

© 2011, CBS Broadcasting Inc. All Rights Reserved.
PLEASE CREDIT ANY QUOTES OR EXCERPTS FROM THIS CBS
TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION."



March 6, 2011 Transcript

GUESTS: SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL
 R-Ky.; Senate Minority Leader

 SENATOR JOHN KERRY
 D-Mass.; Chairman, Senate Foreign
 Relations Committee

 TOM FRIEDMAN
 Columnist, The New York Times

 MARK PHILLIPS
 CBS News correspondent
 Reporting from Tripoli

MODERATOR/
PANELIST: Bob Schieffer, CBS News Political Analyst

This is a rush transcript provided
for the information and convenience of
the press. Accuracy is not guaranteed.
In case of doubt, please check with
FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
(202) 457-4481

TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, Libya is in chaos. Qaddafi is digging in and here at home the battle over the budget and government spending rages on.

As the crisis in Libya escalates, the question is should the United States get more involved and if so, how? That's what we'll ask the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Democrat John Kerry. We'll also ask Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell about that and about the impasse over government spending and reforming Social Security.

We'll bring in New York Times columnist Tom Friedman for analysis and I'll have a final thought on that Supreme Court ruling that gave a church group the right to picket a combat soldier's funeral.

It's all ahead 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.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. We begin today with Senator Kerry. Thank you for joining us, senator. But before we talk here's the latest from Libya.

There is heavy fighting along the Libyan coast. Qaddafi's forces retook the town Bin Jawad as Libyan planes launched air strikes against rebels on the ground. Although, the rebels captured the key oil port city of Ras Lanouf yesterday, they are under heavy attack there today as well as in the cities of Misrata and Zawiyah, cities both outside Tripoli the capital. For more let's go to CBS News correspondent Mark Phillips who is in Tripoli this morning. Mark, what's the latest?

MARK PHILLIPS: Well, Bob, the situation here can best be described as murky this morning. Both sides are effectively claiming victory. At least, the government side is proclaiming a kind of victory saying that it has recaptured several of the towns which the rebel forces have taken over the past week. And the streets here in Tripoli were full this morning of people celebrating and firing guns in celebration in the air. But the situation on the ground appears to be unsettled, one way of describing it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Where do you see this ending? Are we at kind of a stalemate here?

MARK PHILLIPS: I think we are in a kind of stalemate. I think neither of the forces, either the government or the rebels, have either the will or the organization to completely knock the others out.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mark Phillips reporting this morning from Tripoli. One other note, in an interview with a French newspaper today Moammar Qaddafi is calling for a UN commission to investigate the unrest in Libya. He pledges his government's full cooperation. Senator Kerry, I trust you'll want to see some evidence of that before you take that to the bank.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY (D-Massachusetts/Chairman Foreign Relations Committee): Well, more than that. Modar-- Moammar Qaddafi has lost all legitimacy. The only thing he's fighting for is his and his family's ability to continue to rule. There's no principle. There's no governance principle. There's no democracy. There's no reform. There's nothing else on the table. And the

only way that he can stay is by violently taking on the people of his country. That will not be sustained. And so, I believe that he's cornered. But he obviously remains lethal. Yes, there's something of a stand off. That's the way it could be for some period of time, but I think that too will change. There are a lot of tools still at the disposal of the international community. The opposition is really only collecting itself beginning to shape, define itself in terms of who is playing what role, organize itself. So I believe that, yes, we'll probably see days of movement back and forth a little bit. But I think we need to do several things. One, prepare a no-fly zone in conjunction with our allies, not implement it. Certainly, first hope would be if it were called on to be done only in the-- in-- in-- in the context of international agreement, sanctions.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Mm-Hm.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: But right now they don't want that and I think that's good. The last thing we want to think about is any kind of military intervention. We-- and I don't consider the fly zone stepping over that line. We don't want troops on the ground. They don't want troops on the ground. That would be counterproductive. I think there are a number of things we can do in between that--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Well--

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: --that we need to do.

BOB SCHIEFFER: --let's just talk about this whole idea of fly zone because the Secretary Of Defense Mister Gates is a little dubious about that. He says basically that's going to war because he says if you're going to have a fly zone you've got to go in there and bomb their anti-aircraft installations there--

SENATOR JOHN KERRY (overlapping): Well--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --that you're going in and bombing a country.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: That-- that's actually not the only option for what one could do. One could crater the airports and the runways and leave them incapable of using them for a period of time. I don't think this will be a long-term kind of thing frankly. That's just my judgment. But I-- I think that if you were to have one, it's not going to be like Iraq or Bosnia for the long term. That's number one. Number two, I think--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): But you know, senator, I think, what-- what always concerns people, it-- people always say that when we start to get into these things. They say this won't be for the long term.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY (overlapping): Well--

BOB SCHIEFFER: --they said that about World War I.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY (overlapping): I said--

BOB SCHIEFFER: They said it about Vietnam.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: I'm making that judgment about a no-fly zone.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: It's not a very big Air Force. We're not talking about, you know this gargantuan kind of force that we-- that we face. But more importantly, I would only consider its implementation if Qaddafi himself were using it as a means of terror, as a means of massacring large numbers of civilians. And I think it is only then that the global community would begin to say, "Oh-Oh, we've got to do something." Now is the time we have to do it.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): So we have to do that under a UN sponsorship program.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY (overlapping): I-- it is preferable. You don't have to do it under that but it is clearly preferable to have either UN, NATO sanction. But-- but leaving that aside, there are many other things that can happen in between. I think the administration has done a terrific job of, number one, the President's statement could not have been more clear, the President has said Qaddafi has to go. That's an important message to everybody in Libya and around Libya. Secondly, they-- we have engaged in major humanitarian lift. We have made the presence of American military felt for that purpose. But there's always lurking in their minds the question of what else might they do? Third, I-- I think we have the ability in the next-- they-- they have-- they have frozen and seized over thirty billion dollars of his assets and made it clear that those assets will be made available to the opposition in order to begin to develop the-- the new Libya and to do what they need to do in the days ahead. That's very significant. And I think that there are other things we can do in the days ahead--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): What about--

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: --to bolster the opposition.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): --humanitarian aid. Military aid.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: We're providing that. There were four aircraft yesterday, that flew in-- that took people to Egypt. I think to Tunisia. There's humanitarian assistance being provided.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What about military aid?

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: I think, that's a trickier but I would-- I assume that a lot of weapons are going to find their way there from one means or another over the course of the next weeks.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you think it is in the United States of America's national interest that Qaddafi has to go? We know it's in the interest of the Libyan people, but is it in our national interest?

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: Yes, it is. Because if Qaddafi stays, there is no question that he will be mischief in the days ahead as he has been in the past. And furthermore, I think what is happening all across the Middle East is in our strategic national interest. If we have emerging Democracies, people who come out, who say to al Qaeda, look, we didn't have one suicide bomber, we didn't have one violent, you know, sort of explosive act against the West or somebody to make a dramatic statement, we took matters into our own hands with respect to our own government and we have produced change. That just, you know that's not an Iranian moment, it's not an al Qaeda moment. It's the people of Libya attaching themselves to the very values and principles that we have espoused for so many years in that region. And I think if-- if these countries do reform and they do give greater voice to their people and there is greater

opportunity, economic opportunity, and people are enfranchised as a result, Bob, that is of enormous consequence to all of us with respect to relationships in the Mideast, to the war on terror as we have known it and as it might be defined in the future.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We're about out of time. Before you go out, I do want to ask you about though, about the situation up on Capitol Hill. Do you see the two sides getting together and finding a way to cobble together a plan to--

SENATOR JOHN KERRY (overlapping): Well, I do. And I hope it starts soon because I don't believe what we have from the House is a serious economic plan. I think it's a ideological extremist reckless statement. If-- if that were to be in fact, put in place, it would-- it would contribute to the reversal of our recovery. It might even destroy our recovery. It will certainly deny us the competitiveness that we need to go-- to-- to move with China, India and other countries into the future. I think it's a very dangerous plan. It cuts teachers. It cuts education. It cuts research. It cuts energy research. All the things we need to do, Bob, to make America number one again and to move into the global marketplace, their budget sets us back. And-- and it's incontrovertible that it hurts GDP, it sets back GDP, we will lose seven hundred thousand, two hundred thousand, five hundred thousand jobs, whatever we lose. Two hundred to seven hundred, it moves against the recovery that we've worked so hard to achieve.

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): All right.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: So I think it is not-- it's not a real discussion of America's needs. We need to be doing Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid. We need to have defense spending on the table. We need a comprehensive approach. But we cannot eat America's seed corn in terms of our competitive capacity for the future.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Senator Kerry, thank you so much. We're going to get a little different take, I suspect on that question.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: No doubt.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Because now we're going to go to the Republican leader in the Senate Mitch McConnell, who's down at his hometown of Louisville today. Senator, I do want to ask you about what Senator Kerry just talked about. But first, I've got to ask you about Libya and this whole idea of maybe setting up a no-fly zone in Libya. What-- what is your take on that?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL (R-Kentucky/Republican Leader): Well, I think it's worth considering. The other option that-- that John Kerry alluded to in passing that I think we used frequently during the Cold War period is simply aiding and arming the insurgents. We're not quite sure who these insurgents are. There was one report that a group of insurgents actually arrested some British soldiers. So I think we need to make sure who we're-- who we're dealing with here. But Qaddafi going, I think everybody in the United States and hopefully ultimately everybody in Libya will finally conclude that's the best outcome.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, do you believe then, it is in our vital national interest for him to go?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: I'm not sure if it's in our vital interest for him to go. But I think we certainly ought to look for ways to be helpful to those who are seeking to overthrow dictators certainly short of sending in our own military personnel.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me just ask you and I'll just ask you to respond to what Senator Kerry just said. He said that this budget battle that's going on up on the Hill up there, that the House bill that is passed, sixty-one billion dollars in cuts, he call it dangerous. What--

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL (overlapping): Bob, I think, I heard him call it the reckless. Well, it's-- well, what's reckless, Bob, is the 1.6-trillion-dollar deficit we're running this year. What's reckless is the three trillion dollars we've added to our national debt. Our national debt is now the size of our economy. We begin to look a lot like Greece. Look and this doesn't even deal with our long-term unfunded liabilities in Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid. Add up to over fifty trillion dollars of promises we've made to future generations that we cannot meet. Look, this is the time to get serious. The administration with regard of this year's negotiation that we're talking about, that Senator Kerry called reckless, has only come about one sixth of the way to where House Republicans are and where I and majority and-- and hopefully all Senate Republicans are. Look, this is a good place to start. But it's just a pebble in the ocean to what we need to do. This is the perfect time to tackle entitlement reform. We have divided government. That is, one party doesn't control the entire government. That's the time, Bob, to do big things. Remember when Reagan and Tip O'Neill fixed Social Security. Remember when Clinton and Republican Congress did welfare reform. This is the time to do important and difficult stuff. And I agree with the Washington Post. Where-- where's the President? Yeah. Where is the leadership? We're prepared to do difficult things but he must be a part of it because--

BOB SCHIEFFER (overlapping): Well--

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: --we're not looking at making an issue here. We're looking at making a law. And that requires the signature of the President of the United States.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, all we know, of course, is about what is being said in public.

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Mm-Hm.

BOB SCHIEFFER: We hear the back and forth that's being-- being going on in-- in public. But you and the other leaders have been meeting behind closed doors with Vice President Biden. I-- I guess, I would ask you this question. What is your take on the administration right now? Do you believe that-- that President Obama is, in fact, serious about trying to get something done here?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: No, I don't.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Really?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: I have-- I have now had a number of private conversations with the President and the vice president. I was hopeful that we would step up to the plate here, if you will, and use this divided government opportunity to do something big about our long-term problems. I don't have any more complaints about no-- no the conversations with them. I've had plenty of conversations with them. What I don't see now is any willingness to do anything that's difficult. Look, this-- this is the perfect time to do it. We-- we control part of the government. They control part of the government. It could be done in a very, very effective way. And for those who are concerned about the 2012 elections survived politically because both sides will have embraced it. I haven't given up hope but frankly I m not optimistic.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well-- well, you know, that really is a pretty serious charge at this stage to say that you don't even think the President is serious. What is it that makes you say that?

SENATOR MITCH MCCONNELL: Well, look, I've a number of conversations with-- with people who-- who count at the White House. And I think that so far I don't see the level of seriousness that-- that we need. For example, they're in denial about Social Security. They-- they are saying Social Security is not-- not a problem. The Congressional Budget Office said it's running a fifty-billion-dollar deficit this very year. Medicare, Social Security are unsustainable. Medicare-- Medicaid is unsustainable. You step back and look at what this administration has done--they've sort of pumped up the government. Bob, you would be interested to know that unemployment among government workers is half what it is among private sector workers. And most of those unemployed workers are state and local workers who have been laid off. The federal governments, in fact, added a hundred thousand jobs in the course of this administration while the American people have shed millions of jobs. Our-- our priorities are out of whack. When my friend John Kerry says cutting government spending is reckless, I'm wondering, what planet is he living on?

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. Okay, I asked you for a response and-- and you certainly gave me one. Senator McConnell, it's always good to have you here. I thank you. We'll have some context and analysis on all of this from New York Times columnist Tom Friedman who is just back from the Middle East. That's in sixty seconds. Thank you, senator.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we're back now with Tom Friedman who is just back from the Middle East. Well, Tom let's just start with Senator Kerry talking about this idea of a no-fly zone. What do you think about that?

TOM FRIEDMAN (New York Times): Well, Bob, you have three principles clashing here right now. One is something that was so important about the uprising in Tunisia and Egypt was that it was owned by the people who did it. There was no American involvement. There were no foreign troops. And, by the way, let's remember at least four hundred and maybe seven hundred Egyptians died in that struggle for-- for a different kind of government. So I think, first of all, we want to make sure-- you don't want to take the sense of ownership away from whoever is uprising there in Libya. Second, though you want Qaddafi to lose. He's a bad guy. He's driven a country into the ground, used his money badly, was behind Pan Am 103. But thirdly, we don't really know who the rebels are. I mean, I'd like to think that, you know, they're in line with the Egyptian and-- and Tunisia democracies. Well, we really we don't know who they are. And so I-- I find in this clash of-- of really these three principles let's support humanitarian relief everywhere possible. But I'd be very wary about jumping into the middle of this right now.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, the secretary of defense is certainly making sure that the government and people on Capitol Hill understand what's going on. I mean he basically says this is an act of war if you go in there.

TOM FRIEDMAN: Well, it's two things. One, it would-- it would be an act of war. And two, you would need UN approval if you wanted to do it under that legitimate cover. And the Russians and the Chinese would be unlikely to go along with that. So right now, I think we should be looking for everyway to squeeze Qaddafi and provide humanitarian support but without putting boots on the ground there and taking ownership of this thing.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What about Egypt? You're just back from there how-- how does that seem to be going?

TOM FRIEDMAN: Back a couple weeks now. You know, I think Egypt's moving along in an amazing way but they just appointed a new prime minister. The one Mubarak appointed out the door has been removed as American educated engineer, a graduate of Purdue University. The-- the democracy movement there has been very supportive of it. The army announced it on their Facebook page. The Egyptian army has a-- this is an institution that you basically it was against a law to write about. They are now announcing things on their Facebook page. And I think there is a chance, Bob, we have to be very careful-- you got to be really humble about predicting anything there. But that we get an outcome in Egypt that looks a lot like Turkey of ten years ago. We have the army in the background as a kind of guardian of the process but we will have I think a new constitution shortly and I think a good chance for presidential elections there by November.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Bill Daley, the White House Chief of Staff said on Meet the Press this morning that one of the options now is to consider using oil from the strategic oil reserve in order to bring down the price of gasoline in this country. Does that make sense to you?

TOM FRIEDMAN: That would rank in my top five worst ideas of-- of 2011 so far. I think that there's one thing we should finally be doing is using this opportunity to have a credible energy policy that begins to reduce our addiction to oil. Gasoline is almost four dollars a gallon. We know that's a red line where people really start to change their behavior. At a minimum, I'd be talking about a tax that basically says we're going to keep it at four dollars a gallon. If it goes below, well true it up. If it goes above that we're not going to touch it. May be say, we're not going to implement it until 2012. So you signal people it's going-- be coming. You don't change the-- you don't harm the economy today but you get people to change their behavior. Bob, if we don't do that, going forward the difference between the good day and a bad day for America is how the eighty-six year-old king of Saudi Arabia basically manages this reform process. That's where we're putting ourselves. We're putting ourselves in the hands of probably the most frail, antiquated regime in the Middle East. They will be setting your gas pricing, Bob.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Do you see this turmoil, this revolution that's going on across the region? Do you see that getting into Saudi Arabia?

TOM FRIEDMAN: I do. I'll tell you why, Bob. What happened in Egypt was authentic. It was based on real principles of-- of wanting to own your own future. And it had a-- a real narrative of sacrifice. They lost people dying for those principles. You've never seen something that pure, all right, coming from the ground up before in that part of the world in the modern era and that's going to spread. It's going to spread. I don't know when. I don't know how. But Saudi Arabia will not be immune to that process.

And for us to be betting everything-- you know, there're two countries out there if they go south tomorrow, like your life and mine and everyone else in America will be turned over, Saudi Arabia and Greece. Greece defaults on its debt and you've have a sovereign debt crisis in Europe and Saudi Arabia really goes into turmoil, the world we live in will be very different. I don't want to be vulnerable to that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Tom Friedman. Always good to have you, Tom.

TOM FRIEDMAN: Thanks, Bob.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'll be back with some final thoughts in just a second.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, I have spent most of my life defending the First Amendment, and I'll continue to do so, but when the Supreme Court ruled last week that it gave a church group the right to picket at the dead soldier's funeral, with signs that said "God Hate You" and "Thank God for Dead Soldiers," I was appalled. The group believes our soldiers are dying because God is punishing America for tolerating gay people, that anyone would have the audacity to claim knowledge of God's reasoning is ridiculous. But here is the part I don't understand. The courts have long held that free speech can be limited in rare circumstances. We can't yell "fire" in a crowded theater if there is no fire because it would endanger public safety, people might be trampled in the chaos. The First Amendment has done just fine with that limit. But if that is so why isn't public safety endangered when a mob hurls brutal abuse at an innocent citizen who could be scarred with severe and lasting emotional damage? We must obey the law because we are a nation of laws. But whatever the law, what these military families have endured is not right. And every community must now move quickly to establish buffer zones which are legal to keep these protestors as far as possible from military funerals. When there are those among us so selfish and cruel, they're willing to use one of our most cherished freedoms to intrude on the grief of parents who have lost a child just to promote their cause. We must do everything legally possible to deter them. The court has ruled but the effort to protect these families must go on.

Back in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: That's it for today. Thank you for watching FACE THE NATION, we'll see you right here next week.

ANNOUNCER: This broadcast was produced by CBS News which is solely responsible for the selection of today's guests and topics. It originated in Washington, DC.