S. IMAGE IN THE WORLD?**

Very Important	57%
Somewhat Important	26
Not too/not at all	14

FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES: THREATS FROM ABROAD

More Americans today volunteer Iran as a serious threat to the United States than name any other. That country was picked by virtually no one back in April 2003 after U.S. forces seized Baghdad. Americans then first volunteered North Korea, which is now named by only 4% of Americans.

WHICH COUNTRY POSES A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE U.S.?

	Now	4/2003
Iran	21%	--%*
China	12	6
Russia	8	3
Iraq	6	5
North Korea	4	39
Afghanistan	4	--*
None	26	24
*less than .5%		

But the perception of Iran's threat to the U.S. is limited: when asked explicitly how great a threat Iran is to the United States, six in 10 say it is a threat that can be contained with diplomacy. Only one in 10 Americans thinks that Iran is a threat that requires immediate military action.

HOW GREAT A THREAT IS IRAN?

Requires military action now	10%
Can be contained with diplomacy	61
Not a threat at this time	20

Generally speaking, Americans approve of the President engaging in diplomacy, even if it is with a leader of a country that is unfriendly to the United States. Nearly three in four Americans think that it is a good idea for the president of the United States to meet with leaders of such countries.

**SHOULD THE PRESIDENT MEET WITH LEADERS
OF COUNTRIES UNFRIENDLY TO THE U.S.?**

Good idea	73%
Bad idea	20

Few Americans think the United States should try to change a dictatorship to a democracy when it can; only 15% of Americans believe the United States should try to get involved with dictatorships abroad in this way.

Americans are also wary of confronting countries that promote terrorism in the Middle East. 38% say the U.S. would be safer from terrorism if it confronts countries and groups that promote terrorism in that area of the world, while 51% think the U.S. will be safer in the long run if it stays out of other countries' affairs in the Middle East.

THE U.S. WILL BE SAFER FROM TERRORISM IF IT...

	Now	10/2007
Confronts countries supporting terror in the Middle East	38%	47%
Stays out of other countries' affairs	51	45

FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES: IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Americans are divided over how things are going in Iraq, though a slight majority now thinks things are going badly. 51% now say things are going at least somewhat badly, up from 46% last week when a slight majority said things were going well. Today's assessment is similar to what it has been for most of the summer.

HOW ARE THINGS GOING FOR THE U.S. IN IRAQ?

	Now	9/12-16	8/2008	7/2008	5/2008
Well	46%	52%	45%	45%	35%
Badly	51	46	51	51	62

How Americans view the situation in Iraq is a polarizing issue that divides Obama and McCain supporters. Three in four Obama voters think things are going badly in Iraq, and eight in 10 McCain voters think things are going well. Uncommitted voters - those who have yet to decide on a candidate or who might change their minds - are more divided, though most think things are going badly.

HOW ARE THINGS GOING FOR THE U.S. IN IRAQ?

	All Americans	Obama Voters	McCain Voters	Uncommitted Voters
Well	46%	20%	79%	44%
Badly	51	76	19	53

Americans are also divided on whether on whether the troop surge in Iraq is working. Now 44% of Americans think the surge is making things better in Iraq - down from 50% last week - while 11% say it is making the situation there worse and 33% say the surge is having no impact either way. Voters who think the surge is working favor McCain by a margin of more than two to one, while those who think the surge is either having no impact or making the situation worse favor Obama by a similar margin.

THE TROOP SURGE IN IRAQ IS MAKING THINGS...

	Now	9/12-16	8/2008	7/2008
Better	44%	50%	43%	46%
Worse	11	10	13	11
No impact	33	30	33	32

While the McCain campaign has emphasized the success of the surge, the Obama campaign has countered that the U.S. should never have gotten involved in Iraq in the first place, and that the Bush Administration should have been focusing more on Afghanistan. These are positions that most Americans overall agree with - as do most of those voters who have yet to firmly make up their minds about who to vote for in November.

LOOKING BACK ON IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

	All Americans		Uncommitted Voters	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Did the U.S. do the right thing going to war with Iraq?	39%	55	35%	53
Did the Bush Administration focus too much on Iraq over Afghanistan?	54%	34	59%	27

Most Americans think things are going badly in Afghanistan, while only three in 10 think things are going well. Assessment of how things are going for the U.S. in Afghanistan has deteriorated dramatically in the last seven years.

HOW ARE THINGS GOING FOR THE U.S. IN AFGHANISTAN?

	Now	8/2008	3/2003	10/2001
Well	31%	28%	76%	83%
Badly	55	58	14	13
Don't know	14	14	10	4

 This poll was conducted among a random sample of 936 adults nationwide, including 844 registered voters, interviewed by telephone September 21-24, 2008. Phone numbers were dialed from RDD samples of both standard land-lines and cell phones. The error due to sampling for results based on the entire sample could be plus or minus three percentage points, plus or minus four points for the sample of registered voters. The error for subgroups is higher.

CBS NEWS/NEW YORK TIMES POLL
Foreign Policy and the Campaign
September 21-24, 2008

q1 RELEASED SEPARATELY

q2 How much attention have you been able to pay to the news about foreign policy issues
 -- a lot, some, not much, or no attention so far?

	*** REGISTERED VOTERS ***			
	*** Party ID ***			
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%	%
A lot	40	42	40	37
Some	40	42	41	37
Not much	16	11	15	22
None at all	4	5	4	3
DK/NA	0	0	0	1

q3-11 RELEASED SEPARATELY

q12 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling foreign policy?

	*** TOTAL RESPONDENTS ***				Dec07a
	%	%	%	%	%
Approve	26	61	4	21	26
Disapprove	64	32	90	65	65
DK/NA	10	7	6	14	9

q13 RELEASED SEPARATELY

q14 Should the United States try to change a dictatorship to a democracy where it can, or should the United States stay out of other countries' affairs?

					Mar07a
Change to democracy	15	28	10	11	15
Stay out	65	49	78	65	68
Depends (vol.)	9	12	6	10	11
DK/NA	11	11	6	14	6

q15 How important is it to you that the next president improves the U.S. image in the world -- is it very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important to you?

Very	57	45	72	54
Somewhat	26	28	23	28
Not too	7	13	3	8
Not at all	7	14	2	7
Don't know/No answer	2	0	1	3

q16-17 RELEASED SEPARATELY

q18-19 BLANK

q20 Is there any country today that poses a serious threat to the United States?
 IF YES, ASK: Which country is that?

	** TOTAL RESPONDENTS **				Apr03b
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	
	%	%	%	%	%
Iran	21	30	15	19	--
China	12	16	10	10	6
Russia	8	11	9	5	3
Iraq	6	7	4	8	5
North Korea	4	4	4	3	39
Afghanistan	4	4	5	2	--
None/Nothing	26	14	30	31	24
Other	5	6	7	6	14
DK/NA	14	8	16	16	9

q21 Generally speaking, do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea for the president of the United States to meet with the leaders of countries that are generally unfriendly to the U.S.?

Good idea	73	75	79	67
Bad idea	20	21	17	21
No opinion	7	4	3	12

q22-29 RELEASED SEPARATELY

q30 If Barack Obama is elected president, do you think that will make the United States' image in the world better, make it worse, or will it have no effect on the United States' image in the world?

	*** REGISTERED VOTERS ***				Sep08b
Better	53	30	80	43	55
Worse	12	21	3	13	15
No effect	29	42	13	34	26
DK/NA	6	7	4	10	4

q31-39 RELEASED SEPARATELY

q44 If John McCain is elected president, do you think that will make the United States' image in the world better, make it worse, or will it have no effect on the United States' image in the world?

Better	23	36	10	26	26
Worse	26	9	50	16	25
No effect	43	49	34	47	46
DK/NA	8	6	6	11	3

q41-59 RELEASED SEPARATELY

q61 If John McCain were elected President, do you think he would generally continue George W. Bush's foreign policies, or not?

Continue Bush's policies	58	33	82	52
Not continue	33	54	13	37
Don't know/No answer	9	13	5	11

q62-70 RELEASED SEPARATELY

q71 Looking back, do you think the United States did the right thing in taking military action against Iraq, or should the U.S. have stayed out?

	** TOTAL RESPONDENTS **				Uncommitted Voters	Sep08b
	Total	*** Party ID ***				
	Rep	Dem	Ind			
	%	%	%	%	%	
Did the right thing	39	71	13	39	35	42
Should have stayed out	55	21	83	54	53	54
DK/NA	6	8	4	7	12	4

q72 How would you say things are going for the U.S. in its efforts to bring stability and order to Iraq? Would you say things are going very well, somewhat well, somewhat badly, or very badly?

Very well	7	15	1	6	1	10
Somewhat well	39	65	19	39	43	42
Somewhat badly	29	13	38	31	39	24
Very badly	22	6	38	20	14	22
DK/NA	3	1	4	4	3	2

q73 As you may know, the United States has sent a troop surge to Iraq. From what you have heard or read, would you say the troop surge is making the situation in Iraq better, making it worse, or is it having no impact on the situation in Iraq so far?

Making it better	44	69	27	42	42	50
Making worse	11	4	17	10	6	10
No impact	33	16	46	33	39	30
Don't know/No answer	12	11	10	15	13	10

Q74-75 BLANK

q76 What is your impression of how the war in Afghanistan is going for the United States right now -- very well, somewhat well, somewhat badly, or very badly?

	Aug08a					
Very well	2	4	1	3	2	3
Somewhat well	29	46	16	29	28	25
Somewhat badly	32	31	38	29	41	40
Very badly	23	7	33	25	15	18
DK/NA	14	12	12	14	14	14

q77 Over the last couple of years, do you think the Bush administration has focused too much on the war in Iraq and not enough on Afghanistan, or focused too much on Afghanistan and not enough on the war in Iraq, or has the balance been about right?

	Sep07a1					
Too much on Iraq	54	45	69	46	59	51
Too much on Afghanistan	3	1	2	4	3	2
Balance about right	31	40	17	35	24	36
DK/NA	12	14	12	15	14	11

q78 BLANK

q79 Which concerns you more right now--that the government will fail to enact strong anti-terrorism laws, or that the government will enact new anti-terrorism laws which excessively restrict the average person's civil liberties?

**** TOTAL RESPONDENTS ****

***** Party ID *****

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Aug06a
	%	%	%	%	%
Fail to enact laws	31	46	22	28	39
Restrict civil liberties	51	38	62	50	46
Both (Vol.)	1	1	1	1	1
Neither (Vol.)	3	4	2	2	2
Don't know/No answer	14	11	13	19	12

q80 Which comes closer to your view?...In the long run, the U.S. will be safer from terrorism if it confronts the countries and groups that promote terrorism in the Middle East. OR, In the long run, the U.S. will be safer from terrorism if it stays out of other countries' affairs in the Middle East.

					Oct07a
Confronts countries	38	65	21	32	47
Stays out of affairs	51	27	67	54	45
Don't know/No answer	11	8	12	14	8

q81 Thinking about Iran, which comes closer to your opinion? 1. Iran is a threat to the United States that requires military action now. 2. Iran is a threat that can be contained with diplomacy now. 3. Iran is not a threat to the United States at this time.

					Sep07a1
Threat requiring action no	10	16	4	12	9
Threat that can be contain	61	65	65	54	59
Not a threat at this time	20	11	24	23	24
DK/NA	9	8	7	11	8

	UNWEIGHTED	WEIGHTED
Total Respondents	936	
Total Republicans	276	260
Total Democrats	347	318
Total Independents	313	358
Registered Voters	844	774
Registered Republicans	255	228
Registered Democrats	328	287
Registered Independents	261	259