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CBS News

FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: TONY SNOW
White House Press Secretary

Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM (R-SC)
Armed Services Committee

Senator JOSEPH BIDEN (D-DE)
Ranking Member,
Foreign Relations Committee

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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, are we at a turning point in Iraq? President Bush made a surprise visit to Baghdad last week to meet with the prime minister after the death of the leader of al-Qaeda there. Did he come back convinced Iraq is on the right track now? Will troops be coming home any time soon? We'll ask the new White House spokesman Tony Snow, who was with the president. Then we'll talk with Democratic Senator Joe Biden of Delaware and Republican Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. I'll have a final word on dad and how to handle Father's Day.

But first, the situation in Iraq 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. Joining us this morning, the White House press secretary, Tony Snow, who knows a little something about Sunday talk shows, having hosted one. Now he's on the other side of the table.

Welcome, Tony. And I should say to our--to our viewers, we always call government officials by their titles on this broadcast. It's just a rule. But because reporters in the daily press briefing call the press secretary by his first name and he calls them by their first name, we always call press secretaries by their first name. So...

Mr. TONY SNOW (White House Press Secretary): Good, I'll be a lot more comfortable. Thanks.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, Tony, let me ask you first about the news from Iraq this morning. Now, we are told that two US soldiers who were out on patrol with a unit were captured Friday and taken prisoner by somebody in Baghdad. Is there anything new on this?

Mr. SNOW: No. As a matter of fact, we're still trying to figure out what the situation--where that is, the administration and authorities on the ground. I've been in contact today with Baghdad, and there's simply nothing new to report.

SCHIEFFER: Do we have any idea what the circumstances were?

Mr. SNOW: No. There have been some reports from the scene, but, as you know, quite often crime scene reports, they're of varying reliability, and so authorities--US authorities on the ground are trying to figure out exactly what happened. The most important thing is to try to find out where our guys are and bring them back safely.

SCHIEFFER: We do know for sure they're missing.

Mr. SNOW: Apparently, yeah. I don't want to--I don't want to get ahead of what the generals have been saying on the ground, but there are two soldiers

who have not been accounted for.

SCHIEFFER: Another report we want to check. Time magazine today reports that al-Qaeda had planned to attack US subways in New York with a poison gas that was used by the Nazis in World War II. For some reason they called this off, and this was, according to the magazine, back in 2003. Can you confirm that that happened?

Mr. SNOW: No. No. And one of the things I can say, and it's a very general answer, but in the war on terror there've been a number of victories. But I don't want to confirm or deny this particular story. We--we want to make sure that--I just don't have anywhere to go with it.

SCHIEFFER: OK. And the third thing I want to check that's in the news this morning, and that is reports that North Korea is threatening to begin missile testing. Can you tell us anything about that?

Mr. SNOW: The--the administration has been in contact--the president, the secretary of state, the national security adviser--with a number of colleagues--colleague nations, more than a dozen, including the--the other parties to the six-party talks, and have communicated with the North Koreans through the United Nations representative in New York. The North Koreans, in 1999, declared a moratorium on missile testing. And in the--September of last year, they sat down in a series of talks and signed a memorandum that committed to pursuing peace and security within the region. And we certainly hope they're going to continue to abide by their agreement.

SCHIEFFER: Well, are they--does it appear they are preparing for a missile test?

Mr. SNOW: I don't--I really don't want to get into trying to reveal what we know or don't know. I think it's important to stress, again, the North Koreans have--had made a commitment to sit down at the negotiating table with five other parties to try to find ways to deal with their nuclear program so that they become--that we can welcome them back into the community of nations.

SCHIEFFER: Well, then are you telling them this morning, `Don't do this'?

Mr. SNOW: The United--well, I think we made pretty clear--I don't want--even want to say don't do this, because there's no firm confirmation. Your brother, the ambassador to Japan, has spoken with the Japanese foreign minister, and Japan is reporting that, as far as they can tell, there are no plans to launch a missile today. I don't want to get any further. Simply to say that the United States has been reaching out diplomatically to all parties involved, and we certainly hope that the North Koreans stick with the moratorium on missile testing.

SCHIEFFER: Well, you're my last hope, because he's sure not going to give me anything on that, I'll tell you that for sure.

Let's talk about Iraq a little bit. Are we at a turning point? You are just

back from there, you went with the president. I think we actually have a picture of you on the helicopter with the president.

Mr. SNOW: You got that helicopter picture?

SCHIEFFER: And that would be Dan Bartlett, the White House communications chief, who looks like he may be chewing tobacco in that picture.

Mr. SNOW: Well, actually, yeah, we were on a separate helicopter. But there we are, with our vests. And one of the reasons I'm looking at him like that is I couldn't turn my head any further.

I would be wary of trying to characterize--I'll tell you what the most important thing about what's going on in Iraq is that you've got an elected government with a prime minister who seems to be--not only seems to be a very practical guy, and he's taking on challenges like security, like economy, like national reconciliation. And when the president went there, they, they had a really good set of briefings where we got a very realistic take on the state of things in Iraq. I don't think you can ever count on something as being a pivot point.

But what we do now have is a government with which we can deal. The president is impressed by Prime Minister Maliki and his not only can-do attitude, but the leadership ability to set priorities and to try to set up plans for meeting them. Well, we've got Operation Forward Together, which started the day after we left, where 50,000 Iraqi police and military forces are going into certain precincts of Baghdad. There are about five really bad neighborhoods, and they're going after them. We got 7200 coalition forces joining them. That is the kind of operation that I think you're likely to see more of in--in weeks and months to come. But the president's also said it's a funny war because somebody by a single act of violence or if, in fact, an American service--or simply the fact that two American servicemen are missing--that becomes the big story, rather than the fact that you've got almost 60,000 forces on the ground going after bad guys. We've apprehended hundreds of bad guys since Zarqawi died.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me just ask you this.

Mr. SNOW: Yes.

SCHIEFFER: Because it brings me to a point that I wanted to bring up, and that is, I mean, you obviously have been brought aboard to try to help the press and communicate in a more effective way with the American people. Polls continue to show that they think the war is not going well, that they do not approve of the way the war is being conducted. Do you think that is a result, Tony, of the policy or of the way the president's position has been presented?

Mr. SNOW: No, I think it's--it's a natural reaction to a war. We've had troops in Iraq, the war began in March 2003. And it's, it's reasonable--not reasonable, but it's natural for people to think, 'Why can't it all be over?' This is--this is a war unlike any other because we are dealing not with a

national force where you can count your victories in terms of winning on the battlefield. There's no Battle of the Bulge. You know, there's no marching into Berlin. Instead, what you have is an amorphous enemy. And frankly, one of the things we talked about in Iraq is a changing nature of the insurgency, as well, in Iraq.

But, you know, if you turn the question at a different angle, Bob, and you ask the American people, 'Do you want to win?' The answer is yes. And I think now that we have--with Prime Minister Maliki and the Cabinet, there is, I think, people need to take stock of this new Iraqi government because they do want to take charge. They do want to go ahead and secure victory. But they also--and this is something that was very impressive--to a person, Iraqi leaders, Shia, Sunni, Kurd said, 'Don't leave. We need you here.' And not merely because they wanted the support, but because there are a number of people who are undecided in Iraq right now which way they're going to go. You know, you get a situation like that, they're going to say, 'Do I go with the insurgents or do I go with the government?'

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Mr. SNOW: The United States is there, and they know that we're going to be there until the job is done, it makes it a lot easier for them to decide to help the government.

SCHIEFFER: Let me--let me just ask you about the quote that Karl Rove put out, because he clearly is trying to make this a part of the coming campaign. He was up in New Hampshire, and he said, Democrats "are ready to give the green light to go to war, but when it gets tough, when it gets difficult, they fall back on that party's old pattern of cutting and running. They may be with you at the first shots, but they are not going to be with you for the last, tough battle." He mentioned, especially, John Murtha and also John Kerry. What pattern is he talking about? When have Democrats been cutting and running?

Mr. SNOW: Well, I'm not going to--I'm not going to get into the middle of Karl's political fight. But let's talk about...

SCHIEFFER: But that's--you're on the same team.

Mr. SNOW: ...a couple of things. We are on the same team, but, but let's talk about some of the things that are going on on the Hill because there have been a couple of interesting votes. The Senate, for instance, voted this week on a proposal that Senator Kerry put forth to withdraw troops by the end of the year. It got six votes. I think one of the interesting things is trying to make sure that there's clarity about what the--what people want in terms of moving forward in Iraq. What exactly do they want? The president's position is pretty clear, and I'm going to be here--I'll tell you about the president's position, but I'm not going to get into sort of the political...(unintelligible).

SCHIEFFER: But are you comfortable with characterizing the Democrats as

people who want to cut and run?

Mr. SNOW: I think what Ker--Ker--what I'm comfortable doing is telling you what the president's position is.

SCHIEFFER: All right.

Mr. SNOW: I'll let Karl carry the political football.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, thank you very much, Tony. Hope to have you again.

Mr. SNOW: Thanks, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: And we'll be back in a moment with two key members of the Senate.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And with us now from Wilmington, Delaware, is Senator Joe Biden. Joining us from Clemson, South Carolina, Senator Lindsey Graham.

Senator Biden, I want to start with you. You are, of course, the ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee. What do you think about what Tony Snow just said?

Senator JOSEPH BIDEN (Democrat, Delaware): Well, he said a lot of things about what the Democrats want. They want the president to state what he's doing, state a plan, not just go over there in a single event, which is--you know, an event should not be confused with a strategy. What's the strategy? What's he going to do about getting a Sunni buy-in, what's he going to do about making sure that we purge the police and the--and the army of the sectarian thugs? What's he going to do about keeping the neighbors out? We want to know what he's going to do.

SCHIEFFER: Well, what about what he said about this remark that Karl Rove made? He said, 'I'll be glad to tell you what the president said, but I'm not going to get into the politics. That's Karl Rove's department.'

Sen. BIDEN: Well, I--look, I--I like Tony Snow. He's a straight guy, and I think he's--he's making a delineation. But what Karl Rove said is a bunch of malarkey. We did get in. The Democrats did mostly sign up to give the president the authority, but no one contemplated how incompetent this administration would be in pursuing the authority he was given. And now here we are--even people like David Brooks, who I have great respect for, today in The Times talks about his kitchen Cabinet of people who he calls pessimists who don't panic. Almost everybody's pessimistic about this president's approach.

SCHIEFFER: Are you pessimistic about it, Senator Graham?

Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM (Republican, South Carolina): I think I'm resolved to

see it through. And, no, I'm not pessimistic as--really, no, not--not really. What--what else is left? There's no viable alternative from the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party, through Murtha and John Kerry, have a strategy of basically leaving the country by the end of the year or withdrawing from the region. And the reason it got six votes in the Senate, I think almost every American, whether you support the war or not, realizes you can't leave these people in the lurch. What other strategy is there than to stand by moderate forces in Iraq to beat the terrorists, to try to support the new regime, to try to bring the country together, to help them disarm the militia? But at the end of the day, the Iraqis have to come together and bring the insurgency into the fold. The Iraqis have to convince the militia to disarm. If we're going to leave Iraq in Iraqi hands, then we just can't have it both ways. We can't make all the decisions for the Iraqis and say it's a democracy in Iraq.

SCHIEFFER: Well...

Sen. GRAHAM: We're going to have some things done in Iraq that we don't--that, that we won't like, but that's democracy.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Senator Graham, you say the Iraqis have to do this. This is what the president said they have to do. But do you think they're going to be able to do it?

Sen. GRAHAM: Right.

SCHIEFFER: I guess that's the question here.

Sen. GRAHAM: Well, you know, it took us a long time to get where we are as a nation, and they weren't shooting at--at us when we were writing our constitutional convention. We've underestimated--the administration has, I have, all of us have--how hard it would be to pull people together after a 1400-year-old religious dispute. I see progress. You've got the ministers named now, Zarqawi is dead through a collaborative effort, there seems to be an outreach to the insurgency that's working. Yeah, I do see process--progress. And the reason I'm optimistic, not pessimistic, is that every time you kill an Iraqi public official, someone else takes their place. Every time you kill a policeman, someone wants to join the police force. So, yeah, I'm optimistic, I'm very--rather proud of the Iraqi people to withstand the onslaught they've had.

SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about some of the politics of this, Senator Biden, because there's going to be a lot more of that this week in Washington.

Sen. BIDEN: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: Some Democrats are saying that every Democrat has to say that this war was a mistake. Do you think it was a mistake? If they're going to run for president.

Sen. BIDEN: No. No, I don't think every Democrat has to say it was a

mistake. It was right to give the president the authority we gave him. It was wrong to assume that he was going to know how to handle it. Look, there's nobody out there, including the president now, that talks about having conducted this war properly.

I was on your program almost a year ago today, and I was on your program in December, and I called for setting up benchmarks--that we should know how we're moving on electricity, how we're moving on the military, how we're moving on purging the police forces. Lindsey Graham and I, almost three years ago, went and came to Amman and looked at the police training, and we came back and said there was no police training. And the administration insisted, 'No, this is all going just fine.' This administration is always a year late and about I-don't-know-how-many deaths short.

I mean, this is--look, the Iraqis cannot, on their own, purge the police force that we trained. The Iraqis, on their own, cannot purge the army. We have 138,000 American men and women interposed amidst sectarian violence. You talk about 50,000 people trying to screw down Baghdad. There's 40,000 police in New York City. Forty thousand. Every expert says you need a 100-to-1--there's a 100-to-1 ratio there. You need a 50-to-1 ratio.

SCHIEFFER: So...

Sen. BIDEN: And these very police, Bob, are part of the death squads.

SCHIEFFER: But let me just...

Sen. BIDEN: So we've got to come up with a plan.

SCHIEFFER: Here, let me just go back to what I asked you first here, and I think I sort of misstated it. But let me just be more specific: Do you think it was a mistake, today, that you voted for giving the president the authority to do--to go into Iraq?

Sen. BIDEN: If I'd known the president was going to be this incompetent in his administration, I would not have given him the authority. Had I been president, I would have asked for the authority.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Lindsey Graham, where do you think this debate is going in Congress? And--and I go back to what Senator Graham was talking about. Where does it go from here? And--and do you subscribe to what Karl Rove is saying about Democrats, that they may be with you at the first shots, but they are not going to be with you for the last tough battle? Now, he's talking about two men who were wounded in combat when he says that. Is that really--is that really fair?

Sen. GRAHAM: I don't think we should challenge anybody's patriotism because we disagree with each other on what we should do in Iraq. But I am a little frustrated with my Democratic friends who want to make a laundry list of criticism and can't see success when it's--when it's right there in front of you. Jack Murtha's a great American in the sense he's sacrificed for his

country. But if you're waiting for Jack Murtha to tell you good news about Iraq, it's never going to happen. He's a stakeholder in his own criticism. He wants to withdraw from--from Iraq tomorrow. John Kerry served his country nobly and well. I like John. But his idea of withdrawing by the end of the year got six votes. It's criticism without a purpose. There's no viable alternative from the Democratic Party other than what President Bush is doing, in my opinion.

We do need to do a better job disarming the militia, training the police, purging the army. But it takes time. We are having progress in Iraq. Zarqawi's death is a sea change. It was an operational blow to al-Qaeda. It was a shot in the arm to the new government in Iraq. It's helped us back here at home. We're now making some progress. But if we're going to go on these shows every Sunday and talk about every mistake ever made in a war, we're going to lose this war. We didn't do that in World War II. It was our war. The war on terrorism is our war. Iraq is part of the war on terrorism. Whether it should be or not, it is. And I would like to come together as a nation and come up with a solidified public support here at home to see the Iraqis through this tough time. The terrorists want them to fail so bad they're willing to kill anybody and everybody. I want them to succeed. I'm willing to stay there as long as it takes to give them a decent chance to overcome this problem.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Let me ask both of you the same question, and--and if you would go first, Senator Biden, on this.

Sen. BIDEN: (Unintelligible).

SCHIEFFER: Tom Friedman of the New York Times was on this broadcast last Sunday, and he said Guantanamo has become the anti-Statue of Liberty. What should we do about Guantanamo, Senator Biden?

Sen. BIDEN: We should close Guantanamo just like we should've bulldozed down Abu Ghraib prison. And I want to point out, the fact that we got--that John Kerry's proposal got seven votes, does that state the Democratic position? There's a specific plan the Democrats have. I've laid out one specifically, detailed. Carl Levin has as well. What the president should be doing is calling us down to the White House and sitting down with us and saying, 'OK, guys, what do you think we should be doing? How do we get this done?' Instead of doing this political schtick.

Look, people are dying. Ask any expert out there whether they think there's a reasonable prospect on the course we're on now, that we're going to be able to have a stable government and be able to leave there by the end of '07. Find me someone who tells you--and not in the White House--who that's likely to happen absent a significant change.

This administration has been saying, not encouraging the--the--a constitutional amendment that is called for in the Iraqi constitution to give the Sunnis 20 percent of the oil revenues. They say it's too controversial. They don't have a plan. And if the Iraqis come up with a plan saying, 'By the

way, we're going to see to it that the Sharia is invoked on--the Islamic law is invoked--invoked strictly,' we're going to say we're for that?

SCHIEFFER: Right. We've got to give Senator Graham...

Sen. BIDEN: Come on, they need a plan.

SCHIEFFER: We've got to give Senator Graham a chance to answer to the Guantanamo question.

Sen. BIDEN: I agree.

SCHIEFFER: Senator Biden says bulldoze it, but he doesn't say what you do with the people that are there. What do we do here, Senator Graham?

Sen. BIDEN: You move them.

Sen. GRAHAM: I think you reform it, and you keep it open, and we allow the international community to have more knowledge about what we're doing. We need to have our interrogation techniques in the Army field manual, as Senator McCain has suggested and the Congress has approved. We need to let people in the world know that what we do at Guantanamo Bay is going to be done within the rule of law. But we need to remind people that the folks at Guantanamo Bay--there have been mistakes--are folks dedicated to the war on terrorism, and the three suicides there were by some of the toughest guys in the world who made a political statement by taking their own lives. And I am glad that when they committed suicide they didn't take a bunch of Americans or innocent people with them. Keep those people locked up as long as it takes to win this war. Follow the rule of law.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, I'm going to thank both of you for a very spirited discussion...

Sen. BIDEN: You're welcome.

SCHIEFFER: ...this morning. I'll be back with a final word in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, people who have done things for a long time feel an obligation to pass on what they know to those who come after them. So as a veteran father, I feel obligated to pass on what I know about that.

You new dads won't need it. The kids adore you and think you know everything. And the truth is, new moms do most of the work, so just stay out of the way, stand by for directed assignments, and pay the bills. It is easier on everyone.

It's those later years when you'll need help and understanding, those years when you have evolved from the world's foremost authority on everything to an embarrassment to the whole family. I remember the first boy-girl party at my

house. Mom got compliments on her dress. My instructions were, 'Dad, just try to act normal.' This is the time to put the clown suit away. No father has ever come up with a joke that made a teenager laugh. Don't even try.

As you have heard 100 times, just hang in there. Before long, the kids will be telling you once again how smart you are, even if they don't believe it, because they will have discovered it's a good strategy to get what they need. Or maybe they'll tell you that just because they love you, which is usually the case.

In any case, the best strategy for you is to believe it is because they love you, because from here on in it's important for you to stay on good terms with them. They are the ones, after all, who will be picking the nursing home.

So have a great day. Just remember to act normal, and to be on the safe side, pick up the check. That is always a crowd pleaser. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.