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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research
From: Jeremy Rosner, Stan Greenberg and James Carville

National Security as a Winning Issue for Democrats
Results from the Democracy Corps Research

Democrats now have a generational opportunity: for the first time in decades, national security has become a potentially winning issue for them, according to a new Democracy Corps survey.¹ With the public angry about the mismanagement of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, worried about America's declining standing abroad, and concerned about a host of other unaddressed security concerns, from weapons proliferation to global warming, Democrats have now reached parity with the Republicans on the most important measures of national security, and lead the Republicans on other crucial aspects of who the public trusts most in foreign policy.

In order to take advantage of this new parity, Democrats need to take a series of steps in the tone and content of their discussions about national security, as we enter the '08 election year:

- Above all, Democrats need to radically change the way they think and talk about these issues. Democrats should head into this election year *wanting, welcoming, and initiating* a debate about national security. It is time for the party to lose its reflexive defensiveness on national security, and to assume we can gain public support by focusing on Iraq, Iran, energy dependence, and other security issues.
- Democrats need to provide a positive agenda for how they will strengthen the country's security – beyond a change in course in Iraq and a redeployment of our troops. The major doubts swing voters have about Democrats on national security are they do not stand up to President Bush enough, and that they lack their own ideas on these issues.
- Democrats need to strengthen their bond with the armed services. One of the Party's biggest weaknesses on security issues remains a perception that Democrats are distant from the military. At a time when the uniformed military itself may be pulling away from President Bush and the GOP, there is an opportunity and need to strengthen this bond.

¹ Democracy Corps survey of 994 likely voters nationwide conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, October 21-23, 2007.

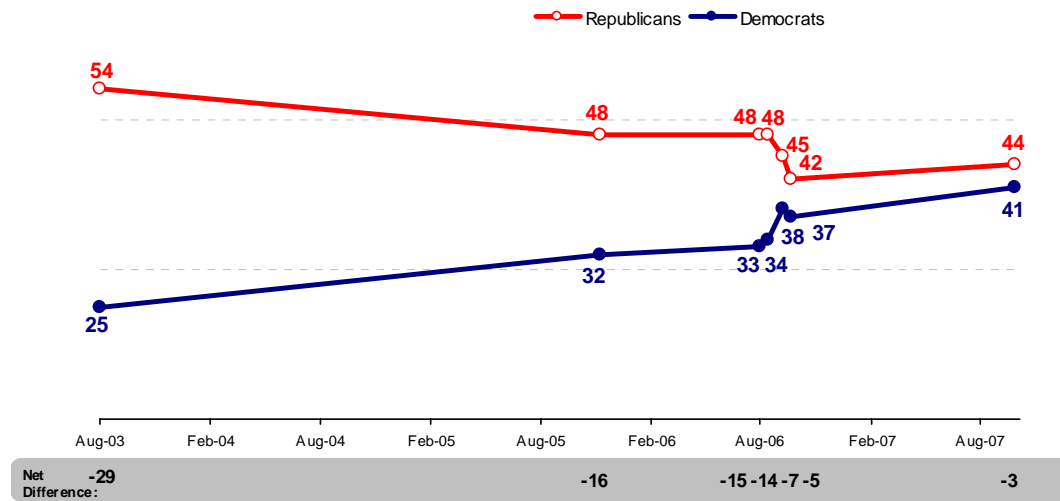
- Democrats need to develop a clearer narrative for characterizing the Republican record of mismanagement and politicization of the country’s national security efforts. As a starting point, Democrats might try this: “The Republicans on security: reckless and extreme – and the American people pay the price.”

Democrats’ New Parity on National Security

The latest Democracy Corps survey shows a remarkable development: Democrats are now roughly at parity with Republicans on which party voters trust more on national security. Just four years ago, in the months leading up to the 2004 election year, Republicans held an outsized 29-point advantage on this question, hobbling Democratic credibility.² Now it is only a 3-point gap – within the margin of error. Surveys by other organizations confirm the change.

Which Party Would do Better Job: National Security

I am going to read a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job with this issue: national security.



² Democracy Corps survey of 1,004 likely voters nationwide conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, August 26-28, 2003.

The improvement is especially dramatic among White men over 50 years of age. The key demographic at this point is not the fabled “security moms,” but rather “security guys” - America’s older men, who have come to doubt that the Republican security approach is either strong or effective.

Democrats have reached near-parity on other “hard” aspects of security as well, such as which party voters trust on “combating terrorism.” Just a year ago, Democrats lagged by 15 points; now the gap is only 5 points.³

On other aspects of the country’s security challenges – such as which party voters trust on “foreign policy” – Democrats have held a lead for some time, and there is evidence that that lead is growing. For example, the May 2007 CBS/*New York Times* survey shows the Democratic lead on this question among all adults has now reached 20 points, 51-31 percent.⁴

Much of this is a result of Iraq. The new Democracy Corps poll reveals record levels of public dissatisfaction with the war on some measures, and shows voters giving Democrats a 7-point advantage on which party would deal best with Iraq, 47-40 percent. But it is not just Iraq; this is an even bigger pattern, with signs of a public that has lost confidence in the broader ability of Republicans to manage the country’s affairs abroad.

There are of course still big challenges for Democrats in getting heard on national security, as we detail below. But at this point Democrats need to radically change their premises about how this set of issues works. There is no longer a reason to approach debates over these issues defensively. Instead, Democrats should *want, welcome, and initiate* debates over Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and America’s standing in the world, because the public increasingly feels we have the better answers. Moreover, by exposing the bankruptcy of the Republicans’ record and ideas on national security, Democrats can deny Republicans the ability to do what they have done in past elections – use these vital national security questions for divisive political purposes – and can instead start to build broad public support for a more effective national security agenda.

³ Democracy Corps survey of 1,000 likely voters nationwide conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, August 24-27, 2006.

⁴ New York Times/CBS poll conducted of 1,125 adults nationwide May 18-23, 2007.

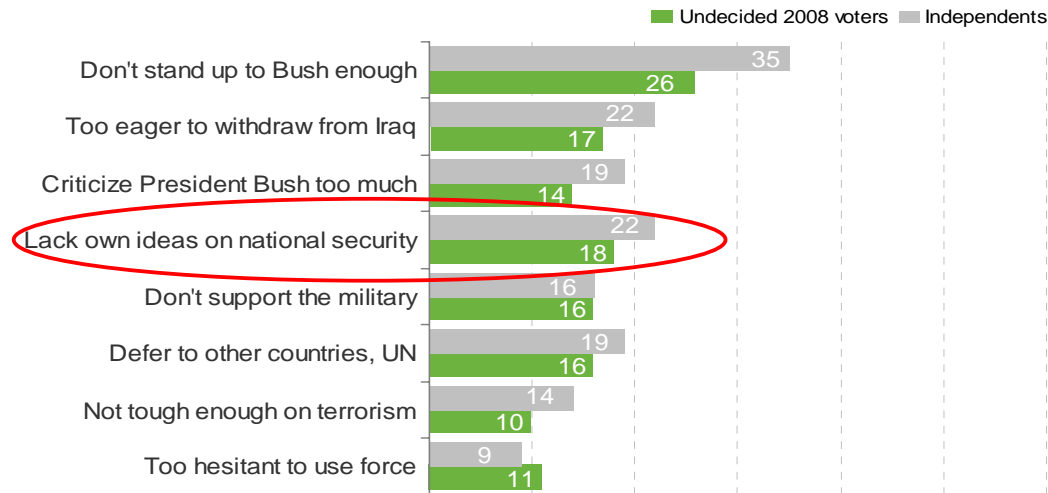
Demonstrate Clear, Positive Agenda on National Security Beyond Iraq

There are four keys for Democrats in order to exploit this opportunity. The first, as noted, is simply to change their tone and attitude toward these issues – assertive rather than defensive.

The second is to show they have a clear, positive plan for strengthening America’s security in a dangerous era – beyond the needed change of course and redeployment of American forces in Iraq. The biggest doubt that voters have about Democrats on national security is that they do not stand up enough to President Bush. But the data suggests voters are looking for more than opposition to his Iraq policies. One of the other strongest doubts about Democrats on national security issues, particularly among both self-identified independents and voters who are undecided on the 2008 presidential race, is that Democrats “lack their own ideas on national security.” It is a much bigger vulnerability than doubts about Democrats’ support for the military or their willingness to use force. Thus, voters need to see a positive agenda from Democrats on these issues.

Top doubts about Democrats on national security Independents and undecided 2008 voters only

Let me read you the doubts some people have about Democrats when it comes to national security. Regardless of whether or not you support the Democrats, please tell me which TWO of these are the biggest doubts you have about the Democrats when it comes to national security.



Democrats have already made major strides in laying out their national security plans – from the “Real Security” program described by House Democrats before the 2006 election, to the security

agendas put forward by the Party's leading presidential candidates. They need to build on this foundation as they enter 2008.

Strengthening the Bond with the Military

The third key for Democrats, in order to take advantage of their recent gains on security issues, is to strengthen their bond with the US military. This continues to be an area of Democratic vulnerability. Democrats lag by 22 points on which party voters trust more on "ensuring a strong military." This gap is down substantially from the 34-point deficit in September 2006. That is partly a testament to the steps Democrats have already taken, such as their support for better rotation policies for our troops and better benefits for veterans, as well as recruiting numerous military veterans to run as congressional candidates in 2006. But this perception is still a barrier to many aspects of the Party's communications on national security, and the Party needs to do even more to show its respect for the troops' service, and its determination to help them carry out their missions.

Significantly, annual polling by *Military Times* suggests the uniformed military itself has lost confidence in President Bush's management of the Iraq war, with only 35 percent approving of the way Bush is handling Iraq in their December 2006 survey.⁵ This dramatic vote of no-confidence also creates a chance for Democrats to be heard among those who carry the heaviest burden in the nation's security operations.

Defining the Narrative

A fourth challenge for Democrats is to develop a new narrative that fits with the new realities of public perceptions of the two parties' capabilities on national security. With the new parity in these perceptions, the old Republican characterizations of Democrats as weak on security no longer resonate strongly with the public. At the same time, the new dynamics give Democrats an opening to develop and deploy a consistent characterization of the Republicans' mismanagement of the country's national security policies over the past decade.

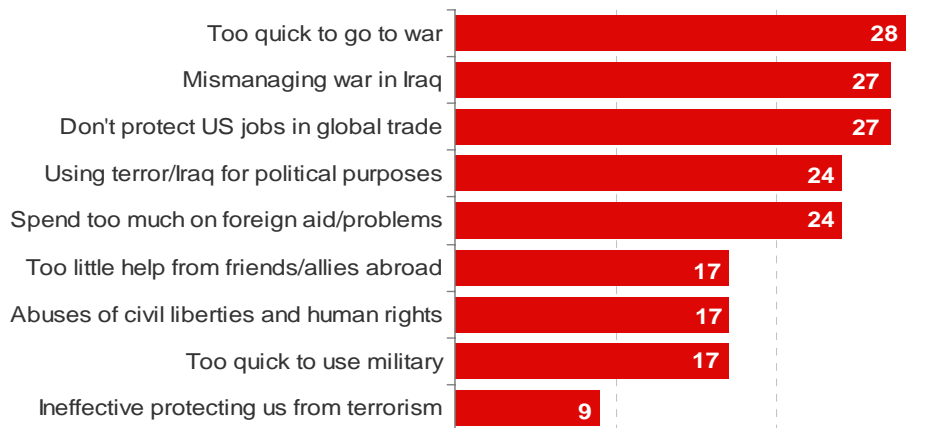
Our work on developing that narrative is still in a formative stage, but the new survey provides some early insights here. The major doubts about the Republicans at this point revolve around being too quick to go to war (28 percent cite this as one of their top two doubts about the Republicans) and then mismanaging the war in Iraq (27 percent). These concerns are supplemented by a feeling that the Republicans use national security to advance their partisan

⁵ Military Times survey, conducted by mail Nov. 13 – Dec. 22, 2006 with 945 respondents.

aims, and that they do not do enough to protect US jobs in global trade (also 27 percent, which is up 6 points from when this same question was asked in September 2006).

Top doubts about Republicans on national security

Let me read you the doubts some people have about President Bush and the Republicans when it comes to national security. Regardless of whether or not you support President Bush and the Republicans, please tell me which TWO of these are the biggest doubts you have about President Bush and the Republicans when it comes to national security.



All this, along with other recent research, points to an initial characterization of the Republicans along these lines: “The Republicans on security: reckless and extreme – and the American people pay the price.” We have not tested this or other alternative characterizations of the Republicans on national security issues, but will do so in future surveys. Exploring the right terms for this narrative will be a continuing aspect of our research on these issues.