



WTH does coronavirus mean for the 2020 election? Discussing the political ramifications of COVID-19

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Danielle Pletka: Hi, I'm Danielle Pletka.

Marc Thiessen: I'm Marc Thiessen.

Danielle Pletka: Welcome to our podcast, What the Hell Is Going On? Okay, you all know what the hell is going on because this is all we're going to be talking about on this podcast.

Danielle Pletka: So just to give you guys a taste of what's ahead, Marc and I thought that we would take the opportunity to talk to a colleague, a pollster, someone who Marc works with at Fox News, who has done some really interesting polling. And we'll give you the full intro and the full run-up in a minute or two, but I do think that how the president has handled this and how he will be perceived to have handled this puts an additional burden on him that I think he didn't expect even a month ago.

Marc Thiessen: No, absolutely. Look, there's a clear effort on the part of his opponents or a hope at least that this will be his Katrina, that this will be the moment when even his solid 40 to 45% supporters start abandoning him. I don't think that's very likely. I mean, there's so many unknowns here. We don't know will this hurt Donald Trump depending on how this comes out or do the measures we take succeed in containing the pandemic and then he's credited with the success. And also an issue because we love to talk about foreign policy is what role China will play in the coming election because one, will China be a factor now because this virus did come from China. I know on Twitter we're told that that's racist and you're not allowed to call it the Wuhan virus.

Danielle Pletka: That's such garbage.

Marc Thiessen: I know it is, but that's the ridiculous Twitter conversation that's happening now.

Danielle Pletka: People don't have enough things to do in their lives.

Marc Thiessen: But the reality is, we've discussed this on several podcasts now, Chinese totalitarianism is a public health threat to America. What happened in Wuhan has now reached every city in America and we are all sitting in our homes—we will so be after this podcast is over, because this is our last day with access to the

studio—we're all sitting in our homes and our kids are home from school and business is shutting down. People are being furloughed and laid off, restaurants closing because of something that happened in Wuhan. And so will that-

- Danielle Pletka: No, because of something that happened in Beijing. I don't want to blame the people of Wuhan. Yes, it's true, the wet markets, yada, yada. But at the end of the day, these decisions got made at the top by Xi Jinping.
- Marc Thiessen: Don't make it sound like we disagree about that.
- Danielle Pletka: No, we totally agree that this notion of racism is just literally people having not enough time on their hands. I mean, guys go out and get a hobby if you're really worried about talking about this virus is racism. I'm speechless, it's so absurd-
- Marc Thiessen: And find another name for Ebola and Zika and all the other viruses.
- Marc Thiessen: But Trump has been ...
- Danielle Pletka: He's been good on this. He's been good on the China vector. He's been good on the China nexus.
- Marc Thiessen: So has he be vindicated and will he have seen ... vindicated as saying that China's behavior is a threat to us? Will it hurt him politically? It's just-
- Danielle Pletka: I don't think it's going to hurt him. I think it's just much more a question of, "What have you done for me lately?" The problem with the 24-hour news cycle for us is not that people will have forgotten that he was one of the first to say that we need to stop traffic from China, which he was, and he has been completely vindicated in that. The problem is that there will have been so much water under the bridge by that point, there will have been so many stock disasters, there will be so many employment disasters that people will be focused on what it is he's going to do next. And of course, when you are the incumbent, you have all the responsibility. It's awesome—you and I used to talk about this when we were in government—it's great being in the minority because it's power without responsibility. And for Joe Biden and for the Democratic Party, this is an opportunity for them to sit back because they can't deliver anything.
- Marc Thiessen: Well, I find it fascinating in the Democratic debate that they had the other night that Joe Biden went after Bernie Sanders on China. He not only talked about his past support for the Sandinistas and his comments on Cuba, but then Bernie's response to that is always, "Well, people say that poverty has reduced in China and that's not supporting totalitarianism." And basically Joe Biden said, "Yes it is. And you've got to stop saying nice things about China." So it's fascinating how we've all become China hawks across the political spectrum.
- Danielle Pletka: Well, and not a moment too soon because the threat that China represents to its own people and to us is very real. Although on our last podcast, Derek Scissors said Joe Biden's record when he was vice president was decidedly not hawkish on China. So we're all going to have an opportunity to go back and look at that. And I'm really looking forward to this. But at the end of the day, this is Donald

Trump's game. It is Donald Trump's game to play and he's going to get criticized-

- Marc Thiessen: This is going to obviously depend on how the handling of the virus plays out, how the economic impact plays out. Derek the other night, he basically predicted this is going to be a V-shaped recession, a very rapid decline and very rapid recovery once we're no longer locked in our houses and economic activity starts because all the fundamentals of the economy are good. Productivity is high, unemployment is historically low, and so we should recover quickly once we've got a handle on the virus. That's a big if. But if it does, we could see a situation where the economy is booming again by the fall and Donald Trump is taking credit for having handled the biggest crisis of his presidency.
- Danielle Pletka: We have no idea what the next day is going to come. Almost literally.
- Marc Thiessen: We don't even know where we're going to record on our next podcast.
- Danielle Pletka: Exactly.
- Marc Thiessen: That's how fluid the situation is.
- Danielle Pletka: It's very fluid. But luckily we have someone to help navigate these fluid waters with us.
- Marc Thiessen: Very nicely done.
- Danielle Pletka: Thank you. I think that was a pretty elegant transition myself.
- Marc Thiessen: Wow.
- Danielle Pletka: Kristen Soltis Anderson is just terrific. I'm sure you guys have seen her on Fox News where she is a very thoughtful and balanced, fair and balanced almost you could say, voice on political polling. She's a pollster in her own right. She is the founder of something called Echelon Insights with Patrick Ruffini. They do really, really interesting work on a whole variety of issues and demographics. She really started as an expert on the youth vote, which I think is something that we're all recognizing is going to be hugely important in 2020. And in 2015, she published something, perfect name, called "The Selfie Vote: Where Millennials Are Leading America (And How Republicans Can Keep Up)."
- Marc Thiessen: God help us.
- Danielle Pletka: Cue old people laughing.
- Marc Thiessen: Get off my lawn. Now I sound like Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders. I'm sorry.
- Marc Thiessen: Kristen, welcome to the podcast.
- Kristen Soltis ...: Oh, thank you for having me.

- Marc Thiessen: Well, so you're sitting there at home-
- Kristen Soltis ...: Well, the technology they have now for allowing remote podcasting is great. So I'm sure you guys will continue to have excellent shows moving forward.
- Marc Thiessen: Absolutely. Well, look, this is not only going to affect our podcast, which is the most important thing in the world, but it's actually going to affect the 2020 elections. We'd like to explore with you a little bit how you think this coronavirus is going to impact the campaign both in the short term and the long term. What are your thoughts?
- Kristen Soltis ...: So I think it is likely to have much more of an impact than any of the news stories we've experienced over the last three years that have been billed as, "This is a bombshell, this changes everything, won't this be the thing that determines the election?" We've had a pretty turbulent couple of years, whether it is regarding foreign policy in the Middle East. It was not very long ago that we thought, oh my gosh, are we going to be at war with Iran by next week? There was impeachment. There was the Mueller Report. There have constantly been these stories that have been, "Oh no, is this going to be the thing that is the big issue that determines everything?" And the president's job approval through all of this has stayed pretty stable. Voters for the most part have tuned out things that are not directly affecting their lives even if they are big and scary and monumental, they are just trying to keep their heads down and get on with their day.
- Kristen Soltis ...: The difference with this story is putting your head down and getting on with your day is exactly what you're not supposed to do. You are supposed to be keeping yourself in your home. That there are going to be massive disruptions to people's daily lives, that it's going to hit them in their pocket books, it is going to change the way people's lives are being experienced and for weeks, if not months at a time. And so when you have something that big, it has to affect your view of leadership and of politics.
- Marc Thiessen: Do you have any thoughts about which way it cuts? I mean, for example President Trump tends to, let's say gently, exaggerate a lot and say things—he's a New Yorker, everything is the greatest, the biggest and all the rest of it. And people sort of bake that into their calculations. Okay, that's Trump again, that's fine. That's just how he is whether you like it or don't like it. But now in a crisis like this, people are looking to the president and the government for very accurate information. And that's been a problem. Is that characteristic of Trump going to be a problem for him as a result of this crisis?
- Kristen Soltis ...: Possibly. And I think the big challenge he was facing even before the coronavirus issue became so present and so dramatically upended American life is that in 2016, if you had voters that did not really love either party, Trump benefited from being an unknown, of being kind of a wild card, of being ... If you're frustrated with things, he was definitely going to be a disruptor. He was definitely going to do things differently. And so you could see in a lot of the sort of research after the election that for folks that went to the polls and said that they didn't like both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, Donald Trump tended to win out among those folks. This time around, I think as an incumbent, he already wouldn't be getting that kind of benefit of the doubt

- Kristen Soltis ...: Now, incumbent presidents tend to get reelected for a whole variety of reasons, that's just how we tend to do it. If Joe Biden is able to present himself as a force that he wants to be stabilizing, that those are the sorts of things that suddenly people are valuing that if unlike four years ago where people really wanted a disruptor who was going to shake things up, and instead people are looking for stability, comfort, et cetera. Particularly as we saw in the midterm, suburban voters really shifting from Republican to Democrat. Suburban moms who are now having to figure out what to do with their kids because their kids' schools have closed and their whole life is being upended and they're looking to our Federal Government for answers and clarity, and instead they're getting confusion and angry tweets. That's not what they're looking for and I think that is potentially problematic.
- Kristen Soltis ...: Now, if we get through this, and in the end everybody goes, "You know what, even if our response wasn't perfect, we made it through. Trump handled this crisis well," that could be a real boost to him. It could make him seem like he is this stabilizing force and given all things being equal, why don't we just stick with the guy we know rather than change to the guy that would be a change.
- Danielle Pletka: So I pulled up the RCP numbers. There hasn't been a ton of polling, although no better time to do polling than now because everybody's trapped by their phone. But the most recent was NBC-Wall Street Journal. So I think what you say is really interesting in the sense that when you want a security blanket, Donald Trump is not a security blanket. Donald Trump feels like you're running out into the Arctic with a bikini on. And not to put that really unpleasant image in everybody's head. So the latest was an NBC-WSJ, Wall Street Journal, poll from between March 11th and 13th. Interestingly, his numbers were still pretty high then. He was at 46 approval, 51 disapprove. And that's actually tighter than the average. Don't you think that it's possible that things might cut the other way, that fundamentally when Americans feel worried and threatened they actually hark back to sources of authority, kind of like George W. Bush's approval after 9/11?
- Kristen Soltis ...: Well, so it depends on, is this George W. Bush's approval after 9/11 or is it George W. Bush's approval after Katrina? I think that's what we still don't know yet.
- Danielle Pletka: Great question.
- Kristen Soltis ...: In contrast to Donald Trump who's job approval has sat at about 40 to 45% and has barely budged from the moment he took the oath of office, George W. Bush's soared after 9/11. And then by the time you got toward the end of his presidency, it cratered down into the 30s. Trump's in some way, because the country is so polarized, the whole idea of, "Could he shoot someone on 5th Avenue and his supporters stick with him?" has been tested. And if his job approval stays pretty stagnant through this crisis we'll sort of know, look, even a dramatic global pandemic and people still ... you like Trump, you stick with him, you don't like Trump, you don't. If anything has the potential to really shake up his numbers, it would have to be something this dramatic because thus far throughout all of the ups and downs of impeachment and Iran and Syria and everything, his numbers barely budged. This could be the thing that makes people think differently about this president.

- Marc Thiessen: So how does losing the rallies affect him?
- Danielle Pletka: Oh, interesting question.
- Kristen Soltis ...: So I think losing the rallies will probably ... I would assume it will affect him personally in that he loves the rallies so much. He thrives off of them. And they are a way for his supporters to feel a sense of unity, a sense of it's us against the world. And look, I'm here surrounded by so many people who agree with me. Look, I'm not alone. My family says I'm crazy, but I'm not crazy. Look, I'm here and all these other people are here with me. Yeah, so I think that they are important as a way for Trump supporters to feel solidarity in the face of a broader pop culture that sort of frowns on being a Trump supporter. I also suspect that's the sort of thing where hopefully by the summer we are past this and campaigns are able to begin resuming some kind of campaigning as normal.
- Kristen Soltis ...: So I think losing rallies now in the spring of an election year is not terribly likely to have an effect. I do think if we are still facing this crisis as we approach the fall, then serious questions need to get asked about how do we conduct elections in a world where having people congregate in lines in building is something we don't like? Hopefully American life can resume some sense of normal rhythm by summer and we don't have to worry about that in the short term. But that is one thing that keeps lurking in the back of my mind.
- Danielle Pletka: So another factor that is really potentially going to hit the president, and I'm curious how you see it is, one of the factors that we've all looked at is the economy. With an economy as good as it was up until the moment the coronavirus struck, it seemed hard to imagine that Americans would want to shift horses in midstream given how well this particular horse is doing. That's not true either. Have you done any thinking about what that might mean in the reelect?
- Kristen Soltis ...: So one of the things that most political scientists will tell you is fairly predictive of whether a president gets reelected or not, or at least their party, whether you will hold the White House or it flips, is the economy in the second quarter of an election year. And so we are about to enter the thick of sort of that most predictive piece of time. And you are right, I mean, Gallup was just releasing numbers a few weeks ago that Americans were feeling better about their own personal financial situation than they had since Gallup begun asking that question I think decades ago. So absolutely wild findings on that front that were great news for Trump. But you could also always have seen glass half full or glass half empty.
- Kristen Soltis ...: Glass half full is, hey look, majorities of Americans approve of the job the president is doing and they're feeling better about the economy than they have at any point in decades. At the same time with that kind of economy and your job approval is 44%, what's going on here? It's like you have to be actively working to have a bad job approval with that kind of economy.
- Danielle Pletka: Well, he does every day.
- Kristen Soltis ...: The second thing to keep in mind though is that I would do these focus groups around the country, I'd go to suburbs in particular because they're so politically

... there's such a focus on them now after the midterm. I would ask people how they felt about the economy. And this was weeks ago, this is January and earlier, people would say, "The economy is good, I feel pretty good about things. I see lots of construction happening in my neighborhood. That feels like a good thing, right?" But it was always kind of tinged with this, "I remember what it was like during the financial crisis where one day things looked good and the next day Bear Stearns was gone." And so I think there has been this latent sense out there that I have heard echoed time and again that things are good, but at any moment they could turn.

Marc Thiessen: And now they have.

Kristen Soltis ...: So I think even though voters had been telling pollsters like me, "I think the economy is good in the present moment," there had still been in that worry of fragility, and that this could all go away at any moment. Like Christ into people's belief, which may be why even though people were giving Trump high marks for the economy in the present, they were unwilling to reward him with support for the future.

Marc Thiessen: Well, it's interesting because the question is also if we go into a recession, what kind of recession is it? We had Derek Scissors on who's one of our economists and a China expert here, the other day. And he said that it's probably going to be a V-shaped recession, which means it's going to be a rapid decline and precipitous decline and then rapid and big uptick because the fundamentals of the economy are good, it's just that all the economic activity is stopping because of the self-quarantining. But one, do you think that voters are going to blame Donald Trump for a virus when they're factoring in the blame or credit for the economy and two, if we do have a V-shaped recovery where the economy quickly comes back, will that second quarter feeling that you described carry over into November?

Kristen Soltis ...: Look, if the economy is back running on eight cylinders and is going like gangbusters as we approach November, that's great news for everyone, including the president. But I think we are still way too early in this to even begin ... if my whole job is to look into the future and try to say what I think will happen, I am deeply uncomfortable doing that at this moment when we don't even know what the next week will look like. I mean, certainly an economic bounce back would be great for the president, but there's the health part of this as well as the economic part of this. And while the president has consistently had pretty good marks on the economy, he has had pretty poor marks on the issue of healthcare just generally, which is where you get voters who are sort of open to the idea of these more progressive, single payer or a public option type plans.

Kristen Soltis ...: There's a sense that Trump and the Republicans have not really had much to say on the issue of healthcare, especially now that "Obamacare is bad," has sort of exhausted its lifespan as a message for them. Do people primarily think of this as an economic problem or does this become a problem of government dysfunction and healthcare, which are the two issues I tend to see pop in the top of polls, and that is again, before coronavirus. That in a way, because the economy had been doing so well for so long, it had faded in voters' consciousnesses. It had been a top issue 2008 through, I guess about 2015 or

so. Economy had been the number one issue and that got replaced by healthcare and now has been replaced by government dysfunction in the surveys that I do. And so if this is viewed as a problem that is like, "Look, healthcare and government dysfunction are clearly front and center and I don't think the president has done a good job on either front," then I think that could be very damaging. I mean, that would be maximally damaging to him.

Danielle Pletka: So before we'd asked you to come on to talk about this survey that you've done on national security, which is something that the podcast focuses on, but you brought up something that's absolutely fascinating. So we're down to two dogs in the fight for the Democratic nomination. Bernie Sanders, Bernie "Medicare for All" Sanders, and Joe "I was born in 1904" Biden. And it's interesting, I mean, it's interesting of course that Bernie Sanders is the young people's candidate despite the fact that he and Biden are roughly at the same age.

Danielle Pletka: But one of the things that came out in their first mano a mano debate was this divide over Medicare for All. And I was interested to see that the press really slammed Bernie for not being up on the coronavirus and not capable of talking about it and answered everything with this sort of cookie cutter, one size fits all, "That's why we need Medicare for All. That's why we need Medicare for All." But do you think alternatively that Joe Biden, if he is meant to carry this forward into the general election, is actually woke enough with the spirit of the young people that have propelled Bernie Sanders forward, that he can answer the mail on being a good alternative on a health care for America?

Kristen Soltis ...: Yeah, so I think it's clear that there is a huge generational divide in the Democratic Party. The exit poll numbers coming out of these primary states are eye-popping. In that there was a generational component in 2016 but it has really just gone on overdrive this time. And frankly, the way Joe Biden's been able to lock down the nomination has been by consolidating older Democrats. That while last time around, Bernie Sanders had some appeal with some older Democrats, that appears to have largely evaporated. So the generational divide there is very stark. And I've always thought that that's a risk because something ... for Joe Biden, because for Hillary Clinton there was, she did not do significantly better among young voters versus Donald Trump, than Barack Obama did against Mitt Romney. That arguably if Donald Trump is supposed to be such an anathema to young voters and yet Hillary Clinton couldn't win a larger share of them against Donald Trump, was she just not that appealing to them? Then does Joe Biden have the same problem?

Kristen Soltis ...: But I think a core difference this time around will be one, even though in the democratic primary, young voters are not surging to turn out, in the midterm elections, young voters did surge to turn out. We know that midterm election participation was way up across all age groups. Comparing 2014 to 2018, it was just a more exciting midterm for a lot of people. But the increase in voter turnout by age cohort was dramatically higher among millennials even compared to other age groups. And once you become somebody who votes in midterms, you're definitely the kind of person who votes in presidential elections. So I think you are likely to see a lot of young people participating in the general election and even if they aren't, their hearts set on fire in love with Joe Biden, the good thing that Joe Biden has working for him is Donald Trump is very motivational.

Very motivational to those who love him and very motivational to those who don't. So he does not need to inspire passion in and of himself because he has an opponent that will inspire a lot of passion for him.

- Marc Thiessen: So that was the logic behind Mitt Romney's campaign in 2012 too, wasn't it? Do you think that anti-Trumpism is going to do for Democrats what anti-Obamaism didn't do for Republicans?
- Kristen Soltis ...: Well, I think anti-Obamaism was always just much more kind of confined to A-
- Danielle Pletka: The fringes.
- Kristen Soltis ...: Yeah. I think if you're looking at your sort of median swingish or on the bubble type voter in 2012, the demographics and what's motivating them would be very different than this time around, folks who really feel strongly about not wanting Donald Trump to be president anymore is a broader group of people. And it frankly includes a lot of people who are more likely to be on the bubble as to whether they vote or not. Especially again, younger voters. So if they are extra motivated, not by a Democratic primary where it's a bunch of old men yelling at each other on a stage, but a general election where it will be old men yelling at each other on a stage to be fair, but will include Donald Trump who again, he's very motivational whether you love him or not.
- Danielle Pletka: And weirdly despite being older and well over 70 and in the same cohort as all these people, he doesn't seem old. He has other deficiencies but he doesn't seem doddering or decrepit in the way that even Bernie Sanders and certainly Joe Biden does.
- Kristen Soltis ...: He definitely brings an energy to the table that-
- Danielle Pletka: I could hear that diplomacy.
- Kristen Soltis ...: We're going to have some interesting debates on our hands if debates wind up happening later this year.
- Marc Thiessen: I want to come back to something that you had sort of mentioned earlier in the interview, which is that this could have an actual impact on actual voting in terms of showing up and casting your ballots. If the virus either goes away but then resurges in the fall or it's still an issue in the fall, it could have an impact on turnout and it would create a barrier to voting for people who are less motivated. Would that do you think turn it into even more of a base election than it's already becoming?
- Kristen Soltis ...: Well, I think there is a real value right now with months to go for states to begin considering making moves toward expanded absentee ballot access or all mail voting. There are lots of states that have made that change and it's gone quite well. In those cases, you do have serious questions around things like ballot harvesting. I know right now this is something that is sort of being debated about... Can volunteers, should they be going to old people's homes and picking up their saliva-licked ballots and collecting them all and going house to

house, that could be a potential threat. So finding ways that you can do this safely, but that can expand people's access as much as possible. I think states need to be thinking about that now.

Kristen Soltis ...: Because the last thing we want ... It would be unbelievably damaging for our democracy, frankly that at a moment when so many people have doubts about things, whether it's voter fraud, election integrity, is there meddling from other places. All sorts of notions that there are exterior actors who want to harm the US and in particular harm our democracy. And if all of a sudden we are not equipped to be able to function and have elections properly that can engage the most amount of people as possible, that's a huge problem. And it's especially a problem because we have so many months now until November to try to prepare for it. So states really do need to begin looking into ways that they can make the shifts that many other states have already made to expand the availability of mail in ballot access so that you don't have these sort of differentials in access to being able to vote.

Danielle Pletka: So you gave me the perfect segue. I really wonder if because we are confronting this, that we are looking at other changes. You rightly say that the landscape in the United States is going to change. People are going to have different attitudes towards what the candidates have to offer, towards how they vote, towards participatory democracy. But one of the things that we've been talking about until we turned inward really in the last three or four days was China, China, China, China, China, and the impact that the Communist Party's mismanagement of the coronavirus had on the United States, on the spread to places like Italy and elsewhere. Do you think there's some possibility that especially understanding and all the work that you've done recently on differing attitudes on national security, whether there might be some changes in American attitudes on foreign policy?

Kristen Soltis ...: So possibly, and I think a lot of this will come down to... right now there are what I think are very silly Twitter debates happening about should you call this a virus that is coming from China or not. I mean, there are silly debates that are happening primarily on the Internet and are not front of mind for most Americans. But I do wonder to what extent when all is said and done, as this unfolds and we really take stock of how this progressed and what information people did and didn't have, how people will view China's role in all this. Because we already know that while there are certain countries that when you ask voters, "Do you believe country X is an adversary of ours or not?" You know that Democrats overwhelmingly will say they view Russia as the biggest threat to our security, or for Republicans, they'll tend to say Iran.

Kristen Soltis ...: But China is one where you actually don't see a huge partisan divide. That folks from both parties seem to be of the mind that China is a country to be sort of watched carefully and with skepticism and confronted with strengths, but that they are not outright an adversary of ours at the moment. And so I suppose if this winds up being something where the Chinese Communist Party is viewed as being clearly culpable in what has become a global tragedy, if that shapes things at all. There was some great polling from the Pew Research Center where they have been tracking American attitudes toward other countries going back many, many years and pretty consistently Americans have had a positive view of China.

They have not really viewed China as an adversary. Those numbers have taken a dramatic ... they took a dramatic dive last year and again, that's before coronavirus.

- Kristen Soltis ...: Remember right before all of this coronavirus stuff when we were talking about Hong Kong last, it wasn't about Hong Kong's extraordinary ability to engage in social distancing and become a model for how you deal with this. It was about the Chinese government dealing with Hong Kong and American businesses like the NBA trying to navigate the politics of, "How do you criticize China without hurting your bottom line?" And so already this question of the world's entanglement with China and how do we engage with this massive, important, influential country, but do so responsibly. I think already those questions have been surfacing for Americans and this just sort of throws it into very sharp relief.
- Marc Thiessen: So you did this big foreign policy poll, you were pointing out that voters are less concerned about foreign policy than healthcare, education, taxes, et cetera, because people don't really have daily contact with the issue. I think you said that the average person is more likely to negotiate with a health insurer than negotiated with Iran. But now with the Wuhan virus, people have daily contact with the effects of Chinese totalitarianism. Do you think that foreign policy will be a bigger issue and more on the forefront of people's minds?
- Kristen Soltis ...: Well, this story directly connects our global world and our engagement with other countries to those very specific issues that people had already had top of mind. So now you may be negotiating with a health insurer about how to pay for your coronavirus test. You may be looking at your paycheck and wondering if your paycheck is going to come next month because of a virus that came from overseas. What I think gives this the most ability to pop into people's daily consciousness and reshape their thinking is because unlike the General Soleimani and then the tensions with Iran that occurred, the coronavirus story is one that does touch on those issues people are thinking about day-to-day much more so.
- Kristen Soltis ...: But also another big thing that I tend to find about foreign policy polling and public opinion on the issue is that people are very willing to change their mind on foreign policy precisely because they don't have as much direct contact with the issue. So how someone feels about healthcare might be pretty set in stone because they've had lots of personal experience that over the years has shaped their views. But foreign policy people are much more likely to kind of outsource their decision making on these issues to trusted leaders whose judgment they follow, which again is how all of a sudden you have Democrats shifting from believing that Russia is no big deal in 2013 to believing they're our number one geopolitical foe now. And Republicans, vice versa, that people take their cues from their leaders on foreign policy issues but they don't have personal information to work on.
- Kristen Soltis ...: The coronavirus story is one where now Chinese totalitarianism is in people's daily lives. I'm still curious and I don't know that we have enough data to suggest that people are thinking about China in a negative way with regards to coronavirus on a daily basis. For many Americans, I would be curious to see if this narrative changes at all over the course of the next couple of weeks, but I would

assume people know that the disease originated in China, but I'm unsure how people's views on the Chinese regime itself will change as a result of this story.

Danielle Pletka: Right. And I mean, the problem with national security is that it has become like everything else, which is that it is viewed through a partisan prism. I mean, your polling numbers, there was more consensus on China between Democrats and Republicans, but it was still viewed lower down than Iran and Russia and actually North Korea in the case of Democrats. And so we'll have to see. The one thing I think that does give you reason to think that this could have some legs is that it furthers a narrative that had already been gaining steam. As you rightly noted, the Pew Report showed there's really been a sea change in attitudes towards China. It's been so much in the news because of trade, because of economic issues, because of political issues-

Marc Thiessen: Because of Trump.

Danielle Pletka: And because of Trump and it'll be very interesting to see how the different campaigns actually decide to handle this because there could be some real implications for the global economy as well.

Kristen Soltis ...: Absolutely. It can be easy to think about these issues in separate buckets. You have your healthcare issue over here, here's the economic issue over here, you have your foreign policy issue over here, but these things are all so tightly tied up in one another these days that we do need to think about them as much more linked than I think prior to this week, many people had thought of them as being.

Marc Thiessen: So exit question. What was the most surprising thing you found in your polling on foreign policy?

Kristen Soltis ...: So in my poll, what we did was, because I find people's opinions on foreign policy can be pretty malleable if you ask someone, "Well, do you support the Iran deal?" Most people don't know what's in the Iran deal. The idea of a deal sounds good, Iran may be not so good, and you're making a gut decision based on what the political leaders you trust have sort of told you about at that point. So I tend to be skeptical of a lot of foreign policy polling. What I wanted to do then was ask people questions just about their gut instinct on "When is it good for America to work with other countries versus going it alone?" and then, "When should America be comfortable using military strength versus just relying on sort of more soft power type tools."

Kristen Soltis ...: And so in the survey I asked nine questions about military strength in different situations where, "Should we or should we not do things like participate in UN peacekeeping missions, increase the size of our military, use military force to preempt genocide or human rights violations?" those sorts of things. And then on the international cooperation questions, things like, "Should we be promoting American values abroad? Should we be trying to collaborate with other countries to tackle global issues like the environment?" Essentially, how much should we be looking to the rest of the world and trying to engage versus looking inward and focusing mostly on ourselves. And what we found in the survey was that Democrats by and large, they all believe we should be looking outward. There are very few Democrats who say, "You know what, let's focus

home first, let's not worry about what's going on overseas."

- Kristen Soltis ...: But you do have a dramatic difference about how much comfort they have with military strength. You have real kind of hawks versus doves in the Democratic Party. But everybody's pretty internationalist, while on the Republican side it's a little bit more mixed. You have some more folks who are really more of those kind of true, "Look, we need to focus at home. Let's start here first. I'm less interested in cooperating with other countries or even worrying about them. Let's start here." But you also have folks who I guess they are more hawkish but less interested in international cooperation. So you don't really find a lot of that among Democrats. Among Democrats who want to use the military more, they want to do so with our allies. It's not just, "Oh, let's use the military for our own purposes." And so seeing these sort of divides, again, it's not just one question, we have nine different questions on each of those axes to get a more complex picture of where people stand and where these divides between the parties really are.
- Marc Thiessen: Well, it's a fascinating poll and this has been a fascinating conversation and I hope as the election winds through this year, we can call on you again to come and give us your insights.
- Kristen Soltis ...: Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me.
- Danielle Pletka: Oh, thanks a ton Kristen. You were awesome.
- Marc Thiessen: All right, Dany. So Kristen's poll has fascinating numbers here on what do voters think is the greatest threat to US security. For Republicans, overwhelmingly, it's Iran. 31% said Iran was the greatest threat. For Democrats, now that the Cold War is over, and '80s called and they want their foreign policy back, 34% say it's Russia. The Democrats are post-Cold War cold warriors. China is 18% of Republicans and only 10% of Democrats. So it really-
- Danielle Pletka: Not a priority.
- Marc Thiessen: Not a priority.
- Danielle Pletka: Right.
- Marc Thiessen: And yet here we are in a situation where this Chinese novel coronavirus has literally shut down our economy.
- Danielle Pletka: Yeah. It's quite remarkable. And I think that that's true before the coronavirus struck. It is absolutely remarkable that a country of 1.4 billion people with a rapidly modernizing army that is a known adversary to the United States that has been operating and attacking us in the cyberspace over years is clocking in at 10% for Dems and even at 18% for Republicans. A lot of this just tells us how politicized everything has become. You alluded to one of our favorite and oft quoted lines that Barack Obama hit Mitt Romney with in the 2012 debates where Mitt Romney identified Russia as one of the greatest geopolitical threats to the United States. And Barack Obama turned around and said "The '80s called, they

want their foreign policy back." Yeah. Just to remind us that we didn't really love Barack Obama's foreign policy either, but that's the contempt that they had for the challenge that Russia represented. Now, of course Russia, the 30 million people that Stalin killed, whatever.

Marc Thiessen: The Gulags.

Danielle Pletka: The Gulags, the captive nations, the threat to Europe, whatever.

Marc Thiessen: Hacking the DNC emails, now they've crossed the line.

Danielle Pletka: It was completely ridiculous. And the funny thing is this mania has affected everybody. So 20% overall think that Russia is a threat, 6% of the GOP, which is also stupid for them to say.

Marc Thiessen: Yeah.

Danielle Pletka: What's wrong with people? How can 6% of Republican voters not recognize that an authoritarian, increasingly totalitarian regime in Russia poses a serious threat to us and to our allies?

Marc Thiessen: Well, because I think what Kristen was pointing out is the fact that people's views on foreign policy are less well-formed than their views on tax policy or healthcare or other things because they're not dealing with it every day, right? We have general views about our engagement in the world. Most Americans I think as a general view are reluctant internationalists. They want us to be a leader in the world. They think it's important that we remain a superpower. They think it's important that we have a moral foreign policy. But they don't want to go slaying dragons unless they really threaten us. And so we don't think about these things until a threat comes to our door. I would venture to say that those numbers on China will be very different a month from now if you asked the same poll.

Danielle Pletka: While we were talking, I was thinking about this, there was a very famous book written I think in 1912 by a man named Norman Angell. It has not withstood the test of time, but in it he wrote, borders were dissolving and trade was growing and that interaction between peoples was so important and had grown so much that we would never face another World War or another war at all. And of course, two years later we had World War I and then not long thereafter World War II.

Marc Thiessen: And Winston Churchill famously quoted that in the world crisis right before World War I and said, "War he wrote is too foolish, too fantastic to be thought of in the 20th century. Civilization has climbed above such perils. The interdependence of nations and trade and traffic, that sense of law, the Hague Convention, liberal principles, high finance, common sense have rendered such nightmares impossible." And then Churchill asked, "Are you quite sure? It would be a pity to be wrong?" And it was more than a pity and it was wrong.

Danielle Pletka: Yeah. And unfortunately we are looking right now at the kind of assumptions that were made then, which is that this can't happen. The world can never go in that direction. We've gone too far. We've come too far. The globalized world,

borders, whatever it is.

Marc Thiessen: Literally the same thing.

Danielle Pletka: And the answer is the gods always want to show us when we presume too much.

Marc Thiessen: Yes. So if I was in the Trump administration what I would be advising the president to do, after this crisis has been contained-

Danielle Pletka: I wish you were in the Trump administration. I'd miss you, but they could use someone sensible.

Marc Thiessen: But if I was in the administration advising the president, after this is contained, after the virus has been ... the curve has been flattened or splattered as Dr. Fauci said the other day, and we're starting to come out of the recovery, I would advise the president to give a major speech on the threat posed by China and to lay this at the feet of Beijing and to say that, "This is why I've been saying we need to move our supply chains out of China. This is why we need to be less dependent on China." And truly lay this at their feet because one, it would be correct. And two, I think we need to have a really serious discussion as we had with Derek on the podcast the other day about our relationship with China going forward after this because this is the Chinese coronavirus. This is the Wuhan virus. It came here. It's shutting down our economy and once we get a handle on this thing, we need to do something about it to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Danielle Pletka: Okay. And for those of you who are worried about China might retaliate against Marc Thiessen ...

Marc Thiessen: They've already got my security clearance forms-

Danielle Pletka: Just remember, self-distancing is the right choice. Hey guys, thank you so much for listening. This has really been an interesting series of conversations. We're going to do our best to keep up with the podcasts.

Marc Thiessen: We are.

Danielle Pletka: Suggestions, ideas, reviews, rating and lots and lots of love, always welcome. Haters, you must go away.

Marc Thiessen: We might have to call it in, but that's what Dany does every day.

Danielle Pletka: Marc, never calls in being a jerk. Bye guys.

Marc Thiessen: Bye.

Danielle Pletka: Stay safe.

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