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*CBS News*

# ***FACE THE NATION***

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Foreign Relations Committee**

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***FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS  
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, can Democrats stop President Bush from sending more troops to Iraq? We'll talk about that with Senator Chuck Hagel, who has emerged as the main Republican critic of the president's war plan. Congress is heading to a showdown this week over what to do about Iraq. Will other Republicans join Hagel and the Democrats in a resolution opposing the president's plan? And what is the Nebraska senator's plan? We'll ask him about that and the entry of Senator Hillary Clinton in the presidential race. Then we'll get context from three top political reporters--John Harris, Jim VandeHei and Josephine Hearn--who have left their newspapers to form politico.com, a new Web site that promises all politics all the time. My final word today, and strap yourself in for this one, I have a compliment for Congress.

But first, Iraq and politics on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now, from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. Senator Hagel joins us in the studio this morning.

Thank you for coming, Senator. I want to start with what I thought was a fairly extraordinary story in The Washington Post today. The Post reports that when President Bush met with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki back on November 30th that Maliki gave him the following information. It was his plan. He said that he wanted no more US troops in Iraq, he wanted US troops in Baghdad to withdraw to the outskirts of the city and let the Iraqis take over in Baghdad, and he wanted other US troops to shift to the borders with Iran and Syria so they could concentrate on tracking down al-Qaeda.

The president, we are told, said that he didn't think that would work, that it would cause Baghdad to just collapse into chaos. But frankly, that sounds like the recommendations that the Baker-Hamilton Commission reported back after studying this problem for about a year. What is your reaction to that?

Senator CHUCK HAGEL (Republican, Nebraska; Foreign Relations Committee): I think your brief analysis is correct. It does include what the prime minister framed up for the president, if that story is correct. Very much the foundation of the 79 recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton report, which I supported, which I have said publicly and privately that I thought the administration should seize upon that, build upon that. Because first, it represents a diplomatic framework for dealing with, not just with the immediate problems in Iraq, but the future. In fact, the Iraqis were already doing this, reaching out the Iranians, reaching out to the Syrians. They've been to Damascus and Tehran. That is going forward. And I'm very happy, very pleased, because I think, in the end, some of us believe, I suspect Baker-Hamilton believe, that there is going to be--have to be a diplomatic resolution. That's going to include a diplomatic accommodation, but also a political accommodation within Iraq that's going to require some shifts. And

what Maliki was talking about I think makes sense. In fact, the resolution that Senators Biden and Levin and Snow and I have put forward details, in some ways, and references, in general ways, exactly what you just talked about, exactly what supposedly Maliki told the president and is incorporated in the Baker-Hamilton report.

SCHIEFFER: So you think the president made a mistake here in not accepting some of these recommendations?

Sen. HAGEL: I've said that he has made a mistake. I think, for whatever reason, the advice he got was not very solid, because I have believed from the beginning, Bob, that the future of Iraq will be determined by the Iraqi people. We can help. For example, the territorial integrity of Iraq. That is something that we could do, to start helping seal off those western borders. That's what Maliki's talked about. We had a panel of four former retired four star generals before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee this week, various ideas and positions. But one of those generals said that this was a fool's errand to continue to put American troops in the middle of a sectarian civil war. I think Maliki was moving in the right direction. I hope he continues to move in the right direction. The future of Iraq is not going to be determined by American military. And, by the way, Generals Casey and Abizaid said this in open hearing in November. So I too found that front page story in The Washington Post both puzzling and also encouraging.

SCHIEFFER: You said on C-SPAN, you were asked would you consider running as an independent for president if you decide to seek the presidency, which I know you're thinking about. You side-stepped that. So I want to ask you right here at the top, are you--would you--are you thinking of leaving the Republican Party in order to underline your opposition to the war?

Sen. HAGEL: Well, first, I'm not a candidate for any office. I may be. I'll make that decision soon. Second, if I would be a candidate for the presidency, it would not be a candidacy based on just the Iraqi war. I am an accumulation of my past experiences. Each candidate now in the presidential race, each member of Congress, certainly, the Iraq war is the centerpiece of what's going on in our country, in the world, the focus, the energy, the leadership, and it will determine a great deal about the future of our foreign policy.

SCHIEFFER: So if you run, you're going to run as a Republican.

Sen. HAGEL: If I would decide to run, I will run as a Republican. But let me make one additional point on this. I think we are living through one of the great historical political reorientations of our time. I think we are seeing defined right now, through the process, and it'll continue right up to November of next year, a new center of gravity for both parties based on beliefs, philosophies.

For example, the Republican Party, interestingly enough, as the new chairman of the Republican Party said in his acceptance speech two days ago, needs to get back to what it once stood for. The party that I first voted for on top

of a tank in the Mekong Delta in 1968 is not the party I see today, Bob. Fiscal responsibility, engagement with others, pro-trade, personal responsibility, less government--that's not who we are today. Parties should be the framework of philosophies and beliefs. Now, if that goes so far away from what I believe, then I wouldn't sit here this morning and say, 'Well, there's no way I wouldn't join another effort or run as president of the United States as an independent.' I don't know...

SCHIEFFER: You're not thinking of becoming...

Sen. HAGEL: ...where this is going to go.

SCHIEFFER: ...a Democrat, are you?

Sen. HAGEL: No, I'm not thinking of doing anything right now except sorting through my immediate decisions that I'm going to have to make if I decide to go forward with an exploratory committee to look at the possibility of being president. I would do that as a Republican. But what I am saying is that where this is going, Bob, I don't know. None of us can go--can sense that now. But I will say again, we are seeing a reformulation, a transformation of American politics that we have not seen in a long time today.

SCHIEFFER: All right, let's get to some immediate news. Tuesday the president's going to make his State of the Union message. On Wednesday the Senate Foreign Relations Committee begins work on that resolution opposing the expansion of the war in Iraq, that you, Senator Snow, and Democrats Levin and Biden are sponsoring. How many senators do you think will go along with you on that resolution at this point?

Sen. HAGEL: The quick answer's I don't know. The reason that I did everything I could to help craft that resolution was to propel, project, to insist on a congressional, therefore national debate on where we go from here in Iraq.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Sen. HAGEL: We've been there almost four years. And you know all the numbers that--investments that we've made in blood and treasure. And we are worse off today in Iraq than we were anytime over the last four years. The president's correct when he says we need a re-evaluation.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Sen. HAGEL: Re-evaluation. We need a new direction. I happen to believe that this is what he's saying is not the responsible new direction we need.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me...

Sen. HAGEL: We need--we need to put the Congress on record here, Bob. We need to have that debate. There'll be more resolutions, there'll be other resolutions.

SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

Sen. HAGEL: I don't care whose resolution passes. That's insignificant to me. But I want every 100 members of the United States Senate to have to take a position on this. We have kids dying every day. It is wrong to put American troops in the middle of a sectarian civil war.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this question: How many Republicans would you have to have on that resolution to make this a bipartisan resolution? We know two of you, because you're sponsoring it...

Sen. HAGEL: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: ...you and Senator Snow. You think you could get as many as a dozen?

Sen. HAGEL: Well, I would answer it this way. We had a Foreign Relations Committee hearing a week ago where we had before us Secretary of State Rice. There are 21 members on that Foreign Relations Committee--10 Republicans, 11 Democrats. I don't believe there was one Republican senator who came forward with any kind of enthusiasm or any kind of strong support of the president's plan. Now, most likely we're going to have eventually a vote or a number of votes on Wednesday in the Foreign Relations Committee marking this up. There'll be amendments. There may be another resolution offered in its place. That's fine, that's what we should do.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this, senator. Vice President Cheney says this sort of thing undercuts the troops. What's your response?

Sen. HAGEL: Well, let me tell you this. I served in Vietnam in 1968. Others did, too--Jim Webb, John McCain, John Kerry, other members in the House. In 1968, when I was there with my brother, worst year, deaths, I would have welcomed the Congress of the United States to pay a little attention as to what was going on. I would have welcomed that. That is complete nonsense to say we're undercutting the support of the troops. What are we about? We're Article I of the Constitution. We're a co-equal branch of government. Are we not to participate? Are we not to say anything? Are we not to register our sense of where we're going in this country on foreign policy?

Bottom line is this: Our young men and women and their families, these young men and women who are asked to fight and die, deserve a policy worthy of those sacrifices. I don't think we have one now. And we have to have a Congress...

SCHIEFFER: Do you think--does the Congress have the ability or, I should say, the political will to cut off the funding if it comes to that? And would that undercut the troops?

Sen. HAGEL: Well, that has not been discussed over on the Senate side. I know there's some consideration or at least some conversation over in the House side. What we don't want to happen, Bob, is to get to that point. We

don't want to so divide this country and so divide the Congress like happened on Vietnam on 1975 when the Congress pulled the plug. That's what some of us want to avert. And if you keep this bottled up by not talking about it, when, for example, today, 22 American kids were killed in Iraq over the last 24 hours. Now, is the American public so weak and they want to put their heads in the sand so deeply that they don't think we should talk about this? If you don't talk about it, if you don't get an engagement of the American people in Congress, what could happen here? What could happen is some kind of cutoff. I don't support that, Bob. I've not supported that. But that's not what we're talking about now.

SCHIEFFER: Well, you have said that the president's policy is, quote, "morally wrong." Now, is that a little strong?

Sen. HAGEL: That's not what I've said. That's not what I've said. What I said was it is morally wrong to continue to put American troops in the middle of a clearly defined sectarian civil war--Iraqis killing Iraqis, Shias killing Sunnis, Shias killing Shias--and think that somehow we're going to stop that or somehow we are going to have some sense of resolution because of that. I think that's morally wrong. Now, there are other points of view on that, and that's fair, but here, let me get back to a point that I think is very important. We should not hide any longer, the Congress of the United States. Let every member of the Senate express himself or herself on this position. We owe that to the American public, and we owe it to those kids we're asking to make those sacrifices.

SCHIEFFER: Final question. The president says if we pull out, it would be chaos there. What do you think would happen if the president took your suggestions and we began to draw down troops?

Sen. HAGEL: Well, you know, there are quite a few smart people on that Baker-Hamilton Commission that produced 79 reports, starting with Lee Hamilton and Jim Baker. You had people on there like Ed Meese, who has never been referred to as a liberal. All 10 unanimously suggested, recommended those 79 recommendations. And all 10 said we ought to start having our troops drawing down out of there early next year, we should engage Iran and Syria. Many of us believe that's the way to do it.

We have right now anarchy in Iraq. We have disaster in Iraq. It's not getting better; it's getting worse. So to say somehow that, if we eventually leave there, it's going to be anarchy, no one wants a defeat. No one wants to put America or the Middle East in a worse situation. I've not heard of anybody doing that or wanting to do that. What we're trying to do is come up with a relevant, realistic approach bringing the partners in, letting Maliki do what he suggested to the president he'd do, and find a way out of the militarily committed peace of this. That's what Baker-Hamilton said. That's what I believe.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you very much, senator.

Sen. HAGEL: Thank you.

SCHIEFFER: Appreciate you coming by.

I'll be back in a moment with our roundtable.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And we're back now with John Harris, Jim VandeHei and Josephine Hearn, and they are all off on what I know they feel is an exciting new project. They have left their newspapers, along with, what, about 20 more reporters from around the country, to form a new Web site called politico.com. They will be all politics, all the time. It begins on Tuesday.

John, why in the world would you do that?

Mr. JOHN HARRIS (Editor-in-Chief, Politico.com): Well, Bob, we are like you. We love politics; we have spent our career covering politics. We believed if we assembled the best collection of reporters that we could find that we would be producing a very interesting publication. And if we have interesting stories, we think there's a huge audience out there that wants to learn the story and also the story behind the story, the back story, if you will, about what's going on in national politics. Senator Hagel just a minute ago talked about these being transformational times. This is one of the most consequential elections that we--can be seen in at least a generation or maybe more, and we believe that we want to be all over that story and that there's a huge audience in Washington and outside Washington that shares our intense interest in this election.

SCHIEFFER: And the good news for us at CBS News is you'll be partnering with us to cover this campaign, beginning right now and going all the way through the election.

Mr. HARRIS: We can't wait.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Jim, let's talk--let's talk about it. What'd you think about what Senator Hagel just said?

Mr. JIM VANDEHEI (Executive Editor, Politico.com): Well, I think it's fascinating to see all the opposition to President Bush. What you have to look for going forward now is how many Republicans get on that resolution and actually say no, do not do this. That number seems to be growing by the day. And if, when this resolution comes to the floor, you have two thirds of members--including a big chunk of Republicans--saying do not do the surge, that is one heck of a conflict between the president and now Congress, a lot of the commanders who are on the field, and a lot of people in the foreign policy establishment.

SCHIEFFER: People say, well, it's not binding, there's no force of law in it.

Mr. VANDEHEI: There's not...

SCHIEFFER: But it will still have an impact, won't it?

Mr. VANDEHEI: You know, the Constitution obviously gives the president tremendous power. But of course it has a context, and it sets this political context. We have the president, you know, he's--already his popularity is very low. There's a lot of opposition to what he's doing. And if he starts to lose that Republican support--he's never really had, you know, firm support from Chuck Hagel, who's been a critic of this from the beginning. But when you start to see people like John Warner, people who are really part of the Republican establishment who are questioning him more and more strongly, that's problematic. And I think there are limits to that support. Now, true, Congress is not going to cut off funding, which is the only thing Congress could really do to tie his hands. But the more opposition there is, the harder it is for Bush to pull this off.

SCHIEFFER: And we learned that Senator Warner plans to introduce his own resolution, probably tomorrow, and we're told that will not endorse what the president has done. It will express some sort of reaction, but it will not be, as I understand, it will not be an endorsement.

Mr. VANDEHEI: Right. You can count on one hand the number of senators who are out there and fervently in support of what President Bush is doing. There are some that are sort of tepid in their support, but there's just not that big well of support that there was, you know, even six months ago. When they said support fades, it's harder and harder for the president to do what he wants to do. That Washington Post story I think is very problematic in the context of what senators are thinking about. When you have Maliki essentially saying what that resolution says. It says you know, you didn't have to go into Baghdad. You could have moved those troops outside of Baghdad, and you could have had the Iraqis take over security. That's a--it's a point we've heard. We heard it in that report--the bipartisan report last year, we've heard it from senators from sometime, and that was sort of the Democratic position going into November.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let's talk about the big political development this week--Hillary. She says she's in.

Josie, were you surprised she announced? I mean, I think we've all expected her to run...

Ms. JOSEPHINE HEARN (Congressional Reporter, Politico.com): Right.

SCHIEFFER: ...but now?

Ms. HEARN: Well, it's not surprising that she would announce now. Obama announced earlier in the week. I think there was pressure there to answer him in some way, to take the press attention away from him. Also, it puts her on the national stage right before the State of the Union address. She wants to be able to engage the president on that, and this gives her a wonderful opportunity to.

Mr. VANDEHEI: What's so interesting about that, Bob, was how she did it. You know, it's not just doing it online, but doing it in a very personal way. There's a huge disconnect between the Hillary Clinton that her staff sees and that, quite frankly, that we see when we talk to her. She can be not only authoritative but also charming and likable. And that does not project very well sometimes through TV or when she's giving speeches. So they're trying to narrow the distance, I think, between Hillary Clinton and the audience she's trying to reach.

SCHIEFFER: What does she need to do, Josie? Number one, get out there and raise money, I suppose.

Ms. HEARN: Yeah, get out there and raise money, but she also needs to define herself. And that's what we're seeing. We saw a pretty unconventional way that she introduced herself. I mean, obviously everybody knows her, right? She doesn't have any problem with recognition. Obama needs to introduce himself to the public, but everyone knows Hillary. And I think what she's trying to do with this announcement is to soften her image a bit. You saw she was talking about conversations, a conversation with the public. She's going to do these online chats for the next three days. So I think it's about softening her image but, at the same time, still appearing muscular on foreign policy issues. You know, for a woman--female candidate for president, you have to sort of tow that line. And so you see her, for example, earlier in the week suggesting actually fewer--stabilizing the troop levels in Iraq, but more troops in Afghanistan.

SCHIEFFER: In Afghanistan.

Mr. HARRIS: Bob, if I could just add to that.

SCHIEFFER: Yes.

Mr. HARRIS: What she is trying to do nationally is what she did in upstate New York when she started in 1999, in 2000, running that Senate campaign and saying, 'Look, you all know who I am by reputation, but you don't know me.' She's able to do that in New York through relentless travel. Obviously you can't do that nationally, but it's an attempt to go through that same transformation.

SCHIEFFER: Is Obama--will he burn out quickly or will he sustain through this campaign?

Mr. HARRIS: That's the high threshold that he has. Hillary Clinton needs to say to Democrats, 'Look, I'm electable. I'm a serious candidate.' Obama needs to say, 'I'm serious; I'm authoritative. I'm not just an exciting new fresh face. I'm somebody that actually has the authority and policy expertise and judgment to be president.' He has not cleared that threshold.

Ms. HEARN: I think...(unintelligible).

SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

Mr. VANDEHEI: Look at the juxtaposition this morning on the front page of The Washington Post, where John and I came from, they have the story of both Hillary announcing her jumping into this race, but then also, you know, 20 or so troops killed. I mean, that is going to be the threshold issue in this election. There's no doubt about it. Obama has to clear that.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask you this. That brings me to my question here. John McCain. Is it going to hurt him with Republicans to be one of the very few senators who wants to increase the number of troops in Iraq? What do you think, John?

Mr. HARRIS: This is a huge problem for any Republican in the general election. I was talking to a very senior Republican just Friday night who says, 'Look, there is no constituency in the Republican Party in the primaries for somebody who wants to wage a candidacy in opposition to George Bush or as the dove on Iraq.' So I'm not sure it's a problem for Senator McCain in his first challenge with Republicans, but it's potentially just a candidacy ending problem for him, I believe, as he tries to face voters in 2008.

SCHIEFFER: President's going to talk about what he sees for the next two years in his State of the Union message. Josie, what do you think he has to do?

Ms. HEARN: Well, I think there's not much he can do on Iraq. The troop surge proposal's already gone over fairly poorly. They said that they're going to limit the speech. It's not going to be as long as it's been in previous years. It's not going to have the laundry list of domestic policy suggestions. So I think they realize that they're facing a fairly tough audience here. I think what he has to do is--I think actually the best thing that can happen right now is that things change on the ground for him, as far as Iraq goes. I'm not sure there's much that he can do on Tuesday to make people more reassured.

SCHIEFFER: So it's not what's going to happen here, but what happens there that will determine what kind of success he has.

Ms. HEARN: Yes, I believe so. And it may not change for, you know, months. We hear, at the fall, we might start to see something change.

SCHIEFFER: You know, normally, presidents--any president goes up in the polls after he makes his State of the Union message. President Clinton went up 16 points at the height of the Monica Lewinsky situation. And yet, when President Bush went on television a week--last week, it was, talking about Iraq, he did not move at all in the polls. It'll be interesting to see what the reaction to this is.

Well, I want to thank all of you. We'll see you many more times down the political road, as we say.

Mr. HARRIS: Great. Thank you.

Mr. VANDEHEI: Thanks.

SCHIEFFER: And we'll be back with a final word in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, I know you will find this shocking, but I am about to say something nice about the Congress. I mean it. Congress has actually done some pretty decent stuff lately. The House has put itself on a five-day work week. What, with the holidays, they haven't actually worked five days in a row yet, but they've been around the Capitol more than usual, and that's important because it means they may actually get to know each other. Working their Wednesday-Thursday schedule in recent years so they could rush home to attend more fund-raisers has left Congress a collection of strangers, one reason the debates have become so nasty and so unproductive.

Equally important, both Houses have finally gotten serious about ethics reform. Mind you, it's taken a slew of indictments and jail terms. On Friday, former Ohio Congressman Bob Ney became the latest to head for the hoosegow. But the new rules the House approved and the legislation the Senate passed Friday amount to the toughest reforms since Watergate. The reforms ban gifts and travel paid for by lobbyists, bar senators' spouses from lobbying, take away pensions of members of Congress convicted of serious crimes, and require public disclosure of who is involved when those secret projects we call earmarks are slipped into the appropriations bills.

What is breathtaking is not so much that these things have been outlawed, but that they were ever allowed in the first place. To be sure, there're still some loopholes to be closed, but at least this is a start. And how long has it been since we could say even that?

Well, that's it for us. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.