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FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: Senator CARL LEVIN, (D-MI)

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The Politico

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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, are we heading to war with Iran? Last week the Bush administration levied heavy sanctions on Iran to try to force the Iranian government to stop its nuclear weapons development program. What if the sanctions don't work? Is a clinical strike against Iranian facilities the next step? We'll talk about it with two members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Carl Levin of Michigan and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

Then we'll check in with Roger Simon of Politico.com for the latest campaign news.

I'll have a final word on still doing a heck of a PR job at FEMA.

But first, what to do about Iran 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 now from Marquette, Michigan, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin. And with us from Greenville, South Carolina, Senator Lindsey Graham.

Gentlemen, welcome to both of you. Obviously no news to you that last week the Bush administration levied sweeping new sanctions against the Revolutionary Guard in Iran and Iranian banks in an effort to pressure Iran to change its policy about trying to develop a nuclear weapon.

I guess the question that a lot of people are asking, and I'll start with you, Senator Levin, does this mean we're headed toward war with Iran, if this--these sanctions don't work?

Senator CARL LEVIN (Democrat, Michigan): I hope not. I think the sanctions are the right way to go. A lot of diplomatic pressure, a lot of economic pressure. Most importantly, keep the world together against Iran. Right now we've got most of the world, I think just about every country, that does not want Iran to have a nuclear weapon. It's in no one's interest that they have it, and I think most countries, including Russia, as well as Israel, obviously, but other countries in the region are not going to stand by and just simply watch if Iran gets to a--the point where they actually are getting to a nuclear weapon. And so my belief is that we ought to dial down the rhetoric, we ought to make it clear that there's always a nuclear--excuse me, there's always a military option of Iran goes nuclear, but that we ought to just speak more softly because these hot words that's coming out of the administration, this hot rhetoric plays right into the hands of the fanatics in Iran. They like to be called an evil empire. These fanatics love to have that weapon in their hands, that the West is beating up on them and threatening them. So we should speak more softly, carry a big stick, as Teddy Roosevelt said.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Senator, you say that nobody is just standing by, including Russia. But President Putin of Russia seems to be standing by. He doesn't seem to want any part of these sanctions. And if you take what he says in public at face value, he seems to be saying that Russia could live with a nuclear-armed Iran.

Sen. LEVIN: Well, I think that--I've not spoken with Putin, but I've spoken with the Russian defense minister. And I think, also, that the Russian willingness to support sanctions and enforce the sanctions which have been adopted is an important indicator. They're not going to go quite as far as we would, because they're playing a little bit of politics, too, with Iran. But I think it is clearly--and our intelligence community thinks it is very clear that Russia will not stand by while Iran has a nuclear weapon, particularly if there is any likelihood that they could threaten its use.

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you agree with that, Senator Graham?

Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM (Republican, South Carolina): Well, I have a little different take. I think Russia's sending all the wrong signals to Iran. When the Russian president goes to Iran and does a news conference with the Iranian president, embraces him, calls for other nations not to consider attacking Iran, it sends the wrong signal. I think the United Nations efforts to sanction Iran have been pitiful because of Russian--Russia and China vetoing a resolution. The European Union has some sanctions; they're fairly weak. We're having stronger sanctions, but they're unilateral. So in this regard I agree with the following, that the diplomatic efforts to control Iran need to continue, they need to be more robust, but we're sending mixed signals. The UN is becoming ineffective when it comes to regulating rogue regimes, and Russia is sending all the wrong signals as far as I'm concerned, so I understand why the president had to do what he did unilaterally.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, let's listen to something that the president said last week. You talked about some tough rhetoric, Senator Levin. Here's one of the things the president said.

President GEORGE W. BUSH: We got a leader in Iran who has announced that he wants to destroy Israel. So I've told people that if you're interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon.

SCHIEFFER: So Senator Graham, is he overstating the case there? Are we heading toward World War III? I think that's what people want to hear--I mean, they want to know. That's what they want to know the answer to here.

Sen. GRAHAM: Well, I think the president is dead right, that the Iranian president has told the world that he desires to destroy the state of Israel. I don't think they're making any bones about they're trying to develop a nuclear weapons program, not peaceful nuclear power. So I'm taking the Iranian president at his word. Their actions speak louder than anything else. They're clearly going down the Iranian--uranium enrichment road that would lead to weapons material and not peaceful nuclear power. So I think the president is justified in trying to wake up the world, wake up Russia, wake up the United Nations, the European Union to do something about this. If everybody likes Israel and loves Israel as we all say we do, we need to be more aggressive. We don't need to talk softly. We need to act boldly because time is not on our side.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Senator Levin, what if these sanctions don't work? Is it--is it fair to start talking about some sort of a strike against Iran? And if so, what kind of a strike would that be?

Sen. LEVIN: It's important we keep a military option on the table, but it is also important that we not play right into the hands of the same fanatic who threatens Israel by talking about attacking Iran so much. What we've got to do is let Iran know and let the world know that it is unacceptable for Iran to have a nuclear weapon. I agree with what Lindsey said; that is Iran's goal. But by the way, when the president says that we're not going to tolerate them having the knowledge, that is too far. That is an overstatement. I don't think we can stop them from having the knowledge. What we've got to stop them from doing is acquiring a nuclear weapon. It's important that we do that, and there's two ways to do it. One is to unite the world, to have very strong sanctions, to keep tightening that rope around Iran to make sure that they don't get to where they want to go, to do everything possible to avoid it, but not just give Iran the propaganda weapon. Don't give them the can of gasoline that they want to pour onto the fire. Don't give them the weapon that they use against us that we're trying to bully them that we're trying to dominate them. And that's what this hot rhetoric does when it's just constantly repeated, about World War III or that we're going to use a military option. Rums--Secretary--Vice President Cheney just goes way too far. The president went too far this week.

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think the president ought to tell Vice President Cheney to kind of tone down what he's been saying here?

Sen. LEVIN: Well, lots of luck.

SCHIEFFER: Senator Levin, let me ask you this. When we discuss sanctions and put in sanctions against North Korea, we also--we also put some carrots in there. It got them to the negotiating table. The North Koreans at least say now they're ready to stop their nuclear enrichment program. But in exchange for that, we're going to give them a lot of things. Number one, fuel, oil and other kinds of aid. Should there be some sort of carrots for the Iranians here?

Sen. LEVIN: Sure they ought to be. We ought to try to figure out what combination of carrots and sticks might work. It's in everyone's interest that they not get to a nuclear weapon. Carrots and sticks are the way to do it, and it's a lot cheaper, believe me, for us to be putting in some carrots than it is to watch Iran move in the direction that they are now moving. I agree with Lindsey on that. But it's a much better alternative to keep the pressure on the Iranians, unite the world against them, don't give them the propaganda value of this heated rhetoric.

SCHIEFFER: Some carrots, would that be all right with you, Senator Graham?

Sen. GRAHAM: Yeah. At the end of the day, the Iranians are their own problem. This is not--President Bush is not the problem here. It's the Iranian regime and their rhetoric and their actions. The Russians offered to provide nuclear fuel to an Iranian reactor. That way they could not control the fuel cycle. I don't have any objections to Iran having a nuclear power plant to produce power as long as someone would control the fuel cycle other than the Iranian military. The Russians made that offer last year, and Iran rejected it. So I'm willing to help Iran have nuclear power as long as somebody controls the nuclear fuel cycle.

But we're not the problem. The president of Iran's the problem. They're killing our kids in Iraq. They're training, equipping militia in Iraq. They're funding Hezbollah. So I just want to let it be known, as far as I'm concerned, the world is not the problem, Iran's the problem. They're killing Americans in Iraq to try to drive us out. They're funding Hezbollah to attack Israel. This is a

regime that's up to no good, and we need to stand up to them. And I think we need to be bolder, not quieter.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, we'll talk about...

Sen. LEVIN: (Unintelligible). Here's the problem.

SCHIEFFER: We'll talk about--go ahead. Go ahead, Senator.

Sen. LEVIN: Well, I was going to say, Iran clearly is the problem. The question is whether we're smart and firm in dealing with them.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, we'll talk about this some more, but let's take a one minute break right here.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And we're back now with Senators Carl Levin and Lindsey Graham.

Senator Le--Senator Graham, let me start with you this time. The price of oil went to more than \$90 a barrel this week just because the president said we're going to put in some sanctions. Or I think that's why most people think it took that sudden upsurge. If we should attack Iran, isn't that going to drive the price of oil just out of sight and won't that have an enormous impact on this country? And the world?

Sen. GRAHAM: Make no mistake about it--yes. Make no--make no mistake about it there are two very bad choices here. Allowing Iran to have a nuclear weapon is a horrible choice. Attacking Iran militarily is a very dangerous choice with a lot of serious consequences. What President Bush is trying to do through sanctions is to create a third way. But we can't do this unilaterally. The sanctions that he's imposed against Iran's Revolutionary Guard I hope will work. But the European Union, the United Nations, Russia and China needs to stop vetoing these resolutions that would really create some bite against the Iranian desires to possess a nuclear weapons program. I want to go down the diplomatic sanctions road very, very much like the president does. But, at the end of the day, if the choice is to use military force to stop an Iranian--nuclear-armed Iran, I think it's better to use military force than it is to allow them to have a nuclear weapon. But that shouldn't be our only two choices. The third option is diplomatic efforts with sanctions that will result in a change of behavior. The sanctions we have today are not going to result in a change of behavior because the world is not united behind the sanctions as they should be.

SCHIEFFER: Senator Levin, let me ask you this. Exactly what is Iran's capability right now? Let's suppose that, as a last resort--and clearly you still believe that we may have to consider the military option, we can't take it off the table--if we did strike Iran militarily and they say that they would retaliate in some way, what exactly could they do?

Sen. LEVIN: They could fire missiles with at least heavy effect. They could close down the Straits of Hormuz. They probably would unleash a terrorist response around the world, a Hezbollah response perhaps with biological and chemical weapons. They don't have a nuclear

weapon, but there are other weapons of mass destruction. It would be a massive response which would have, I'm afraid, terrorist support around the world. So there would be a very serious unleashing. We're involved right now in two Muslim countries and for us to kind of casually talk about moving against a third one, it seems to me, is playing right into the hands of the terrorists and the fanatics.

SCHIEFFER: When they--when you talk about firing missiles, missiles to where? Where could they deliver explosives to, Senator?

Sen. LEVIN: I think their range probably could reach--I know it could reach Israel, but it could reach Russia, it could reach other countries in the region. I don't think they have a longer range missile at this time than that.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you--let me just shift...

Sen. GRAHAM: Bob, could I...

SCHIEFFER: Yeah, go ahead but quickly, because I have another subject.

Sen. GRAHAM: I think one of the--one of the targets would be the Sunni Arab nations where we have bases. And the Sunni Arab nations are very much concerned about a nuclear-armed Iran. So Carl is right, a military engagement with Iran is a very dangerous thing and nobody wants to go down that road. But the sanctions that we have in place now worldwide are not--are not working, and they will never work until the world get more serious about them. And if the sanctions don't work, military operations against Iran, I believe, will be inevitable unless the world community steps up.

SCHIEFFER: I want to ask you quickly about the chances of Mr. Mukasey, the administration's nominee to be attorney general. It looked like he was off to a pretty good start with the Judiciary Committee, but he ran into a little bit of a roadblock this week over whether or not he believes waterboarding is torture.

Sen. GRAHAM: Right.

SCHIEFFER: What's going to happen on that, Senator? Can you continue to support him, Senator Graham?

Sen. GRAHAM: Well, I'm on the committee. I thought he did a good job explaining himself, generally speaking. But he was asked a specific question about an interrogation technique called waterboarding. I am convinced, as an individual senator, as a military lawyer for 25 years, that waterboarding, the technique that was described to Judge Mukasey does violate the Geneva Convention, does violate our war crimes statute and is clearly illegal under domestic and international law, and I think it would serve the attorney general nominee well to embrace that concept. He's talked around it. But you know, I want to win this war. And the way we win this war is to adhere to our values, don't adopt the enemies' values. The rule of law is something...

SCHIEFFER: Well...

Sen. GRAHAM: ...that we embrace, and so I hope he will give a direct answer to that question.

SCHIEFFER: Well, would you vote against him if he doesn't?

Sen. GRAHAM: I am urging him that he needs to come forward. If he does not believe that waterboarding is illegal, then that would really put doubts in my own mind because I don't think you have to be very--have a lot of knowledge about the law to understand this technique violates Geneva Convention Common Article III, the war crimes statute, and many other statutes that are in place.

SCHIEFFER: All right.

Sen. GRAHAM: So I do hope he will embrace that.

SCHIEFFER: And, Senator Levin, how about you?

Sen. LEVIN: Well, there's been too many mixed messages out of this administration about torture. There's been too many activities at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib which constitute torture, which constitute inhumane treatment in violation of law. This has worked very heavily against us in terms of the enemies'--our enemies'--the terrorists' use of these tactics. He is sending a mixed message in his testimony. He should not be confirmed unless he is very, very clear about these aggressive techniques which violate our laws, and violate Geneva as being totally unacceptable because the attorney general is supposed to be at the head of the Department of Justice talking about what our values are, because those values are the things that have made this country strong and powerful and attractive, and they're essential that they be maintained for our own security.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Gentlemen, thanks to both of you. We'll be back in a minute to talk some politics.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And now we have Campaign Quick Check. And with us this morning to talk a little politics, Roger Simon, the chief political columnist for Politico.com.

Roger, glad to have you this morning.

Mr. ROGER SIMON (Politico.com): Thank you.

SCHIEFFER: Well, while the president was talking tough about Iran this week, the candidates certainly stepped up the heat in what they were saying about each other. No stronger statement than the response to one-time Yankee fan--I guess he's still a Yankee fan, Rudy Giuliani, who said he'd be pulling for the Red Sox in the World Series. When he said that, his ex-wife Donna Hanover responded this week by saying, 'Go, Rockies.'

Mr. SIMON: That's tough.

SCHIEFFER: But the other candidates on the Democratic side sort of turned on Hillary Clinton...

Mr. SIMON: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: ...and I think the reason for that is pretty clear because, when you look at the numbers that came out this week, the latest CBS News/New York Times poll showed that Hillary Clinton now has about twice as many votes as the next two candidates, Barack Obama and John Edwards, combined. Has she got this thing locked up, do you think?

Mr. SIMON: She doesn't have it locked up, but it's extraordinary in a field that has seven credible candidates, actually seven pretty good candidates, for one person to get 51 percent of the vote, which is the third time she's done this, the third poll she's done this in. That's not an insurmountable lead, but it's large. I mean, look at where we are. In approximately eight weeks, Americans will begin voting in Iowa, January 3rd. Four weeks after that, it'll probably all be over at the big February 5th super duper Tuesday contest. So if you're going to make traction against Hillary Clinton, someone with 51 percent in the polls--polls, you got to make it quickly, and you got to strike now if you're going to turn this thing around.

SCHIEFFER: Well, what is the relationship between these national polls and the contests in Iowa and New Hampshire, which, as far as we know, are going to be the first two contests at this point?

Mr. SIMON: It's an imperfect relationship, and, in fact, you're absolutely right that the primaries aren't decided nationally. They're decided state by state. In Iowa, Hillary Clinton only leads by about 5 percent. In New Hampshire, she leads by much more than that, and in fact in every state, the difficulty, again, in beating her, she leads in every state poll. But the dynamic she's created is this: If John Edwards loses Iowa, he's almost certainly out of this race. If Barack Obama loses Iowa, he's badly damaged, and we don't know if he can go on. If Hillary Clinton loses Iowa, she takes a hit, but she's going to go on to New Hampshire where she's leading by about 20 percentage points and onto the rest of the states where she's also leading. That is the kind of mechanics that she has created with her national poll numbers.

SCHIEFFER: You know, basically, what Obama said this week when he really kind of started putting more of an edge on his message...

Mr. SIMON: Right.

SCHIEFFER: ...it seemed to me what he was actually saying was she brings out the worst in Republicans.

Mr. SIMON: Well, his difficulty is showing that she is a polarizing and divisive candidate by attacking her, which is essentially polarizing and divisive. He's got to do something. This is-- what we've seen this week is about the fourth wave of attacks on battle group Hillary. First was the attack on her vote for the Iraq war, which she refuses to apologize for or say was a mistake. Didn't go very far. Second, she was attacked for being polarizing and divisive, even though she doesn't attack other Democratic candidates. Third was her taking of money from lobbyists in Washington. That didn't go anywhere. And now it's her vote to declare the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist group, which passed a Democratic Senate 76-22. So it was hardly a line in the sand.

SCHIEFFER: All right. And on the Republican side, of course, nobody yet has really broken out of the pack in a significant way.

Back with a final word in just a second.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: The last time I was at Disney World, they had sticks of a certain height stuck in the ground with signs that said something like, 'You must be this tall to ride this ride.' Well, FEMA, the disaster relief agency, must use a variation of that to hire its public relations staff. Somewhere on their employment application there must be a clause that says, 'Your IQ must be below a certain level to work here.' How else to explain FEMA's action last week when it staged a phony news conference where its employees posed as reporters and threw softball questions to the agency leaders so they could tell us all what a good job they were doing.

Mind you, this is the same FEMA once headed by Michael Brown of 'Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job' fame, the agency that fell on its face during Katrina. While New Orleans drowned, remember, Brownie's PR people busied themselves by e-mailing old Brownie to roll up his sleeves before TV interviews so it would look like he was working hard.

The Department of Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff said he found the phony news conference offensive, and since it is an emergency relief outfit, here's some emergency suggestions: Fire these people and the people who hired them, then explain to the new people that the best way for a disaster relief agency to get good publicity is to do a good job helping victims. As part of a massive new PR campaign, you might even consider taking the PR staff from behind their desks and sending them out to deliver food and water to fire victims. Now, that would make a great story.

We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.

