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AP Poll: 57 Percent Of US Says Going To War In Afghanistan Was ‘Wrong Thing To Do’

December 18, 2013

President Barack Obama’s approval ratings for handling foreign policy issues generally top his ratings for most domestic issues, including the economy and health care, according to a new Associated Press-GfK poll. But the poll also suggests a majority of Americans want the president to pull troops out of Afghanistan faster than he’s doing, and many are skeptical about a tentative nuclear deal with Iran.

The poll found that 57 percent now say going to war in Afghanistan after the 2001 terror attacks was probably the “wrong thing to do.” And 53 percent say the pace of the planned withdrawal is too slow, 34 percent said the pace was just about right and 10 percent said it was too fast. All combat troops are scheduled to leave by the end of 2014.

Meanwhile, six in 10 Americans approve of the preliminary deal between Iran and six global powers to curb Iran’s nuclear ambitions. But that support is soft and many doubt it will lead to concrete results.

Even though he garners more disapproval than approval on the handling of Afghanistan and Iran, Obama generally gets better ratings on foreign policy than on domestic issues.

Nearly half (49 percent) approve of his handling of U.S. relations with other countries while 50 percent disapprove. In contrast, just 40 percent approve of his handling of the economy, while 59

percent disapprove. And on health care, the approval rating stands at 39 percent, with 61 percent disapproving. His overall job approval is at 42 percent, with 58 disapproving.

The slightly higher ratings on foreign policy generally make sense, suggested Philip Salathe, 70, of Indianapolis, who participated in the poll.

Salathe said Obama in 2008 ran against Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who during the campaign joked about dropping bombs on Iran. "I figure we could fix the economy if it gets ruined and we can repeal any bad laws that get passed," Salathe said, but a military confrontation with Iran or other foreign policy crisis could have more disastrous consequences.

Salathe approves of the job Obama is doing overall but still thinks things are headed in the wrong direction. "We're not doing anything about the major problems facing humanity. Basically, we have a number of disparate goals that are at odds with each other," such as protecting the environment while promoting growth and urban development. He said Obama is the first Democrat he's voted for as president. He said he tends to favor Republicans.

Just 16 percent of those polled said they expected the situation in Afghanistan to "get better" over the next year; 32 percent said they expected it to "get worse" while about half said they expected the situation to "stay about the same."

Jennifer Reese, 28, of Burnsville, Minn., considers herself a Democrat and says she voted for Obama. But she questions whether he's the cause for the economy getting better.

"I think the economy is getting better, but I don't think it's necessarily because of what Obama's doing," she said. "That's the way things work. When things go down so far, then they're going to go back up."

She said she also believes both parties could do an equally good job protecting the country and that the pace of allied troop withdrawal from Afghanistan is "about right." She favors a continued presence of allied troops in the country to train and assist Afghan troops. "My family was in the military. My father was over there for a while and he says they're doing good things."

As for negotiations with Iran on curbing its nuclear program, Reese says she is pleased Iran is at the bargaining table. "Let's negotiate this, see what we can do," she said.

The poll showed Americans broadly approve of a tentative deal to curb Iran's nuclear program. Fifty-nine percent approved, 38 percent disapproved.

But that support was tentative, with more than 4 in 10 (44 percent) also saying it's unlikely the agreement will keep Iran from seeking to build its own nuclear weapon. Just 11 percent think that outcome is extremely or very likely.

Mark Dabney, 54, of Cartersville, Ga., who describes himself as a political independent who supports the tea party movement, disapproves of Obama's performance on both domestic and foreign policy fronts.

As for Iraq and Afghanistan, “I just believe that we shouldn’t go meddling in other countries’ internal affairs,” he said.

The AP-GfK poll was conducted Dec. 5-9 using KnowledgePanel, GfK’s probability-based online panel. For results based on all 1,367 adults, the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

KnowledgePanel is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Respondents were first selected randomly using phone or mail survey methods, and later, completed this survey online. People selected for KnowledgePanel who didn’t otherwise have Internet access were provided with access at no cost.