

MTP Transcript for Nov. 26

Arnold Schwarzenegger, Duncan Hunter, Ike Skelton, Barry McCaffrey, Wayne Downing

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MR. TIM RUSSERT: Our issues this Sunday: One year ago the Republican governor of California had an approval rating of just 32 percent. His disapproval: sky-high at 58 percent. And yet, two weeks ago, in the midst of a national Democratic landslide, he was overwhelmingly re-elected.

(Videotape):

GOV. ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER (R-CA): I love doing sequels, I tell you. But this, without any doubt, is my favorite sequel.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: How did he do it? What can politicians and the Republican Party learn from his victory? This morning, an exclusive interview with Arnold Schwarzenegger, the governor of California.

Then, Iraq. Pentagon insiders say the U.S. has three options: go big, go long, or go home. What should we do? With us: the chairman and ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, Republican Duncan Hunter and Democrat Ike Skelton; and the former commander in chief, U.S. Special Operations, retired General Wayne Downing; and the former commander in chief, U.S. Southern Command, retired General Barry McCaffrey. Hunter, Skelton, Downing and McCaffrey on Iraq. Where do we go from here?

But first, joining us now is the newly re-elected Republican governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Governor, congratulations and welcome.

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Thank you very much. Thank you, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me again show you and our viewers these numbers, because they are amazing. A year ago, here you were, 32 percent approval, 58 disapproval. And here are the election results from just about two weeks ago:

Schwarzenegger, 56 percent; your Democratic opponent, 39 percent.

TEXT: CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR

[photo shown] Arnold Schwarzenegger R

INCUMBENT 56%

[photo shown] Phil Angelides D

39%

MR. RUSSERT: Joel Kotkin in The Wall Street Journal did a little analysis of your race, and this is what he concluded: "Amidst the Republican rout, some important political lessons can be drawn from the results in California. Oft dismissed by conservatives as 'the left coast' and written off as hopelessly blue, the state election revealed some critical trends that may prove decisive - for both parties - in 2008 and beyond.

"Arnold Schwarzenegger's 17-point victory alone commands some attention, since it is easily the most impressive score by any Republican in a Democratic-leaning state this year - and it suggests a future for pro-environment, pro-business, fiscally conservative and socially moderate politics. ...

"The key to Mr. Schwarzenegger's victory lay not in seducing the left, but through his mastery of the state's rising independent center." Do you agree with that?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Yeah, I agree with that, but I think that the key thing is is that, you know, if you forget about the Republicans, Democrats, independents and all this, I think that we did the people's work. And we did what the people wanted us to do. And so it doesn't really matter what party you come from. I think the people appreciate that and they know that you're working together, that you can provide the kind of leadership to bring both of the parties together, and do the kind of things that need to be done for the state. And I think that's what we have done.

And it was really miraculous in a way, for California, because it was election year, like every other state, and Democrats and Republicans came together in a very unique way, and we have accomplished more than in decades. It was one of the most productive legislative sessions in decades. And I think that was really terrific, and I have to congratulate, you know, both Democrats and Republicans, because both of them made that happen.

MR. RUSSERT: George Lewis, who works for NBC News, did an analysis, and he talked about the specific issues that you focused on. And let's look at that. "Schwarzenegger did something that is unheard of in politics these days, he said, 'I messed up. I was wrong.' And he made a hard turn to the center politically and started working with the Democrats, who control the state legislature. ... The new Schwarzenegger backs stem cell research. ... He also favors a measure, that was written by Democrats, to increase the minimum wage here in California and to combat global warming. So the new Schwarzenegger is a moderate." Is that fair?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Well, no, because I have always been a moderate. When I came into office three years ago, you and I talked about it then. I, I was, you know, promoting and pushing stem cell research then already, literally. Like, I was not even in office when I was already out there campaigning for stem cell research. I think this is just a very important issue.

And we shouldn't look at those issues as Republican issues or—vs. Democratic issues, or conservative vs. liberal. It is just—these are people's issues. We need to address those issues because I think that if we really promote stem cell research and fund stem cell research, I think we can find cures for very, very important—illnesses that so many millions of people are suffering from. And I think that if it is—has to do with global warming, or if it has to do with raising the minimum wage, or if it has to do with lowering prescription drugs for vulnerable citizens—all of those things are people issues, not Democratic issues or Republican issues, and I think we were able to bring both of the parties together and accomplish all of those things.

MR. RUSSERT: But it is unusual, governor. Most politicians come on MEET THE PRESS, and they'll say, "I am consistent, I've never changed my mind. I still do the same things."

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Yeah.

MR. RUSSERT: And when you went to the people on four different voter initiatives and lost them all, and you took on the unions, you took on the Democrats, you said, "I made a mistake."

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Well, the mistake was not on what we were trying to do, because we need the reforms, and I think slowly we are seeing reforms happening in California. But what was wrong in—was the approach. To go and to say to the legislators, "I give you two months, and if you don't agree with all of those things that I put on the table here in my State of the State address, then I will go to the people." Well, the people really, you know, rejected that. They basically have said to us, "Don't come to us with every initiative and with every idea. You fix it in the capital. That's why we elect you, to go to the capital, and Democrats and Republicans work together." And that's exactly—we all got the message.

Last November, the Democrats and the Republicans got the message that the people want us to work together at the capital. And this is what we did. We sat down and we looked at each other and said, "Let us do this year the work of the people that the people really want us to do," and that's exactly what we have done. And both of the parties worked together, and I think we have accomplished so much because of that. And I think it just—I think if there's any lesson in there is that we have to look—nationwide, we have to look at it much more like what is it that the people need, rather than what is good for our party. You know, that is, I think, the key thing here.

MR. RUSSERT: The last time you were on, I said, "Are you going to run as a Bush Republican?" You said, "No, I'm going to run as an Arnold Republican."

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Right.

MR. RUSSERT: What's an Arnold Republican?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Well, it's basically being fiscally conservative, being socially moderate and you know, being environmentally progressive. I think that's what it basically means. And you know, Tim, one of the most important things, I think, that this nation is facing is that we—while we must see economic progress—and I think we have had great progress economically and I think the Bush administration hasn't gotten enough credit for that, the jobs are coming back, we have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years or so, the economy's booming—But we also have to protect the environment at the same time, and that's what we are doing in California. And I think this is something that this country has to do. We have to show leadership in protecting our environment so that we have a future for our children and grandchildren.

MR. RUSSERT: It's interesting how you have stepped out on the green movement, on global warming. I, I'll show you something about a fellow Republican, Jim Inhofe, he's chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, and he says this back in August of '03: "With all of the hysteria, all of the fear, all of the phony science, could it be that man-made global warming is the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people? It sure sounds like it." What will those kinds of statements do to the Republican Party in the future, in your mind?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: I don't think it does—it does much to the Republican Party. I think it is just, you know, there's always in history been people that are back with their thinking in the Stone Age. And I think that the key thing for us is, is to not pay any attention to those things, because as I said, the science is in, we know the facts, there's not any more debate as to global warming or not. We have global warming and the fact also is that we can do

something about it. We can slow it down or we can stop it, but only if everyone is working together.

The United States is, you know, 5 percent of the world population but we're using 25 percent of the oil. So I mean, you know, we are creating 25 percent of the pollution of the greenhouse gas emissions with a 5 percent population. So of course, the rest of the world is looking at us kind of, you know, in an odd way, saying, "Why are they preaching to us and why are they trying to be, you know, so righteous about all of this?" Let us all work together on this. And I think that's what we have to do.

California—the states in the United States are not waiting anymore for the federal government to provide leadership. We are going off on our own. We are providing leadership. The Northeastern states, Pataki and all of those guys, are providing leadership in the Northeastern states. I think that you will see more and more states joining to show leadership in protecting the environment, or showing leadership in lowering the prescription drugs, or showing leadership in increasing the minimum wage. All of those kind of things—oh, and solar energy—and all those kind of things. I think that the states are providing this leadership and working together with other states and doing regional partnerships rather than waiting for the, for the United States, for the, for the federal government to do those things.

MR. RUSSERT: As you chart this independent course, a lot of conservative Republicans get upset with you. The National Review wrote this about Arnold Schwarzenegger: "Behold the new Arnold, a man bearing little resemblance to the revolutionary who toppled Governor Gray Davis just three years ago. He's politically compliant, eager to please, and anxious to avoid a fight. One might say ... a girlie man." That's the National Review. How do you deal with those kinds of words?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: They're absolutely correct that I'm eager to please the people. I'm eager to please the voters because I'm a public servant. I don't see myself as a politician. I see myself as a public servant. I serve the people of California. I serve Democrats and Republicans, and if someone says that, that I'm eager to please, yes, I am. I'm there to please the people. That's what this is all about. People send us to our capital to represent them and to work for them. That's what we are going to do.

And let me tell you something. I think that the key thing is that when I came into office in California, we had really no vision at that point what the future of California is. No one knew where we were going to go. Now, we know. We've just passed a \$37 billion infrastructure bond package. We're going to rebuild California. And you know something? We're going to clean our environment and we're going to contribute and do our share.

And I think that that is the question of this presidential race that's coming up in 2008. Are those issues addressed? Is—are the other candidates talking about, where's America going to be in 2020? Where are we going to be environmentally? Where we going to be with our dependence on fossil fuel? Are we going to get off fossil fuel? Is there a goal where we say, "We're going to be 50 percent more self-sufficient and to go—and to rely more on hydrogen fuel or on, on biofuel?" All of those kind of alternative fuels, I think this is what we have to look at. Are we going to be a nation that's going to rebuild our infrastructure? Because our infrastructure nationwide is, is falling apart, it's aging right now. We in California have made a commitment to rebuild our infrastructure, to rebuild our roads, our schools, our levees, and all of those kind of things.

But those are the questions for the future. Will we—are we going to fix the problems that we have the unfunded liabilities with our pensions all over the United States, which is by the billions and billions and billions of dollars. Are we really going to create accountability in education so we really produce the smartest kids possible? So all—those are the issues that we have to address.

MR. RUSSERT: One of the issues that are confronting you is the continuing deficit in California and also the six million uninsured, without health insurance. The San Jose Mercury wrote an editorial on Friday and said this, "While other states have been racking up surpluses and squirreling away money, California has run up deficits and piled on debt. That can't continue. In the latest five-year forecast, the non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office projects a \$5 billion deficit in the coming year and a \$4 billion deficit the year after. ... Now, something's got to give - either Gov. Schwarzenegger's vow not to raise taxes or his campaign pledges to fix health care and reform education. The latter should be the priority. He shouldn't abandon promises on behalf of students and the [6 million] uninsured. ... Schwarzenegger should swallow hard and consider taxes: either a dedicated tax, like raising the tobacco tax, or a temporary tax. ... [Another] option worth exploring: expanding the sales tax to include some professional services in exchange for reducing the sales tax rate." How do you juggle that?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Well, Tim, when I came into office, they said exactly the same thing: I got to raise taxes, I got to raise taxes, please raise taxes by at least 5 billion or \$8 billion a year. And I said, "No. We're going to stimulate the economy," and that's exactly what we've done, we've stimulated the economy. Now our revenues went up by \$20 billion, first from 76 billion to \$96 billion without raising taxes. That is the way to go. I think what we have to do in the future is, is we've got to go and pay down our debt, which we have been doing. And we have done a tremendous job of bringing down the structural deficit from \$16 ½ billion when I took office to now \$4 ½ billion. And we're going to come down further this year and we're going to eliminate it by next year or the year after that. I think that's what we need to do. Never raise taxes, it wouldn't happen. The people of California have voted "no" on all the

tax increases this year, if it is the tobacco tax, if it is any kind of additional tax, everything was voted no on, including the nurses, as you remember, the nurses' association, they have had a proposition on there to raise taxes, everything was voted no, including, including the oil tax.

MR. RUSSERT: And you'll still take—you'll still take care of the uninsured and education?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: No, absolutely, because we are—this year is the year where we go—this coming year—where Democrats and Republicans are going to work together to fix our health care problem. First of all, we have to bring down the health care costs, we have to make it more affordable to provide health care. Number two, we've got to insure everybody, because we have 6.7 million people that are uninsured, and we're working right now on the various different ideas, we're going to bring those ideas together, I'm going to present this in my State of the State address. But this is the next big challenge. Look, if we could face the challenge and fix our infrastructure problem and approve a \$37 billion infrastructure package, we can also solve the health care problem. We're going to solve all of those things. Democrats and Republicans are very determined in California to say, "We have certain problems that have been problems for decades, and we're going to go out now and fix it." And that is what is so wonderful about it, bringing both of the parties together.

MR. RUSSERT: You're a Republican winning in California, a blue state, in a Democratic year. People would have you on the short list for the Republican nomination in 2008. But they can't for one reason: You were not born in the United States. Is that fair?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Well, I concentrate on the things that I as an immigrant was able to do in, in California and America. I mean, the things that I was able to do, I mean, look at me, I'm governor of California, I have been the highest-paid actor, action star, bodybuilding champion, made millions of dollars, I have the most unbelievable family, the most fantastic wife, the greatest children—look at all the things that I was able to do.

MR. RUSSERT: But you've been a, you've been a citizen...

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: I concentrate on those things, what I was able to do as an immigrant...

MR. RUSSERT: But you've been a citizen...

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: ...not what I was not able to do.

MR. RUSSERT: You've been a citizen for 23 years, shouldn't you have an opportunity to run for president?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Well, you're talking now about complete and total immigration reform, right?

MR. RUSSERT: The Arnold Amendment.

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: The Arnold—exactly. No. No, no. But I think that, you know, I think that it will never happen in my lifetime. I think that it's something that the people of America can debate over in the, in the future. And this is a debate worth happening. You know, let the debate go on, but I mean, it's not for me. I'm happy where I am; I'm happy to be a public servant and to serve the people of California. And I will go around, and—around the country, and I will be talking in the future about the issues that are important for the country because I love America. And I think that if we all work together, Democrats and Republicans, we can solve all of those problems, because after all, let's face it, we are the greatest nation in the world, and we are the most powerful nation in the history of mankind. And, you know, I think that we can do it all, including fix our problem with Iraq.

MR. RUSSERT: Will you stay a Republican?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

MR. RUSSERT: Who you going to support in '08?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: I don't know yet, but I'm going to look at the candidates, and I'm going to look at, "Are those candidates, you know, are they really able to look at and create a great vision for the future?" I think this is the most important thing. We got to look at where would America be in 2020? What would this country be like, you know? Because the key thing is, did we get off our reliance on fossil fuel. The key thing is that we are cleaning our environment, that we contribute to really slow down the global warming, and that we continue with our economic stimulation and creating jobs, and really helping our most vulnerable citizens. We, we got to concentrate on those things, and also rebuild our infrastructure. Candidates that talk about those issues are the candidates that I will be looking seriously at.

MR. RUSSERT: Is anybody doing that now?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: I think that all of our candidates that're out there are talking about this, but I will see as time goes on when they really zero in on those subjects.

MR. RUSSERT: How about in 2010 when your term is over? Would you consider running for the U.S. Senate against Barbara Boxer?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: You know, I'm not really thinking about what I'm doing in 2010. I'm not ruling anything out, but I'm not really thinking about any of that. I'm thinking about, now, moving California forward, making sure that we create more accountability in education in California, fixing our health care problems to insure everybody that is uninsured. I mean, those are the kind of—and how we build California. I think those are the very important issues.

And then we have also a huge crisis with our prisons in California. We got to have prison reform so we don't have a almost-70-percent recidivism rate in California. We got to, you know, bring that number down. And we got to go and rehabilitate our inmates so when they go out that they're capable of dealing with society and getting a job and get going again in life and not come back in, in the other door and become part of the prison system again.

MR. RUSSERT: Before we go, you mentioned Iraq. When you were last on, you said you thought the war was the right thing to do. Right before the election, you said we should start consider to get out. What advice would you give the president about Iraq today?

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: I would not give him any advice, because I would not, not—never be that presumptuous. I think that he has a lot of, you know, smart people around that study the subject, and especially now, since they have the Baker-Hamilton Commission, a bipartisan commission. I think that's a very good idea to have that commission where you have five Democrats, five Republicans, study this subject very thoroughly. Those are all very, very smart people and they have a great reputation. There'll be great substance to the—that part of the commission. So I think we should look at that.

But I think that we all know that we've got to get out of there, but we've got to get out of there the right way, not just to turn our back on Iraqis and leave and just think about ourselves. Because we've got to always remember, what was the reason why we went there: We thought this was the springboard of terrorism, international terrorism. So we, we cannot just turn back and let the place be that springboard of terrorism. We also have to make sure that we create the democracy that we wanted to create, and also we wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein, which we did.

So I think we got to get out of there. We have to have a time, a timeline. I totally believe that there has to be a timeline there. But we got to get out of there with a victory rather than with a defeat.

MR. RUSSERT: Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, we thank you for joining us. Congratulations, and we hope you come back and talk about the issues confronting your state and our country soon.

GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER: Thank you very much, Tim. Thank you.

MR. RUSSERT: Coming next, Iraq. Are there any good options? We'll ask Congressmen Duncan Hunter and Ike Skelton of the House Armed Services Committee, and retired Generals Wayne Downing and Barry McCaffrey. Iraq, where do we go from here? Coming up on MEET THE PRESS.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: The war in Iraq, Republican Congressman Duncan Hunter, Democrat Ike Skelton, and two retired generals, Barry McCaffrey and Wayne Downing. We try to put it in perspective, after this station break.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: Today marks the 1,347th day of the war in Iraq, which is the exact length of direct U.S. involvement in the Second World War. Yet in Iraq, there is still no end in sight. Joining us now to discuss the current situation, the chairman and ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, Congressmen Duncan Hunter and Ike Skelton; and retired generals Wayne Downing and Barry McCaffrey. Welcome all.

And I'll begin with the grim statistics. To date, U.S. military deaths, as we see on the screen, 2,865. U.S. military wounded, 21,778. Iraqi civilian deaths at least 50,000 and several hundred over the last 48 hours, which led to Tom Ricks' piece in The Washington Post which wrote this, "The Pentagon's closely guarded review of how to improve the situation in Iraq has outlined three basic options: Send in more troops, shrink the force but stay longer, or pull out, according to senior defense officials.

"Insiders have dubbed the options 'Go Big,' 'Go Long' and 'Go Home.'"

Congressman Hunter, is that about it?

REP. DUNCAN HUNTER (R-CA): Well, actually there's another one that, that I've recommended to the president, Tim, and that's this: Go Iraqi. Right now you've got 114 Iraqi battalions trained and equipped, and we, we've spent a lot of time getting them equipment, standing them up. And of--33 of those battalions are in, in provinces where there are less than one attack a day occurring right now. So you've got, out of 18 provinces, you've got about half of them, about nine of them, that have almost no action, that are very quiet. You've got 33 Iraqi battalions in those area. Saddle those guys up, move them into the fight, get them into the Baghdad area, a couple of the other areas, Samarra, where you have a lot of action occurring.

And that does a couple of things. One, it stands up the Iraqi forces, because nothing trains a combat unit better than actually being in military operations. So that gives them unit cohesiveness, develops leaders. And the most important thing is, Tim, when the, when the ministry of defense picks up the phone and orders and Iraqi colonel to saddle up his battalion and move into the fight, if that colonel refuses to do it or, or wants to, to delay, you need to know that and you reach into the fighting battalions where they are having successes and you pull field-grade officers out of those places and you move them into that battalion and you move them into the fight.

So, so standing up the Iraqi forces is the key here upon which all else depends. If you had an Iraqi force today that was stood up that could stabilize that country, we'd be on the way out right now.

MR. RUSSERT: But we don't. That's the point.

REP. HUNTER: Well, but the point is we haven't moved all the Iraqi forces into the fight. So what we could do right now before we decide whether we want to increase or decrease or maintain the level of American forces, before you make those decisions, let's take the forces we've already trained, we've already equipped, which are 50 miles away in some cases, move them into the fight, see how they carry that security burden. And, and after we get a, we get a handle on how well they're doing, then we can make adjustments on the American force level.

MR. RUSSERT: Congressman Skelton, what do you think?

REP. IKE SKELTON (D-MO): I think that it's up to us to do the very best we can to train and advise those battalions and brigades of the Iraqi forces. I also think that we're going to have to send a message to the Maliki government, to the Iraqi people, as well as to the American people, that we're not there forever and it's in the law that we redeploy this year. That would begin it this year. I also...

MR. RUSSERT: When you say redeploy, what does that mean?

REP. SKELTON: That means take troops from Iraq, maybe bring them back to the United States, take them to Kuwait, Germany, and if you needed them for a very quick mission you could bring them back for another.

The third thing I think you have to do is convene a conference of the entire region. You have to get Iraq zeroed in on Iran, on Syria and the other states in the region. On October the 20th the Democratic leaders, Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, and I and several others sent a letter to the president spelling this out. And it's been said the Democrats are all over the place and I have

a proposal myself of re—or redeploying one American brigade for every three Iraqi brigades that are brought up to the top level.

But be that as it may, we all agree on the one thing, and I think the key is getting the Iraqis trained and fully advised. Now at Fort Riley, Kansas, there is an ongoing effort to train American soldiers to go over there and do this even better. The problem has been a lot of the trainers, great Americans, but they were not trained to be trainers. That's what special forces do and that's what special, specially trained people do. But the average combat soldier in America was trained to do combat duty. He wasn't trained to be a trainer.

MR. RUSSERT: The problem is how acute this crisis is. Let me show you a dispatch from Reuters. "Violence in Iraq has reached alarming levels, the United Nations said in a report that painted a grim picture of a country gripped by sectarian and ethnic bloodshed that has killed and displaced thousands. ...

"The report says worsening security and increasing poverty has caused 'unparalleled' population movement. It estimate 100,000 people leave Iraq every month and more than two million people, about 8 percent of the population, have fled their homes since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. The monthly immigration is equivalent to a million American going abroad and a loss to the U.S. economy for a city the size of Detroit every four weeks." General McCaffrey, how long do we have to stabilize Iraq, and how do we do it?

GEN. BARRY McCAFFREY: Well, I think I'd go under the question by saying, Tim, that if we fail in our mission in Iraq, the consequences to the American people and our allies will be severe. I don't think—you know, this whole "go long, go, go big, go home" is sort of nonsense. We're not going home. We're not going to be big because we have an inadequately sized Army and Marine Corps, Special Ops, to carry out this mission. What we're going to do is try and—I think Congressman Hunter was right on the mark. We've got to get the Iraqi army and police better equipped, better trained and into the fight. And I think we've got 24 months. The next two candidates to the presidency are going to walk away from this war if it still looks this bad.

MR. RUSSERT: But haven't we been saying that, General McCaffrey, that we have three months, six months, and now, to ask another two years. Do you think the American people will be that patient?

GEN. McCAFFREY: Well, I think General Abizaid in his—in a recent congressional testimony, is right on the money. I—my guess is next four to six months are crucial. If Maliki's government cannot gain the allegiance of their security forces, cannot find some way to mute the power of the militias—which are, I might add, are—you know, we start talking as if there were two or three militias and one Sunni insurgency. In fact, it's now splintering. There's as many as 23

separate militias in Baghdad alone. So the Maliki government's under the gun, and I think the president's visit on, on Monday is going to be a very crucial dialogue between the two of them. They have to govern or we can't sustain a counterinsurgency campaign in the urban areas of Iraq.

MR. RUSSERT: Here's the problem with that. This is the cover of Newsweek magazine entitled "The Most Dangerous Man in Iraq," Moqtada al-Sadr, and according to The Washington Post, "One lawmaker allied with ... anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr ... said he and others would withdraw their support from [Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri] al-Maliki unless he cancels a scheduled meeting next week with President Bush in protest of the decaying security situation. ... Sadr's support is critical to Maliki's government."

So General Downing, here's Mr. Sadr saying, "If the prime minister of Iraq meets with the president of the United States, my support for the Iraqi government is gone."

GEN. WAYNE DOWNING: Well, Prime Minister Maliki is the key guy, and really, Tim, the Iraqis are the key people. We can sit here and talk among ourselves about all the different things that we can do. All the different options, all the different things that, that we can do to make the Iraqis stronger. But ultimately, it's going to be up to them to make the choices to either do or not do what has to be done. Prime Minister Maliki probably could, could cut 90 percent of the violence out if he could sit down and get all the different people together in Iraq and come to some very, very fundamental political decisions. Not military decisions, not security decisions, but political decisions. I don't know if he can do this or if he's not the right man to do this. But ultimately, Tim, this is going to be up to the Iraqis and not up to us Americans.

MR. RUSSERT: But is Prime Minister Maliki afraid of Mr. Sadr? Why doesn't he go in and just take apart his Shiite militia? Congressman Hunter:

REP. HUNTER: Well, well, Tim, I, I think the Shiite militia is going to stay in place, and I don't think there's a way to disarm it. It's, it's a, it's a—considered to be a counterweight by a lot of the Shiite communities to the, to the Sunni community. And that, that, that militia is going to stay in place.

I think you're—I'll repeat what I've always said about this piece of the world. You're always going to have bombs going off in Iraq. And if money and resources could keep bombs from going off, they wouldn't be going off in Israel. Against that backdrop of, of strife and ethnic divides and all the other things that we have that make Iraq, we have a government which is in place, which was embraced enthusiastically by the Iraqi people. There has been no alternative or substitute government offered to that. So, this isn't—a car bomb or a suicide bomber doesn't constitute a substitute government. So against this backdrop of violence,

which will continue, I think, for a long time, as long as there's this, this deep friction and divide between Sunnis and Shiites, that government, I think, is going to be able to remain in place.

The key is, are we going to be able to stand up an Iraqi military that's capable of defending this fragile government? And that's the second step that we've taken for, for 60 years. Across this globe, we have taken—had a three-step process to bring freedom to parts of the world. We stand up a free government, you stand up a military that's capable of protecting it. Last thing you do is the Americans leave. Right now we're on number two. And, and we've got of the 114 Iraqi battalions that we, the Americans, have trained and equipped, a lot of them are in peaceful areas of Iraq and they're not being deployed. So let's move them into the tough areas, make them saddle up, get them into battle, get them into operations. I think you're going to see military leaders rise to the top who are efficient, who are competent, and who do respond to the civilian government, which is a key link here. But I think we're going to have to do that against the backdrop of these militias staying in place. You're never going to completely disarm the militias. I think it's a bridge too far.

MR. RUSSERT: Here is the latest from Newsweek, the headline and the cover I showed you. "More than anyone, Sadr personifies the dilemma Washington faces:

If American troops leave Iraq quickly, militia leaders like Sadr will be unleashed as never before, and full-scale civil war could follow. But the longer the American occupation lasts, the less popular America gets - and the more popular Sadr and his ilk become." What do you do?

REP. SKELTON: We just do what I suggested. We do our very best to train them up so they can stand up by themselves. At the end of the day, this is not going to be a military decision, Tim. It's going to be a political decision. Maliki's going to have to bite the bullet, do the best he can to pull everybody together to make sure that Iraq stays together. He told me, when several of us had breakfast with him not long ago, that he was most concerned about the militias, and he wanted to disarm them. I don't see how he can do that, but he can—I think—get them to work together. At least I would hope so. That's the only out for him politically, is for them to work together so they can govern together, so that the military that he has, being better-trained by us, can control the sectarian violence, which, by the way, has overlaid all of the insurgency and the terrorism that's over there.

MR. RUSSERT: You keep using the words "sectarian violence." Is it a civil war, in all honesty?

REP. SKELTON: You know, it depends on what you call a civil war.

MR. RUSSERT: Well, what do you think?

REP. SKELTON: Scholars will say no. I will say yes, because the violence is, is so heavy. In true civil wars, Tim, there's a political goal. There is a way to stop it and shake hands and put an end to it. The sectarian violence, the only purpose is to kill each other. The Sunnis are killing the Shiites, the Shiites killing the Sunnis, and among themselves. But insofar as peace and decorum is concerned, it's a civil war in, in my book.

MR. RUSSETT: General McCaffrey, we had thought that the goal of Iraq was eliminate the weapons of mass destruction, and that proved not to be the case. Then, obviously, a whole notion of a democracy in the Middle East, the shining example in, in that country. In all honesty and candor, what are we going to leave behind in Iraq?

GEN. McCAFFREY: Well, we're about to find out. You know, I think going in, taking down Saddam clearly was a good idea. I thought so then, I still feel that way. There's also probably no question that the Iraqis under his regime were a threat to the region, to oil stability, to their own people. So, you know, the goal, clearly, though, Tim, has morphed. The whole notion of democracy and an island, a beacon of hope for the Middle East, has come later and certainly may not be achievable.

From our perspective, though, we've got to leave a viable state with an operating security institution. We've got to make sure that U.S. troops get out of there. You know, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps are not adequately sized to sustain the current national security process. So we are going to withdraw. We're going to draw down to at least 10 brigades, I hope by next summer. The, our goal right now, though, we've passed so many off-ramps, Tim, it's hard to see a simple solution.

MR. RUSSETT: General Downing, is there a possibility of a military victory? Or should the American people brace themselves to say, "OK, this is not going to be clean, it's going to be rather messy. We're going to get out and leave something behind far different than we had hoped for."

GEN. DOWNING: Tim, there's not a military victory. That is not in the cards. It's primarily not in the cards because this an insurgency that we're fighting. The insurgency has been, been, been, I think, well described by the two congressmen. This is political in nature. This thing is being waged for political stakes. The politicians are going to solve this thing.

The, the, the diplomatic, the economic, the social ramifications of a counterinsurgency campaign are what drives it. You have to have security, and that's going to be important, but this security that is so important is going to have to be derived from the Iraqis. More Americans are not going to solve this problem; in fact, they're, they're going to make it worse.

The, the Iraqi army, I was back over there for my seventh trip back in September, they've made tremendous gains in the last year. There are leaders emerging in the Iraqi army which are outstanding men who really are, are, are patriots. Their—they'll not describe themselves as a Shia or a Sunni, and in fact, one brigade commander became very insulted when a member of my party asked him what religion he, he was from. He said, "I'm an Iraqi army officer. My job is, is to defend this country."

What's really fallen down, Tim, has been the police. We reconstituted the Iraqi police pretty much in their old image; they are corrupt, they are feared by the people, and we recognize this and we're starting a program now, we started it about three months ago, to revamp the Iraqi police, because it does us, it does us no good to conduct these operations in places like Baghdad where we clean up a neighborhood—it takes six to eight weeks to get everything out of there, get things back to normal. We turn it back over to, to the Iraqi police, Tim, and within weeks it's right back to the way it was before. So we've got to have the police, but not only the police, we've got to have rule of law in Iraq, which we don't have, which means you need a court system, you, you need prosecutors, you need defenders.

MR. RUSSERT: But why should the insurgents participate in any of these kinds of diplomatic outreaches? They can just sit there, bide their time...

GEN. DOWNING: But...

MR. RUSSERT: ...continue their campaign of chaos and mayhem and wait for the United States to leave.

GEN. DOWNING: But the, but the insurgents want something, too, Tim, they want a stake in this political process. Now, al-Qaeda sits out there, and the, the, the al-Qaeda sympathizers, the, the radical Salafist jihadis, they want something entirely different, they want the ninth-, 10th-century Islamic state. But the majority now of, of this insurgency has political stakes, and that's why I go back to the comment that I made earlier. This is why Maliki—and if Maliki can't do it, some Iraqi leader has to stand up and bring the people to the table and solve the issues. You know, we haven't talked about the Kurds here, that's another big piece. Are we going to divide this country in, in, into three separate federations? A lot of people don't want that to happen, a lot of people are very concerned that the Sunni piece of this thing, even though this is remote right now, could at some point morph into a Taliban state right in the center of the most strategic area, I, I would say, in, in the world right now.

MR. RUSSERT: That could happen?

GEN. DOWNING: Yeah, that, that, that could happen. But we need the—when I say “we,” that’s a misnomer—the Iraqis must take charge of this thing. There’s about five key political issues, constitutional issues that are out there that must be resolved. If they can get those things resolved, that’s going to go a long way to satisfying these insurgents that they have a political role to play in this process.

MR. RUSSERT: The—we have some photo—pictures this morning of this very morning in eastern Baghdad, another attack on a U.S. military installation. It appears, Congressman Hunter, that the insurgents can strike at will. Back in March when we went to war, you said, “I believe we will win this conflict in overwhelming fashion.” In hindsight, you were very, very, very overly optimistic. Fair?

REP. HUNTER: Yeah. No, Tim, I think we are going to win this conflict. We won the military piece in taking Baghdad, and we’re now trying to stand up a free government. And, Tim, we’ve been here before. You and I were here in the, in the 1980s when the—when we were trying to, to bring freedom to Europe and bring down the Berlin Wall. We had the Russians ringing our allies in Europe with SS-20 missiles, and we responded with, with strength, that is Ronald Reagan started to move Pershing 2 and ground-launched cruise missiles into Europe. Lots of critics said, “We’re in the biggest mess we’ve ever been in in this century. We’re going to have a World War III, and the president’s got to back down, and we’re in a huge mess.” We persevered, we freed hundreds of millions of people in eastern Europe.

In our own hemisphere, and you were there as well, in El Salvador, that was going to be a Vietnam where we bogged down. We provided a shield for that little fragile government as it stood up, and Salvadorans today are fighting side by side with us in, in Iraq.

So the Middle East never will be a neat package. You’ve got hundreds of issues and sub-issues and problems that will spring up, you’ve got all of the problems of a fledgling democracy. But you have two institutions in Iraq that have both Shiites and Sunnis in them, where people have come together. One institution is the government; although unevenly, you have Sunnis and Shiites in the government, and secondly in the military, as General Downing said, you have Sunni and Shiite leaders in the military. So you have two institutions where there has been some conciliation. I think we’ve got to build on it.

And, and I understand that there’s lots of doom and gloom to spread around, but we’ve been in these tough positions before, we persevered when we had endurance. We need to have endurance, this is not an easy thing to do. And we, we brought freedom to hundreds of millions of people in this world by hanging in there. When we were, when we were up against the Russians, we were trying to bring down the wall. This is a different type of wall. It’s a different type of world. I think we’re going to be successful.

MR. RUSSERT: Congressman Skelton, you certainly have evolved in your thinking on the war in Iraq. You supported it. Back in December of '06, about a year ago, I want to read something—'05--let me read something that you said. Skelton "rejected calls by some Democratic Party leaders for a quick withdrawal from Iraq.

"The United States has no choice but to succeed in Iraq ... which will require a 'more responsible' plan than a pullout based on any kind of time frame, which he called 'counterproductive.'

"If we should pull out prematurely or allow there to be a unsuccessful conclusion, Iraq could become a snake pit for terrorists ... Further than that, it would also lead to the possibility of nearby countries being made unstable.'" You now say it's mission: impossible. Your thinking has changed, hasn't it?

REP. SKELTON: It has. The situation has changed. Let me go back to what General Downing was saying. There are three types of fighters over there. You have your insurgents, mostly Sunni type, former Baathist type. Helping them you have the foreign fighters, part of which are the al-Qaeda. Then on top of that, overlaying all of this, is the sectarian violence that you have. And—which we didn't have some time ago. And consequently it, it is a, a cauldron that's very difficult to understand.

What is important to remember—and I pointed this out to the president in two letters prior to us going in there, the first on September the 4th, 2002; the next one, March the 18th, 2003: Beware of the aftermath. Beware of chaos after the initial military victory, because number one, it's the Middle East; number two, because they have a tribal structure mentality and that, of course, is coming to the fore right now. Not just the insurgents, not just the old Sunnis and the Shiites, but you have all of them fighting each other. It's a cauldron that's very, very difficult to understand.

The American people spoke in the election just recently, and it's very interesting to note not just that we have a new secretary of defense coming in, but it's very interesting to note besides the Baker-Hamilton Commission, which I commend for their work, but you have a new study group within the White House, you have a new study group over in the Pentagon headed by General Peter Pace, as, as to the way ahead in Iraq. And...

MR. RUSSERT: A lot, a lot of study groups. Let me ask you a fundamental question I think that most American people are curious about. In your professional estimation, how many troops will we have in Iraq a year from now?

REP. SKELTON: Well, I hope it's far less than what we have today. I would hope we could stand up their brigades, their battalions and that they would be effective. And the way to do this is for us to train them better, to have advisers that understand. And I think at Fort Riley, Kansas, they're training our people to do that. We've had the wrong types in many instances.

MR. RUSSERT: But if the Iraqis aren't capable of that and they don't stand up...

REP. SKELTON: Well...

MR. RUSSERT: ...and they don't step up, what happens?

REP. SKELTON: It's up to the Iraqis to form their own future. We can't do it for them and it cannot be done militarily. They're going to have to—at the end of the day, perform their own security, and they're also going to have to put their political thoughts together in their government.

MR. RUSSERT: General McCaffrey, how many troops at—one year from now?

GEN. McCAFFREY: We'll get down to 10 brigades. But let me, let me...

MR. RUSSERT: Which is, which is how many?

GEN. McCAFFREY: Well, probably the whole package would be 60,000, 70,000 max, because I don't think we can sustain much more. We got to fix the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. It's probably a \$61 billion job.

But let me add to Congressman Skelton's notion, which I basically agree with. We have to equip the Iraqis to sustain a major internal battle to protect their own government. Thirty light trucks, light, small arms. These people need armored vehicles. They need an air force. They need a helicopter force. We simply have to pay the price to allow ourselves to withdraw.

MR. RUSSERT: General Downing, do you think we'll be down to 60,000 troops by the end of next year?

GEN. DOWNING: Tim, for two years I've been making this prediction and every time I knock it down by 50,000 and it either doesn't go down or, or, or even goes up. I think we're reaching a point right now where the Iraqis are going to have to produce or America is going to start a wholesale withdrawal from Iraq. I hope we're patient because I think the program we have in place now—I, I think what we're doing right now, despite all these bells and whistles that we're hearing from, from, from these different commissions and, and groups, basically has it right. The advisory effort is absolutely crucial. The Iraqis are absolutely crucial. We, we, we

must continue with the reconstruction efforts as we can. Maliki must, however, make the right kind of political decisions. If that happens, we're going to be able to, to, to withdraw in a, in a very systematic and probably a very, very smart manner. If this does not happen, then we've got to figure a way, Tim, to cut our losses and, and do this thing smart. Because we cannot be perceived as walking out of Iraq with our tails between our legs. Osama bin Laden, Ayman Zawahiri, their number two, they've been saying for over a year now that the Americans are going to cut and run, they're going to leave.

Whether we like it or not, Iraq has become a central campaign in the global war on terrorism. That was not our intent back in 2003, but Iraq and Afghanistan right now are central fronts. The entire Islamic world, the entire world, are going to watch those two things to see how we do it. If we are going to have to get out, if the Iraqis can't do it, we've got to do it in a smart way. But what we don't want to do, Tim, and, and, and, you know, my congressmen here, don't let us go out of this thing the way we did it in Vietnam. Let's not sell these people down the river the way we did the, the, the South Vietnamese. Let's do this smart.

MR. RUSSERT: To be continued. General Wayne Downing, General Barry McCaffrey, Congressman Duncan Hunter, Congressman Ike Skelton, thanks very much. We'll be right back.

(Announcements)

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